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Dons and Dragons:
Beowulf and 'Popular Reading'

Daniel C. Remein and Erica Weaver

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A bit of sober reflection from the early eighth century, the most popular Old English poem forms a powerful meditation on life and death, good and evil – on what it means to live (and die) wisely and well. Garnering praise for its 'dry, deeply understated' style and 'intense emotion', it foregrounds unavoidable journeys, departures, and judgments.[1] Throughout, the oral poet masterfully suspends the audience in 'a poised temporality' within which 'we feel the expansive vocabulary working perfectly against a sense of the compression of time.'[2] We are talking, of course, about *Bede's Death Song*:

For þam nedfere   næni wyrþeþ
þances snotera,   þonne him þearf sy
to gehicgenne   ær his heonengange
hwæt his gaste   godes oþþe yfeles
æfter deaþe heonon   demed weorþe.[3]

[Before the inescapable trip, no one grows
wiser of thought than one compelled
to mull over, before his passage from here,
what to his soul of good or evil
will be accorded after death bears it away.]

Widely attested from the eighth century to the sixteenth, these five lines of vernacular poetry were supposedly composed by the venerable historian on his deathbed and survive today in at least thirty-four manuscripts.[4] Transmitted through the *Epistola de obitu Bedae* [Letter on the death of Bede] of Cuthbert, Bede's own student and later abbot of Wearmouth and Jarrow, *Bede's Death Song* was regarded as the only surviving vernacular poem by the early medieval schoolroom author and today remains the best-attested Old English poem by far, even if it is now rarely taught or studied.[5]

In contrast, *Beowulf* survives in one half-burned copy yet is today both the star poem that begins countless British Literature surveys and one of the few medieval texts with sufficient name recognition to receive a major Hollywood movie adaptation under the same title as its scholarly edition.[6] When we think about Old English poetry, it is likely the first text that now comes to mind (an honour that, we are willing to wager, is never accorded to the *Death Song*). So, how might this unusual dyad help us rethink what constitutes a canonical Old English poem?

To be fair, at only five lines long, the *Death Song* is an easy addition to a compilation, while *Beowulf* requires far more parchment and planning. Moreover, as Peter Orton calculates, only 679 lines of Old English poetry – or 2.2% of the extant corpus – survive in more than one copy, making the *Death Song*'s high manuscript count all the more remarkable and Beowulfian exceptionalism par for the course.[7] Yet, Anglo-Latin poems tend to circulate more widely, so our sense of 'the corpus' of early medieval English literature is skewed by the undeniable fact that most 'early English literature' was not produced in English, at least as it has come down to us in manuscript. Aldhelm of Malmesbury's *Carmen de virginitate* [Verses on Virginity] – roughly the length of

Beowulf and only one half of a full *opus geminatum* or ‘twinned work’ – survives in five copies, all written or owned in England before 1100,[8] while the longest surviving pre-Conquest English poem, Wulfstan Cantor’s *Narratio metrica de S. Swithuno* [Metrical Life of St. Swithun], totals nearly 3400 lines extant in full in two copies, with a part in a third.[9] As Daniel Donoghue reminds us, however, ‘the pervasive presence of oral poetry among the general population’ may be fruitfully thought of as equivalent to the ‘dark matter and dark energy, which together constitute 95 percent of all the mass-energy of the universe’ and ‘included women and men from all walks of life, from peasants like Cædmon to scholars like Aldhelm’.[10] For early medieval England, the manuscript count alone cannot account for true popularity or rarity, then, as the oral-literate spectrum stymies any tallying efforts.

By other metrics, *Beowulf* certainly participates in notions of what might have constituted ‘popular’ literature in the early medieval North Atlantic. It is impossible to say whether the poem would have been, in today’s terms, canon or fan fiction, a definitive work in the legendarium of early medieval Germanic languages or a spin-off, but brief echoes and shared characters suggest that *Beowulf* was itself one part of a larger network of poems, sagas, and didactic works even if we now only have traces of the full legendary universe. Rather than surviving as a pure one-off, then, *Beowulf* shares poetic formulas with the Old English *Andreas*, a poetic account of the apostle Andrew’s captivity in Mermedonia.[11] Many of *Beowulf*’s central characters even recur in texts on the Swedish-Geatish wars, which form a backdrop to the poem, as well as in schoolroom compendia. So, the Scyldings – the Danish dynasty of which the besieged Hrothgar forms a part – feature in dozens of Scandinavian and Icelandic texts from the later Middle Ages, while

Hygelac – Beowulf's uncle and king – makes a brief cameo in the *Liber monstrorum*.[12] What constitutes a 'representative' or 'popular' text is thus a far more complex question than we might at first assume, both for the present and the past. And it becomes increasingly complicated when we remember that the past is itself a rapidly multiplying category, especially in poems like *Beowulf* and *Bede's Death Song*, which experiment with dilating and contracting timescales and with how individual lives can fit into geological, eschatological, and even just human historical time.

Beowulf seemingly survives to us against incredible odds, but this may have more to do with evolving notions of taste and decorum (and then, whose taste? And when?) – as well as the inevitably quirky survival record of literature in a language that had become largely unreadable by the time of the dissolution of the English monasteries (1536–1541) and that remained incomprehensible to all but a very small group of readers well into the nineteenth century. As Brian O'Camb has demonstrated, George Hickes' 1705 *Thesaurus* had 'founded an Old English literary canon with gnomic poetry at the helm nearly a century before *Beowulf* was published for a reading public'.[13]

After centuries without any surviving record of attention to the poem, Humphrey Wanley's somewhat misleading mention of it in his catalogue of 1705 (as 'wars waged against princes of Sweden by a certain Dane named Beowulf…') was followed by another century of silence until Sharon Turner's 1805 *The History of the Manners, Landed Property, Government, Laws, Poetry, Literature, Religion, and Language, of the Anglo-Saxons*. As Haruko Momma reports, Turner's inclusion of translated passages from *Beowulf* 'introduced a hoard of inaccuracies including those resulting from the transposition of a single leaf in the manuscript' (an error Momma notes was soon caught

by John Josias Conybeare's posthumous *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry*).[14] As Momma argues, both Conybeare and John Mitchell Kemble, who was engaged in the first modern edition of the poem, 'believed that *Beowulf* had not received enough attention' and 'argued for an intrinsic value of the language';[15] however, their differing philological approaches set the scholars at odds – an opposition that may have delayed coordinated attention to *Beowulf*'s literary merits.

In Chris Jones' account, the nineteenth century's popular idea of an Old English poem was drawn not from any medieval source but from Walter Scott's 1819 novel *Ivanhoe*.[16] So, how did *Beowulf* emerge from almost complete obscurity to gain a place in the canon? And if, as Momma writes, '"What has *Beowulf* to do with English?" is a genuine question, the answer to which may be either "nothing" or "a lot," depending on whom we ask', what makes *Beowulf* a 'bestseller' in a global, multilingual world?[17]

The traditional account of the poem's rise to prominence hinges on a single essay, but as we will show in the pages to come, its canonization actually involves many more readers and critics. Teachers of Old English tell themselves and their students a story about how *Beowulf* came to be studied as a serious literary endeavour only relatively recently, pinpointing philologist and fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien's 1936 Israel Gollancz Memorial British Academy lecture, subsequently published as '*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics', as a site of pure origin that opened up the possibility for modern English-language readers to encounter the poem as a unified text and a sophisticated literary accomplishment for the first time.[18] This assumption – and several others that, as we will see, come with it – takes Tolkien at his word that when he spoke of '*Beowulf* as a poem, with an inherent poetic significance', he acted to cut a path, for the first time, through the

work of the 'jabberwocks of historical and antiquarian research' who 'burble in the tulgey wood of conjecture, flitting from one tum-tum tree to another' and who supposedly all but guaranteed that up to that point, 'the main interest which the poem has for us is thus not a purely literary interest', as Tolkien quotes from Archibald Strong.[19]

Already, we might ask precisely who comprises this plural first-person pronoun, this supposed *us* to whom Tolkien's infantilised and primitivised antiquarians have denied the *poesis* of *Beowulf.* And as Dorothy Kim reminds us,[20] we should pause, too, over the adjacency of this rhetoric to Tolkien's distinctly ethnicizing and race-making investments in 'the ancient English temper' which he claims to identify in the poem's '*instinctive* historical sense' [emphasis ours],[21] his insistence that 'we have to deal with a poem by an *Englishman* using afresh ancient and largely traditional material' [emphasis ours] in order to understand its poetry,[22] and the inclusion of a specifically 'Gallic voice' complaining of 'beer-bemused Anglo-Saxons' in his list of parodied detractors.[23]

Moreover, even as Tolkien insists that *Beowulf*'s interest is 'not purely literary', his own allusion to 'jabberwocks' (and his recognition that the poem already anchored British literature syllabi) belies this claim. By mocking antiquarians in the terms of Lewis Carroll's 'Jabberwocky', he undermines his own narrative about contemporary disinterest in Old English verse qua verse, because he is quoting a poem that is itself presented by an 'Anglo-Saxon messenger' in Carroll's 1871 novel *Through the Looking Glass* and is thus an intentional and recognizable send-up of an Old English poem about the killing of an adversary with 'jaws that bite' and 'claws that catch' whose dismembered head is ultimately carried back as a trophy. Carroll thus transmutes *Beowulf*, however subtly, into

nonsense verse, attesting at least satirically to recognition of its literary appeal sixty-five years before 'The Monsters and the Critics'.

And yet, whatever awareness we may have of its problems, in critical and pedagogical practice, scholars of Old English continue to venerate the lecture as marking the true dawn of the poem's modern readership, even in what from outside the field might appear as an attempted apotheosis: *Beowulf and The Critics,* which presents what was originally a lecture printed in 36 pages with another 17 or so pages of appendices in a 479-page critical edition.[24] Including two unpublished versions of Tolkien's lecture (designated *A* and *B*), this later edition, however accidentally, amusingly recalls the two earliest known acts of 'modern' readership of *Beowulf*: the copies of the poem's unique manuscript made by the amanuensis hired by eighteenth-century Danish antiquarian Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín and Thorkelín's own copy, known to students of *Beowulf* today as Thorkelín *A* and *B*, respectively.

More recently, however, the monumental status of Tolkien's lecture has been shaken. Kathy Lavezzo recounts Tolkien's role in shutting out a young Jamaican-born, Black British Marxist theorist Stuart Hall from medieval studies and graduate work on *Piers Plowman*, playing the role, to Hall's recollection, of an 'ascetic South African professor' whose attachments to aristocratic, idealized rural white supremacy have long been apparent to scholars of modern fantasy narrative.[25]As a result, amplifying Lavezzo's work alongside an essay about the poem by Toni Morrison, Kim has issued a call to put Tolkien's lecture 'to bed and read *Beowulf* anew'.[26]

Many literary luminaries already have, from Bryher's queer, feminist novel *Beowulf* (1948) to John Gardner's *Grendel* (1971) to Michael Crichton's *Eaters of the*

Dead: The Manuscript of Ibn Fadlan Relating His Experiences with the Northmen in AD 922 (1976) to Maria Dahvana Headley's *The Mere Wife* (2018) to recent work by writers of colour like Teju Cole, Natasha Trethewey, and of course Morrison, which we will discuss at greater length below. As we will see, Tolkien – together with the British Academy – was not really singularly responsible for delivering *Beowulf* to the literature classroom, the publishing industry, and Hollywood. Lending force to this argument, this essay gives historical frames of reference for readers of *Beowulf* as a poem before Tolkien as well as for subsequent readings that we hope may supersede his.

Indeed, if *Beowulf*'s canonical status in 'British Literary History' was sealed by mid-century investments in 'Literature' as a privileged domain for relatively de-historicized, formalist reading all underwritten by an oddly Arnoldian, decidedly middle-brow philologist,[27] how was it that the poem held its place throughout the significant revisions of the canon during the poststructuralist and Marxist debates of the 1980's and 1990's – and how might it continue to earn its keep in ongoing efforts to decolonize the canon? Surely, there must have been other processes, other now obscured vectors for the poem's canonical apotheosis. We thus ask what other stories we can tell about the poem, both in terms of its enduring appeal as a poem and its course through different institutional spaces and historical moments. Our answers are exploratory, rather than exhaustive – a partial inventory of often overlooked elements of the processes that yielded *Beowulf*'s canonization and the contemporary popular belief in its representative status (many of which have received or would benefit from fuller analyses in their own right from other scholars with more specific expertise) rather than a case for what *Beowulf* decidedly is, does, or should be now.

Here, Tolkien's focus on 'the Critics' – and, more precisely, on the most 'potent' criticism – proves instructive.[28] Although it now reads as an indictment of a broad field of scholars, it was, for Tolkien and his auditors, a much narrower category comprised largely of Oxford dons seeking to legitimate English as a serious scholarly discipline. Tellingly, two years after Tolkien's lecture, Virginia Woolf lamented that 'the noble courts and quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge often appear to educated men's daughters like petticoats with holes in them, cold legs of mutton, and the boat train starting for abroad while the guard slams the door in their faces.'[29] Jana Schulman notes that Tolkien himself voted to make certain that Dorothy Whitelock, one of the greatest medievalist scholars of her moment, would not inherit the Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship after him in the interests of a less well-published man.[30]

As it happens, however, precisely during the period in which Tolkien finds his professorial predecessors failing to grant *Beowulf* sufficient importance in British arts and letters, the teaching of Old English in the United States – and, in particular, in elite women's colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities – was yielding literary attention to *Beowulf* and contributing to ensconcing the poem within late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literary history, as Mary Dockray-Miller and Matthew X. Vernon have uncovered.[31] Some of these curricula can be documented to have often included passages of *Beowulf*, and resulted in a number of dissertations on *Beowulf* by women around the turn of the century.[32] As Dockray-Miller explains, this phenomenon in women's colleges drew on and contributed to the women's suffrage movement while at the same time intersecting with various strands of white supremacist Anglo-Saxonism, wherein 'these women used training in Anglo-Saxon to

expand their social and professional mobility, even as it reinforced the racialized and racist hierarchies of the era'.[33]

Against this history of white supremacy, however, Old English – and the teaching of *Beowulf* specifically – also emerged in the early twentieth century as an important subject at Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the United States. As Vernon has demonstrated, for instance, the renowned African American philologist Lorenzo Dow Turner regularly taught Old English at Howard University from 1917 to 1928; during those years, he also offered courses on Old English poetry and on *Beowulf* specifically at the University of Chicago, where he received his PhD after completing an MA at Harvard.[34] While at Harvard, Turner had also studied Old French, so careful work on medieval languages provided the first indication of his linguistic interests and, we would argue, laid the groundwork for his later research on Gullah. Today, his 1949 magnum opus, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, remains a foundational text for African American studies. Indeed, after leaving Howard, this teacher of *Beowulf* established the first African Studies department at Fisk University.[35]

Elsewhere, Nathaniel Tillman taught Old English at Atlanta University from 1927 to 1957, likewise bridging medieval studies and careful study of African American vernaculars after completing a dissertation on Lydgate,[36] while the all-women Spelman College offered its first Old English class in 1932.[37] As one of Tillman's former students, A. Russell Brooks recalled, 'His approach to the study of language was organic and dynamic rather than prescriptive', truly bringing texts to life rather than drowning them in pedantry.[38] Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, Tillman's formative mentor, the African American scholar and Morehouse College professor Benjamin Griffith Brawley, was

likewise a sensitive reader of Old English literature long before Tolkien's 'Monsters and the Critics', devoting several pages of his landmark 1925 *A new survey of English literature* to *Beowulf* specifically, about which he observed, 'Above all other virtues are courage and love of kin. Beowulf boasts as well as acts, but he is ever a man of deeds rather than words'.[39] By shaping countless other students – particularly in Brawley's textbook, which went on to a second edition – these inspired professors of Old English thus helped to construct *Beowulf* as a literary object in the modern world, and particularly in HBCUs in the American South.

American women also published their own poetic translations from *Beowulf* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, likewise attesting to the poem's recognizable literary merits. Anna Robertson Brown, a poet with a PhD in later medieval English literature, published 'The Passing of Scyld' and 'The Battle with the Water-Sprite' in the 1890 issue of *Poet Lore*, an important (and still-running) journal that would also publish the likes of Rabindranath Tagore, Rainer Maria Rilke, Anton Chekhov, and Paul Verlaine in its early years.[40] Also of note are the translations from *Beowulf* and the 206-line poem 'The Ballad of Hart Hall' (adapted from the first third of *Beowulf*) by Mary Gwinn,[41] whose work Dockray-Miller recovered from obscurity among Gwinn's husband's papers.[42] Dockray-Miller argues that Gwinn's 'Ballad' uses couplets and numerous mythographical elements to create a fictional 'source' for *Beowulf*,[43] and so the poem registers the obvious importance of *Beowulf* to Gwinn *as a poet* as well as a scholar.

Gwinn was entirely self-taught and held no degrees other than her 1888 PhD on *Beowulf* from Bryn Mawr, which likewise registers a pre-Tolkien critic committed to

accounting for its poesy.[44] As Dockray-Miller observes, 'her topic is not philological at all', as she 'argues for "a purely literary enjoyment and appreciation" of the poem and focuses on the poem's use of imagery'.[45] Gwinn's proposed methodology is a kind of late nineteenth-century anticipation of reader-response criticism: 'we shall do best to confine ourselves strictly to the poem itself, and be very honest with ourselves about the impressions we receive from it, and scrupulous in our way of noting them'.[46]And in contrast to Tolkien's motionless, balanced elegy, for Gwinn, the 'poetry' of *Beowulf* has 'an air of abundance', of 'interminable flow'.[47]

Many people, although not Oxford dons (however otherwise privileged), were thus reading *Beowulf* as a poem before Tolkien, including four of the best-known nineteenth-century poets and aesthetes – Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Sidney Lanier, Alfred Lord Tennyson, and William Morris – who all reworked the Old English in contemporary poetry and testify to a growing readership on both sides of the Atlantic. While Tennyson's imperialist and racializing Anglo-Saxonism is probably most readily identified in his 'Brunanburh', Chris Jones locates a thread that runs continuously from the poet laureate's undergraduate work with Old English (including a glossary full of Old English words and a fragmentary translation from *Beowulf*) to his later 'Brunanburh', lodging *Beowulf* and Tennyson's friend from Cambridge and *Beowulf*'s first editor, John Mitchell Kemble, within the canonical heart of Tennyson's corpus.[48] As Jones argues, Tennyson's 'Sonnet to J. M. K[emble].' is ostensibly about Kemble's commitment to the Anglican Church, but 'seems to hint at Kemble's philological interests' precisely when Kemble resolved to leave off his pursuit of a clerical life and focus on philological pursuits.[49] This sonnet not only sutures the subject of Tennyson's corpus into the

production of that famous complete edition of *Beowulf* (the second volume of which—the translation—Kemble inscribed as a gift to Tennyson),[50] but also, we would suggest, points to the more surprising implications of a letter Jones describes from Arthur Henry Hallam in 1832. In 'mock grievance', Hallam, who had been staying with Kemble just before his first 1833 volume of *Beowulf* was published and would soon help out Kemble as a proof-reader, describes Kemble as so absorbed in his manuscripts that he can only respond to a greeting with notes on the text.[51] Hallam would soon suggest to Kemble that he 'select some very ancient passage in an Edda' as 'puff collateral' to help sell Tennyson's new book, and, when Kemble writes Tennyson to announce that *Beowulf* is out, Tennyson responds with, 'I am heartily glad you have got *Beowulf* out'.[52] Hallam's role as the mediator of sorts between Tennyson's 'mainstream' poetry and the production of *Beowulf* then installs, if indirectly, Tennyson's seeming adjacency to the construction of a canonical *Beowulf* into the heart of his perhaps most famous poetic project, the lengthy *In Memoriam A. H. H.*, first published in 1850, but mourning Hallam's sudden death from a cerebral haemorrhage in 1833, just after these exchanges around the publication of Kemble's *Beowulf* – making *Beowulf* an unlikely ghost haunting the margins of *In Memoriam*.

Meanwhile, the poem was supposedly absent from American literary circles. In 1878, Lanier lamented that, although 'One will go into few moderately appointed houses in this country without finding a Homer in some form or other … it is probably far within the truth to say that there are not fifty copies of *Beowulf* in the United States.'[53]A former Confederate soldier, Lanier appropriated the dialects of both black Americans and poor whites from the American South in his poetry,[54] and takes his own place within the

historically specific inheritance of racist uses of Old English in the American South.[55] As John D. Kerkering argues, in the interests of a post-bellum project of national reconciliation for white Americans, Lanier posits a theory of poetry and music that casts 'Anglo-Saxon' and *Beowulf* in particular in terms of 'race-specific sound' that he contrasts with what he sees as the less developed sounds of Black American speech (even producing editions of Old English poetry 'to introduce children to Anglo-Saxon rhythms', replacing '[Thomas] Jefferson's reliance on Anglo-Saxon legal codes for instilling national character with a pattern of sound perpetuating Anglo-Saxon racial identity').[56] Kerkering points out that Lanier claimed that *Beowulf* may at first sound 'strange and rugged' but that careful attention yields 'a very familiar face' – presumably a white one – 'speaking to you in the voice of an old friend' thanks to a rhythm that is 'well-nigh universal in our race'.[57] Lanier thus laments that *Beowulf*:

> is not found in the tatters of use, on the floors of our children's playrooms; there are no illuminated boy's editions of it; it is not on the booksellers' counters at Christmas; it is not studied in our common schools; it is not printed by our publishers; it does not lie even in the dusty corners of our bookcases; nay, the pious English scholar must actually send to Germany for Grein's Bibliothek in order to get a compact reproduction of the body of Old English poetry.[58]

Yet, two decades later, *Beowulf* was more easily available to the American reading public, with Lanier conceding in a footnote, 'Since this was written (in the winter of 1878–9), two editions of the work have been published here', attesting to growing interest.[59]

At the same moment, as Jones notes, 'as early as 1886 [William] Morris was publically proclaiming *Beowulf* a poem "worthy of a great people"'.[60] A collaboration with A. J. Wyatt, Morris' *Beowulf* was first published in 1895 in a deluxe Kelmscott Press edition. Part of a larger trend by which the New Philology seems to have resulted in a 'heightened etymological awareness' for a number of nineteenth-century English poets,[61] Morris' translation takes the archaizing impulse that still haunts much translation from Old English poetry to an extreme.[62] Morris' translation, with lines like, 'Brake the bale-heedy, he with wrath bollen',[63] 'often needs the same glossing that the original does', and indeed includes a glossary.[64] Even if later critics have been unenthused, its immediate reception held it a success.[65]

In 1899, Lanier's hope for Beowulfian nursery fare would even be answered by Clara Thomas's *The Adventures of Beowulf*, which offered a paraphrase for use in elementary education and was quickly followed by several adaptations that explicitly sought to put the poem on the playroom floor.[66] Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall's 1908 *Stories of Beowulf*, for instance, begins: "'*Beowulf* is known to every one.' Some months ago I read these words, and doubted if they were true. Then the thought came to me that I would help to make them true, for Beowulf is a fine story finely told, and it is a pity that there should be any who do not know it. So here it is 'told to the children.'"[67] As Lise Jaillant has observed, however, this was hardly a purely literary project; rather, these early children's *Beowulf*s encoded nationalist and frequently racist Victorian medievalism in their typography, illustrations, and cover art in order to market the poem as a foundational text for white English identity.[68] Over the course of the twentieth century, children's *Beowulf*s would continue to hit the market, with Manuel Vallvé

publishing a moralizing Spanish *Beowulf* in 1934 and Robert L. Schichler even suggesting that Grendel might underpin Theodor Geisel's (Dr. Seuss') Grinch – a supposition that receives more weight when we remember that the young Geisel had studied Old English at Oxford.[69]

Publications like these serve to remind us of at least two things. First, that the history of modern literary studies itself and its installation within university education is relatively recent. And, second, concomitantly, the picture outside the halls of Oxford may look very different (where, after all, in its early nineteenth-century form, the Rawlinsonian chair itself 'had no resemblance to a modern professorship' and was occupied by a number of persons who had never published on Old English at all).[70] It may be that few of Tolkien's 'critics' read the poem 'as poetry', but plenty of other readers certainly did, including queer American poet and labor rights activist Edna St. Vincent Millay, who went by Vincent and who – just as Morris' *Beowulf* was being put to music – was hard at work on *The King's Henchman*, the libretto set in tenth-century England that would take her two years of intensive study to complete and would be hailed as 'the Great American opera' upon its premier at New York City's Metropolitan Opera in 1927.

Although Millay was commissioned by the Met, the story was left entirely up to her, and she found her ultimate topic in the 'era that had fascinated her during her Vassar years and studies of the language using Henry Sweet's *Anglo-Saxon Reader*', which included Beowulf's fight with Grendel's Mother as its poetic apogee, with Sweet's introduction noting that the lines comprised 'one of the most vivid and picturesque passages in the whole poem'.[71] Indeed, she had first studied Old English with Vassar

Professor Christabel Fiske and maintained her interests in early medieval England.[72] While she found her central plotline in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a 'well-thumbed' copy of Sweet may still be found in her library at Steepletop along with Holthausen's German edition of *Beowulf*, which was a gift from her mother Cora and contained a scholarly introduction, glossary, and critical apparatus as well as 'much handwritten notation' from Millay herself.[73] Although her mother gave her this edition after *Henchman* had already premiered, the gift attests to Millay's sustained work on early medieval England while likewise suggesting that *Beowulf* was of sufficient interest to her that a rigorous scholarly edition – in German at that – constituted a welcome gift.[74] Millay's *Beowulf* 'has extensive written annotations throughout, mostly appearing to be translations of words and phrases', and in Mark O'Berski's summation, 'Needless to say, the book is well-read.'[75]

Moreover, while *Henchman*'s overarching plot derives from the *Chronicle*, the story is inset in *Beowulf*'s world of banquets and scops. Millay provides several pages of stage directions to set the opening scene, which features King Edgar and his court listening to a scop at the end of a banquet: an arrangement that vividly recalls Hrothgar's court at Heorot. Moreover, the scop's opening song initiates the play in an imitative alliterative meter complete with a caesura running down the page that further testifies to Millay's work with Old English poetry in the original and with *Beowulf* in particular: 'Wild as the white waves / Rushing and roaring, Heaving the wrack / High up the headland; Hoarse as the howling / Winds of winter'.[76] Ladies in attendance, including a 'Hildeburh' weep for the murdered king, while the lords lament that none of his retainers came to his aid, another detail reminiscent of *Beowulf*. Like Bryher's *Beowulf*, Millay's

Henchman thus offers what Peter Buchanan has termed a 'queer historical palimpsest' of the poem.[77]

As Bryher and Millay's reworking of Old English reveals, the story we tell about *Beowulf* and Oxford falls subject to the same problems that the poem itself faced in the early to mid-twentieth century (and beyond): the obsession with singular dates and names and with excavating a history in and for the poem rather than reading it. From this perspective, the obsession with Tolkien and with 1936 is another symptom of the desire to date the poem and to thereby legitimize it within a certain kind of elitist framework. But there is a distortion effect caused by focusing myopically on Oxford – and, relatedly, on Harvard in the history of *Beowulf*'s afterlives, with Tolkien's lecture serving as a midpoint between the poem's early translation by Fireside Poet and Harvard professor Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and its later uptake by Harvard oral-formulaic theorists.

But just as Harvard also offered medieval linguistic training to Lorenzo Dow Turner and therefore to the formation of African American studies even as Stuart Hall was being turned away from medieval studies at Oxford, so too may Oxford's contribution to *Beowulf*'s literary status be reimagined, at least in fiction if not in real life, through the work of Nigerian American novelist and cultural critic Teju Cole, whose novel *Open City* imagines newer, more generative lines of transmission for *Beowulf* and other medieval English poems.

Whereas Tolkien pushed Hall away from graduate work on *Piers Plowman*, Cole gives us a fictional Oxbridge that welcomes in a Japanese American DPhil student whose crowning achievement is an annotated translation of *Piers.* The fictional young scholar ultimately becomes an early medieval literature professor in New York City, where he

teaches and mentors the novel's protagonist and narrator, Julius, a Nigerian immigrant and a research fellow in psychiatry, but in between, he and his family are interned during World War II. As Julius explains, 'The war had broken out just as he was finishing his D. Phil, and he was forced to leave England and return to his family in the Pacific Northwest. With them, shortly afterward, he was taken to internment in the Minidoka Camp in Idaho,' where he takes consolation in memorizing poetry, so that, years later, the lines '*In summer season when soft was the sun, I wore a shroud as I a shepherd were*' come back to him with the unanswered question for his former student: 'Do you recognize it?'[78] Again, then, medieval English poetry offers Cole a means of retracing lines of transmission, so that the medieval becomes a consoling touchstone for memory and identity in times of profound racism and crisis.

In the novel's opening pages, Julius visits Professor Saito, whose 'English Literature Before Shakespeare' seminar he had taken as a junior and who, he relates, 'had taken me under his wing' and 'invited me to meet with him several times in his office,' where 'we drank coffee, and talked: about interpretations of *Beowulf* … and of his studies just before the Second World War'.[79] While the war and the poem are thus entangled, the poem offers a means of undoing the racist violence of internment as well as the larger war, and Julius notes that 'those meetings became cherished highlights of my last two years at Maxwell. I came to view him as a grandfatherly figure', so, when he returns to New York after medical school, he resumes the visits, which transport the elderly professor back to his graduate school days: 'It was the late thirties again, and he was back in Cambridge,' reminiscing about how his tutor, Chadwick, had 'been taught by Skeat himself' and 'taught me the value of memory, and how to think of it as mental music, a

setting to iambs and trochees'.[80] Here, we have 1930's Oxbridge, *Beowulf*, and even the editor and first Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon W.W. Skeat, together fostering kinship and providing 'mental music' for Julius and Professor Saito. (Incidentally, 1931–32 really did usher in the first Japanese translation of the poem by the scholar Fumio Kuriyagawa, who wrote *Beowulf* into 'the "Middle Japanese" prose of a biwa romance', as Marijane Osborn summarizes.[81])

Extending his *Beowulf*ian interests, Cole's 2016 collection of essays literally begins with the first three lines of the poem and the revelation, 'When I am trying out a new pen in a shop, I write out the first words of *Beowulf* as translated by Seamus Heaney. Years ago, I memorized the opening page. After a while, those were the words that came most readily to hand when I was testing the flow of ink.'[82] As his go-to pen trial, the poem thus serves an important function for Cole's writing, getting the ink flowing and becoming the arbiter for his writing implements. Indeed, we may even hear an echo of it in Cole's debut novel, *Open City*, which opens similarly *in medias res*: 'And so.'[83] So, while the nonfiction collection his Heaneywulf anecdote opens takes its title from another Heaney poem, suggesting that Cole's primary interest may be in Heaney rather than *Beowulf* itself, his medieval interests are in fact sustained throughout his work.

As a native of Kalamazoo, Michigan, the home of the International Congress on Medieval Studies, this medieval enthusiasm comes naturally, so that *Beowulf*'s opening lines flow seamlessly together with his go-to quip when anyone asks him about Yoruba, the language of Nigeria, where he spent his childhood and teenage years: 'Opolopo opolo ni ko mo pe opolopo eniyan l'opolo l'opolopo' ('Many frogs do not know that many people are very intelligent').[84] As he riffs, 'I reiterate *Beowulf*. I recite my Yoruba tongue-

twister, I tell Lucian Freud's joke: we are creatures of private convention. But we are also the ways in which we enlarge our coasts.'[85] *Beowulf* and Yoruba and the joke he uses to test the microphone before talks and readings are thus both 'private convention[s]' and radical means of both mapping and reorienting the self. Indeed, the self enlarging its own coasts through reading and remembering texts takes its guiding image from *Beowulf*'s subsequent lines, which trace Scyld Scefing or 'Shield Sheafson' in Heaney, as he circumnavigates the North Sea to become the influential leader to whom 'each clan on the outlying coasts / beyond the whale-road had to yield' and who, when dead, is taken 'out to the sea's flood', where 'A ring-whorled prow rode in the harbour, / ice-clad, outbound.'[86] In Cole's reading, however, coast enlarging is mapped into migration rather than conquest.

For Poet Laureate and Pulitzer Prize winner Natasha Trethewey, *Beowulf* is also intimately woven into her experience of reading, writing, and memory writ large. When asked about her 'first encounter with poetry', Trethewey replies, 'my father used to recite parts of *Beowulf* to me as a bedtime story.'[87] *Beowulf* in Old English, that is, with her father's particular specialty being Grendel's terrifying entrance through the doors of Heorot. As she reminisces, laughing, 'I think I was charmed by my father's performance of it; he had a big, booming voice and he could do part of it in Old English, so that was pure sound. Then, the translation was the story, which was gripping. After all that, he'd turn off the lights and I'd have to go to sleep.'[88] Relating the same anecdote in another interview, she explains that 'the stories he told me undergird our relationship and our shared relationship to my mother', thus weaving *Beowulf*, however faintly, through her poems on family, race, and her native Mississippi.[89] Indeed, in her first book, *Domestic*

Work, she recounts how 'Late, / when my dreams turned / to nightmare, you were there- / Beowulf to slay Grendel / at my door'.[90]

An episode of the television series *Star Trek: Voyager* also registers a history – and a speculative future – for *Beowulf*'s popularity that resists and revises the role that white supremacy has played in constructing and sustaining *Beowulf*'s particular hypercanonicity.[91] Written by Naren Shankar and aired in the United States on 24 April, 1995, the episode, 'Heroes and Demons', features Ensign Harry Kim (played by Garrett Wang) playing the role of the eponymous hero in a holographic simulation of *Beowulf*. After Kim's mysterious disappearance, the role of Beowulf is then taken up first by the Vulcan Tuvok (played by African American actor Tim Russ) and then by Chakotay, a Native American character (played by the Latindio actor Robert Beltran), before the ship's holographic doctor and a 'shield maiden' simulation character frees the missing crew members together with the simulation's 'Grendel', a sentient star-energy life-form that had become trapped in the ship's computer system. For at least one member of the cast, the racial inclusiveness of this speculative *Beowulf*-future was specifically important, as Wang reports that being an Asian American actor had limited his opportunities to appear in period drama.[92]

Delivered as a lecture over the course of many years and retrospectively published as 'Grendel and his Mother' in 2019, Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison's contribution to the future popularity of *Beowulf* proceeds by amplifying the perspective on the poem espoused by her teacher John Gardner and his novel *Grendel*. As she and the other thinkers cited above reveal, we can thus make *Beowulf* continue to be canonical by appealing to the potentially radical possibilities opened up by the poem itself. Thinking

with *Beowulf*, Morrison is able to conclude, 'I like to think that John Gardner's view will hold: that language – informed, shaped, reasoned – will become the hand that stays crisis and gives creative, constructive conflict air to breathe, startling our lives and rippling our intellect'.[93]

The language of *Beowulf* can thus itself open new horizons. Even though it only comes down to us in a single manuscript, the poem can continually find new readerships, because, it remains just as re-thinkable as it was in the early Middle Ages. In fact, in Roger Reeves' poem 'Grendel', which was published in *The New Yorker* during the revision phase of this essay, 'the beast Grendel' signifies James Baldwin's rendition of 'Precious Lord' as a fragile 'absolute prophecy … Bringing humans the best vision of themselves, / Which, of course, must be slaughtered.'[94] *Beowulf* is a poem that modulates and re-paces its own timescales as it dramatizes the uncontrollable circulation and destruction of heroes, objects, and, above all, stories. Good poems, like language in Morrison's and Gardner's view, escape their traditional contexts and give air to new discussions, so that – rather than requiring Tolkien's 'potent' criticism – *Beowulf* can still offer Morrison 'fertile ground' (255). Indeed, this sense of the ground that offers up new stories is intimately bound up in *Beowulf* itself.

At the very end of the poem, the poet briefly alludes to a one-thousand-year gap from the burial of the treasure that would furnish the dragon's hoard to the slaying of the dragon who now lies dead beside it: 'Him big stodan bunan ond orcas, / discas lagon ond dyre swyrd, / omige, þurhetone, swa hie wið eorðan fæðm / þusend wintra þær eardodon' (ll. 3047–50) [By him there stood cups and flagons, plates lay stacked and expensive swords eaten through with rust – just as they had spent a thousand winters, there in the

lap of the earth]. We learn that, at the moment of burial, these dishes were wrapped in a curse, presumably unknown to Beowulf and his men. Now, after another thousand-year gap, from the copying of the sole surviving manuscript to our own, provisional account of its course through several later literary histories, these lines still offer us treasures whose stories we may not fully understand.

[1] Howell D. Chickering, 'Some contexts for Bede's *Death-Song*', *PMLA* 91, no. 1 (1976): 91–100, at 93 and 94.

[2] Chickering, 'Some contexts', pp. 98 and 99.

[3] We quote here the West Saxon Version, which survives in seventeen manuscripts from the British Isles, as edited by Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems*, *ASPR* 6 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 107–8, at 108.

[4] The count is Michael W. Twomey's from 'On reading *Bede's Death Song*: Translation, typology, and penance in Symeon of Durham's text of the *Epistola Cuthberti de obitu Bedae*', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84, no. 2 (1983): 171–81 at 171, supplemented with the copy in The Hague, Royal Library, MS 70.H.7, which he does not count.

[5] Cuthbert, *Epistola de obitu Bedae*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), 579–87.

[6] *Beowulf*. Directed by Robert Zemeckis. (Hollywood, CA: Paramount, 2007).

[7] Peter Orton, *The Transmission of Old English Poetry*, Westfield Publications in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 12 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000).

[8] Helmut Gneuss and Lapidge, Michael, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England up to 1100* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2014), nos. 12, 82, 542, 584, and 661.

[9] For more information, see *The Cult of St Swithun*, ed. Michael Lapidge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[10] Daniel Donoghue, *How the Anglo-Saxons read their poems* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), p. 6.

[11] For a recent exploration of these correspondences, see Irina Dumitrescu, '*Beowulf* and *Andreas*: intimate relations' in *Dating Beowulf: studies in intimacy*, ed. Daniel C. Remein and Erica Weaver

(Manchester: Manchester UP, 2020), 257–78.

[12] For an overview of the Scylding backdrop to the poem, see Roberta Frank, '*Beowulf* and the intimacy of large parties', in *Dating Beowulf*, 54–72.

[13] Brian O'Camb, 'George Hickes and the invention of the Old English *Maxims* poem', *English Literary History* 85, no. 1 (2018): 1-31, at 2. On the earliest editions of *Beowulf*, see J. R. Hall, 'The first two editions of *Beowulf*: Thorkelin's (1815) and Kemble's (1833)', in *The editing of Old English*, ed. by D. G. Scragg and Szarmach (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1994), 239–50.

[14] Haruko Momma, *From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2013), 87-88; citing Sharon Turner, *The History of the Manners, Landed Property, Government, Laws Poetry, Literature, Religion and Language, of the Anglo-Saxon* (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, and Orme, 1805), and John Josias Conybeare, *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry by John Josias Conybeare, M.A. &c., Late Prebendary of York and Vicar of Bath Easton, Formerly Student of Christchurch and Successively Professor of Anglo-Saxon and of Poetry in the University of Oxford*, ed. with addition notes, introductory notices, &c., by his brother William Daniel Conybeare, MA, &c., Rector of Sully (London: Printed for Harding and Lepard, 1826), p. 31.

[15] Momma, *From Philology*, 87.

[16] For more details, see Chapter 1 of Chris Jones, *Fossil Poetry: Anglo-Saxon and Linguistic Nativism in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: 2018).

[17] Haruko Momma, 'What Has *Beowulf* to Do with English? (Let's Ask Lady Philology!)', in Mary Hayes and Allison Burkette (eds), *Approaches to Teaching the History of the English Language: Pedagogy in Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 211–22 at 219.

[18] This sense is routinely reaffirmed in the 'handbook' genre of critical literature, e.g., Thomas A. Shippey refers to the essay as 'the most influential essay ever written on the poem' in 'Structure and Unity', in *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Lincoln: University of

Nebraska Press, 1997), 149-174, at 162; while Seth Lerer, even while critiquing the critical rhetoric Tolkien's essay underwrites, still identifies it as the 'originary piece of modern *Beowulf* criticism' in '*Beowulf* and Contemporary Critical Theory', in *A Beowulf Handbook*, 325-339, at 328.

[19] J.R.R. Tolkien, '*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics', *Proceedings of the British Academy* Vol. 22 (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 8, and Archibald Strong, *A Short History of English Literature* (Oxford, 1921), 2-3, qtd. in Tolkien, 'Monsters and the Critics', 5.

[20] Dorothy Kim, 'The Question of Race in *Beowulf*', *JSTOR Daily* 25 September, 2019; https://daily.jstor.org/the-question-of-race-in-beowulf/.

[21] Tolkien, 'Monsters and the Critics', 5-6.

[22] Ibid., 6.

[23] Ibid., 7.

[24] Michael C. Drout, ed., *J.R.R. Tolkien: Beowulf and the Critics*, Second Revised Edition (ACMRS, 2002).

[25] Kathy Lavezzo, '"New Ethnicities" and "Medieval Race"', *Addressing the Crises: The Stuart Hall Project* 1.6, p. 2. See also the speculative fiction writer and Marxist China Miéville, who famous called Tolkien 'the wen on the arse of fantasy', Miéville, 'Debate', n.d., *China Miéville Official Website* [now defunct], http://web.archive.org/web/20050115043853/http://www.panmacmillan.com/features/china/debate.htm

[26] Kim, 'The Question of Race in *Beowulf*'.

[27] We thank Nicholas Watson for this characterization of Tolkien and his tastes.

[28] Tolkien, 'Monsters and the Critics', p. 1.

[29] Virginia Woolf, *Three guineas* (London: Harcourt, Inc., 1938), p. 5.

[30] Jana Schulman, 'An Anglo-Saxonist at Oxford and Cambridge: Dorothy Whitelock (1902-1982)', in *Women Medievalists and the* Academy, ed. Jane Change (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press,

2005), p. 555.

[31] Mary Dockray-Miller, *Public medievalists, racism, and suffrage in the American women's colleges* (New York: Palgrave, 2017); and Matthew X. Vernon, *The black Middle Ages: race and the construction of the Middle Ages* (New York: Palgrave, 2018), especially 'Medieval self-fashioning: the Middle Ages in African-American scholarship and curricula'. Dockray-Miller catalogues 32 women's institutions, including Spelman College, that offered coursework in Old English in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (8), while Vernon identifies Old English courses at Howard University and Atlanta University.

[32] See Dockray-Miller's Appendix 1, in *Public Medievalists, Racism, and Suffrage*, 75-84, and Appendix 2, especially 91-96.

[33] Ibid., 2. Salient examples of Dockray Miller's bibliography on the longer history of racist Anglo-Saxonism in the United States dating at least to Thomas Jefferson are worth rehearsing: Stanley R. Hauer, 'Thomas Jefferson and the Anglo-Saxon Language', *PMLA* 98.5 (1981): 879-898; Reginald Horseman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Harvard University Press, 1981); Gregory A. VanHoosier-Carey, 'Byrthnoth in Dixie: the emergence of Anglo-Saxon studies in the postbellum South', in *Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Eric Kaufmann, 'American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Anglo-Saxon Ethnogenesis in the 'Universal' Nation, 1776-1850', *Journal of American Studies* 33.3 (1999), 437-457; and Richie Devon Watson, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008). See also more recent contributions on race and Old English studies by scholars of colour; e.g. Adam Miyashiro, 'Decolonizing Anglo-Saxon Studies: A Response to ISAS in Honolulu', blog post, *In the Medieval Middle*, http://www.inthemedievalmiddle.com/2017/07/decolonizing-anglo-saxon-studies.html; Mary

Rambaran-Olm, ‘Anglo-Saxon Studies, Academia, and White Supremacy’, *Medium* post, 27 June, 2018, https://mrambaranolm.medium.com/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3; and Kim, ‘The Question of Race’.

[34] Vernon, *The black Middle Ages*, 79–80. Dockray-Miller has also identified an earlier Old English poetry course taught by Professor Gordon David Houston at Howard, prompting Mary Rambaran-Olm to uncover more about Houston’s career as a medieval philologist in “‘Houston, we have a problem:’ erasing black scholars in Old English literature’, *Medium* post, *The Sundial*, 3 March, 2020, https://medium.com/the-sundial-acmrs/houston-we-have-a-problem-erasing-black-scholars-in-old-english-821121495dc.

[35] Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum, *Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner Connecting Communities through Language*, exhibition brochure, August 9, 2010.

[36] Vernon, *Black Middle Ages*, 81, n. 91. Nathaniel Patrick Tillman, *Lydgate’s Rimes as Evidence of his Pronunciation*, PhD Diss, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1941.

[37] Dockray-Miller, *Public Medievalists, Racism, and Suffrage*, p. 43.

[38] A. Russell Brooks, ‘Nathaniel Patrick Tillman (1898-1965: a tribute to a distinguished teacher’, *CLA Journal* 9, no. 2 (1965): 207-8.

[39] Benjamin Griffith Brawley, *A new survey of English literature: a text book for colleges* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925), 7. In the opening section on Old English literature, Brawley also gives an overview of the four major codices that today preserve the bulk of Old English verse (p. 3) and delves into several texts, recounting Bede’s story of Cædmon (p. 9), noting the runic signatures that link the poems of Cynewulf (p. 10), and summarizing ‘the famous *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*’ (p. 12), among other highlights that give a learned overview of Old English literature.

[40] The poems may be found in *Poet-Lore* 2 (1890): 133-4 and 185-87, and, as Marijane Osborn notes, comprise verse translations of *Beowulf* lines 26-53 and 1493-1571, in her ‘Annotated List of Beowulf

Translations', in *Beowulf: Two Centuries of Translations, Paraphrases and Adaptations*, https://acmrs.org/academic-programs/online-resources/beowulf-list.

[41] Dockray-Miller, *Public Medievalists, Racism, and Suffrage*, Appendix 1, p. 115.

[42] Ibid., Appendices 3-4, pp. 96-126

[43] Ibid., 116.

[44] Ibid., 92.

[45] Ibid., 93.

[46] Mary Gwinn, *The First Part of Beowulf*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1888, p. 8.

[47] Ibid., 13. Cf. Tolkien, 'The Monsters and the Critics', 30.

[48] On this point, Jones differentiates his account of Tennyson's knowledge and attention – including even which books he owned or accessed – from that of Damian Love, 'Hengist's Brood: Tennyson and the Anglo-Saxons', *The Review of English Studies*, 60 (2009), 460-74; and Edward B. Irving, Jr., 'The Charge of the Light Brigade: Tennyson's Battle of Brunanburh', in *Literary Appropriations of the Anglo-Saxons form the Thirteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Donald Scragg and Carole Weinberg (Cambridge: 2000), 174-93.

[49] Jones, *Fossil Poetry*, 238; citing, on the timing of the poem, Clare Simmons, 'Iron-Worded Proof: Victorian identity and the Old English Language', *Studies in Medievalism* 4 (1992), 202-18.

[50] Jones, *Fossil Poetry*, 239.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Here we merely rehearse in a new context Jones' already superb account of the primary sources: see *Fossil Poetry*, 239-40, citing Jack Kolb, ed. *The Letters of Henry Hallam* (Columbus, OH, Ohio State University Press, 1981), 646, 738; and other quotations from Irving, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', 176-7.

[53] Sidney Lanier, 'The Death of Byrhtnoth: a study in Anglo-Saxon poetry', in his *Music and poetry: essays upon some aspects and inter-relations of the two arts* (1898), pp. 136–58, at 138.

[54] E.g., Sidney and Clifford Lanier, 'The Power of Prayer, or, the First Steamboat up the Alabama', and 'Uncle Jim's Baptist Revival', in *Sidney Lanier: Centennial Edition* 10 Vols. (Baltimore: Hopkins, 1945) I. 215-17. And see, John D. Kerkering, *The Poetics of National and Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: 2003), 114–51.

[55] On Southern Anglo-Saxonism, see also Donna Beth Ellard, *Anglo-Saxon(ist) Pasts, Postsaxon Futures* (Goleta: Punctum Books, 2019), especially Chapters 1, 6-7.

[56] Kerkering, *Poetics of National Identity,* 120, 153–54.

[57] Sidney Lanier, 'Lecture I' in *Shakespeare and His Forerunners* in *Sidney Lanier: The Centennial Edition*, Vol. 3, 23; Lanier, *The Science of English Verse* in *Sidney Lanier: The Centennial Edition*, Vol. 2, 113. Qtd. in Kerkering, *Poetics of National Identity*, 121.

[58] Lanier, 'Death of Byrhtnoth', pp. 136–37.

[59] Idem, p. 138, n. 1.

[60] Jones, *Fossil Poetry*, p.184; citing William Morris, 'Early England', in *The Unpublished Lectures of William Morris* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), pp. 158-78.

[61] Ibid., 183.

[62] Ibid. And see, Denis Ferhatović's characterization of this phenomenon as 'familiar defamiliarization' in his 'A Portion of the Translator as Grendel's Mother: The Postcolonial Feminist Polyphony of Meghan Purvis's *Beowulf*', in *The Shapes of Early English Poetry: Style, Form, History*, ed. Irina Dumitrescu and Eric Weiskott (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019), 59–81 at 73.

[63] William Morris and A.J. Wyatt, trans., *The Tale of Beowulf Done Out of the Old English Tongue,* in *The Collected Works of William Morris,* Vol. 10 (London: Longmans, Green, and co., 1898), 723.

[64] Ibid., 186.

[65] Ibid., 165.

[66] Clara Thomas, *The Adventures of Beowulf* (London: H. Marshall & Son, 1899).

[67] H.E. Marshall, *Stories of Beowulf* (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack, Ltd., 1908), i.

[68] Lise Jaillant, '*A fine old tale of adventure*: *Beowulf* told to the children of the English race, 1898–1908', *Children's Literature Association quarterly* vol. 38, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 399–419.

[69] Manuel Vallvé, *Beowulf* (Barcelona: Araluce, 1934). Robert L. Schichler, 'Understanding the outsider: Grendel, Geisel, and the Grinch', *Popular culture review* 11 (2000): 99–105. We thank Damian Fleming for bringing the possibility of a Grendel-inspired Grinch to our attention.

[70] Momma, *From Philology*, 80.

[71] James A. Pegolotti, *Deems Taylor: A Biography*, p. 143. Henry Sweet, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse: With Grammatical Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), 119.

[72] Elizabeth Hazelton Haight, 'Vincent at Vassar', *Vassar Quarterly,* vol. XXXVI, no. 5, May 1951.

[73] The condition of Sweet's *Reader* is according to Elaine Bremer Apczynski, as recorded in Pegolotti, *Deems Taylor*, p. 371, n. 18. We were unable to locate Elaine Bremer Apczynski, *The making of The King's Henchman: An American Opera* (MA Thesis, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1991), pp. 61–2, but Pegolotti also reports that she posits that Millay derived her topic from a reading of William of Malmesbury's *Chronicles of the Kings of England*. For more on Millay's *Beowulf*, see F. Holthausen and L. Morsbach, 'Beowulf. nebst den kleineren Denkmälern der Heldensage... 2. T., Einleitung, Glossar und Anmerkungen', *Steepletop Library: the books of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, accessed December 26, 2019, https://steepletoplibrary.org/items/show/1274.

[74] The catalogue of Millay's library is, at present, only half-finished, so it is difficult to ascertain whether Millay owned other editions of *Beowulf* as well, but we are grateful to Mark O'Berski of the Edna St Vincent Millay Society for his insights into Millay's collection.

[75] Private communication from Mark O'Berski, 2 February 2020.

[76] Edna St. Vincent Millay, *The king's henchman: a play in three acts* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1927), p. 7

[77] Peter Buchanan, '*Beowulf*, Bryher, and the Blitz', in *Dating Beowulf*, 279–303 at 299.

[78] Teju Cole, *Open city* (New York: Random House, 2011), 9 and 14.

[79] Ibid, 9.

[80] Ibid, 10 and 14.

[81]Marijane Osborn, 'Annotated List'.

[82] Teju Cole, *Known and strange things: essays* (New York: Random House, 2016), xiii.

[83] Cole, *Open City*, p. 3. Seamus Heaney famously – and somewhat controversially – begins his *Beowulf* with 'So,' explaining his logic in his *Beowulf: a new verse translation* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. xxvii.

[84] Cole, *Known and strange things*, xii.

[85] Ibid, xiv.

[86] Heaney, *Beowulf*, ll. 9–10, 30, and 32–3.

[87] Remica L. Bingham, 'Interview with Natasha Trethewey', *PMS poemmemoirstory* 8 (2008): 1–20; repr. in Joan Wylie Hall, ed., *Conversations with Natasha Trethewey* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013), p. 62.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Natasha Trethewey, 'Mythmaker', in *Domestic Work: Poems* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2000), p. 31.

[91] This recalls André M. Carrington's breakthrough analysis of *Deep Space Nine* (another Star Trek spin-off from the 1990's) as 'not only an SF narrative, but a racial narrative, embedded in American cultural traditions alongside the Black-White buddy comedy and the captivity narrative', in his

Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), Chapter 5.

[92] Edward Gross and Mark A. Altman, *Captain's Log: Supplemental: The Unauthorized Guide to the New Trek Voyages* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996), 143–44.

[93] Toni Morrison, 'Grendel and his Mother,' *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), p. 262.

[94] Roger Reeves, 'Grendel', *The New Yorker* (14 September 2020), 48.

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