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“WHAT KINSHIP SHOULD MEAN:” AN EXAMINATION OF THE ETHNIC AND NATIONALIST THEMES WITHIN *BEOWULF* ADAPTATIONS

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

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Submitted to the Undergraduate Research Scholars program at
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by Research Advisor: Dr. Britt Mize

May 2017

Major: History

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ABSTRACT

"What Kinship Should Mean:" An Examination of the Ethnic and Nationalist Themes Within *Beowulf* Adaptations

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Thesis Statement

The purpose of this thesis is to critically examine *Beowulf* adaptations for moments in which the adaptor chooses to emphasize themes of a community drawn along ethnic or national lines. These authorial choices reveal how different historical translations and retellings of the story of *Beowulf* have used the epic to justify or define their national and ethnic identities.

Theoretical Framework

For this analysis, adaptation is defined as the retelling of source material in a way which requires to author to add, change, or leave out potions of the original, coupled with other creative decisions. Ethnicity is defined as the state of belonging to a group with a shared cultural or national tradition. Nationality is defined as self-identifying as a member of a sovereign state. Otherness is defined as those who are either deemed as outside of, or perhaps even a threat to the community by those within. This thesis will scrutinize the frequently complex relationship between ethnic and national boundaries. These are frequently revealed in retellings of stories

which are deemed part of cultural heritage, because adaptations expose what attitudes are held to be shared by an ethnic group in an unguarded setting.

Project Description

This study of *Beowulf* adaptations will delve into how many retellings of the poem use the story to provide insight into their own national and ethnic identities. This thesis will demonstrate that the particular nature of *Beowulf* adaptations have often encouraged these discussions, and provide a variety of viewpoints on the issue. This survey of literature will include sources from Victorian children's adaptations to graphic novels and modern translations.

The intent of this thesis is to reveal the multi-faceted nature of this topic in two parts: a scrutiny of *Beowulf* adaptations in which the author identifies with the culture of the protagonist and how those authors who do not identify *Beowulf* as part of their own heritage approach the poem.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my research advisor, Dr. Britt Mize, for introducing me to the rich world of *Beowulf* adaptations. Without his knowledge of and passion for retellings of the *Beowulf* story, I would have never stumbled upon this vibrant area of study. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Melbern G. Glasscock Center for Humanities Research for furthering the Glasscock Undergraduate Summer Scholars Program. This thesis would not have developed without the opportunity to spend my summer immersed in *Beowulf*. The facilities that this program supplied, especially the office space, proved invaluable to my researching process.

I owe many thanks to the faculty and staff of both the History and English departments for inspiring and advising me in my studies. My dear friends also should be acknowledged for their endless encouragement in the face of installment deadlines. In particular, my research compatriot, Patrick Dolan, deserves my deepest gratitude for being both a patient sounding-board for my ideas and pushing me to achieve more and better things. I would not have had such a positive experience at this university without all these wonderful people, and I cannot thank you all enough.

Above all else, I need to thank my parents and Lauren—my greatest and most constant of supporters—for the many hours they have spent listening to me rant about *Beowulf*. I wouldn't have been able to do this without you guys. Love you.

INTRODUCTION

A Question of Kinship

The *Beowulf* manuscript stands as one of the oldest Anglo-Saxon long poems, surviving at least a thousand years and literally passing through fire. While *Beowulf* is an ancient story written about monsters and monster-killers, and may seem far removed from modern discussions of heritage and political spin, it deals with complex themes of kinship and community. And perhaps even more importantly, it is sort of an immigrant tale—a story about Scandinavian heroes written by an Anglo-Saxon monk.

To whom does *Beowulf* belong? Though none of the characters even hail from the British Isles, the *Beowulf* manuscript is a British heritage item. This designation, however, has been somewhat contentious. Many scholars in this century and others have argued over to whom the *Beowulf* manuscript belongs. Some scholars from the 19th century even went so far as to claim Old English was a dialect of Old Norse in an attempt to strengthen their case (Shippey, 225).

Two frequently minimized themes that emerge in retellings of *Beowulf* are those of heritage and ethnicity. Robert J. C. Young, FBA, historian, and postcolonial theorist, elucidates the common problems academics face when analyzing ethnicity in the British Isles. Much of the difficulty arises from the term "ethnic," which was synonymous with either race or "uncivilized" cultures until the post-WWII period, when the backlash against the Nazi movement compelled

scholars to reexamine their terminology (Young, x). To further complicate matters, by this period the British had already devoted generations of study to their heritage. Oftentimes these claims of identity were used to spin a political agenda. As Young examines in *The Idea of English Ethnicity*, Plantagenet, Tudor, or Stuart monarchs were more likely to promote the idea of a monarchy descended from the Celts (Young, 15). Conversely, Hanoverians, hailing from Germany, would prefer to champion the image of a robust nation issued from "Saxon stock" (Young, 26).

During the early Victorian era, many students of science swept away by the new fad of "anatomically based racial science," (Young, 71) sought to quantify the differences between these two ethnicities. By observing such "racial markers" as facial features and hands, many believed that they could extrapolate personality traits (Young, 84-7). These views fell out of vogue in the late 1860s, only a few years before the first *Beowulf* adaptation I will study. By this point, scholars began to define Englishness more by culture than bloodline (Young, 172). In essence, they saw Englishness as the mingling of many different people groups, united by a common language and customs (Young, 232). But beneath this seemingly progressive definition lurks the assumption that Englishness is intrinsically tied to whiteness (Young, 239). I wish to examine this view, along with earlier attempts to trace "English" traits back to different ethnic groups, in this survey of *Beowulf* adaptations.

Why Study Adaptations?

Although the epic of *Beowulf* centers upon three monster fights, it is also a deeply philosophical work that deals with the repercussions of mortality, the transience of wealth and fame, and the implications of casting people from community. While these messages would have been plain to its Anglo-Saxon audience, the culture of a twenty-first observer has changed to the extent that only a very careful reader will glean the full meaning of the text.

This gives adaptors of *Beowulf* several options. They can attempt to portray of the Anglo-Saxons in an accurate way their readers will understand, they can make these Scandinavian heroes behave in a way more consistent with their own society, or they can reshape the tale into what the average reader expects from a medieval story, packaging it alongside Arthur, Cúchulainn, and Robin Hood. Adaptors obviously have the right to retell a story in whatever way best suits their vision of the tale. But it behooves readers to examine these retellings with open eyes, for they can reveal traces of the attitudes their authors might have left pressed between the pages. Because it is there, nestled between the paragraph breaks, we find the way these adaptors view the *Beowulf* story, and how they expect their audience to approach it.

Many scholars have endeavored to study the sizable, and confusing, place the *Beowulf* epic has staked out in the popular imagination. Victorian adaptors, renowned for their ability to reimagine the past in light of their own times, placed horns on Viking helmets and turned *Beowulf* into a "construction of a heroic ideology anchored in a common past" (Jaillant, 405). Postmodern *Beowulf* adaptations are just as zealous in reshaping the text into a "parallel reality

where the participant can reenact the medieval fantasy at will" (Gómez-Calderón, 993). Most adaptors shape the story in a way they hope their audience will connect with. But in doing so, they mold the tale into what both they and their audience believe it to be.

Adaptations of *Beowulf* are powerful because they not only illustrate their author's conception of the Anglo-Saxons, but also reveal what they imagine their own culture to be. The themes which the author emphasizes in retellings of the tale communicate to us how they read the story, what messages captured their attention, and especially what they themselves value.

Methodology

This thesis will focus on two smaller topics within the larger discussion of ethnicity and the *Beowulf* epic. The first section will be a study of *Beowulf* adaptations during the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, especially those works marketed for a broad audience. Some very interesting ethnic and nationalist themes lurk within both the text and paratext of John Gibb's Victorian retelling *Gudrun, Beowulf, and Roland, with Other Mediaeval Tales* and the Edwardian work of Ebbutt's *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race.* The goal of this section is to shed light on how authors in the late 19th and early 20th century sought to establish *Beowulf* as a piece of cultural heritage, and legitimize British society as the natural descendants of a noble people group.

The second section will focus on Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, Jorge Luis Borges' poetry, and the *Beowulf* graphic novel written by Santiago García and David Rubín.

Since none of these authors originate from England or Scandinavia, their translations provide a valuable insight into this Anglo-Saxon poem from an outsider's point of view. Heaney especially approached the task of translating the poem with trepidation, but found that his Ulster heritage helped him shape new facets in the tale. Likewise, Jorge Luis Borges frequently wondered why he studied "the language of the blunt-tongued Anglo-Saxons" (Borges, trans. Reid, 202). The aim of this section is to get a glimpse into how those writers who would have been considered outsiders by the Victorians of the first section see the poem, and how in many ways, they feel the need to justify their interest in an Anglo-Saxon poem.

CHAPTER I

A BEOWULF MADE IN THEIR IMAGE:

THE VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN ADAPTORS

In this chapter, I will look at adaptations of the *Beowulf* epic by British authors from the Victorian and Edwardian periods. These will be John Gibb's second edition of his collection of medieval stories published in 1884 entitled *Gudrun, Beowulf, and Roland, with Other Mediaeval Tales* and Maud Isabel Ebbutt's *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race,* an anthology which was released in 1910. While there is a wealth of material in these texts and many fascinating avenues this discussion could travel along, my focus for this particular chapter will be on the ways in which these retellings reveal attitudes towards nationalism, monarchy, and the borders created around community. This is often revealed not only through the text itself—what an author choses to omit or add—but also through the paratext of a work.

Context

But in order to understand these retellings of the *Beowulf* story, it is vital to recognize the culture of the Victorian era. The era of industrialization created conditions in which a new upwardly-mobile middle class could rise to nearly the place of the traditional gentry. These "nouveau riche" frequently sought to adorn themselves with all the traditional trappings of the upper classes: splendidly furnished homes, the finest clothing, and—that most telling sign of good breeding—an extensive library. The ownership of books, with good reason, had long been a status symbol. Manufacturing books, even since the advent of the printing press, was costly and

somewhat time-intensive. But the industrial revolution brought with it the ability for publishers to more efficiently mass-produce books. This new manufacturing capability coupled with the rising prosperity of the middle classes (Branca, 6) ensured that even the solidly middle-class could afford a decently-sized home library. Naturally, publishers seized upon this growing market. Before the Victorian era, English publishers would frequently sell unbound manuscripts in order that a wealthy customer could have it bound in leather to match the rest of their library (University of Reading). But around the year 1820 advances in printing techniques allowed bookmakers to economically manufacture cloth bindings. Within a few decades, exquisitely glided, cloth-bound tomes were displayed at the Great Exhibition, which only served to whet the public appetite for affordable and beautiful books (University of Reading).

The Victorian era was also a time of increasing nationalistic feeling among the British. This was the epoch of imperialism, when the British Empire was beginning to make her influence felt much more strongly on the world stage through her colonies on nearly every continent. The vastness of the empire emphasized the differences between Victoria's subjects. In some ways, this contributed to a need for Victorians to draw borders around their communities and define what it meant to be British. If even two people from the same city and a similar community could have vastly different fortunes, what common ground could exist between her Majesty's subjects living in India and those in England?

While the booming trade in mills, markets, and manufacturing could elevate a person from near destitution to wealth, a poor investment or material shortage could just as easily cast

them back onto the streets. At the same time, the fledgling national police force was tasked with controlling the increasingly visible corruption of inner cities. Though there were many periods in British history that were just as bleak—if not bleaker—many Victorians fell victim to the general attitudes of the time, viewing the world in morally-laden terms. For many Victorians this tumultuous period of relative prosperity for some and crippling poverty for others caused them to look to history and the legends of their country for comfort. Perhaps in the past in they might obtain meaning for the present. Although this need for a compelling origin is by no means unique to this period of history, or even to the British themselves, during the Victorian era the British were arguably consumed with their vision of a romanticized past.

A More Seemly Middle Ages

Like most works of medievalism, Victorian works set during the Middle Ages frequently reveal more about their own society than the periods they profess to depict. Authors such as Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Sir Walter Scott set their writings in a romanticized version of the mythic past, sanitizing elements of previous works that they found distasteful. Of course, not all Victorians viewed the medieval period as a model time or a heroic age, but the fact remains that many of the most popular artists did. This invites the question: why were the Victorians so drawn to medieval subjects? In part, this fascination is due to the increasing visibility of the Middle Ages from the republication of *Le Morte d'Arthur* and growing scholarly interest in the period (Holloway and Palmgren, 1). But this reason does not seem sufficient for the prevalence of medieval themes throughout Victorian culture. I would argue that to a certain extent, the Middle Ages were alluring to many because they remained somewhat mysterious. Medieval tales were

just familiar enough to a Victorian audience that they could draw parallels to their own time, but foreign enough to be an effective form of escapism. As Lorretta M. Holloway and Jennifer A. Palmgren explain in their introduction to a collection of essays focused on medievalism across many disciplines, the Victorians "used the Middle Ages as an anchor in a time of stormy upheaval" (Holloway and Palmgren, 2). Especially in moments when the present and future seem dangerously uncertain, the past can appear comfortingly concrete, solid, and unchanging.

However, although the actual events of the past are fixed, popular perceptions of the past are constantly shifting. As historian Edward Hallett Carr once said, history is "an unending dialogue between the present and the past" (Carr, 30). Historians, for all their effort to be impartial, do bring some biases to their examination of primary sources. Without access to the extensive primary sources that provide the best insight into the past, popular visions of the past often offer a skewed view of history that is, in many ways, the present dressed in historical costume.

Because of this, adaptations of medieval stories often reveal how their authors conceive of the audience. In the Victorian and Edwardian adaptations this tendency is especially pronounced, because both the author and audience generally view the story as part of their cultural heritage. Because of this, they often see the story as espousing their modern Victorian virtues or possessing some kernel of these views buried deep within the text. So for many authors, it was perfectly acceptable—or perhaps even preferable—to discard parts of the tale which did not conform to their own views. Another way of looking at this is as a quasi-genetic

view of history. To some extent, the Victorians saw their own society as possessing traits which had been passed down by past generations. Any medieval attitudes or beliefs that did not endure to their own time had been winnowed out by natural selection, so why include them in retellings?

Genetics played a far less figurative role in these adaptations as well. The Victorians were fascinated by the study of lineage and 'blood,' perhaps because it is a visceral way to confirm affiliation with a community (Young, 50). During the Victorian period, students of racial science posited that there were two main cultural forbears of their society: the Saxons and Celts (Young, 45). The two were frequently in conflict with one another. While the Saxons were characterized as hardy and self-possessed, two characteristics which were very appealing to many Victorians, the Celts were viewed as more tempestuous and creative (Young, 45). Interestingly enough, despite the vast number of cultures which influenced the English, like the Normans and Dutch, scholars of this time period focused nearly exclusively on the Saxons and Celts (Young, 45). While it is tempting to view these attitudes as a counterpart to the modern-day use of astrological signs, many people, among them scholars, took this topic very seriously. These beliefs in no small way lay the groundwork for the racial science of future generations. The Saxon was proclaimed as the "superior race" to the Celt, and often to other ethnic groups as well (Young, 85).

This is a marked attitude in many adaptations of medieval tales, but especially prevalent in adaptations of *Beowulf*. The *Beowulf* epic is unique simply by its nature. Although it was transcribed by an Anglo-Saxon monk, there is not a single character in the poem from the British

Isles. This gave adaptors more license to interpret the themes of kinship and community which exist within the poem, and to correlate these motifs to an ethnic theory of the time.

In a way, the reshaping of old narratives served to both confirm and comfort their audience. By presenting the Middle Ages in a manner which mirrors Victorian values, authors used these works to reenforce their views both of the present and the past. Thus, the medieval becomes an echo of the modern. At this juncture, it is important to note that texts may not always be an accurate expression of an author's own opinion. Especially given the increasing commercial attitudes towards writing with the ever-growing purchasing power of the Victorian middle class, it is not unthinkable that an author might write a work that panders to what they believe their audience will purchase. Though the viewpoints depicted in these works I shall examine may not necessarily be the author's own, they nevertheless do bear examination. Because at the very least, these authors are crafting something they believe their audience will appreciate and buy. One of the places in literary studies that the attitude towards a text is most evident is in the paratext of a work. Something as simple as cover design, font choice, or illustrations can reveal a plethora of attitudes about the medieval. Paratext serves to indicate the value of a book, signaling the way the audience should approach the book, and can even change the interpretation of a text.

Paratext will be a vital aspect of this study of Gibb and Ebbutt's adaptations, mainly for the insight it provides into how publishers and authors alike expect their readership to engage with the text. Both of these retellings envision *Beowulf* as a part of a cultural heritage the authors

share with the readers. Because of this, the authors are more likely to reveal their attitudes towards and definition of Britishness in an unguarded dialogue with an audience with a shared background. Specifically, I will be examining how nationalism is addressed in the text, whether it be through kingship or cultural and ethnic heritage, how the author or illustrator engages with "the medieval," and how the trappings of religion, specifically Christianity, is frequently used as an ornament to the text.

Gibb's *Gudrun, Beowulf And Roland With Other Mediaeval Tales*

John Gibb, a professor at the Presbyterian Theological College of London, was best-known in the scholarly community for his translations of the works of St. Augustine. Although he lectured on and studied the early church fathers, one of his passions outside of the classroom was medieval literature. From this zeal grew one of his most popular works: *Gudrun And Other Stories from the Epics of the Middle Ages*. Released in 1881, this collection of Germanic tales was sought-after enough by Gibb's Victorian audience to merit a reprinting three years later by publishing house T. Fisher Unwin (McConnell et al., 269). It is the University of Michigan's copy of that reprint, retitled *Gudrun, Beowulf, and Roland, with Other Mediaeval Tales,* which I will examine here.

Confusingly, although the title of the book is *Gudrun, Beowulf, and Roland, with Other Mediaeval Tales,* the title on the cover pages is *Gudrun, Beowulf, and the Death of Roland.* But title issues aside, the paratext from the gilded cover proclaims through lavish, glittering art how the audience ought to view the text. In the upper right, a man in a fanciful helmet and chainmail

embraces a maiden with flowing hair, nearly kissing her. The lower left corner is emblazoned with the profile of a woman fitted out in a swan helmet and carrying a shield. It is almost needless to say that the style of clothing worn in both images is exceedingly anachronistic. But this historical inaccuracy is perhaps most conspicuous in the style of helmet worn by both the man in the upper right and the woman in the lower left, which from the helmet ornamentation and the neck guard look more like a 19th century brass helmet than anything worn in the Middle Ages. Both of these images are perhaps better suited for the promotional material for a Wagnerian opera than this collection of medieval tales.

A Germanic Tale?

This theme continues in front pages of the second edition. In the words of the *Academy*—a journal reviewing literature, art, and science—which are so helpfully reproduced in an endorsement section of the text, "[w]ithout some such work these precious prototypes of Anglo-Germanic romance would have remained sealed volumes for all youthful readers" (Gibb, i). *The Spectator* added that this rendition of the *Beowulf* epic is a "lovelier tale of Northern valour, and noblest conquest, and heroic death," and as such is a "fresher reading for our boys and girls than the much-studied Greek stories" (Gibb, i). Both these reviews speak to a preference for educating children about tales originating from Northern Europe, which is not inherently a bad thing. However, these reviews speak to a desire to base a child's education primarily on narratives from his or her cultural heritage or to applaud these works as inherently superior to writings from other cultures. Both of these attitudes point to a larger tendency to equate stories from the past with situations and attitudes in the present.

Gibb's own words in his preface reveal a bias of this very nature. As he puts it, Gibb selected the stories in his collection because they were "among the earliest remaining of the three greatest nations of Europe—the Germans, the English, and the French" (Gibb, ii). Rather than seeing *Beowulf* as something with innately value, this way of thinking necessarily must factor the present into studies of the past. To be fair, this can be a valid way of approaching a text, but it must be within reason. It is reasonable to look within an earlier text for an expression of a wider trend within literature; however, there is a temptation to disregard the historicity of a text in this critical approach, and forget that a work was created by a culture which, no matter how similar in geography or language, is not analogous to one's own.

Let me examine Gibb's own words to understand his position. In the concluding chapter Gibb expounds upon the themes stated in the preface. He traces the history of these works, characterizing them as stories told to children by fireside or to "sleepy knights in the winter evenings" (Gibb, 270). He represents the tales as being forgotten—and even despised—by scholars for many years both on account of their antiquated language and the waning significance placed upon them for many years. Gibb argues that these stories ought to be remembered because they give insight into the past and the people who populated these bygone days. This is all well and good. However, his true feelings are made unequivocally clear as he continues:

> We must not forget, in reading such tales as Gudrun and Beowulf, that it is of our own ancestors we are reading. In our veins runs the same blood as in theirs; and the great German and English peoples are descended from the brave

> humorous heroes who … at length mastered the stern masters of the old world. Any story that gives a glimpse of the characters of the northern peoples in earlier days is in truth a bit of our own family history. (274)

For Gibb, the real value of these stories is contained within their heritage status. He anticipates that the main draw for readers would not be to discover any information about the historical Anglo-Saxon culture of either the scribe or the characters of *Beowulf,* but rather to uncover some deeper truth about themselves from the text. By invoking the themes of blood and lineage, Gibb draws parallels between his own time and that of the writer of the *Beowulf* epic, and through this imagery suggests that Victorian culture is in no small way drawn from this mythic, Germanic past. This is an expression of the genetic view of literature, in which the value of the works is dependent largely on events—or in this case, cultures—which postdate them. As discussed earlier, this mainly happens when authors approach texts as if they have certain traits that have been passed down to their cultural progeny. For Gibb, then, the real value of these stories is contained within their heritage status. He anticipates that the main draw for readers would not be to discover any information about the historical Anglo-Saxon culture of *Beowulf*, but rather to uncover some deeper truth about themselves from the text. Between the preface, the endorsements a page earlier, and Gibb's own admission in the concluding chapter, this adaptation is threaded through with themes of nationalism, linking the present with the past in a manner which clouds the historicity of the stories and populating these ancient tales with Victorians in chainmail.

But onto the text itself, where these tendencies are writ, or often drawn, large. One of the best places to find where this adaptation has divorced *Beowulf* from its historical setting is its illustrations. Unfortunately, the illustrator of this edition remains uncredited for his or her work. But this aside, many of the illustrations which accompany the text of Gibb's adaptation feature a dramatically anachronistic setting for the *Beowulf* epic, a feature which is all too common to these Victorian and Edwardian retellings. One of the illustrations where this is most evident is the rendering of Beowulf and Wiglaf after Beowulf has slain the dragon and lies dying (see figure 1).

Figure 1: "Beowulf and the Dragon" from the 1884 edition of John Gibb's *Gudrun, Beowulf And Roland With Other Mediaeval Tales,* p. 164.

Although this illustration lacks the winged helmets of many Victorian depictions of Vikings, both Beowulf and Wiglaf are dressed in armor more suited to knight of the thirteenth century than Scandinavians of the sixth. Both Geats are appareled in a chainmail tunic like a hauberk, and Beowulf is attired in a patterned surcoat along with what seems to be a decorative armband on his bicep. Beowulf wears what appear to be mid sixteenth century sabatons, metal foot armor, which are common to mounted knights. But seeing as Beowulf fought the dragon on foot, there is no reason for him to be wearing armor designed specifically for combat on horseback. Beside the fallen Beowulf rests a plumed helmet, which looks similar to a plumed bascinet from the late 15th century. Though on the surface these historical anachronisms seem harmless, they are yet another indication of a tendency for adaptors—or in this case, illustrators—to pick and choose minutia from varied periods within the Middle Ages and jumble them together in a hodgepodge of "the medieval." Gibb and his illustrator, however, are hardly the worst offenders, as will be seen. In accordance with the original text, the illustrator depicted Wiglaf standing next to Beowulf, bearing a few treasures of the dragon's horde on the back of his shield to place before his fallen lord to assure the aged warrior that he did not perish in vain. At Beowulf's feet lies a crown, symbolizing the end of his kingship. But so much for paratext: let me now examine the retelling itself.

A Study in Kingship

The *Beowulf* poem opens with the discovery of a child in a boat: a foundling who will one day become a great ruler. Gibb sets the stage for this by describing the turmoil of the kingless Danes, a detail which is not in the original, in order to add credibility to their relief at

finding this babe adrift on a raft heaping with treasure. In the *Beowulf* epic, Scyld arrives on shore as a destitute waif aboard a ship, not a princeling borne ashore. However, it is easy to see where Gibb arrived upon the image of a ship laden with treasures. There is a section of the original poem which, in what Dr. Roy Liuzza, Old English scholar and acclaimed translator of *Beowulf,* explains as typical dry Anglo-Saxon humor, the poet notes that "with no fewer gifts did they furnish him there … than those did who at his beginning first set him forth alone over the waves while still a small child" ("Beowulf," lns 43-46). The immediate reaction of the men in Gibb's adaptation is joy, because they believe this foundling child, Scyld, was sent by the gods to rule their land. The Danes immediately crown Scyld their king. Gibb's retelling of this poem presents thanes who long for nothing more than a king to rule over them, to the extent that they are willing to crown a baby rather than live in anarchy.

This stands in opposition to the original text, wherein Scyld must earn his kingship in a fraught test of his own will. He emerges victorious; fate has repaid him for his destitute beginnings. By changing this detail, Gibb could perhaps be echoing the custom of his own time or Biblical narratives like that of the nine-year-old king Josiah, but he could also simply be adding a scenario which he believes to be more dramatic for his audience. Whatever the case may be, Gibb does return back to the canon *Beowulf* in Scyld's adulthood. The boy-king Scyld becomes a mighty warrior who conquers "all the neighboring peoples across the whale-roads" and demands tribute from them (Gibb, 136).

Although this depiction of Scyld's kingship is very similar to that in the *Beowulf* epic, barring the omission of Scyld breaking the mead-benches of his enemies, John Gibb does augment this section of the narrative with a few lines on Scyld's son and heir. While this may seem insignificant, it does color the reader's view of both the Danes and Danish society as a whole. As Gibb tells it, the Danish people rejoiced when Scyld had a son and "all were willing that he should sit upon his father's throne, and that the Scyldings should rule over them for ever" (Gibb, 136). This simplifies the complexity of kingship in the *Beowulf* epic. In the Liuzza translation, it is only because Scyld's son is a good ring-giver and warrior that his thanes praise him as a worthy king ("Beowulf," lns 20-25). Although kingship would pass down family lines, the poet of *Beowulf* is ultimately fairly cynical about the nature of ruling. One of the most notable moments is Beowulf's remarks to Hygelac about Hrothgar's plan to weave peace by marrying his daughter, Freawaru, to Ingeld, a Heathobard prince. As the Liuzza translation renders it, "seldom anywhere after the death of a prince does the deadly spear rest for even a brief while, though the bride be good!" ("Beowulf," lns 2029-2031). This is a far cry from the thanes of Gibb's retelling, who seem to blindly accept Scyld's son and all future forebears simply because of their good luck to have a worthy ancestor.

In *Gudrun, Beowulf, and Roland, with Other Mediaeval Tales,* Hrothgar is given a completely different kind of kingship than Scyld. His primary role as king in this adaptation is as a ring-giver, and it is this—not the passing reference to his victories in battle or his fighting ability—which wins him the adoration of his people and renown throughout the lands (Gibb, 137). Gibb expands this idea still further when he states that Hrothgar gave his wealth to his

thanes, all he possessed save "land and the lives of men for these, he said, belonged to no one" (Gibb, 137). This is a line nearly quoted verbatim from a translation of the *Beowulf* text, save for Gibb's addition that people's lives and the land belong to no one. This story also touches upon the moments in the *Beowulf* epic in which the poet mentions peoples paying tribute to Hrothgar and, like the original, Gibb's retelling treats their homage as a positive attribute of Hrothgar's leadership. Hrothgar, then, is presented as an idealized king who is wise and generous to his people.

Gibb fails to paint the Danish king with the same complexity and moral ambiguity he is given in the original text, where there are moments in which the narrator leads the audience to question Hrothgar's character. In the *Beowulf* poem there does seem to be a possibility that Hrothgar's actions have perhaps caused the monster attacks. By building gleaming golden Heorot, which the narrator warns us will be burned to the ground even as he describes the building's erection, Hrothgar appears arrogant in trying to construct something which will last for all time ("Beowulf," lns 67-70, 81-85). Hrothgar also seems unable to deal with his monster problem, and twelve years elapse before Beowulf finally finishes off the Grendel-kin. For more than a decade, then, this king of the Danes had been either unwilling or unable to ask his allies for aid. Even within the narrative, Hrothgar in some part blames himself, especially after the death of his trusted counselor, Æschere ("Beowulf," lns 1330-1344).

Gibb's rendition of the story, however, presents a flattened, binary version of kingship either wholly good or utterly bad, in which there is no room for complexity and moral ambiguity.

But Hrothgar's exceeding goodness in this retelling could serve a purpose. In light of the king's benevolence, Grendel's nightly raids create even more horror in Gibb's audience. These attacks seem random and undeserved. Hrothgar is not presented as misguided or arrogant in his construction of Heorot, and Gibb even adds that Hrothgar frequently met with his counsellors to determine a way to rid the kingdom of its monster trouble (Gibb, 139). And since the twelve year gap before Beowulf's arrival is not addressed in this retelling of the epic, Hrothgar appears completely blameless for the shadow stalking his people. Although this serves Grendel's actions seem all the more disturbing, it does have a somewhat comforting effect as well, depending on the audience's feelings towards monarchy. The Victorian period was a time, like so many others, within which both foreign and domestic policy hinged on trying to build and maintain things that ultimately could not last. The idea that these sorts of actions could possibly bring ruin and suffering would not have been very comforting to Gibb's Victorian audience.

Whatever the case may be, Hrothgar is portrayed as an unambiguously considerate and generous king throughout Gibb's adaptation, which may serve to illustrate an idealized monarchy, specifically divinely-sustained kingship. There is a section of the scene where Grendel enters Heorot for the first time which has puzzled readers for centuries. Although Grendel can open the bolted iron doors of the great hall, he does approach Hrothgar's throne, the seat of the Danish riches, the place where the king gives out gold and treasure to his thanes. The author of *Beowulf* provides only a little, and fairly cryptic, explanation for this, which has forced readers to come to their own conclusions about this boundary placed on Grendel. The Liuzza translation renders this as an expression of Grendel being totally outside of Danish society. He

does not recognize Hrothgar's authority and thus "saw no need to salute the throne, he scorned the treasures; he did not know their love" ("Beowulf," lns 168-169).

True to form, John Gibb furnishes an interesting theory of his own: that Grendel is not allowed to approach the throne in order to keep him from harming Hrothgar. Specifically, that "the Creator forbade … that evil should befall the King" (Gibb, 138). By defiling Hrothgar's seat of power, Grendel would undermine the symbol of his authority, which Gibb equates with harming his personage. Whether he intends to or not, Gibb betrays an understanding that the king's seat of power is sacred, divinely protected, and must be esteemed as such by those he rules—and those he does not. Without a seat of power, Hrothgar would be without influence, and therefore could not be a true king. However, Gibb ignores the very real problem of the twelve years Grendel spends nightly raiding the hall of the king. Surely more than a decade in which a king is powerless to stop the murders of his closest thanes would threaten his dominion more than the loss of a gilded chair.

But let us move from Hrothgar's kingship to the reign of Beowulf. As in the original, Hygelac, king of the Geats and Beowulf's lord, dies in battle. His grieving widow, Hygd, offers the crown to Beowulf, who is too noble to take it and instead offers to support her young son, Heardred, in an advisory capacity. But Heardred is killed, and Beowulf takes the throne as an already fairly seasoned warrior. In this retelling—just as in the original poem—when Beowulf hears of the destruction meted out by the dragon, he determines that he will fight this beast to protect his people.

However, Gibb does not choose to include the fatalistic attitude of this aged Beowulf, who instead of saying "but for us…it shall be as *wyrd* decrees, the ruler of everywhere" ("Beowulf," lns 2525-2527), Gibb's Beowulf merely, and more ambiguously, declares "I mean to gain the treasure in yonder cave for my people or to die in the attempt" (Gibb, 161). This highlights two things present in both this adaptation and the original poem: the pursuit of treasure, and Beowulf's eventual self-sacrifice. While in Gibb's retelling Beowulf does die from wounds he receives from the dragon, he does not offer the same acknowledgement of the inescapability of his fate as in the original telling. This is fascinating on several counts. First of all, this artistic choice forces the narrative to lose the tension between destiny and deeds, the acknowledgement of overarching fate while continuing to strive against it that was the main drive of the original. Without these opposing forces, Gibb's retelling misses much of the soul of the original.

Gibb, too, overlooks some seemingly insignificant details which cast the dragon-battle in a completely altered light. In the *Beowulf* manuscript, the poet specifies that Beowulf rides out to face the dragon with a band of his most seasoned and faithful warriors. Gibb, however, refers to this troop as Beowulf's attendants, which paints them as courtiers rather than grizzled war veterans. This strips the emotional impact from their desertion. While that behavior to some extent could be expected from a retinue of nobles, these men would have followed Beowulf into countless battles by this point and should have been steadfast thanes, which lends weight to Wiglaf's pleas for them to remember their vows. Gibb too neglects to mention that Wiglaf is the youngest of Beowulf's troop, a fact which makes his determination to fight and possibly perish

alongside his king all the more moving. This is not the only place that Gibb deprives Wiglaf of glory. While in the original, as he lays dying, Beowulf commissions Wiglaf to take his crown and watch over the Geatish people, Gibb does not record this part of the tale in his retelling. Of course, this has the obvious affect of avoiding the rather unpleasant business of foreshadowing the destruction of the Geatish people. In some ways, this authorial choice makes sense. While an Anglo-Saxon audience was used to their tales ending in tragedy, even for Victorian readers, the extinction of an entire culture was a bit of a downer.

However, I credit Gibb with more foresight and purpose than simply giving his readers a less upsetting ending. Had he wished to have done this, he could have ended his retelling after the fight with Grendel's mother, like many other Victorian adaptors. After all, Gibb did include details such as the name of Beowulf's sword, so I doubt he omitted the passing of kingship due to a mere oversight. By not relaying that Beowulf passed on his crown to another, Gibb preserves Beowulf as the last and greatest king of the Geats. Though Beowulf cannot be the Anglo-Saxon parallel to the "once and future" reign of the legendary Arthur, the reader still is impressed with the sense of bookended kingship. In this way, Gibb's retelling of the tale closes with a funeral pyre of the last king of the Geats, the ultimate ending to an era.

While Gibb may provide several oblique examples of kingship within his adaptation of *Beowulf*, once again, his appendices reveal his true feelings on the matter. Gibb asserts that the "brave Kings of the north" never viewed themselves as above their subjects, but rather lived, feasted, and died besides them as "brothers in arms" (Gibb, 284-5). The real problem, as he sees

it, began when kings began to imitate the emperors of Rome—who in turn stole the idea from the "cruel tyrants of the patient and long-suffering people of the East"—and gave themselves despotic control of the state (Gibb, 285). So in this interpretation of history, the northern peoples —by whom Gibb means the English, French, and Germans—did not innately possess an unhealthy, unstable version of monarchy, but adopted it from the east. Even if this were not a gross oversimplification of European history, Gibb's claim creates contradictions within his adaptation. If Hrothgar is not placed above his men, why does God not allow Grendel to approach Hrothgar's throne, let alone his person? And if that were truly a superior style of rulership, why did these "brave Kings of the north" feel the need to adopt a completely different method of government? Gibb casts the traditional governance of these northern European kings as more equal, in a way which clearly promotes national feeling, by simplifying it to the point of historical inaccuracy. Gone are the blood feuds, the pecking order, the fraught negotiations with other glorified warlords. The truth—whether or not Gibb chose to recognize it—is that kingship has been complex and fraught with the possibility of corruption since its beginning.

Theology, the Geats, and You

Threads of national feeling run throughout Gibb's adaptation of *Beowulf*. As addressed earlier, the front-matter sets this up as a collection of the earliest stories of France, Germany, and England, the three countries which Gibb deems the greatest of Europe. However, in his concluding chapter, Gibb elucidates the origin of the *Beowulf* story and posits a hypothesis first put forward by Thomas Arnold as to why an English author chose to write about Norse heroes. Arnold's theory was that at the time of the epic's composition, many Scandinavians still adhered

to their traditional belief systems while the English were predominantly Christian. Because of this, Arnold argues, the English desired to convert them and so sent missionaries north. He proposes that some of these English missionaries heard the story of *Beowulf* and brought it back to England with them. Gibb deems this theory "so pretty, and also so likely, that I think most people will be disposed to accept it as true" (Gibb, 280). As this comment in his appendices suggests, Gibb did not merely draw upon themes of nationalism within his adaptation of *Beowulf*, but by sprinkling quasi-Biblical phrasing throughout his adaptation links the Anglo-Saxon text with the Christian faith.

It is important to note that although the *Beowulf* text itself contains many references to Biblical themes, Gibb expands upon these, recasting many scenes within the work in scriptural light. From the very opening of his retelling of the tale, he begins with a depiction of the anarchy among the kingless Danes, remarking that "everyone did what was right in his own eyes," a phrase which to his audience would have been a very familiar allusion to the Book of Judges (Gibb, 135). Though some of the Biblical phrasing Gibb uses is more obscure, such as describing Grendel as "sore displeased" by the singing of the scop, (Gibb, 138) or referring to Hrothgar and Hygelac as shepherds of their peoples, the elevated language he uses is evocative of the King James Version of the Bible. By doing this, Gibb associates these Danes and Geats even more strongly with the Victorians' cultural background and religious beliefs. This both elevates the *Beowulf* epic to the gravity of scripture and enables his audience to better identify with the characters of the tale. In an interesting twist, Gibb's antiquated language serves to disengage his audience from the text—the undercurrent of Biblical phrasing becomes overt enough to jar the

reader—even as it draws them in. This creates an ebb and flow, pushing and pulling, forever distancing the reader from narrative even as it pulls them back.

In Closing

While there is much in Gibb's adaptation that may seem somewhat heavy-handed for modern readers, he presents a fairly straightforward retelling that avoids many of the pitfalls that other Victorian authors do not. Though his views on kingship, especially the origin of tyrannical rule, reveal a definite desire to shift blame for wrongdoing outside of his community, he nevertheless does glorify that sort of kingship in which a ruler is ready to make personal sacrifices in order to secure the good of their people. On the whole, Gibb's attitude towards kingship and nationalism in general is positive. And perhaps his use of antiquated, scripturally-tinged language is a reflection of his golden-hued view of the past. Though he does not shy away from descriptions of the monsters and the havoc they wreak, Gibb does not include the references to the futility of human striving that the *Beowulf* poet sprinkles throughout the text. Because of these omissions, this retelling creates something wholly different in tone from the original where harsh winds batter sharp rocks, fell monsters crawl from the depths of murky swamps, and man, no matter how strong his grip-strength, is powerless against the ravages of *wyrd* and time.

But just as the original poem reveals much about its audience, so too does *Gudrun, Beowulf, and Roland, with Other Mediaeval Tales.* This second edition of Gibb's work was printed in the middle of the 1880s, while Victorian England was in its prime. Great technological

advances were being made at this time: locomotive engines had become commonplace and gas lights were beginning to crop up all over London. The middle classes had more buying power, the wealthy had more leisure time, and the British Empire seemed like it would last forever. Of course, things were not so rosy for the working classes, but they were not the target demographic of this book. Gibb's collection of tales is aimed at the person who is looking for roots to better understand the nations of England, France, and Germany—a luxury, like so many others, which the lower classes could not afford. So Gibb provides a telling of this Anglo-Saxon epic his middle class audience will find appealing. He paints an amalgamated "medieval" landscape populated by good kings, strong heroes, and vicious monsters, jacketed in a glittering cover so this book can serve as a fitting adornment to a bookshelf. Even the quasi-Biblical language lends itself to being read aloud, and it does not seem too far a stretch to imagine a Victorian family sitting together by the fireplace, listening to Gibb's retelling read by firelight.

M. I. Ebbutt's *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race*

Now let us move to a work written during the Edwardian period, at the closing of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Maud Isabel Ebbutt, born in 1867, compiled this collection of medieval tales, published in London and in New York in the year 1910. The fabric cover, a rich forest green, glitters with gold embossed images and intricate Celtic-inspired Art Nouveau vines blooming with Tudor roses. In the center of this image stands a warrior clad in stereotypical "Viking" garb, complete with a winged helm and cape unfurling in the wind. Behind him, the rays of the rising sun glisten a radiant gold, which causes the warrior to be somewhat backlit. At his feet a round shield and twin crossed swords are also gilded.

However, though it appears a sword is attached to his belt, the warrior brandishes a banner rather than a weapon. In the distance behind the warrior the turrets of a far-off castle peek just above the horizon. The spine of the book, too, is gilded, a mass of twisting vines in the Art Nouveau fashion, broken in the center by the image of a single broadsword and decorative shield. The overall effect is the balancing of the familiar and the foreign, perfectly encapsulating the Edwardian extension of a Victorian attitude towards the medieval. It is a clean, ennobled vision of the past, where banners flap majestically in the wind and winged helmets gleam in the light of the new dawn. This cover is itself an art object, and it does not take a stretch of the imagination to conceive that this book may well have been proudly displayed on a bookshelf.

Like *Gudrun, Beowulf, and Roland, with Other Mediaeval Tales*, Ebbutt's book is a collection of tales. However, unlike Gibb, Ebbutt boldly displays her academic credentials as a Master of Arts on the cover and subsequent pages of the text. This serves to set her up as an authority over the text and could possibly influence the way in which her readers approach this work. In her introductory material, Ebbutt explains that her goal in retelling all these stories was "the pursuit and representation of the ideal hero as the mind of Britain and of early and mediæval England imagined him" (Ebbutt, xvii). Much like Gibb, Ebbutt's *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race* seems to be targeted towards a broad audience. However, Ebbutt explicitly sets her book up as a primer within which children and young adults can discover examples of heroism that they can emulate. This perhaps explains why Ebbutt was so anxious to display her academic accolades, because she must prove to not only the public at large, but middle-class parents, that she is an authority that can be trusted with their children's education. For this reason, I have

examined Ebbutt with intense scrutiny, because it is one thing for a book to argue a point to adults, but an entirely different thing when it is focused on inculcating views in children. The beliefs that parents and educators wish to pass on to the future generation are usually their deepest-held convictions, and not entered upon lightly.

While Gibb focused on the heroes of France, Germany, and England, Ebbutt narrows the subject of her anthology to legends of the British Isles. She, however, takes this nationalist approach one step further, and spends the majority of her introduction dissecting all the ethnicities which make up what she deems the true British person. As she plainly states, "the modern Englishman is a compound of many races, with many characteristics; and if we would understand him, we must seek the clue to the riddle in early England and Scotland and Ireland and Wales, while even France adds her share" (Ebbutt, xix).

An Ethnocentric Reading of Beowulf

For Ebbutt, then, the goal of studying these stories is based entirely on what they reveal about her own society. This reduces these works of literature to no more than a treasure hunt, in which the reader scours the text to find reflections of his or herself. In this same vein, Ebbutt's introduction to her collection details at length which traits each ethnicity contributed to "the modern Englishman." Linking linage with personality was not innovative by any means; even fifty years before the publication of this collection many British men of science were already striving to quantify the different "races" which made up different groups within the British Isles.

But Ebbutt's introduction reveals how commonplace these theories had become, and also how much stock many people placed in them.

Though she begins this ethnic study of the British Isles with the Iberians, she does not credit them with much other than human sacrifice and corrupting the Celts to Druidic religion. Ebbutt describes the Iberians as short, swarthy, "harsh-featured and long-headed" (xx). This description sounds like many of the phrenology texts of decades earlier. Unfortunately, this mistrust of darker-skinned people was not limited to the ancient past, as a multitude of Victorian hobbyists typified diminutive, dark-skinned people as being of lower character (Young, 134-7). John Beddoe, in his 1885 book *The Races of Britain*, bemoaned the fact that the people of Britain were becoming darker-complected, and worried that these typically lower-class people would outnumber the fairer skinned upper-class (Young, 136-7). Perhaps the most distressing aspect of Beddoe's lament is his palpable sense of fear of and resentment towards the darker-skinned lower class. Ebbutt seems to agree attribute a similar feeling to the Celtic ancestors of the 'modern Englishman' in her observation that "to these Iberians, and to the Celtic dread of them, we probably owe all the stories of dwarfs, goblins, elves, and earth-gnomes with fill our fairy-tale books" (Ebbutt, xx-xxi). While the tall, fair Celts are credited with having "no small share in moulding the modern Briton," the Iberians are given the conciliatory prize of being immortalized in the annals of English literature as magical sub-humans (xxii). And even this pittance passes to them through the Celts.

From this unsettling statement—and the even more worrisome form of mind it betrays—she moves onward to “the proud Aryan Celtic race” which she compares favorably to the Homeric Greeks, even hinting at some possibility that these two ethnicities were one and the same (Ebbutt, xxi). She credits these Celts with endowing the people of the British Isles with “the passion for the past, the ardent patriotism, the longing for spiritual beauty, which raises and relieves the Saxon materialism” and attributes to them the creative impulse which crafted Arthurian legend (xxi). While many works of decades earlier were harsher towards the Celts, beginning in the 1840s many writers and newspapers protested the anti-Celtic—which generally meant anti-Irish—sentiment of many in academia (Young, 104-6). And so, by the period Ebbutt published this anthology of hero-tales, the Celts were associated with a fiery and tempestuous creative spark (Young, 129).

But creativity and spirituality was apparently not enough to protect the Celt from the Romans, who, according to Ebbutt, crushed the Celtic spirit and made them “helpless and dependent” upon the emerging Teutons. She characterizes these Anglo-Saxons as a wandering people, restless for exploration and war, but also with a deep longing for home. Ebbutt states that from these clannish and warlike people the modern-day English people inherited “a sturdy loyalty, and uprightness, a brave disregard of death in the cause of duty” (xxiii). As discussed in the beginning of this chapter, by the time Ebbutt created this anthology, the debate between the domination of Celtic or Saxon culture upon British heritage had been hotly contested for more than half a century. So Ebbutt in fact is entering into the conversation and contributing her own

opinion. And in her telling, she credits both the Saxons and Celts with contributing vastly different things to the "British" character.

As I move onward in this analysis to the other cultures and people groups she establishes as part of the great lineage of modern British society, there is one thing that bears a quick note. Ebbutt does not include the effects that vastly different cultures have upon her contemporary British Empire. Arguably, the Dutch were a massive influence on modern British society, and changed both the economic and literal landscape of the island and paved the way to the Industrial Revolution. The Dutch Stadholder William of Orange even ruled over the island for quite some time with his wife Queen Mary. The Dutch, aside from lending the British a monarch, gifted them with their commercial banking system and stocks, their civil engineering, and their emphasis on commercial dominance. The colonies, too, contributed a massive impact to English culture. While the repercussions from trading with and colonizing these unfamiliar places, peoples, customs, may not have been fully felt by the time of Ebbutt's writing, surely an attuned observe could notice the foreshocks rumbling underneath their feet. So there must be some reason Ebbutt excludes these cultures, and it is because she is concerned with tracing a bloodline and pedigree, not in nuanced study.

She continues to trace the heritage of British national character to the Danes. Though Ebbutt describes these Vikings as very similar in appearance to the Anglo-Saxons, she attributes to them a greater love for roving the sea and pillaging. She attributes the enterprising, adventurous, and colonizing tendencies of the British to these Norsemen. Ebbutt does concede,

however, that these Vikings had negative qualities as well. Or as she puts it, “his disregard of death for himself led to a certain callousness with regard to human life, and to a certain enjoyment in inflicting physical anguish. There was an element of Red Indian ruthlessness in the Viking” (xxiv). While this staggering aside is strident and unpleasant to the modern reader, it is important to acknowledge and dissect the attitude behind this racial generalization. This desire to reduce a multitude of nations with unique cultures into a skin color reveals Ebbutt’s larger tendency within this entire section. By ignoring the complexity of and contradictions within a culture, and even jumbling together different vastly different people groups under one classification, she reduces vivid and diverse people groups to a caricature. However, this does suit her purpose. It is easier to pick and choose traits from cardboard cutouts than from a nuanced, historically accurate depiction of a culture.

But perhaps I am being too critical. This is only introductory material, after all. While this scrutiny may seem like nit-picking, her generalizations of both the Anglo-Saxon and Danish cultures directly influence not only her retelling of the *Beowulf* epic, but also the way an audience will approach the text. Because she portrays these peoples as singularly warlike and restless, without acknowledging their depth of philosophical thought and their innate complexity, even if she were to present a very balanced retelling of *Beowulf*, she already primed the readers to focus upon the martial aspects of the poem to the neglect of the deeper insights the story lends us into the world of the Anglo-Saxon monk who transcribed it. This of course, is assuming the material in the introduction plays no part in Ebbutt’s retelling. But as this introduction is Ebbutt’s statement of purpose for composing this collection, it is vitally important to examine it critically.

Since her retellings hinge on her presentation of the ideal hero to each of these people groups, it would be a gross oversight not to analyze the way she both conceives of and presents the Iberians, the Celts, the Anglo-Saxons, the Danes, and the Normans.

While Ebbutt's view of the Normans bears little tangible influence on the *Beowulf* text, it further reveals her sense of history and the level of civilization inherent in the peoples who dwelled in the British Isles before the Normans invaded. In an interesting development, she equates the Normans with the Danes, though she characterizes the Normans as softened somewhat by religion and feudal law. Ebbutt credits the Norman success in conquest to the fact that England was in need of "some new leaven to energise [sic] the sluggish temperament of her sons" (xxvi). But lest we think the Normans were a generous and positive influence, she continues to state that it was their tyranny and unreasonable rule which inspired a "national consciousness," and created the climate for noble outlaw-heroes like Robin Hood (xxvii). But she does credit the Normans with infusing the national character with cleverness, reverence, courtly behavior, and respect for the law.

Ebbutt details all of this ethnic history in order to make the point that within British literature exist many different ideals of heroes, which change according to time and place. By studying the literature of these different cultures, readers can understand what these people valued and perhaps even what they aspired to be. While this is true, the problem with Ebbutt's approach to medieval literature is that she is attempting to find roots for the attitudes and behaviors which exist in her own time. This is an attitude fraught with the risk of using the past

to justify the present. However, it is the responsibility of a student of history to be honest about his or her biases and not, as Ebbutt herself did, proclaim their account of history "as close as possible to the medieval mind" (ix), as if such a thing ever existed. *Beowulf* is a particularly difficult text to approach in this manner. Most scholars believe that the copy of the *Beowulf* epic that has survived is a scholar's transcription of an older possibly oral tale, the date of *Beowulf'*s setting is quite vague. Although other texts reference characters from the story—such as Hrothgar, Heremod, and Hygelac—in a way more consistent with historical figures, the *Beowulf* text does not set itself up to be a historical document. This does not necessitate, however, that an adaptor ought to disregard *Beowulf* as an object which exists in history. Although adaptors should have the ability and the freedom to refashion a story to suit their artistic vision, it is in bad faith to do so and then purport that the new revised work is as close to the original as possible.

To Illustrate a Hero

That being said, Ebbutt's retelling of *Beowulf* is not nearly as exceptionable as one might presume from the thirteen pages of introductory material, or indeed, the illustrations by J. H. F. Bacon. Bacon was a fairly notable artist, particularly for his depictions of historical and Biblical scenes. For Ebbutt's adaptation of the *Beowulf* epic, Bacon produced five black-and-white illustrations, which naturally focused primarily upon the monster attacks. As is evident upon even the first glance at one of these illustrations (see Figure 2), Bacon's primary goal does not seem to be historical accuracy.

Figure 2: “Beowulf shears off the head of Grendel” from the 1910 edition of Ebbutt’s *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race,* p. 26.

This Beowulf, clad in an impractical full-body chainmail jumpsuit and a heavily ornamented helmet, strikes a heroic pose as he bends over to lob the head off of Grendel's corpse. His raiment is not something that would have been worn into combat by a warrior in either the Anglo-Saxon period or any other time, and perhaps is suited more for the stage than the battlefield. There is a great deal more of the theatrical in this illustration than was present in the drawings in Gibb's retelling. The contrast between shadow-dark Grendel and the resplendent Beowulf draws the eye downwards in a diagonal line, creating a dynamic scene. Bacon's illustration itself is fairly stark, uncluttered by anything other than a vague suggestion of an animal skull in the background, which could serve to build a sense of foreboding and death. Because of this minimalist background, the whole image feels very stark for all of Beowulf's gleaming mail and chiseled scowl. He is beardless with high cheekbones, both relatively common features among these Victorian and Edwardian depictions of Beowulf. More remarkably, Bacon draws him with an extremely muscular physique, particularly his quadriceps, which are worthy of a bodybuilder. There is a significant leap between the Beowulf pictured in Gibb's adaptation, who is primarily drawn as an aging king, and the burly Beowulf of Bacon, whose stern expression and tight clothing make him look more like a comic-book hero than an Anglo-Saxon warrior.

This superhuman Beowulf of Bacon's art dovetails nicely with Ebbutt's description of him as the ideal "grand primitive" hero in an age of strife (Ebbutt, 1). She opens her retelling with an introduction proclaiming that, no matter what disagreements may divide scholars regarding the date, location of the poem, and religion of the poet, all readers should see the

Beowulf epic "as embodying the life and feelings of our Forefathers who dwelt in North Germany on the shore of the North Sea and of the Baltic" (Ebbutt, 1). So even before she begins the narrative of the piece, it is already apparent that nationalism and ethnicity are going to play an important role in this retelling.

Nationalism and Kingship

What better way to build for her reader the sense of national cohesion and feeling among the Danes than by relaying the tale of the foundling-king Scyld? Thus it would make sense that, like Gibb, she begins the narrative of her *Beowulf* retelling with the person of Scyld Scefing. As in Gibb's version, Ebbutt's depiction opens with an infant Scyld washing ashore in a boat laden with treasure, but unlike Gibb, she does not portray the Danes as existing in a state of anarchy prior to the discovery of the infant Scyld. This could possibly be indicative of a shift from an emphasis upon the role of the king as unifier of a nation to a greater sense that it is shared national feeling that binds a community together.

Scyld, who is from an unnamed people from an unknown land, occupies a unique position in this work so focused on ethnicity and kinship. Though he is not a Dane, he becomes their king. The ramifications of this are far-reaching, especially given the quasi-genetic qualities of national character Ebbutt expressed in the introduction. Regrettably, however, she does not devote sufficient space to illustrating Scyld's transition from outsider to leader for analysis. Nevertheless, Ebbutt makes explicitly clear that during his reign, Scyld "increased the power of Denmark and enlarged her borders" (2). While Gibb only ever used the term Danes, Ebbutt is

very unequivocal in using the word “Denmark” when referring to Scyld’s kingdom. By using this terminology, Ebbutt perhaps unintentionally conjures up the image of a nation-state, a governed province of contemporary scope. In this telling, then, Scyld is the ruler of a nation proper. As such a ruler, it is only fitting that he be known for expanding his nations borders. Ebbutt also increase the emphasis upon the importance of family and heredity. By the time of his death, Scyld has set himself up as founder of a great dynasty, “leaving the throne securely established in his family” (Ebbutt, 2). After the ship carrying Scyld’s body is swept away by the sea, his progeny rule over the land peacefully until Hrothgar takes the throne.

This transition is one of the many instances where Ebbutt breaks the flow of her narrative to insert an declaration of the historical veracity of the text, such as her assertion that the Geats were from Götaland in southern Sweden (Ebbutt, 5). In this specific case, her purpose is to establish that Hrothgar is one of four siblings, all of whom are identified on the historical record by other sources. While maintaining the historicity of a text which prominently features monsters may strike modern readers as odd, it clearly was vitally important to Ebbutt. I propose this is because Ebbutt is trying to maintain her own credibility as a scholar of and authority on the *Beowulf* text. While many of the characters from *Beowulf* are found elsewhere in primary documents, it is important to note that this alone does not necessitate that Ebbutt’s interpretation of this story is as historically valid as the facts she cites.

I will analyze Hrothgar’s kingship in more depth shortly, but for now, I will focus specifically how diplomacy and national feeling play a large role in Ebbutt’s depiction of this

king of the Danes. Much like in the original poem, the trouble for the Danes truly begins when Hrothgar undertakes the construction of a glorious mead-hall. But Ebbutt specifies that Hrothgar's desire to impress foreign visitors with his glittering hall was one of the primary reasons behind the erection of Heorot (Ebbutt, 3). While this detail could be be a message warning of the possible pitfalls of excessive national pride, Ebbutt adds enough circumstances into the narrative in which national feeling is encouraged and rewarded that it is difficult to come to that conclusion within the context of the story. While the original poem does contain much diplomatic speech, especially in the exchanges between the shore watchman and Beowulf and the later dialogue between the Geatish hero and Hrothgar, the grandiose speeches in this retelling would put even the most silver-tongued statesman to shame.

A passing remark made by Hrothgar in one of these dialogues is particularly interesting for the jarring anachronism buried within a compliment. Hrothgar declares that Beowulf's deeds are renowned "throughout the whole of the Teutonic North" (Ebbutt, 5). This is an intriguing word choice and not, I believe, accidental. As touched upon in an earlier section of this chapter, during the Victorian period and the decades that followed many hobbyists, amateur historians, and students of the social sciences alike were increasingly fascinated by the study of ethnic groups. Those who placed more emphasis upon the heritage they saw as uniquely Saxon often referred to the Teutons, linking Britain with Germany. Especially viewed in the light of Ebbutt's conspicuous insertion of historical proofs for the *Beowulf* epic not two pages earlier, this terminology is interesting. As a scholar Ebbutt must have known that, even if there had been such a thing as a "Teutonic North" at this time, there certainly was no sense of fraternal bonds of

kinship between these people groups and would not be even after the fall of Napoleon from power.

And as the poem progresses beyond the first of the monster fights, Beowulf emerges victorious and in possession of a monstrous appendage. Beowulf's men declare that Grendel's arm must be displayed in the hall in order to draw attention to the fact that this deed was done by a Geatish hero (Ebbutt, 18). But this retelling does not simply accentuate Beowulf's identity as a Geat, it intensifies the emotional ties of the characters to their lands. When the scop sings of the long-ago war between the Danes and the Frisians, Ebbutt states unequivocally that "it roused the national pride of the Danes to hear of the victory of their Danish forefathers" (Ebbutt, 19). This is a moment within the text that is strangely self-referential. Just as the Danes are hearing a tale of their forebears defeating their enemies, so too is Ebbutt's reader. So in this brief period of rest in the tale, where the Danes are finally free of the foe plaguing them for more than a decade, it is by the the harp-strumming of a scop that she most clearly parallels the aspirations of her own writing yet still remaining within the narrative. While Ebbutt most likely would not describe herself as a scop, she did expressly represent her collection of stories as tales of national heritage. So one must wonder if she too hopes to stir up the national pride of her readers.

A good indication of national pride in a monarchy is not only one's attitude towards specific kings, but kingship in general. Much like in my earlier analysis of Gibb's writings, I will analyze Ebbutt's portrayal of each king before extrapolating what these characterizations could indicated about her attitude towards kingship in general. As mentioned earlier, as in Gibb's

telling, Ebbutt presents Scyld as coming ashore in a boat laden with treasure. While this may simply be a misunderstanding of the original text, it might also betray some of the expectations that these authors have of kings. As if being whisked magically ashore by the wind and tide was not enough of an indication to the Danes—and to the reader—of this foundling child's unusual destiny, a boat weighted down by precious goods makes it explicitly clear that this is no ordinary infant. Though this may not have been Ebbutt's intent, it shows at the very least a casual connection between treasure, perhaps a symbol of divine favor, and kingship. However, in the Liuzza translation, it is clear that Scyld, even if he was destined to become a great king, did so by the strength of his will ("Beowulf," lns 5-7). However, Ebbutt's version does preserve more of this spirit than Gibb's, because regardless of his possession of treasure horde as a toddler, Scyld must still earn the kingship for himself.

In further contrast with the earlier retelling of Gibb, Ebbutt portrays Hrothgar is a more complex king in her adaptation. Though in the earlier years of his reign Hrothgar was a bold and brave king who took in political refugees, such as Beowulf's father Ecgtheow, his pride proved to be his undoing. In this tale, Hrothgar's desire for a lasting symbol of his power arguably borders on vanity, as "he longed for some outward sign of the magnificence of his sway; he determined to build a great hall, in which he could hold feasts and banquets, and could entertain his warriors and thanes, and visitors from afar" (Ebbutt, 3). It is important to note that even though part of his motivation in building Heorot lay in bettering the circumstances of his people, Hrothgar and his subjects are punished for his desire for grandeur. "Proud [was] the heart of the king, who from his high seat on the daïs saw his brave thanes carousing at the long tables below

him” (Ebbutt, 3). As a result of that pride, terror falls upon the mead-hall. Unlike Gibb, who presented the Grendel attacks as more random, Ebbutt acknowledges that Hrothgar’s desire for both his thanes and foreign envoys to marvel at his glory played no small role in instigating the calamity. Yet Hrothgar is ultimately a more complex and nuanced king, which could show an evolution in the attitudes towards monarchs and kingship in general, and a growing understanding that no king is perfect. But some kings will always be better than others, as Ebbutt reveals in her description of Beowulf’s lordly ways.

With the growing increase and regularity of the nightly attacks, Hrothgar seems to succumb to a state of depression and despondency, powerless to stop the slaughter. As Ebbutt tells it: “Hrothgar grew old in helpless longing for strength to rescue his people from their foe” (Ebbutt, 5). In fact, the only thing which finally draws Hrothgar “from the sad reverie into which he had fallen” is the arrival of the Geatish hero Beowulf (Ebbutt, 10). It is with this coming of a hero from across the sea that Hrothgar returns to his former state of power and competence. Though even in the original poem Beowulf arguably functioned as a redemptive character, Ebbutt makes this distinction even starker. In this telling, even the mere presence of this Geatish hero makes the people around him better. Hrothgar rouses himself from despair, his men are inspired to achieve great things, and even Unferth becomes a more sympathetic and humble character after exposure to the leader of the Geats.

Interestingly, in a significant departure from Gibb, and indeed most adaptations, Ebbutt devotes a great deal of space to Beowulf’s childhood. She describes the hero’s appearance in

great detail, depicting him as great in physique even as a young man, and quite handsome, with the very Aryan features of light hair and "clear blue eyes" (Ebbutt, 6). In fact, his figure is so striking, that later in the tale the Danish warden can tell with a glance that he is the leader of the Geatish troop, "for the mighty stature, the clear glance of command, the goodly armour, and the lordly air of Beowulf left no doubt as to who was the chieftain of that little band" (Ebbutt, 7). Though this moment is present in the poem, because of the great attention Ebbutt paid to Beowulf's physical appearance mere paragraphs earlier, it reenforces the idea that his body is the manifestation of inward nobility. Interestingly enough, she describes his personality as "sluggish," good-natured and unwarlike (Ebbutt, 6). This slowness to anger despite his muscular frame which gave him the ability to dominate others, brought him nothing but teasing from his peers (Ebbutt, 6). This little detail serves to provide more facets to Beowulf's character and make the reader feel more sympathetic towards him. But it is important to remember that this forbearance which his peers distain, too, is a kingly quality.

In this telling, Ebbutt stresses the fact that the young Beowulf was a member of the "Geatish court," the sister-son of King Hygelac (Ebbutt, 6). Indeed, she is very specific that from the age of seven, he was brought up in the house of the king himself. While this may just seem like an attempt to humanize Beowulf or gain the reader's interest in him, I would argue that these details actually serve a much more vital role. At the very least, Beowulf is a fostered child in the royal household, and it is rather heavily implied that he is a member of the "Geatish royal family" (Ebbutt, 6). Not only does this further reenforce the dynastic feeling of kingship in this retelling, it also serves to legitimize Beowulf as a man who would be in the line for the throne.

These additional details ultimately portray a very different image of kingship than in the original poem. Ebbutt's choice of words reveal a definite tendency to portray Anglo-Saxon kingship in contemporary terms. The use of the phrases "court" and "royal family" cannot help but conjure an image of monarchy, complete with marble floors and finely woven cloth, which is completely anachronistic to the *Beowulf* text. By stressing Beowulf's royal upbringing, Ebbutt strengthens the concept of innate kingship passed down along dynastic lines, and provides an a justification for this view from what she considers a foundational piece of British heritage.

This adaptation also features a closer style of narration and introduces more insight into Beowulf's mental state. In the poem, and even in Gibb's adaptation, the character of Beowulf remains purposefully vague. While Ebbutt's insight does serve to make him a more sympathetic character, it is both humanizing and alienating. For even though Beowulf is flawed, these shortcomings serve to make him an even larger-than-life figure, because he is able to accomplish great deeds in spite of his weaknesses. And thus he emerges as a hero endowed with goodness as great as his grip-strength.

First, let me present the weaknesses that Ebbutt presents in this retelling, and then examine the ways in which Beowulf overcomes them. Ebbutt preserves the hero's tendency to be impulsive from the original text. For example, as Unferth points out, Beowulf undertook a dangerous swimming contest against the advice of his friends (Ebbutt, 12). However, though Beowulf answers Unferth's accusations to the satisfaction of the Danes, the fact remains that the reason Ebbutt gives for this Geatish hero seeking out Grendel in the first place is to test his own

strength. In her introduction, she typifies Beowulf as "bold to rashness for himself, prudent for his comrades," which paints a picture of a far less cunning Beowulf than exists in the text of the original poem.

One of the moments where Beowulf's pragmatism borders on ruthlessness in the Liuzza translation is when Grendel came into Heorot while Beowulf's men are sleeping. Grendel grasped one of Beowulf's sleeping men and "slit him open suddenly, bit into his joints, drank the blood from his veins" ("Beowulf," lns 741-742). While his kinsmen is being devoured, Beowulf is awake, but chooses not to rush into the combat blindly, instead observing Grendel's modus operandi so that he can gain the upper hand against the monster. Though his tactics are impeccable, the poet does not shy away from the fact that in the midst of combat he had to make a difficult call. Ebbutt's Beowulf is never placed in a position to demonstrate that he is, in fact, a seasoned warrior familiar with having to choose the lesser of two evils.

But to be fair, Ebbutt does preserve some of Beowulf's lesser qualities which cannot be spun into positive traits. Chief among these is this hero's nagging reluctance to tell the truth in its entirety. In the original poem, Beowulf does not reveal that the Geats were hesitant to allow him to assist the Danes with their monster problem. In Ebbutt's telling too, Beowulf conceals this information from Hrothgar. This is the only instance in which Beowulf does this in her rendition of the narrative. However, in the original text, Beowulf does not relay the whole event of the fight with Grendel's mother to Hrothgar ("Beowulf," lns 1651-1670). He also omits an important character from even the knowledge of the reader until he speaks with Hygelac after returning to

the Geats. It is before the Geatish leader that he reveals that Hrothgar's daughter, Freawaru is promised to the prince Ingeld, a situation which Beowulf sees as teetering on the cusp of an alliance breakdown, and open warfare between the two peoples ("Beowulf," lns 2020-2031).

Ebbutt adds some very humanizing details to her portrayal of Beowulf. After the monster fight, she devotes a sentence to describing his efforts to catch his breath. While this may not sound like much, even this mere sentence impacts the way in which the reader sees Beowulf. For a moment, this Geatish warrior, though he has achieved his great boasts, must rest and recover from the battle. As Ebbutt describes, "Beowulf sank panting on a shattered seat, scarce believing in his victory" (Ebbutt, 17). This too introduces an element of self-doubt to the warrior that is not present in the original telling. Even if he had believed his boasts wholeheartedly while feasting in the bright torchlight of Heorot, there was a moment that Ebbutt's Beowulf gave up hope of surviving the struggle with Grendel. This expression of vulnerability causes the reader to further sympathize with Beowulf. Ebbutt's warrior, though still mighty and brave, is perhaps not as insurmountable a hero as the original.

Though Ebbutt's Beowulf does possess flaws, he still emerges as an idealized archetype of heroism in the text. This should not be a surprise; from the beginning Ebbutt was candid about presenting instances of heroism from British national heritage. Part of his heroic nature makes him inevitably a model king. Of course, Ebbutt sets up his kingly behavior from fairly early on in the telling, thus the section on Beowulf's upbringing in the hall of Hygelac. In fact, Beowulf even uses the royal we in referring to his personage after the Grendel fight—"We have

performed our boast, O King" (Ebbutt, 19)—mere moments after he sits down on a bench, panting to collect his breath.

From the very beginning of this retelling, Ebbutt sets Beowulf up as a sacrificial character. She casts his death as "a glorious victory over the powers of evil, a victory gained for the sake of others to whom Beowulf feels that he owes protection and devotion" (Ebbutt, 1-2). When Hygelac is slain, Beowulf calls on Hygd to assume the regency (Ebbutt, 31). She tries to give him the crown, but he refuses and speaks so movingly that all the Geats want him to become Heardred's guardian and protector (Ebbutt, 31). It is Beowulf's fame as warrior, coupled with his diplomatic prowess, that protects his people for nearly fifty years. As Ebbutt makes clear "Beowulf in fact, became an ideal king, as he was an ideal warrior and hero, and he closed his life by an ideal act of self-sacrifice for the good of his people" (Ebbutt, 31). Unlike Gibb, Ebbutt emphasizes Wiglaf's role in the dragon-battle, which could perhaps demonstrating the importance of loyalty to one's sovereign or extolling the virtues of military service (Ebbutt, 37). As he lays dying, the aged Beowulf poignantly refers to Wiglas as "my son," bestowing upon him the kingship of the Geats. This could also be more than an affectionate move, and quite probably stand as an adoption of Wiglaf so that the line of Beowulf will continue.

La Belle Saxon sans Philosophique

Consistent with her characterization in the introduction of the Anglo-Saxons as "a simple warrior race" (Ebbutt, 1), Ebbutt does not preserve the original text of a good deal of the tale more similar to wisdom literature, such as Hrothgar's sermon. This is an interesting move given

that, as she stated from the beginning, her goal is to provide a medieval template for modern behavior. This moment in the tale could have been one of the many places where Ebbutt breaks her prose structure to insert passages of her own translation of the original poem. In fact, Ebbutt's retelling of the *Beowulf* epic is 41 pages long, and she breaks the narrative flow 22 times with excerpts from her own translation. Often, these poetic passages only serve to restate what has been said in the prose retelling, but in a more purposefully antiquated way of speaking.

In these insertions from her rendition of the poem, common to many translations of the era, Ebbutt divides each line into two parts, leaving a large space in the middle. This structure is typesetting convention anachronistic to the original poem, which was written as an unbroken line more similar to a modern-day prose work. Examining the formatting may seem like being preoccupied with an insignificant detail, but many adaptations of the *Beowulf* poem from this time period, whether they were scholarly translations or retellings of the story intended for a mass audience, structured their retellings in a similar anachronistic way. Ebbutt's language too, even in the prose sections, feels much more antiquated than Gibb's rendition, despite being published nearly thirty years later. This reveals a medievalized portrayal of the text, grounded in a fantastic rather than historically-accurate conception of the Anglo-Saxons.

Unlike Gibb, however, Ebbutt sparingly uses quasi-Biblical phrasing in her retelling. The only unequivocal instance I could find was the use of "truly I say to thee" when Beowulf is reprimanding Unferth (Ebbutt, 14). Instead of scriptural allusions, she makes multiple references to the All-Father (Ebbutt, 9, 18). She also mentions *wyrd* far more frequently than Gibb. While

these are just small details, they could possibly speak to an impulse to tie Teutonic feeling with the idea of robust German paganism in the vein of Wagner. However, this is not made explicitly clear in her text, so perhaps the point is moot. However, she does posit her own theory of *Beowulf* as the legend of "a divine Beowa, hero and ancestor of the English" merging with the tale of sun-god versus swamp-demon (Ebbutt, 1). This is strangely reminiscent of Gibb's theories of Beowulf being a sort of demi-god.

In Summation

Though this retelling of *Beowulf* does keep fairly close to the original in many ways, the fact that Ebbutt expanded on sections about Beowulf's youth and ties to Hygelac's family at the cost of other themes woven throughout the text illustrates where Ebbutt's priorities lay. I would suggest that she viewed the themes of kinship more important to preserve within her retelling than the wise observations of the pitfalls of pride and the transience of riches and glory. While this justification makes the neglect of the philosophical sections less objectionable, it nonetheless is a glaring omission—but not, perhaps, an unforeseeable one.

As Ebbutt herself stated, the goal of *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race* was the representation of the traits of the ideal hero from every age. Unfortunately, however, this approach somewhat limited the scope of this body of work. Especially in an instructional work designed to teach moral lessons, which is what I believe Ebbutt was intending, it is difficult to present complexity and shades of grey. To be fair, Ebbutt does suggest in several places that Beowulf himself is not only an unreliable narrator, but a human being who has to catch his

breath after battle. Nevertheless, by her own stated objective, Ebbutt must make Beowulf correspond to the role of the ideal hero of his age, even if she must break a few bones to make him fit the mold.

This approach does not allow for complex, contradictory heroes who philosophize at length about mortality and yet at the same time literally tempt fate by rushing into battle alone against enemies they have a scarce chance of defeating. Ebbutt may have intended to provide a glimpse into the world of the Scandinavian warriors of the *Beowulf* myth in order that her readers might trace the lineage of heroism back through the mists of time, yet her determination to give clearly-cut models of behavior dimmed the fact that these heroes grappled not simply with monsters or enemy armies, but with the fear of death, the desire for meaning, and the need for community.

CHAPTER II

STRANGERS TO THE MEAD-HALL:

NON-ENGLISH ADAPTATIONS OF *BEOWULF*

For this chapter, I will examine adaptations of the *Beowulf* epic which originate from authors who would not consider the story a part of their cultural heritage. This study is the natural successor to the previous chapter, if perhaps an inversion, because although I will be evaluating how and why an author approaches the *Beowulf* text, I am focused primarily on those who exist outside of a culture largely influenced by the Anglo-Saxons. This chapter hinges upon an in-depth analysis of the ideology behind an author's approach to the poem in addition to a brief overview of the work itself. In order to provide a sufficiently comprehensive survey, I will first examine the 1999 translation of *Beowulf* by the poet Seamus Heaney, to several poems by Jorge Louis Borges within which he grapples with his motivation behind studying this Anglo-Saxon text, and finally to a completely different method of approaching the text, the Spanish-language graphic novel by Santiago García and David Rubín.

A Study of Borderlands

After all, *Beowulf* is a complex tale threaded through with elements of many genres: the quest for meaning and warnings about blind ambition common to wisdom literature, commentary on political climate and historical battles much like a history, and perhaps most importantly the depiction of the unfolding of a life which forms the basis of the dramatic biopic. With all these rich themes to expound upon, why would any author be hesitant to adapt the *Beowulf t*ext?

Why do we study *Beowulf* at all? Is this Anglo-Saxon epic significant merely as some piece of cultural heritage or ancestral history, of interest only to the fair-haired and blue-eyed? Is able to be approached by readers as a work of art like any other; an object that, while still a part of history, in some ways remains separate from the past like a fly trapped in amber? Do we read this tale because the poet of the *Beowulf* narrative captures some essential part of what it means to be Anglo-Saxon, to be English, or even to be human? Do we continue to study this epic simply because it is an ancient text, or the longest Anglo-Saxon epic remaining? Now, of course, to continue this train of queries further would naturally bring us to the question of why we study ancient texts at all, and even perhaps to the role the study of the humanities plays in our understanding of the world around us, and similar issues too far-reaching and nuanced to study in a work of this scope. But it is important that I at least touch upon the elementary issues many of these "outsider" authors must grapple with before I begin to discuss how these adaptors approach the *Beowulf* text.

And as if these underlying questions surrounding the study of *Beowulf* and the desire to retell it were not murky and daunting enough, past scholarship and adaptations have exacerbated the issue further. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, there existed a trend among Victorian and Edwardian authors to tie the *Beowulf* epic to their own national heritage, which effectively functioned to keep other cultures from accessing the tale. Now, of course, these adaptations are valuable for many reasons, but especially for my study because they provide a snapshot of national feeling at the time they were written, demonstrating how these authors see themselves

and their audience. When writing to an audience that they believe to share their cultural heritage, these authors can be at their most unguarded, and air their true feelings about the subjects upon which they might otherwise remain tight-lipped. These retellings highlight the way these people who strongly identified with the culture of the *Beowulf* legend—ignoring, for the moment, whether or not that felt kinship was truly justified—saw themselves as natural cultural progeny of at least the *Beowulf* poet, if not the Danes and Geats of the legend.

Perhaps this would not be so visceral an action in most other works, but one of the primary themes of *Beowulf* is the problem of outsiders. Grendel and his mother are situated as the ultimate outsiders, so alienated from the human culture of the Danes that even the joyful sound of feasting and merrymaking is odious to them. Their separation from the customs of society is so complete that they cannot communicate in any way other than bloodshed. So these Grendel-kin, in addition to being cast from society, are the primary antagonists and the major threat of the first two-thirds of the narrative. Outsiders are the ultimate danger in the *Beowulf* epic; safety lies within the heroes of the mead-hall. By affiliating their culture so closely with the Scandinavian heroes in the legend, the Victorian and Edwardian adaptors cast all those existing outside of their own community outside of the mead-hall to the moors and fens.

When the *Beowulf* text is viewed as primarily a heritage object, as had been the case for several generations of Scandinavian, English, and German scholarship, anyone who comes from a culture which is not one of these three is automatically cut off from an aspect of the text. And what if these adaptors wish to identify themselves with a group within the text? Since the only

other outsiders in the text are either monsters or other kingdoms threatening war, the only "kinship" these adaptors can find is with the strangers and aliens banished to the borderlands.

So in a way, the *Beowulf* epic can be seen as a borderland tale that draws the line between those in a community and those outside with a stark slash of red, the trail of Grendel's blood on the moors. The tale could even be read as a story of the dangers of outsiders, and certainly some retellings emphasis the foreignness, the inherent inhumanity of the Grendel-kin. This can reveal the image of a culture through a mirror dimly. This helps explain how hesitant many authors from other cultures are to approach this tale, and how even when they do so, many of them are acutely aware of their own 'otherness.'

Celtic Invasion: Heaney's 1999 Translation

Seamus Heaney, Nobel prize-winner and acclaimed poet, had been approached by the editors of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* in the mid-1980s to craft his own translation of the *Beowulf* epic. In many ways this seemed a natural task for Heaney, an artist adept in crafting evocative images of the wild: dramatic and craggy cliffs battered by wind, bodies buried ceremonially in the peat, the metallic bite of bitter cold sitting heavy on the tongue. Though Heaney entertained the idea for a while, and was even eager to undertake the project for a while, he eventually set it down, and let it gather dust. The undertaking was more difficult than he anticipated, because master poet though he was, he was not an expert in the Anglo-Saxon language.

Moreover, Heaney had always been a decidedly Irish poet and dedicated many lectures and poems to scrutinizing the English influence upon and exclusion of more Irish forms of expression. Why, then, would an Irish poet want to translate a work which so often was deemed the embryo of English literature? As if that were not enough, much of the academic community have long been consumed with the nitty-gritty of *Beowulf*: finding parallels in similar Nordic works, searching for matches in genealogies in the historical record, and even devoting themselves to the study of single words of the text.

Beowulf, after all, is often seen by scholars and laypeople alike as a work of Germanic heritage; even the structure of the poem itself, as typified by its ponderous alliteration and sometimes heavy-handed kennings, is antithetical to lilting, song-like traditional Irish poetry. Heaney himself admits that for a long while he "tended to conceive of English and Irish as adversarial tongues" (Heaney, xxiv). This is in no small part due to the tumultuous history between the two peoples. These borders are constant in a time of ever-shifting rhetoric and volatile politics. In Ireland, as in many other nations, a person's identity is explicitly bound up with the community they belong to: *Gaels* or Orangemen, Protestant or Catholic. So it is not difficult to understand why a Irish poet would remain uncertain about translating a work which was a foundational heritage piece for the culture which undertook massive—and all too successful—attempts to stamp out all expressions of his own identity and way of life. Much of the scholarly work and popular history in this area has been reactionary, hasty to emphasize the differences between the two cultures and slow to build bridges spanning between them.

Ironically, then, it was Heaney's very Irishness which caused his initial doubt that eventually shaped his later keen appreciation for the *Beowulf* epic. It was his experience of growing up in a Northern Ireland which was, for all intents and purposes, an ideological and physical battlefield in the midst of the Troubles that helped him find new angles on facets of meaning within the poem. The primary tensions within the poem are, as stated earlier, the fear of outsiders, Heathobard and monstrous alike, lurking outside the tightly-knit community. Heaney acknowledges this "apprehension of menaced borders, of danger gathering beyond the mere and the marshes" (Heaney, xv). In his introduction to this translation, he analyzes one of the many digressions of the story: the scops' telling of the Battle of Finnsburg. In this moment, Heaney finds a summation of the hopelessly honor-bound society of these warriors in which "vengeance for the dead becomes an ethic for the living, bloodshed begets further bloodshed; the wheel turns, the generations tread and tread and tread" (Heaney, xiv).

He makes similar comments about the state of seemingly perpetual violence in his native Northern Ireland in much of his earlier poetry, which Eugene O'Brien terms "Heaney's Bog Problems," scribing reflections upon republicanism and national feeling which lie buried under a very shallow layer of sediment (O'Brian, 5). It is important to remember that at the time of these compositions conflicts between the IRA and UDA were escalating, the Irish Civil Rights movement was campaigning against the suppression of Catholic suffrage, and internment camps were being introduced in Northern Ireland. Though Heaney was not himself present physically in Ireland through this entire period, he was attuned to the polarization of his homeland. Heaney

remained profoundly influenced by the factionalized and increasingly weaponized political climate of Ireland.

Particularly during the Troubles, there was an almost constant supply of martyrs both Republican and Unionist; their twisted, broken bodies ready and waiting to elevated by political rhetoric and transfigured into sacrificial lambs to be offered on the altar of "the cause." But for Heaney, and many like him, these constant sacrifices rang hollow. No martyr could take upon their body the sufferings of their people, no death could secure lasting peace. These bleak prospects inspired Heaney to write much of his "bog poetry," in which he unpacks the themes of sacrifice and mortality against the backdrop of the black, peaty earth. Though the setting is different than the rugged mountains and windswept beaches of *Beowulf*, the themes Heaney weaves within these poems are eerily similar. Even in the final stanza in Heaney's poem "The Tollund Man," there are traces of the Finnsburg episode in his mention of the Jutes. As Heaney so poignantly puts it "Out there in Jutland/ In the old man-killing parishes/ I will feel lost, / Unhappy and at home" ("Tollund Man," lns 55-60).

Of course, it took further reflection before Heaney himself recognized within his own works echoes of the Anglo-Saxon. Especially within his earlier work, like the poem "Digging," he wielded alliteration and vivid imagery derived from nature with haunting agility. Within *Beowulf* itself, Heaney found a bridge spanning between his own Irish heritage and the ancient Anglo-Saxon. But it is a bridge shrouded by mists of unfamiliarity across a gulf of time and space. The deeper truths and the overall aesthetic of the poem remain, though battered by the

winds of time. But Heaney was only able to see it as such when he viewed the poem as a piece of art like any other, freed from the staunch ethnocentric and nationalist that had been mooring it for so long. Like Scyld Scefing, the *Beowulf* poem

> arrived from somewhere beyond the known bourne of our experience, and having fulfilled its purpose (again like Shield) it passes once more into the beyond. In the intervening time, the poet conjures up a work as remote as Shield's funeral boat borne towards the horizon, as commanding as the horn-pronged gables of King Hrothgar's hall, as solid and dazzling as Beowulf's funeral pyre that is set ablaze at the end. These opening and closing scenes retain a haunting presence in the mind; they are set pieces but they have the life-marking power of certain dreams. They are like the pillars of the gate of horn, through which the wise dreams of true art can still be said to pass (Heaney, xii)

For Heaney, then, *Beowulf* stands primarily as an art object much like a museum piece which, though it may remain inaccessible for some, merely needs the proper mediation for a modern audience to understand it.

Heaney also raises the point that the *Beowulf* epic seems unfamiliar to many modern readers because it is not part of Classical Greek and Roman heritage "enshrined in English" (Heaney, xi). Even if *Beowulf*'s subject matter were not at times complex to the point of inscrutability and its narrative structure meandering, the names and events are less commonplace to the average person than those of Greek and Roman mythic figures. Hrothgar and Æschere are, after all, hardly towering figures of pop culture. By virtue of this unfamiliarity, the modern

reader must overcome some hurdles before engaging with the text. In addition to the felt alienness of the story, the popular conception of *Beowulf* as little more than a monster story is another obstacle that Heaney pushes against in his introduction. Heaney devotes many pages to both outlining previous approaches to *Beowulf*, as well as elucidating his own. But more than that, his introduction highlights the genius of the original poet, defending many of the more unpopular sections of the work as informed creative choices made by the poet. He touches upon nearly all of the popular genres the *Beowulf* epic encompasses, the biopic, the drama, the horror story, the wisdom literature.

Additionally, few readers engage with the text to its full depth. A surface-level reading seldom leaves the reader stricken with the bleak, brutal beauty of the poem. As Heaney addresses in his introduction, his rendition of the epic strives to leave the reader haunted by the bleak mood of the poem. This attitude is reflected in his translation, which focuses primarily on the stark, stirring, dark beauty of the poem. However, his emphasis on creating a palpable atmosphere does come at a price; by Heaney's own admission, this translation does lose some of the line-by-line specificity of many other translations. But in Heaney's estimation, *Beowulf* itself exists as a work of art, able to be accessed across a vast gulf of time and space. So, Heaney treats it as any other art object, carefully endeavoring to restore it to its previous luster and convince others of the importance of viewing it.

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"I suppose all I am saying is that I consider *Beowulf* to be part of my voice-right. And yet to persuade myself that I was born into its language and that its language was born into me took a

while" (Heaney, xxiv). In Heaney's mind, language functions the primary uniting force between the Anglo-Saxon epic and any audience trying to approach it because it provides a cultural snapshot. It is through language we better understand the Anglo-Saxons as they communicated, and how we discover similarities between them and us. Heaney himself was able to find ties between the Anglo-Saxon and the Irish through words like *þolian,* Old English words with equivalents still spoken in rural Ireland (Heaney, xxv). But Heaney also left marks of his own Irish identity in his translation, most notably in by putting a bawn in *Beowulf*. As Heaney explains, "bawn" was the term used for the defensive buildings that the English erected to keep the native Irish from overrunning their plantations throughout Munster and Ulster. It struck Heaney as a fitting expression for the "embattled keep where Hrothgar waits and watches," (Heaney, xxx) while still asserting the poem's Englishness. Seamus Heaney, then, remains largely faithful to his own image of the Anglo-Saxon masterpiece, populated by towering figures who dispense hard-won wisdom and struggle against the inhospitable forces of nature and fate.

Five Shades of Saxon: Borges' Anglo-Saxon Poetry

Jorge Luis Borges stands as an illustrious and prolific short story writer, essayist, scholar, linguist, and of course, poet. Born in Argentina in the year 1899, Borges would travel across the globe, from Spain to the Baltic, Texas to Switzerland. He was awarded the Miguel de Cervantes Prize in 1980 as a testament to his achievements in Spanish-language literature. And these achievements are profound; Borges' works provide masterful musings over the questions of aesthetics, identity, language, the nature of knowledge, and that merely scratches the surface of

his canon. Time and again, he emphasized the examination of universal emotions and the meanings behind actions, all in the pursuit of examining the true drama of the human condition. It is for this reason that he enjoyed gangster films and westerns, for their lush drama and sensuous atmosphere ("Jorge Luis Borges, The Art of Fiction No. 39," the Paris Review)

An author of a deeply philosophical bent, Borges frequently contemplates the nature of writing itself. Like many modern poets, Borges has a conception of poetry in which meaning hinges upon the interaction between poem and reader, "the aesthetic act, the thrill, the almost physical emotion that comes with each reading" (Borges, 294). While Borges may intend to convey one message in a piece, he would argue that the true poetry arises from the response it elicits from the reader. In a sense, this makes the task of analyzing his poetry easy, but it also makes discerning his true meaning all the more difficult, since it is an even more insubstantial and slippery thing. One thing is fairly certain, though, that Borges conceives of his poetry as a revealing of the everyday holiness of familiar places (Borges, 290). It is somewhat strange, then, that Borges devoted so much of his time to studying the Anglo-Saxons.

While Borges in many ways remained unsure as to what specifically drew him to Scandinavian subjects, he nevertheless devoted himself to the study of Anglo-Saxon. Borges began learning the Anglo-Saxon language while gradually losing his vision, before becoming functionally blind in his mid-fifties. He characterizes the genre of the epic as "one of the necessities of the human mind" (Borges, 296), and *Beowulf* stands as a premier example of this. With this in mind, Borges' preoccupation with the *Beowulf* text is understandable. As discussed

in my introduction to the chapter, I will be examining selected poems from Borge's vast bibliography. Namely, I will study "Elegy," "The Saxon (A.D. 449)," "Fragment," "Embarking on the Study of Anglo-Saxon Grammar," and "Poem Written in a Copy of Beowulf." These are, of course, a looser adaptation of *Beowulf* than Heaney's translation, but no less valuable for the insight they provide into the conceptions held by a great modern author and accomplished scholar of Anglo-Saxon.

Furthermore, Borges is one level further removed from a culture which views itself as the cultural progeny of *Beowulf* than Heaney. To my knowledge, resentment and ill-feeling towards the English was not nearly as endemic to Argentinian culture at the time of Borges's writings as in Irish culture at the time of Heaney's. Of course, the dispute over the Falkland Island changed that in the mid-1980s. This matter aside, significant barriers do still tower between Borges and *Beowulf*. here is also a language barrier between myself and Borges, as I am not nearly fluent enough in Spanish to render his poetry in anything approximating justice to their shades of meaning. Instead, I am relying on translations by Alastair Reid, Donald A. Yates, and Norman Thomas di Giovanni. Borges worked directly with Norman Thomas di Giovanni to translate his poetry into English, and they both oversaw the reworking of the translation into an English poetic form by Reid, Yates and others.

I will begin this study by first providing a brief analysis of "Elegy," translated by Donald A. Yates. This is a good entryway to his poetry concerning the Saxons, and a fitting introduction to Borges as both a narrator and character. The poem is in tenor a playful yet melancholic musing

upon Borges' life of travel, of diverse study, and of his restless pursuit of knowledge. He opens with somewhat flippant invocation of fortune, which sent him sailing "across the diverse seas of the world/ or across that single and solitary sea of diverse names" ("Elegy," lns 2-3), making him part of every city and land he visited. It is through these journeys that Borges discovers much about himself, only to find that he had "grown old in so many mirrors" (ln 12). So in this poem both his location and the "lithographs, encyclopedias, atlases" (ln 14) that he questions function as reflective surfaces, allowing Borges to see different facets of himself. This is just another expression of the delicate balance between the tactile and the insubstantial, the physical and the mental that is common in many of Borges' poems. This line illustrates how not merely literature, but landscapes function as a formative forces in both Borges' understanding, but his identity. He emerges from each new place he travels a man at least somewhat changed.

One of the many places he discusses in this poem is the regions "where the Saxon warred with the Dane and mixed their blood" (ln 9). While this does not touch upon *Beowulf* specifically, and really is a much broader reference to Borges' study of Anglo-Saxon in general, it is a good starting-place for the rest of this study. In this line, Borges evokes images of the battlefield, while all the other places he discusses are cities, states, and countries are more like the "red and tranquil labyrinth of/ London" (lns 10-11). By this martial description, Borges raises the issue of blood feuds and clannishness that he addresses in more depth in poems I shall discuss shortly. However passing this reference might seem, it is important to note that, typical of Borges, not a single word is wasted. In the short phrase "mixed their blood," he addresses the futility of the cycles of warfare prevalent throughout much of Anglo-Saxon, Nordic, and

Germanic poetry and epic myths. Ultimately, the lines between clans, families, and people groups these hostilities strive to uphold are blurred, the blood of warring peoples are mixed together on the great equalizer of the battlefield.

Another theme raised by this poem that Borges will develop in more detail in other poems is the divide between sight and blindness. This metaphor is especially impactful in light of the fact that Borges began losing his vision in his thirties. In this piece, the narrator, understood to be Borges himself, “sought in vain the marble gaze of the statues” (ln 13), searching for meaning in the cold, unfeeling past, and looking for answers from statues of the ancients who can only gaze mutely ahead, tongues forever stilled. This line harks back to the earlier mention of the “single and solitary sea of diverse names” (ln 3), by which Borges could have meant that stories are a repetition of the same themes over and over, while only the names change. Even if Borges only was thinking of the sea of names he had encountered along his travels, it is entirely possible that he would count Hrothgar, Freawaru, and Beowulf among those number. But let us turn now to Borges’ conception of one particular, unnamed Saxon.

The next Borges poem I will examine is “The Saxon (A.D. 449),” which was first published in Buenos Aires by Emecé in the collection E. Poemas 1923-1953. The edition I will examine here is part of the Penguin Presses 1972 selection of Borges’ poetry from 1923-1967, and was translated by Alastair Reid. This poem is the first in many of Borges’ Anglo-Saxon-themed writings, (322) and so it is compelling to see how his conception of the Anglo-Saxons shifted over time. This poem moves this study from a specific reference to one particular Saxon

“everyman,” the a broad overview of Anglo-Saxon culture in general, which gives my study more particular insight into Borges’ characterization of the Saxons. The Saxon protagonist of this poem, “blond and blunt” (“The Saxon,” ln 2), arises at dawn to walk across the sand dunes of the beach “with a tentative bare foot” (ln 3), a detail which Borges later regretted adding to the poem (322). Though these first few lines give us no insight into the specific mental action of this Saxon, the reader gets a general sense of caution born of harsh conditions. The man himself described as blunt, a descriptor which Borges is fond of applying to the Saxons, evoking a conception of solid strength, but perhaps not mental acumen.

But this physical strength is necessary in light of the bleak landscape of ashen seas and inky mountains which Borges describes in the next stanza. In such an unforgiving landscape, there is little wonder that survival, not fine, delicate crafts and niceties of language, would be the primary concern of Borges’ Saxon. Indeed, it is almost surprising that, given the constant need to maintain his own protection, that this man would have time to use “the hand that was hard in battle…To carve with iron point a stubborn rune” (lns 11-12). In Borges’ reckoning, the Saxon man of the poem, and his people by extension, was clearly not an ignorant brute, but possessed a creative spark despite—or perhaps because of—the harsh conditions of his daily life. However, the runes he wrote are etched with the edge of a weapon, which is a beautiful allusion to the frequently war-like and martial poetry of the Anglo-Saxons. Borges speaks more plainly of Anglo-Saxon writing in his next stanza: “To give voice to memories or hymns/ He coined laborious names and metaphors;/ War was a coming face to face of men,/ a crossing of swords, a

colloquy of spears" (lns 25-28). This is a recurrence of a theme he touched upon in "Elegy," namely, the ties between language and culture.

It is precisely the Saxon's culture of constant uneasiness and frequent warfare which produced their modes of expression. Especially in light of the forbidding landscape described earlier in the poem, and the Saxon's struggle for survival, it is through these "laborious manes and metaphors" that the Saxon protagonist tried to add beauty of expression to his harsh existence, and elevate his bleak and martial struggle to carve out a place for himself among the craggy rocks. Like Borges' earlier image of carving runes by blade-edge and the bluntness of the Saxon himself, these lines emphasize the studied literary conventions of the Saxon.

Particularly interesting is Borges' use of the phrase "laborious names and metaphors." While these kennings could become repetitive, and may seem clumsy and strained to the modern reader, they were a marker of an oral tradition of composition. The Iliad in particular is littered with great examples of a similar impulse, and I would argue that "whale-road" and "word-horde" are no more labored than Homer's frequent use of "dawn's rose fingers" or "grey-eyed Athena." Borges, then, emphases the ties between modes of expression and the language itself. Kennings exist as a natural outgrowth of an oral tradition, but also as a completely artificial and fairly elaborate mode of expression.

In a particularly insightful move, Borges weaves a link between warfare and conversation in the line "War was a coming face to face of men,/ a crossing of swords, a colloquy of

spears" (lns 27-28). Does this suggest that Borges envisions the Saxon's primary mode of communication as the end of the spear? Yes and no. While it would be tempting indeed to imagine that Borges holds a view of the Saxons akin to Ebbutt's solely war-like, simple folk, this would be a gross exaggeration of his nuanced attitude. While it is clear that the Saxon of this poem is certainly not a togaed Athenian philosopher, his writings dealt primarily with the "grave concerns of men," which include war, natural disasters, hunger, sleep, and death (lns 32-34).

While Borges does spend a great deal of his poem focused keenly upon the Saxon as he existed in 449 A.D, the last two stanzas zoom out in order to take a broader view of his role in English history as a whole. The poem even closes with the line "the sons he bore brought England into being" (ln 40). So it is nearly impossible to divorce the Saxon from the cultures that follow. And so the theme of heritage remains ever-present. Perhaps this means that the Saxons in general, and the *Beowulf* epic in particular, are nearly impossible to separate from their cultural progeny. Borges in fact notes that the language of the Saxon must be honed by time and generations before it can produce Shakespeare (ln 33-35). So according to this approach, is the Saxon worthy of study based on his own merits, or simply as a part of the cultural heritage of the British Isles? Perhaps this makes Ebbutt's viewpoint more understandable, if not perhaps the full picture.

One of the main themes of this piece is the slender balance between striving and wyrd common to most Anglo-Saxon poetry, As Borges pens, "Destiny towered above him like the arch/ Of the day" (lns 15-16a). He masterfully captures the inexorable presence of "impervious

Fate/ Which grants no pardon" (lns 30b-31a) regardless of what sacrifices the Saxon offers to his household gods. Borges characterizes the Saxon of this piece largely based upon his study of the themes present in works such as *Beowulf*. But unlike Ebbutt, Borges presents a more rounded view of the Saxons that, rather than reducing the Saxon to a simple, warlike people, delves into the artistic and philosophical musings of Anglo-Saxon literature.

This theme of fate, relentless and irresistible is further developed in Borges' poem "Fragment." This poem was first published in September 6th, 1969 by *The New Yorker*. The edition that I will examine is from the same Penguin collection as "The Saxon," though this poem is translated by Norman Thomas di Giovanni rather than Reid. This poem is perhaps a little less straightforward than the other poems I have discussed thus far, and therefore I must engage in more conjecture than previously. This is also the first of these poems to mention the character of Beowulf specifically, though he is not the subject of the poem itself. This piece is centered upon the mysterious sword, possibly crafted by giants, that Beowulf wrested from the cave of Grendel's mother. As the sword was clearly ancient, so much so that Hrothgar, aged and learned as he was, could only read the runes upon it with difficulty, Borges elaborated upon its mythic past which the *Beowulf* epic left shrouded in mystery. The tone of this poem is very fatalistic, and once again emphasizes the role of weaponry and martial prowess in the world of the Saxons.

Borges opens the poem with the lines "A sword/ An iron sword hammered out in the cold of dawn,/ A sword carved with runes/ That no one will overlook, that no one will interpret in full" ("Fragment," lns 1-5). From the beginning, there is an air of inscrutability to the sword, and

this is due largely to the language of the inscription being so obscure as to be unreadable. Interestingly enough, the line “that no one will interpret in full” means even those who forged the sword could not understand the inscription fully. In an inversion of the theme of language, Borges brings to light the opacity of written expression, and perhaps even expression as a whole. No medium can perfectly convey the exact sentiment a person is trying to communicate, and even if it could, any message is open to interpretation. So perhaps Borges is pointing out the imprecision of language. But perhaps this interpretation stretches the poem too far.

Language is, after all, just a minor thread running through the piece. The emphasis of the piece is upon destiny, and the relentless march of all too often incomprehensible fate. The sword itself, like the tapestry of the Greek Fates, or the thread spun by the Norns, becomes a symbol of fate in this poem. However, its creators cannot foresee its end, so perhaps it is the touchstone, a weapon which remains in limbo, waiting for the worthy warrior—whom in the last line of the poem, we learn is Beowulf—to take it up and fulfill the demands of fate. After all, this is “A sword that will be loyal/ To an hour known only to Destiny” (lns 10-11), a blade destined for one shining moment, the purpose that it was unknowingly created for centuries prior. Will it prove faithless in all the moments leading up to its retrieval by Beowulf? Borges does not tell us, but the suggestion lingers that, much like the Ring of Power in Tolkien’s Middle Earth, this weapon was destined to be only faithful to one master.

Interestingly enough in the original tale itself, Beowulf prefers to fight with his own bare hands. After all, he has the grip strength of a band of men, which ultimately allows him to best

Grendel. When he dives to the mere-lair of Grendel's mother, he brings with him Hrunting, the sword of Unferth. But at the critical moment, Hrunting cannot pierce her skin. In this moment of desperation, Beowulf must improvise, casting about for the first weapon he can reach. It is this weapon, a gigantic sword forged in the days of giants, etched with runes so ancient that no one can understand them fully, that fits his hand. After Beowulf dispatches Grendel's mother, he uses this sword to behead Grendel. The blood of Grendel is so corrosive that it melts the blade, leaving Beowulf with nothing more than the hilt etched in runes. It is of this sword that Borges speaks. After this moment in the poem, Beowulf can never again rely on his the strength of his arm alone, so this scene marks a significant change in his character. If this sword functions as the symbolic representation of fate, perhaps Beowulf's grip strength might symbolize the strivings of mankind to overcome the machinations of destiny. This interpretation could be applied most naturally to Beowulf's fight with the dragon. Though he wishes that he could oppose him without weaponry and on the basis of strength alone subdue the scaly beast as he had Grendel, Beowulf must resort to a sword, shield, and mail. In that same moment, he acknowledges that although he desires to overcome the dragon, he has less confidence in his own might than he used to, and that ultimately the contest will be decided by fate, against which the strivings of men are ineffectual.

Now, that is not to suggest that the sword has agency in this poem. It is a singularly passive object, and while it must remain static until it reaches the hero whose grip it was made to fit, it is drawn inexorably onward by the invisible hand of *wyrd*. Beowulf likewise is propelled forward to become the hero worthy of wielding this mighty weapon. But both sword and hero are

fated to be destroyed by a monster: the sword by the blood of Grendel, Beowulf by the poison of the dragon. All that will remain of the former glory is the faintest echo of a glittering hilt and burial mound, which within a few generations will pass into legend so that none will understand them fully. In the end, it is the hand of Beowulf "that will guide the beautiful battle, the web of men... that will squander red gold … deal death to the serpent in its golden lair … gain a kingdom and lose a kingdom … that will bring down the forest of spears" (lns 14-26).

The sword is made to be wielded by the grip "that will squander red gold" (ln 19). As the narrative is careening towards the foretold end in *Beowulf*, a runaway slave steals a cup from a dragon's horde. Enraged, the dragon wreaks havoc throughout the Geatish countryside. As the king, Beowulf must put an end to this wanton destruction and save his people from their fiery terror. But there is another motive for this action, glimmering temptingly in the dragon's lair. Even if the Geatish king were to die, as he acknowledges, at least the treasure would bring prosperity to the Geats he would leave behind. Though Beowulf intends to use the dragon's horde as the security for his people, by Wiglaf's orders it is used instead as an adornment for his burial mound. Thus, even posthumously, Beowulf cannot function as the ring-giver he ought to be, and his death is robbed of whatever benefit it could have brought to his people. In the end, it is not only the red gold, but Beowulf's own life that has been squandered.

This blade was fashioned "to fit the hand/ That will gain a kingdom and lose a kingdom" (ln 23). After the death of Hygelac and his two sons, Beowulf becomes King of Geats. But in his death he not only loses the kingdom, but dooms his people to having to face their

enemies without a strong leader. After all, it was only the threat of Beowulf's strength that kept rival lords from attacking the Geats for so long. And so the line "A sword to fit the hand/ that will bring down the forest of spears" (lns 24-25) has two meanings: either Beowulf will defeat them, toppling this grove of weapons, or possibly through his death allow a forest of spears to descend on his defenseless people. I personally prefer the second, as it fits the chronology of this poem much better. The other mentions of Beowulf's exploits proceed in a strictly linear progression, so it would be odd for Borges to double back in these last few lines. This interpretation not only fits the structure of the poem, but also better harmonizes with the aesthetic of the piece.

Borges, in this poem, presents a weapon and hero similarly caught in a web of fate. Though both will together accomplish great things, they ultimately are powerless, swept along in the riptide of forces beyond their control. In this poem, the sword takes the forefront, and Beowulf himself seems like a sort of tool or weapon. He has no autonomy, as fated to lead the web of men as the sword is fated to fit his hand. This poem's bleak view of both the inevitability of fate and the manner in which it honestly presents the consequences of Beowulf's failures alongside his successes reveal a somber reading of the text that is more rare than one would think. Gone is the glory of bygone days sung by Gibb and Ebbutt less than one hundred years previously. Borges presents a disillusioned retelling, a reflection on how even the pinnacle of human striving is doomed to failure, underscored by a bleak meter, and a ponderous, sorrowful structure.

The next poem I will examine is the significantly less fatalistic "Embarking on the Study of Anglo-Saxon Grammar." The edition I shall be using is from the same Penguin collection of Borges' poems spanning from 1923-1967, and is translated into English by Alastair Reid. In this poem, Borges shifts his attention from the philosophical musings contained within Anglo-Saxon literature to ponder the language itself and his role as linguist and scholar. He opens the poem by acknowledging the space between him and the original writing, remarking that "(Such gulfs are opened to us all by time)" (ln 2). Rather than being a lamentable circumstance, Borges' distance from Anglo-Saxon literature actually allows him to more freely study it, and he can access this material primarily because it exists in the past. So, then, separation both in time and space is vital to an informed reading of *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon texts.

This avenue of study brings Borges "To the harsh and work-wrought words/ Which, with a tongue now dust,/ I used in the days of Northumbria and Mercia/ Before becoming Haslam or Borges" (lns 5-8). So in some manner, before Borges was himself with a claim to his father's family name, his tongue had tasted the syllables of Anglo-Saxon. What could Borges be suggesting here? Is he implying reincarnation or staking some personal claim upon the Anglo-Saxon language? I propose that he is more reasonably suggesting that through the study of languages, he feels a sense of kinship with the culture that produced it. After all, languages are largely reflective of the cultures that shaped them, containing nuance and insight into speech patterns and values of the people using them.

This is a conception of the relationship between culture and language that he shares with Heaney. As poets and linguists, both authors are keenly aware of the power of words and modes of expression. Borges and Heaney view language as an extension of culture as much as apparel and customs. This attitude towards the text of *Beowulf* itself is notably absent from the tellings of Gibb and Ebbutt. While both of these Victorian authors devote a great amount of space in both their works to analyzing the general traits of the Anglo-Saxon culture, they do not consider the importance of varied modes of expressions, or the linguistic structures of the Anglo-Saxons. Even Ebbutt, who quotes extensively from her own translation of *Beowulf*, does not provide the reader with any insight into the specifics of the Anglo-Saxon language, or reveal any of her attitudes towards it. This is unfortunate, because as demonstrated previously by Heaney, language can function as a bridge between cultures, or at the very least, can help overcome some barriers between the past and the present.

However, the study of ancient language is by no means a seamless form of communication, as Borges himself acknowledges. As with any historical matter, a contemporary reader must by necessity view the past through the lens of the present, which distorts things all too easily. "To me these words seem/ Symbols of other symbols, variants/ On the English or the German (their descendants),/ Yet at some point in time they were fresh images" (lns 15-18). Borges admits that his approach to the text is influenced by his encounters with the cultures influenced the Anglo-Saxon tradition, but at least he is open about his biases. Perhaps most prominent of these is his specific appreciation of Anglo-Saxon as "this perfect contemplation/ Of a language at its dawn" (lns 28-29). Borges, therefore, views the later languages of English and

German as the natural offshoots of the Anglo-Saxon tongue, which could be compared to a version of Ebbutt's genetic theory softened by the passage of years and development of scholarship.

But it was this belief of the foundational status of Anglo-Saxon which in turn inspired Borges to study this language which he compares to "Some vestige of a changeable tamed god/ Whom no one can confront without feeling an ancient fear" (lns 23-24). It is interesting that he characterizes language as a god-like thing, beautiful and terrible to behold. By this metaphor, Borges gives the reader a sense of a certainly arcane, if not primal mist shrouding the Anglo-Saxon language. By this, he heightens the reader's awareness of the foreignness of the *Beowulf* text, along with other pieces of Anglo-Saxon literature. Even though Borges and Heaney both adopt similar views of the role of language in accessing Anglo-Saxon texts, in many ways, while Heaney treats the *Beowulf* text as an art object, Borges in this poem suggests an attitude much closer to an appreciation of a primitive object.

The last piece I will examine from Borges is "Poem Written in a Copy of Beowulf," which is also part of the Penguin collection of his poetry, and is translated by Alastair Reid. This poem is fairly short at fourteen lines long, and is primarily a musing upon the more fatalistic themes of the *Beowulf* poem. Borges largely meditates upon his causes for studying the Anglo-Saxon language, the problem of mortality and aging, and ponders the immortality of the soul. It is important to note that it is the *Beowulf* text which sparks this contemplation.

Borges begins this poem by questioning why, "while my night came down" ("Poem in a Copy of Beowulf," ln 2), he studied Anglo-Saxon. The night he speaks of most likely alludes to the encroaching blindness he experienced, as well as possibly the passage of years and coming of age. As he did in the poem "The Saxon (A.D. 449)," Borges refers to the language as that of a "blunt-tongued" people, which conjures imagery of weaponry and martial prowess, while perhaps making this language seem clumsy and unwieldy. But Borges could also mean this slightly tongue-in-cheek, because after all, most people have rounded tongues. It is entirely possible that Borges is both engaging with a common stereotype of the Saxons, while simultaneously poking fun at it.

Borges brings the topic of aging and forgetfulness to the forefront of the piece when he describes how his mind is losing its grip on his word-horde, that the "words that I have vainly/ Repeated and repeated" (lns 6-7) do little but slip through his fingers as he tries to grasp them. He introduces the concept of the weaving and unweaving of his own personal weary history, which could perhaps echo Beowulf's own journey through the poem, encountering new threats that are all too similar to ones he has already faced. Which brings us to the end of both pieces. Like the *Beowulf* poem itself, this poem is largely concerned with the questions surrounding death. Is the soul immortal? Can glory last "beyond this writing" (ln 14)? Certainly, death is inevitable and unescapable. But Borges, unlike the *Beowulf* poet, concludes that glory is not found not in lasting fame, but in the immortality and boundless ability of the soul.

But some glory must be preserved by deeds, or why else would Borges care to write and publish? This seems to trace a progression in the ideals of lasting deeds, from an emphasis upon the strength of a person's arm and martial prowess to the ability to tell stories and the soul's personal limitless energy of expression. It is fitting that I conclude my study of Borges' Anglo-Saxon poems here, on the poem that gazes unblinkingly at mortality, and yet ends with a glimmer of hope. It is in this way that in his heart, Borges differs from the poet of *Beowulf*, who can only provide a refrain of Beowulf's deeds and eagerness for glory as he closes his own poem. Borges, however, opens his arms to the awaiting universe, which is "inexhaustible, inviting" (ln 14).

***Beowulf* Reimagined: Santiago García and David Rubín's Graphic Novel**

It is only right that I conclude this survey with a glimpse into a completely different form of adaptation that the others. While an adequate analysis of this work in full would require another forty pages, I will attempt to give a brief overview of the project, giving examples of moments when Santiago García and David Rubín embraced old themes or added new elements to the story. To conclude, I will examine how and why García and Rubín chose to render *Beowulf* in this beautiful graphic novel. While the medium of the graphic novel may, in many ways, seem a closer adaptation than the often obscure lines of Borges, by its very nature this medium forces Santiago García and David Rubín to redesign the original poem extensively. Rubín's artwork must convey much of the atmosphere and solemnity of the poem through a visual means, so

everything from his character designs and color palette to the panel layout and physical dimensions of the novel are a visual testament to his reading of *Beowulf* and vision of the project.

As a brief aside, García and Rubín used Heaney's translation as the foundation for their adaptation, which seems only natural given Heaney's emphasis on the aesthetics of *Beowulf* as an artistic artifact. While on its surface, this may not seem as complex as translating the epic into a different language, the graphic novel is one step further from the original medium of the poem, which makes it a formidable undertaking. But not a challenge wholly foreign to either García or Rubín, both of whom had previously crafted adaptations of classics such as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

Why did García and Rubín decide to create an adaptation of *Beowulf*? In the afterword, Javier Olivares fleshes out a little background on this project that was more than a decade in the making. García had prepared a draft of *Beowulf*, but Olivares, the illustrator he was working with, was taken ill, so the project was cast aside for a time (198). This massive undertaking sat gathering dust for years until García found a new illustrator, David Rubín, to grapple with the task. As I mentioned previously, this challenge was not altogether foreign to either García or Rubín, as both had separately worked on adaptations of classic literature before. But in particular it seems from Olivares' afterward that this project was García's childhood dream. In light of the final pages of this retelling, this is not surprising.

Nevertheless, García and Rubín had a difficult task set before them, and must capture the heart of the written word in visual form. Thus Grendel's breaking of bones and gobbling of blood become scenes of Tarantino-style gore and mayhem, rendered in captivating crimson. García's decision to keep the dialogue of the novel sparse and blunt helps to propel the story forward to the bloodletting. Gone are the lengthy pontifications of Gibb, Ebbutt, and Heaney's Anglo-Saxons, these warriors of the graphic novel let their grip-strength and weapons do the talking.

Rubín's character designs reflect this. His depiction of Beowulf is solidly-built and blond, with widely set ice-blue eyes and a square jaw. But interestingly enough, Rubín does not make him much more muscular and broad-shouldered than his companions, or with a palpable air of nobility. His hair is unkept, often tied up to keep it out of his eyes, and his facial hair is scraggly, not quite stubble and not quite full beard. He dresses simply and, for the most part, practically in the attire of a soldier. However, Beowulf is pointedly vulnerable in his fight with Grendel, which he fights completely naked. The monster tosses him around the mead-hall, shattering benches and wooden beams, getting bruised and bloodied before he emerges victorious. Even in his old age, he remains sturdy and practical, with a simple gold band for a crown and pointedly unadorned apparel. If Ebbutt's depiction of Beowulf could be compared to Laurence Oliver, with glittering mail and theatrical poses, then Rubín's vision is more like Clint Eastwood's Man With No Name, a gruff fighter who speaks in short, but powerful, sentences.

By contrast, Rubín provides an interesting take on the character of Hrothgar. While he begins as a broad-faced, powerfully-built king with a jolly smile, after twelve years of nightly

Grendel raids, he has shrunk into a shadow of his former self. His skin is greyed, eyes milky and sunken into their hollows, and he looks more like a skeleton than the proud warrior he once was. His hands, too, are wizened and grey, and his fingernails have grown long. This is not a man who can wield a sword or challenge a monster. This is a king who has been decaying upon his throne, haunted by the nightmare stalking his people.

The design of Grendel and his mother both emphasize their monstrosity. Like the xenomorph of the *Alien* franchise, both have an extendable jaw with wicked rows of teeth. Grendel's face is more chimpanzee-like, with large, deeply-set eyes and small nostrils that are nearly flush with his maxilla. His body is nearly human in structure save for his legs, which are more chicken-like. Grendel's skin is a mass network of black scales and vine-like tendons, creating a shiny, impenetrable epidermis. His creature concept merges the human and the animal, which serves to make his actions all the more horrifying. His mother is less human: towering over Beowulf, with flowing, eel-like hair, and an even more terrifying pharyngeal jaw. Because she is at least somewhat submerged for much of her battle with Beowulf, it is more difficult to interpret her anatomy, however, it seems that her lower jaw actually has some sort of petal-like structure to capture prey more easily. Her face is more cat-like than Grendel's, smooth and eerily beautiful—like a sculpture of Bastet or the art of H.R. Giger—with eyes that glow the same green as her murky lair. The dragon, too, is not a traditional monster. It has two rows of eyes, crab-like front legs, and the powerful incisors of some tunneling rodent, uncommon features on dragon concepts. While it has wings, they are tattered and the dragon does not use them for a combative purpose. Instead, it uses its fiery breath and a stinger to ultimately kill Beowulf.

Rubín creates a vivid tone for this adaptation through his masterful eye for color, using almost exclusively rich jewel-tones. Each monster scene has its own palette, a deep amethyst for Grendel's nightly attacks, a murky emerald green for the mere-battle, and a canary yellow and tangerine for the dragon. Weaving together these diverse color schemes is Rubín's use of crimson throughout the entirety of the piece, from front cover to final page. It is the rampant bloodshed of this adaptation that unites the piece into a cohesive whole.

It is plain that García and Rubín wished to highlight the gritty realism of the poem, and emphasize the martial elements of the story. The fight scenes stretch on for more than twenty pages, chock-full of panels depicting brutal decapitations, bludgeoning, burning, hacking, and general mayhem. But let me not simplify this telling into a bloodbath. In a discerning and nuanced take on the original, Rubín balances even the most joyous occasions by foreshadowing death and destruction, a move which clearly echoes the ominous asides of the *Beowulf* poet. He sets up this contrast even from the opening of the novel in his depiction of the feast dedicating Heorot. While the upper panels are gold-toned and warm, depicting scenes of feasting and merry-making, they are inset in larger panels that depict the destruction of the hall and the bloody massacre carried out by Grendel in icy-blue tones accented by the scarlet of copious bloodletting (García and Rubín, 5-10). García and Rubín make a similar move later in their narrative by moving Beowulf's account of his swimming contest to overlap with scenes of Grendel's bleeding body sinking into the mere-home of his mother.

In many ways, the visual medium of comics functions as an ideal means to communicate the story of *Beowulf* to modern audiences used to film. The overarching sense of sorrow, the frequent flash-backs and foreshadowing lend themselves naturally to this style of storytelling. I mentioned before that the blood-letting was Tarantino-esque in scope, and there is an almost cinematic feeling the copious gore. Rubín does not shy away from showing burned corpses, heads hewed in twain, and the disemboweled body of our hero. More than the adaptors I've examined thus far, García and Rubín change the story of *Beowulf* significantly. They add in scenes where the Geatish warriors wonder what will happen to their families if they were to be slain by the monsters (32-33), Unferth becomes a surly teenager determined to undermine Beowulf, and matters of diplomacy are discussed at length by Beowulf and Wiglaf.

Aside from all the carnage, García and Rubín do not shy away from updating the horror of the poem to feature things that are more disturbing to the modern reader than home invasion: the sexual assault of Beowulf. In this disturbing moment, Grendel catches sight of the naked Beowulf, becomes aroused, and fondles the sleeping Geat (42-44). Beowulf wakes up, and leaps up to tackle Grendel just as the monster ejaculates. This is a scene which ought to generate scholarly discussions, and probably other papers, but in this paper I do not have the space to dedicate to unpacking these panels in the way they deserve. But for the purposes of this discussion, this moment speaks to García and Rubín's desire to engage with current events. Sexual assault, particularly when it occurs to men, is becoming an increasingly discussed topic, especially in recent years. The fact that the man who is assaulted is the strong and heroic Beowulf could possibly point to a more nuanced image of men who have been sexually

assaulted. However, there is a possibility that this scene demonizes homosexuality and the fact that it is thrown into the telling without closure raises more questions than it answers.

Also new to the tale is Wiglaf's desire to cultivate diplomatic relations with both neighboring tribes and marauding dragons. Once again, this is a very modern moment in this retelling, as these Anglo-Saxons must grapple with the questions that have plagued foreign policy for millennia. Beowulf is explicit in the fact that Wiglaf, born in a time of peace, has never had to take up a sword and fight, and so he naturally seeks a peaceful solution to conflict through political maneuvering. But Beowulf declares that the only way to reach an agreement with a monster is to kill it (140). Ultimately, Wiglaf must take up a sword to defend his king and the Geats, and though he deals the killing-blow, Beowulf is slain. As his faithless comrades come slinking back, and enraged Wiglaf declares that on account of these warriors' cowardice, the Geats will soon be driven out by Swedes. While the panels beneath this impassioned speech depict Beowulf's funeral pyre, zooming in on the warrior's face as it is consumed by flame, the opening words of *Beowulf* being sung inAnglo-Saxon over the fallen warrior as his ship slips away, Wiglaf growls "Cowards are always slaves to fear" (189).

García and Rubín close this adaptation with a meta twist. As the ship bearing Beowulf fades beyond the horizon, the reader is left with nothing but the sparks of fire and the Anglo-Saxon dirge. The sparks die, and the next spread is inky black. On the next page, we zoom out a little, and the blackness of the pages earlier is revealed to be nothing more than a close-up of a letter, which is revealed in the next panel to be "Hwæt!" the first word of the *Beowulf* poem in its

original Anglo-Saxon. From there, the panels on the opposite page trace the progress of the poem from Heaney's translation to García's initial script of the graphic novel, then to Rubín's rudimentary sketches to his colored rendering. The final page details the final stages of producing this piece, from cover design, printing, and selling. The final two panels show the reader picking up a copy, and opening it to the first page.

All in all, these final pages perfectly depict this self-aware and thoroughly contemporary approach to *Beowulf*, a blend of creative fantasy and gritty combat scenes. García and Rubín seemingly were not troubled, as Heaney and Borges were, by approaching this work as non-English adaptors. Perhaps this speaks to a new attitude towards *Beowulf* as more of a mythic tale than a serious heritage work, or this could just be a consequence of the visual medium García and Rubín are utilizing. Whatever the case may be, this is a fascinating look at an informed comic adaptation which, though it does make significant changes to the poem, is born of an knowledgable, astute reading of *Beowulf*.

CONCLUSION

A WEAVING TOGETHER

In closing, I must circle back to the original question I posed at the beginning of this work, with a bit of a twist: why study the themes of nationalism and ethnicity in retellings of *Beowulf?* Over these last few dozen pages I have examined a multitude of adaptations from a variety of backgrounds, and it is easy to finish such a broad—and quite frankly, long—survey of sources, look up from the page, and wonder why you devoted so much time to reading it. Why bother tracing attitudes towards nationalism and ethnicity from the late Victorian period to the opening of the 21st century? While this study may seem narrow and irrelevant to daily life, I would argue that it is vitally important, especially in light of the changes in political climate which became unmistakable earlier last year.

But let me sidestep a little, and begin with a confession: this topic was not what I anticipated researching. But I kept getting drawn back to the question of to whom *Beowulf* belongs. I participated in the Glasscock Undergraduate Summer Scholars Program, over the course of which, Dr. Mize introduced my research compatriot and myself to a vast number of *Beowulf* retellings, one of which was Ebbutt's *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race.* This work struck me, and the introductory material irked me no small amount, especially as a student of history. Probably in response to my evident vexation, Dr. Mize suggested that I research discussions of ethnicity in my thesis. I remained slightly unconvinced of the importance of this topic, however, until I began following the Brexit vote more closely.

At the same time these thoughts were stewing in my brain, political developments in Europe pushed the topics of ethnicity and heritage into the limelight. The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU earlier this summer has forced many people to confront their definition of what it means to be British. Now obviously, Britishness was not the only topic of discussion leading up to the vote on June 23rd. Many people felt that leaving would provide an opportunity for Britain to become more autonomous, since many of the UK's policies, especially those having to do with trade and immigration, have to be approved by the other 27 countries in the EU. Others held the opinion that free movement within Europe coupled with the ability to join forces with other countries for greater bargaining power offset any concerns about the balance of power between Brussels and London.

All this was well and good. But shortly after Cameron announced the referendum, immigration had risen to the forefront of issues. Suddenly, people began to voice their opinions on who should and should not be considered British. In the eyes of many, Britishness is quasi-genetic, something you inherit from your forefathers: to be English, Welsh, or Scottish is to be tied with the land itself. Others see British society as many diverse peoples tied together, not by blood, but by voluntary bonds of partnership. Still more fall somewhere in-between these two views.

Within the context of America, these questions took on sharper and more distinct edges. This is not a journalism piece, nor is it a manifesto, and I do not feel that airing my political

views would be appropriate in a work of this nature. However, I do wish to acknowledge facts. Within the past few months, tensions along ethnic and religious lines have begun to mount, acts of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia have become more common in newspaper headlines, and immigration has become a focus of policymaking.

Now, what does any of this have to do with *Beowulf*? My thesis was written to demonstrate that adaptations of *Beowulf* have often encouraged discussions of ethnicity and heritage, and provide a stage for authors to put forth a variety of viewpoints on these issues. This paper has not been an exhaustive survey by any means. I chose two out of more than a dozen Victorian and Edwardian adaptations I examined, and did not even begin to scratch the surface of *Beowulf* adaptations from a non-English, Germanic, or Scandinavian background. This nearly thousand-year-old work lends itself to this study; its emphasis on the bonds of community are easily translated by adaptors into the context of the nation or ethnic group as a community.

Unsurprisingly to me, the adaptors that would consider *Beowulf* as part of their cultural heritage, Gibb and Ebbutt, tended to enhance the themes of kingship and national feeling respectively. Both of these authors, though separated by a span of thirty years, rendered the text in increasingly ornate and purposefully antiquated language. The paratext of their works confirmed this tendency to view *Beowulf* in a gilded fashion, a glittering tale of heroism and national heritage. Heaney and Borges, however, primarily viewed *Beowulf* as an art object or artifact. Interestingly enough, both of these poets emerged with somewhat different takes on the aesthetics of the piece, Heaney tending more towards the haunting beauty of the poem, Borges in

tracing the way in which the struggle of "blunt-tongued Saxon" against fate shaped later English and Germanic tradition. This finally brings me to the graphic novel *Beowulf* by Santiago García and David Rubín, perhaps the most adaptive work I examined. García and Rubín, while in many ways staying true to the original trajectory of the poem, keeping much the same structure—with a little postmodern twist at the end, of course—do at times freely update the poem to suit their modern audience's sensibilities. And even if that were not so, they must translate the written word to a visual medium, a daunting task. All of these adaptors were faced with question of community and the divide between those inside and outside.

Over these past few months, I have watched the ways in which the borders we place our community reveal our understanding of the world around us. Borders tell us what we fear, what we value, and how we define ourselves. These same issues play out in *Beowulf* adaptations, because it is just familiar enough that much of the tale resonates with us, but it remains unfamiliar enough to distance ourselves from it. After all, we must remember that everyone who is not an Anglo-Saxon is an outsider approaching this text. None of us are members of the original community this work was intended for, despite the arguments of the authors of the first chapter. So let us approach *Beowulf* from across the great expanse of time, mindful of our own place relative to the text. Let us not be wall-makers or gate-keepers, barring others from appreciating this work, but bridge-builders, so that we may preserve *Beowulf* for future generations.

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