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REVIEW ARTICLE

Beowulf: A new translation. By Maria Dahvana Headley. FSG Originals, 2020. Pp. 176.

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The following pages offer a review of a recent translation of *Beowulf,* an Old English poem, by Maria Dahvana Headley. Maria Dahvana Headley is an American writer born in 1977. Before translating *Beowulf,* she wrote a retelling of the poem, *The Mere Wife* (2018), a novel set in the twenty-first century United States. Her full rendition of the poem, *Beowulf: A new translation,* was published in 2020. The original version of *Beowulf* comes from the Old English period and its single copy survives in London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A.xv; the manuscript is also known as the *Beowulf* manuscript.

Lawrence Venuti describes two possible approaches to literary translations. They may range from domestication to foreignization of the target text: "a translator could choose the now traditional domesticating practice, an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to dominant cultural values in English; or a translator could choose a foreignizing practice, an ethnodeviant pressure on those values to register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text" (Venuti 1995: 68). In her translation of *Beowulf,* Headley domesticates the text by modernizing *Beowulf's* diction, poetic devices, syntax, characterisation, and narrative techniques. The present review will examine her contribution to a long tradition of translating *Beowulf* into modern English.[1] The practice began early in the nineteenth century and was mainly motivated by the fact that native users of English are not able to read Old English.

[1] For the long history of the translation of *Beowulf* cf. Hugh Magennis (2011), *Translating* Beowulf: *Modern versions in English verse,* Cambridge: D. S. Brewer.

Versification in the Old English poem

In order to appreciate (or criticise) Headley's rendition of *Beowulf*, it is necessary to understand the most salient features of Old English verse. The passage introducing Scyld Scefing's reign in the introductory portion of the poem is not only representative, but also outstanding in terms of the number of poetic devices that are typical of Old English poetic diction.

> Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
> þeodcyninga þrym gefrunon,
> hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
> Oft Scyld Scefing sceaþena þreatum,
> monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah,
> egsode eorlas, syððan ærest wearð
> feasceaft funden. He þæs frofre gebad:
> weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
> oð þæt him æghwylc þara ymbsittendra
> ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
> gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cyning!

> Listen! We have heard the glory of the Spear-Danes, of the people's lords, in the old days; how princes performed deeds of glory. Often Scyld Scefing had deprived many nations of their mead-halls with enemy troops, terrified earls since he was found destitute. He experienced prosperity, grew under the clouds, enjoyed glory, until every neighbouring nation across the whale-road obeyed him and paid tribute. That was a good king" (*Beowulf,* 1–11).[2]

In Old English poetry, the poetic line consists of two verses that are separated with a caesura. The verse before the caesura is called on-verse or verse a, the verse after the caesura is called off-verse or verse b. Both verses usually have two stressed syllables and are linked with alliteration, a repetition of consonants in some of the stressed syllables in a line. The third syllable always alliterates with at least one syllable of verse a, with the first stressed syllable, the second one or both. Lines 2 and 10 in the passage quoted above contain this basic type of alliteration. In *Beowulf,* double alliteration also abounds; in such a case, the third stressed syllable in off-verses is alliterated with both the first and second stressed syllables in on-verses. The passage under consideration is extraordinary in terms of the number of verses linked by double alliteration, as there are as many as five of them (lines 4, 5, 7, 8, and 11). Sometimes stressed syllables begin with vowels, in which case verses are joined with assonance instead of a reiteration of a

[2] Henceforth indicated as *Beowulf* followed by verse numbers. All quotations taken from Fulk, R. D, Robert E. Bjork & John D. Niles (eds.), 2008, *Klaeber's Beowulf* (The fourth edition.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press. All translation from Old English to modern English are mine.

consonant (lines 6, 10). In addition, line 1 contains an example of cross alliteration, G of *Gar*- being linked to *gear*-, and D of -*Denum* being linked to -*dagum*. Only in the case of cross alliteration does the fourth syllable alliterate with the second syllable of the on-verse. The function of alliteration is not only ornamental. It is a structural feature of Old English verse.

The present passage also exemplifies the general prevalence of nouns over verbs in Old English verse. As Andy Orchard observes, the fragment is not unusual in being “richly noun-based: in these eleven lines we find nineteen nouns but only ten finite verbs and... only three adjectives. Several of the finite verbs, moreover, are rather bland and colourless..., and again underline the relative importance of the nouns, and more specifically of the compound nouns” (Orchard 2003: 60). Responsible for the number of nouns in Old English poetry is the use of compounding to create inventive periphrastic expressions called kennings. *Beowulf* contains a number of unique kennings not found elsewhere in Old English poetry as well as traditional ones that appear ubiquitously in other Old English poems, for example, *hron-rad* ‘whale-road’ at line 10.

When it comes to syntax, Old English verse is characterised by syntactic parallelism, also called apposition. The passage quoted above contains a number of appositive constructions, in which at least two phrases, referring to a single person, object, or idea, are grammatically paralleled by each other. As Fred C. Robinson observes in his seminal *Beowulf and the appositive style*, “what is essential, apparently, is that two elements in an appositive construction be the same part of speech, have the same referent, and not be connected except by syntactical parallelism within the sentence in which they occur” (Robinson 1985: 3). An example of apposition can be found in poem’s opening sentence, where *þrym gefrunon* ‘heard the glory’ in line 2 parallels *ellen fremedon* ‘performed glorious deeds’ in line 3 grammatically, a noun followed by an infinitive. *Gar-Dena* ‘the Spear-Danes’ and *þeod-cyninga* ‘the princes of the people’ might also be read as appositives, two plural genitive nouns. Another example of appositive parallelism is manifest in the fragment, as *sceaþena þreatum* ‘enemy troops’ parallels *monegum mægþum* ‘many nations’ in lines 4 to 5; in both constructions a plural noun in the genitive case joins a plural noun in the instrumental case.

Another salient feature of Old English verse is its oral formulaic character. Inspired by Milman Parry’s and Albert Bates Lord’s studies of Homeric epics as oral formulaic compositions, Francis P. Magoun Jr. applied their oral formulaic theory to *Beowulf* and other Old English poems. In Germanic oral culture, in which writing was not used to commit poems to memory, songs were preserved by *scops,* oral courtly poets. But, as Magoun observes, “the oral singer does not memorize either the songs of singers from whom he learns nor later does he memorise in our sense of the word songs of his own making. His apprenticeship involves the

learning of thematic material, plots, proper names, and formulas with which he will gradually become able to compose in regular verse songs of his own" (1955: 191). Magoun applied Parry's definition of the formula as "a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (1955: 194). Magoun thus claims that verses 1b, 3a, 4b, 5a, 5b, 8a, 10b, and 11b of the above passage are formulaic, since "they occur exactly the same elsewhere [i.e., either in other verses of *Beowulf* or in other Old English poems, JO] or with only some insignificant change in inflection" (1955: 195). While other scholars have concurred that there are residual elements of formulaic composition in the text of *Beowulf,* Magoun's singular claim that *Beowulf* is wholly formulaic has been rejected by most.[3] The residual orality of *Beowulf* is still, however, acknowledged to be its prominent feature.

Also, related to the oral formulaic aspects of Old English metrical composition is the figure of the poet. In Old English poetry, the poet is represented as the bearer of the tradition. The Old English oral poet is not an author who invents new material, but transmits traditional knowledge relying on formulaic stock phrases and on his audience's knowledge and appreciation of traditional stories that have already been told, presenting them in a fresh idiom. This is not to say that the *Beowulf* poet or narrator remains transparent. On the contrary, he addresses the audience, beginning the poem with a formulaic expression *Hwæt* (*Beowulf*, 1). He also uses a we-have-heard formula and describes past events as if he participated in them as a witness.

Headley's versification: modern metre and modern media

The way Headley renders *Beowulf's* opening lines demonstrates her use of poetic licence in modernising and domesticating the traditional Old English verse.

> Bro! Tell me we still know how to speak of kings! In the old days,
> everyone knew what men were: brave, bold, glory-bound. Only
> stories now, but I'll sound the Spear-Danes' song, hoarded for hungry times.
> Their first father was a foundling: Scyld Scefing.
> He spent his youth fists up, browbeating every barstool-brother,
> bonfiring his enemies. That man began in the waves, a baby in a basket,
> but he bootstrapped his way into a kingdom, trading loneliness
> for luxury. Whether they thought kneeling necessary or no,
> everyone from head to tail of the whale-road bent down:
> There's a king, there's his crown!
> That was a good king
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1–11).

[3] According to Carol Braun Pasternack, scribes also behaved as oral poets and applied formulae in the process of the textualisation of Old English texts (Pasternack 1995: 7).

Headley invents almost everything in the fragment as regards diction, style, and Scyld's story. The only thing she retains from the original is the encomiastic "that was a good king". Headley's treatment of formulaic elements is striking and inventive. "Bro" translates the Old English "Hwæt". Headley substitutes imperative for the declarative mood of the original. She disposes of the we-have-heard formula present in the original version. She does not reproduce the Old English poet's artful parallelism. She disregards the passage's syntactic structure that relies on parallelism and apposition as well as the structural use of alliteration. As she says in her introduction, "the lines in this translation were structured for speaking, and for speaking in contemporary rhythms" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xvi). She uses rhymes, occasionally employing the heroic couplet.

Alliteration is the only feature of Old English formulaic poetry that appears regularly in her *Beowulf*, but her alliteration is not structural, as it "often rolls over line breaks" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xviii). Her irregular meter is not structured like Old English metre, as there can be fewer than four beats or more. She uses a strongly alliterative line at the beginning of the fragment in which "first", "father", and "foundling" alliterate, a pattern inspired by the Old English *fea-sceaft funden* (*Beowulf,* 7). It is notable that Headley does not conform to the restrictions imposed on alliteration observed by Old English poets. This tendency is illustrated in lines "He spent his youth fists up, browbeating every barstool-brother, /bonfiring his enemies" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 5–6). Here she uses enjambment and carries alliteration to the following line. In addition, alliteration does not fall on the first, second, and third stressed syllable, but also on the fourth (or fifth in some lines). Still, her rendition is richer in alliteration than many of the earlier translations (some of which forsake alliteration for that matter). One of her most interesting and beautiful uses of alliteration can be found in lines 324–328 that describe Beowulf and his companions putting their weapons aside before entering Heorot.

> They stacked shields,
> wood-weathered, against the walls, then sat down
> on benches, their metal making music. Their spears,
> they stood like sleeping soldiers, tall but tilting,
> gray ash, a death-grow
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 324–328).

In the description of Scyld Scefing' reign, the kenning *hron-rad* 'whale-road' (*Beowulf*, 10) is retained. Headley translates many kennings in her creative translation of the poem. Some other kennings are also retained as exact translations of the ones found in the original poem, for example, "mead-hall" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 34). Others are invented by Headley and do not appear in the corresponding Old English verses of the Old English *Beowulf*. For example,

a "barstool-brother" might mean "soldier who regularly attends bars" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 17). She also invents "ice-maiden" (Headley's *Beowulf,* line 34), which refers to the ship built for Scyld's funeral, as well as "snow-seasons" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 143) for years (Headley's *Beowulf,* 143). Another invention is "forest-gift" for a wooden shield (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2339).

Headley does not imitate parallelism, apposition, and variation in her rendition of *Beowulf.* As for her treatment of variation, it is necessary to break the poem's chronology and quote from later episodes. Her rendition of lines 189–193 of the Old English poem does not include a single of instance of parallelism that structures the corresponding lines of the poem:

> So it went for years, the Hell-sent raider harrowing
> the Halfdane's son, who sat in silence, brooding
> over unhatched hopes, while in the dark his
> people shuddered, salt-scourged by weeping,
> by nights spent waking instead of sleeping
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 189–193).

The corresponding passage from the original poem differs in terms of syntax and poetic devices:

> Swa ða mælceare maga Healfdenes
> singala seað; ne mihte snotor hæleð
> wean onwendan; wæs þæt gewin to swyð,
> laþ ond longsum, þe on ða leode becom,
> nydwracu niþgrim, nihtbealwa mæst
>
> so the great sorrow of Healfdene's son continually seethed; the wise man could not reverse his misfortune; the fight was too strong for him, hateful and enduring, that befell that nation, violent persecution, the greatest night-evil (*Beowulf,* 189–193).

Frederick Klaeber considers lines 189 to 193, which describe Hrothgar's grief as Grendel attacks Heorot, as an exemplary and sophisticated use of variation in *Beowulf*. As Klaeber points out, there are a number of phrases that are used in apposition in the passage. First, there are two phrases referring to King Hrothgar: *maga Healfdenes* 'Healfdene's son' and *snotor hæleð* 'the wise man' (Fulk 2008: cxviii). Secondly, his conflict with Grendel is mentioned three times as *gewin* 'fight', *nydwracu niþgrim* 'violent persecution', and *nihtbealwa mæst* 'the greatest night-evil'. As Klaeber observes, "initially it is indicated by the neutral term *gewin*; then it is called a *nydwracu niþgrim*, a fierce act of malicious violence forced upon the Danes; finally, in typically superlative terms, the poet calls it *nihtbealwa mæst*. In yet further elaboration upon Grendel's hostility, we are first told that it is *to swyð* to be overcome, then (in an incremental manner)

that it is too much driven by hatred (*laþ*) and too long-lasting (*longsum*) to be turned aside, as well" (Fulk, Njork & Niles 2008: cxviii–cxix). The effect of such parallelism, when it is handled by a skilful poet, is to build tension, rather than create a series of creative, but redundant appositions. Here, Klaeber demonstrates, tension is being increased by referring to the conflict between the Dane and Grendel first with a word that is not only neutral in meaning but also very common, *gewin,* and completing the series with a phrase that is most relevant to Hrothgar's predicament and that anticipates the nocturnal terror that the Danes suffer for the twelve years of Grendel's reign over Heorot (2008: cxviii–cxix). In the corresponding passage in Headley's translation, the same technique is not in evidence. The verse is thus domesticated and appeals to the modern reader unaccustomed to Old English parallelism and repetition.

There is an instance of parallelism found in lines 1192 to 1194 in Headley's translation. This type of parallelism is, however, a feature of her modern idiom and is not intended to reproduce the formulaic repetitions found in the same lines of *Beowulf.* The passage from the Old English poem goes:

> Him wæs ful boren ond freondlaþu
> wordum bewægned, ond wunden gold
> estum geeawed, earmreade twa,
> hrægl ond hringas, healsbeaga mæst
> þara þe ic on foldan gefrægen hæbbe.
>
> To him [Beowulf] a cup was carried as well as offer of friendship made,
> Weaved with elevated words, and wound gold was presented to him
> In good will, two arm-ornaments,
> Armour and rings, the best collar
> That I have heard of on earth
>
> (*Beowulf,* 1192–1196)

This is Headley's rendition:

> She brought him the cup. She called him friend.
> She gave him gold. Her will was wrought in rings.
> She offered armlets, garments, a neck ring:
> A collar larger than any I've ever seen
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1192–1195).

The same lines of the Old English poem are characterised by grammatical parallelism involving a cumulative apposition of lines juxtaposing a drinking-cup, friendship, and gold offered to Beowulf. The syntax and pace of Headley's rendition takes the focus from the cup and Beowulf's reception of it onto the queen herself. She becomes the grammatical subject of three balanced sentences; "her will" in the fourth sentence asserts her agency. In the original version,

the fronting of "him" places Beowulf in the spotlight, while the syntactic fronting of weapons and accoutrements he receives from Wealhtheow as grammatical subjects in a series of short clauses brings focus to his elevation. In contrast, Headley's rendition elevates Wealhtheow to prominence. The sequence of the gesture of passing the cup, which establishes friendship between Wealhtheow and Beowulf, and the presentation of gold to Beowulf are livelier in the translation than in the original, as they increase the pace of the fragment and endow Wealhtheow with a liveliness that she lacks in the corresponding lines of the Old English poem, a liveliness that not only does not detract from her formality, but in fact empowers her, emphasising the important diplomatic role in cementing peace between Heorot and Beowulf. The fragment is thus a meaningful addition to the characterisation of an important female figure in this translation that rewrites female characters (and turns the dragon into a heroic woman).

It is also important to note that the alterations that she makes in the passage also involve changing Old English nouns to modern English verbs. As both passages, one describing Hrothgar, the other Wealhtheow, make manifest, Headley does not reproduce the noun-based diction of the original in her translation, disposing of parallelism involving noun simplexes and compounds. This tendency extends to her entire translation, being not limited to the two passages considered here. This manoeuvre makes the poem more readable, as observing the syntactical rules of the noun-based diction of *Beowulf* would pose a challenge to the modern reader.

Headley's manipulation of form and diction serves the domestication of *Beowulf.* Her use of modern military jargon domesticates *Beowulf* and transposes the poem to a new fictional setting that fuses early medieval Germanic past with modern war. When it comes to the residual elements of oral culture that are manifest in *Beowulf,* both in its diction and descriptions of the poet's activities, Headley's *Beowulf* is set not in an oral culture, but in a culture that relies on modern media. When Grendel attacks Heorot, "news went global" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 193). When Wealhtheow appears in the hall, men gathered in the hall are posting their comments on Twitter or Facebook and the narrator inform of a hashtag they use: "Hashtag: blessed" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 622). The narrator also adresses the audience in familiar terms, often using foul language: "Bro, lemme say how fucked they were" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 181). Beowulf promises to kill Grendel by saying , "I'll be a mere chapter in /his gory story" (440–441). When Beowulf comes back home and visits Hygelac's hall, he is surprised that his king has not heard about his victory over Grendel, as the event is "already written /into poems" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2001–2002). Her rendition does have some foreignizing effect, mainly owing to the occasional use of archaism ("forsooth", "ween") and, for example, Scots ("mickle"). These, however, do not compromise her aim to domesticate *Beowulf* to a modern poetic idiom.

The very first word she uses in her *Beowulf* domesticates the poem, as if it was recited to a contemporary audience of military men. She does not translate the opening formulaic "Hwæt" as "Listen" or "Lo", but "Bro". As she points out, "the entire poem, and especially the monologues of the men in it, feels to me like a sort of competitive conversations I've often heard between men, one insisting on his right to the floor while simultaneously insisting that he's friendly. 'Bro' is, to my ear, a means of commanding attention while shuffling focus calculatedly away from hierarchy" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxi). She also uses "Bro" to satirise "a certain form of inflated, overconfident, aggressive male behaviour" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxi). In Headley's translation, the narrator is also a witness to events he describes and addresses the audience directly. In the introduction, Headley says, "As I constructed the persona of the narrator, other things about the poem fell into one place – the insistent periodic recaps for a distracted multinight audience, the epithets and adamant character calibrations interspersed throughout ("That was a good king"). I emphasised those things were I found them, both for the mnemonic aid factor and for the feeling of a communal, colloquial history" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xix).

The traditional context of poetic recitation, which is conventionally assumed to take place in a Germanic hall, is removed by Headley, as the heroic story is told as a war report by a veteran addressing his bros sitting on barstools. The poet challenges his audience asking whether they are able to "speak of kings" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1). While the original version recreates the greatness of the past, Headley also refers to the poem's present time as worse than ancestral history and introduces a contrast between now, described as "hungry times" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 3), and the past where "everyone knew what men were: brave, bold, glory-bound" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2). The introduction also introduces a hierarchy between the poet/narrator and the audience. The audience is challenged as presumably incapable of giving voice to the past; the poet declares "I'll sound the Spear-Danes' song" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 3). There is no sense of community that unites the audience and the poet in the original strengthened by syntax and the use of the pronoun "we". The narratorial voice amplifies the competitive atmosphere of the heroic code; the heroic bragging that characterises the behaviour of warriors is here extended to the poetic practice of story-telling and renders the narrator a commanding figure.

Finally, the dignified heroic diction of the poem is compromised by Headley's use of colloquialism, military jargon, and foul language. It is notable that these profane words alliterate with others words a lot. For example, Grendel is "fucked by Fate" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 102). When Beowulf considers Hrothgar's decision to give his daughter in marriage to Ingeld, his enemy's son, to bring peace between the Danes and the Heathobeards, he says that Hrothgar in vain hopes "that sending his precious daughter to fuck his foe's son /will fix the fatherly feud" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2028–2029). The f-word alliterates almost every time it occurs in her translation.

A revisionist approach to the poem

The introductory portion of *Beowulf* in Headley's rendition is an anti-imperialist revision of the poem and foregrounds a perception that war and conquest is an unmarked norm in the heroic world represented in the original text. She also domesticates the poem's heroic imagery in order to evoke military conflicts in which the United States were involved in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries. Before Scyld becomes a great king, he was a common soldier who "bootstrapped his way into the kingdom" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 7). Headley's "barstool brother" whom Scyld Scefing must defeat has no clear equivalent in the poem, except for the verse *eorlas egsode* 'terrified lords' (*Beowulf*, 6). The heroes of the Old English poems are thus described as contemporary American soldiers. The Scyldings' older retinue that Grendel hunts is collectively referred to by Headley as "wizened vizier" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 167), which may evoke Iraqi leaders. Such changes might also suggest that Grendel is the American occupant of a Middle-Eastern nation.

However, the Scyldings' violence in the northern world recreated by Headley foregrounds the violence that prevailed in the heroic world as well as the exclusively homosocial aspect of political, military, marital, and familial relationships. Men in Headley's *Beowulf* are wedded to war; in her rendition war is recurrently represented as a wife to violent men, an image that is not used in the Old English poem. Beow, Scyld's son, must be generous with gifts as "when war woos him, as war will, /he'll need those troops to follow the leader" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 22–23). Also, "War is the wife that Hrothgar first wed" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 63). Great warlords are also dads in Headley's translation.

> Beow's name kissed legions of lips
> by the time he was half-grown, but his own father
> was still breathing. We all know a boy can't daddy
> until his daddy's dead
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 17–20).

Power is masculine, even though it is women who give birth to sons; a biological fact that the Old English text of the poem silences by presenting sons as if they were fathered by their male ancestors. In *Beowulf,* the Scylding genealogy in fitt one not only presents kings descending from their fathers, but also erases one queen, Healfdane's daughter, given in marriage to Swedish King Onela. Her name is missing from the text represented in Cotton Vitellius even though "the text is written without interruption and MS is undamaged here" (Klaeber's *Beowulf,* 117). The removal of queens from genealogy is thus symbolically enacted on the Old English text of *Beowulf,* as the damage in the Cotton Vitellius makes the name of Healfdane's daughter absent. Headley does not make this erasure go unnoticed.

> He [Healfdane] rose in the realm
> and became a famous warlord, fighting ferociously
> dawn to dusk, fathering his own horde of four,
> heirs marching into the world in this order: Heorogar
> Hrothgar, Halga, and I heard he hand-clasped his daughter
> (her name's blur) to Onela. Tender, she rendered that battle-Swede
> happy in fucking, where before he'd only been happy in fighting
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 58–62).

Headley's narrator tells the audience about her name being a "blur" in the genealogy of Scyldings, a "blur", which is both factual and symbolic, an accidental philological puzzle that exposes the absence of female agency in the aggressively homosocial heroic world. Hrothgar culminates this homosocial genealogy of the Scyldings by building Heorot as "a house to espouse his faithful" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 67). His "war-wedded" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 79) warriors show off wearing gifts conferred on them by Hrothgar. Hrothgar's Heorot is built for "blood-brother by blood-brother" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 76). An interesting addition is the mention of sexual intercourse, as sex is never referred to in *Beowulf.*

The dependence of those heroic men on the use of physical strength to prevail over their opponents rationalises the reversal that happens to the Danes with the advent of Grendel. The verses that follow the description of Hrothgar's building of Heorot and complement the Old English poem's narrator's proleptic reference to Heorot's destruction in fire and during blood-feud are of Headley's invention: "You know how it is: every castle wants invading, and every family /has enemies born within it. Old grudges recrudesce" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 83–84). The hunter becomes hunted and the victor may be easily displaced from its superior position in a violent and heroic world. In the Old English poem, Grendel's sudden attack follows Hrothgar's courtly poet's performance of a song in the hall. It is not a heroic song, as one would expect, but a poem describing the creation of the world and alluding to the Old Testament. In Headley's rendition, the content of the song accounts for Grendel's violence. Her translation presents him as fated to experience a continuing sense of displacement from the surface of the earth, because, according to the words of Hrothgar's scop "the Almighty made Earth for us… / Sun and moon for our (de)light /fens full of creatures for our feasting /mere to quench our thirst" (Headley *Beowulf,* 93–96). In the Old English *Beowulf,* the noise of the song of creation disturbs Grendel, but it is impossible to say whether Grendel attacks Heorot because he is disturbed by its meaning. Headley adds additional layers to its original meaning, representing it as celebrating the creation of the world for humans, specifically for men who are powerful and have armies to conquer it. Grendel's attack therefore is presented in Headley's rendition of *Beowulf* in the more concrete context of the heroic world's violence.

The idea that the world was created to satisfy the thirst of *men* is further reinforced by the adjacent description of fens and moors as places of Grendel and his mother's habitation, which the Danes men utilise as a site of valuable resources. She thus engages in an ecocritical and post-colonial discussion of the relationship between the Danes, Grendel, and nature that has been recently become an subject of critical discussion.[4] Headley's text suggests that Hrothgar encroaches upon and claims the land that previously was part of the wilderness that Grendel has ruled.

> Grendel was the name of the woe-walker,
> Unlucky, fucked by Fate. He'd been ruling the wild:
> the mere, the fen, and the fastness,
> his kingdom.
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf*, 101–105).

Grendel approaches Heorot, because he wants "to see what horde haunted this hall" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 115). Grendel is also contrasted with the Danes as a "brotherless" creature (Headley's *Beowulf,* 87) that lacks not as much humanity as homosocial bonds that characterises the war-wedded Danes. It is the fact of being brotherless, Headley's addition, not found in the Old English poem, that is Grendel's fated curse. Grendel's predecessor, the brother-slaying Cain, is the complete antithesis of heroic values in both the Old English poem and Headley's translation, where fraternal bond, based either on blood or duty, is sacred. Grendel inherits Cain's fate of displacement from such social structures and is represented as a misfit, whose conflict with the Danes only compounds his exile from human joy. Cruel and violent as he is, Headley's Grendel is, however, intimated to resist the Scyldings' claim that the world is theirs to conquer and dominate at Grendel's expense. Grendel can thus be thought of as the only neighbour who does not bend down and pay tribute to kings of Scylding dynasty.

Beowulf

Headley's Beowulf, like the protagonist in the Old English poem is, in Gillian R. Overing words, "one of the most unsettling forces in the poem and has long been recognized for the kinds of ambiguity he generates – about the value of pagan and Christian ideals or the value of treasure, for example" (Overing 1990: 84). In the poem's reception there is an established tradition of reading the poem as a negative exemplum of vices that blemish the poem's heroic world and its

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[4] An ecofeminist reading of Grendel's mere and Grendel's mother is provided by Heide Estes in her *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes* (Estes 2017: 49–54).

protagonist. Beowulf has thus been associated with the vice of pride and greed. Margaret Goldsmith discusses the poem as a warning against the sin of pride and avarice and argues that Beowulf is wrong to fight the dragon to take the pagan gold-hoard from him (Goldsmith 1963: 374–375). Andy Orchard also claims that Beowulf, like Grendel, is an *æglæca* and as a hero most eager for fame (“lofgeornost”, *Beowulf,* 3182) he succumbs to worldly values against Hrothgar’s counsel to beware pride (Orchard 1995: 57). One of most interesting aspects of Headley’s translation is perhaps her representation of the poem’s protagonist in a contemporary context by means of her modern idiom. By not engaging in the academic disputes over the Christian poet’s attitudes to his character’s pagan values, she presents Beowulf as a modern soldier, whose virtue, masculinity, and military prowess are in a dialogic relationship with the persistent and ruthless violence of his world.

Beowulf is a man of great strength and gigantic proportions; Headley puts the word “giant” in the watchman’s mouth who meets the Geats on the Danish shore as they arrive in Hrothgar’s kingdom. The narrator’s first mention of Beowulf is couched in the following words:

> News went global. In Geatland, Hygelac’s right-hand man
> heard about Grendel. Bro, here is a warrior
> like no other: massive, mighty, born of noble
> blood. He called for a ship to be readed
> for his band, and boasted he’d try his teeth on this tale,
> sail in as a saviour over the swan-road, seek that king
> and lend a hand as a defender
>
> (Headley’s *Beowulf,* 193–199).

When Headley’s narrator introduces Beowulf’s first speech, the text combines a line that contains a quaint literal translation of the poem’s actual lines (Beowulf “unlocked his word-hoard”, Headley’s *Beowulf*, 267) with a line in Headley’s characteristic idiom (“he was the senior soldier, so he spat certainty”, Headley’s *Beowulf*, 268).

In the episode when Beowulf is about to dive into Grendel’s mother’s mere, the phrase “Beowulf gave zero shits” renders *gyrede hine Beowulf* ‘Beowulf prepared himself’ (Klaeber’s *Beowulf*, 1441). Beowulf’s speeches in the Old English poet are dignified and decorous. The contrast between the Old English and Headley’s lines in the episode in which Beowulf offers counsel and heroic consolation to bereaved Hrothgar merits attention. This is the Old English text and a literal prose translation:

> Ne sorga, snotor guma; selre bið æghwæm
> þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne.
> Ure æghwylc sceal ende gebidan

worolde lifes; wyrce se þe mote
domes ær deaþe; þæt bið drihtguman
unlifgendum æfter selest.
Aris, rices weard, uton raþe feran
Grendles magan gang sceawigan.

Do not grieve, wise man. It is better for everyone that he should avenge his friend than mourn too much. Everyone will experience the end of his life; let him attain honour who can before his death; fame is best for a man who is dead. Arise, the defender of the kingdom, let us go together, following in the footsteps of Grendel's kinsman. (Klaeber's *Beowulf*, 1384–1391).

The speech opens with a gnomic remark that reflects the relationship between honour and vengeance obligation. In the poem, the heroic ideology colouring Beowulf's statement accounts for his complex motivation to retaliate Grendel's mother's attack. He wants to satisfy Hrothgar's desire to have his best advisor avenged, defending the honour of the king and winning renown for himself. Headley's rendition removes the fragment's formulaic technique and its gnomic tone.

No worries, wise one, I've got this. When a friend
Needs to be avenged, it's better to fight than cry.
Even when mourning, this is how it goes.
We're all going to die, but most of us won't go out
In glory. Here's what matters, though, for men:
Not living, but living *on* in legend. I'm not afraid
Stand up, protector of this place, and let us go together,
Following Grendel's mother's tracks
(Headley's *Beowulf,* 1383–1389).

Beowulf speaks like a contemporary soldier and sympathises with Hrothgar's grief. In terms of the dignity of style, the language of men in Headley's translation is far removed from the language in the original speeches. It seems that Headley's intention might to divest men's words of their ideological surface. (Parenthetically, it is notable that Queen Wealhtheow's remarks and speeches are more faithful to the original text than speeches by Beowulf and Hrothgar.)

Headley's rendition also implies some criticism of Beowulf as hero and king. Lines 3053–3057 of Headley's translation, like the original poem, inform the reader of a curse cast upon anyone who touches the treasure and that the curse may be lifted by God.

There was a spell on the hoard,
Left by a skeleton tribe, a ward
That said no man could touch it

> Unless God, Glory-Dispenser and Hoarder
> Of Humanity, chose a hero and gave permission
> For the treasure to dispense
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 3052–3057)

In the original version of the poem, the narrator remarks that the curse is operative, but God can lift it, depending on the worth of the person who trespasses the dragon's lair. Headley's account seems to conflate the curse with the proviso articulated by the poem's narrator, as in the Old English poem the spell performed by the previous owners of the treasure is unconditional and God's will to lift the spell overrides its heathen power. In addition, Headley adds corrosive censure of Beowulf's desire to claim the dragon's hoard: "He forgot: not all gifts are for getting" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 3075), a line that is her invention and does not correspond to anything said in the poem. The narratorial comment implies that in his fight for the treasure Beowulf became negligent of a lesson he had learnt before.

Wealhtheow

As noted earlier, King Hrothgar is often described as wedded to war and war-wedded to his warriors when he is described for the first time (Headley's *Beowulf,* 63–80), a metaphoric description invented by Headley. When it comes to his wife, Queen Wealhtheow, she is presented by Headley as a cup-bearer and peace-weaver. In some fragments, she is changed, as she appears more assertive and forceful than in the original poem.

> Wealhtheow appeared among men then, Hrothgar's queen.
> Gleaming, her gown golden, she chose her chance to charm.
> She was the cup-keeper. She raised it high to show the men,
> Then bore it to Hrothgar, Dane's delight,
> Her husband and home-holder. She held it to his lips
> And he drunk deeply, the love of country in each draft.
> He threw it back as fast as once he's drawn his sword,
> This old, old lord of war, and his men cheered.
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 612–619)

This scene depicts Wealhtheow as presenting cups to warriors in a ceremony called cup-bearing. She passes cups first to the king and other warriors who are higher in hierarchy. Younger warriors are offered cups next, and Beowulf, as a guest, is last to receive a goblet. The compound "cup-keeper" does not exist in the Old English poem, but is a description invented by Headley. It imitates the concept of queen as cup-bearer that exists in critical commentaries rather than the in the poem itself. Wealhtheow speaks and behaves as ceremoniously as in the

original. She is called Hrothgar's "wifely strife-soother" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 665), a kenning invented by Headley that resembles the concept of peace-weaver and peace-pledge and refers to the queen's role of cementing peace between nations. After Hrothgar chooses Beowulf as "a brand-new son" (her own words, Headley's *Beowulf,* line 1177), Wealhtheow addresses Beowulf in a way that sounds more threatening than in the original: "Believe me, Beowulf: my thanes' wishes align with mine. /The sole desire of those drinking here is to do my bidding when it comes to you" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1229–1231). In the Old English poem, she also says that men will carry out her orders, but her threat is implied rather than stated. On the whole, Wealhtheow is least transformed when it comes to main characters.

Grendel's mother

Headley strongly reacts to the practice of many translators of *Beowulf* to represent Grendel's mother as monstrous, even though the Old English text emphasises her human qualities. As Headley points out, "Grendel's mother, my original impetus for involvement with this text, is almost always depicted in translation as an obvious monster rather than as a human woman – and her monstrosity doesn't typically allow even for partial humanity, though the poem itself shows us that she lives in a hall, uses weapons, is trained in combat, and follows blood-feud rules" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxiii). She quotes here examples from translations by Tolkien, Rafell, Trask, and Heaney (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxiv). Headley entertains a notion that Grendel's mother's troll-like monstrosity is a result of rape, "because the poisonous myth that a raped woman is a ruined woman, thus an abomination and thus, all too possibly, evil, has persisted as long as women have" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxv). Headley claims that "Grendel's mother doesn't behave like a monster. She behaves like a bereaved mother who happens to have a warrior's skill" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxv). She also considers the earlier practice of translating the *æglæc-* element in such words as *æglæca* and *æglæc-wif* as "hero" when the word refers to Beowulf and as a monster when it refers to Grendel or his mother (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxv). Headley rightly claims that, given the entire context of the poem, *æglæc-wif* should be translated as "formidable noble woman" (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxv). She also claims that translating *fingrum* as "claws" rather than simply "fingers" to refer to her is not correct, while *brimwylf*, often cited to support her subhuman monstrosity, might well be a scribal error (the word is sometimes emended to *brimwyl*) (Headley's *Beowulf,* p. xxvi).

Headley's translation represents Grendel's mother as "a murdering mother" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1444). She is a heroic woman rather than a monster. Worth

considering is Headley's rendition of a fragment in which the narrator comments on Grendel's mother's physical prowess and reactions she inspires in Hrothgar's warriors. In the original poem, the narrator says:

> Wæs se gryre læssa
> efne swa micle swa bið mægþa cræft,
> wiggryre wifes, be wæpnedmen,
> þonne heoru bunden, hamere geþuren,
> sweord swate fah swin ofer helme
> ecgum dyhttig andweard scireð.
>
> Her terror was lesser to a degree that a woman warrior's prowess would be lesser than that of a male warrior, when his sword, bound in warfare, forged with hammers, wet with sweat, cuts through the boar decorating enemy's helmet with its strong blade (*Beowulf,* 1282–1287).

The Old English poem's evaluation of Grendel's mother's physical strength and stature is phrased with a view to describing her physical prowess as lesser than that of men without actually detracting from the terror she inspires; a balancing act that helps the narrator avoid rendering her less fearsome, since the fear she inspires is lesser only to a degree, just as other women's terror that does not match that inspired by men. Headley changes the meaning of the original to present Grendel's mother as equally heroic and equally strong in comparison with men.

> The horror wasn't muted by the measure
> of women's strength against men's brawn.
> Both can hold slaying swords, glazed with gore,
> and score the boar-crests from war-helmets, warming them with blood
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1284–1285).

Headley's narrator also claims that both women and men can actually "hold slaying swords", using a set of balanced appositive and alliterative phrases that replace the Old English subordinate close in lines 1285–1287. In the Old English subordinate clause it is the weapon, an adorned sword, that cuts through the helmet decorated with a boar. The independent sentence that Headley substitutes in her translation normalises Grendel's mother heroic agency undercutting a modern perception, articulated in some critical readings of *Beowulf,* that Grendel's mother transgresses heroic expectations with respect to femininity. While women in the heroic world of Beowulf never wield weapons,[5] Grendel's

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[5] While critics have tended to read Modthrytho's violence figuratively, Dockray-Miller claims that suggests the use of these compounds testifies to the literal violence performed by Modthrytho (2000: 82). By wielding this power and performing violence, Modthrytho, Dockray-Miller argues, actually constructs her gender and that her gender that she assumes is masculine (2000: 83).

Mother does use a short sword, a *seax,* to assault Beowulf in her mere; Headley's alteration anticipates her assaulting action that is to take place in one of the next episodes.

Another important modification is related to Grendel's mother's gender. In the Old English poem, masculine pronouns *he* (*Beowulf,* 1392, 1394) refer to Grendel's mother instead of the feminine form *heo*. Where the masculine pronoun *he* is used in the original poem, however, Headley uses its feminine counterpart (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1392, 1394). In the description of the bottom of the lake that Grendel's mother inhabits, she translates *foldan fæþm* 'the bosom of the earth' (*Beowulf,* 1393) as "Mother Earth" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 1393), making a connection between Grendel's mother and nature, and associating nature with femininity. In her translation, masculine violence and military ethos are thus represented as antagonistic to the natural environment. It seems pertinent to align Headley's *Beowulf* with contemporary ecofeminist discussions of the poem. Recently, Heide Estes has based her reading of the monstrous landscape in *Beowulf* on Julia Kristeva's investigation into the symbolism of menstrual blood. Estes discussed the mere as associated with menstruation and blood, claiming that it is represented as "a kind of *vagina dentata,* monstrously fearsome in its geographical formulation, the toothy animals reaching out to grab Beowulf as he descends" (2007: 47). Headley's translation renders the place a metaphoric representation of Grendel's mother's womb and the monsters that inhabit it are represented by Headley as her children. One of the water monsters killed by Geats is represented by Headley as Grendel's mother child. The act of killing it actually represented as an enforced abortion; the monster is taken out of the mere that is conceived of quite literarily as Grendel's mother's uterus.

> *This* monster they could control.
> They cornered it, clubbed it, tugged it onto the rocks,
> Stillbirthed it from its mere-mother, deemed it damned,
> And made of if a miscarriage
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1436–1439).

This is Headley's invention, as in the original poem an anonymous warrior simply shoots a monster with an arrow. The theme of the episode in Headley's translation is thus not so much Beowulf's retaliation for Æschere's death as a masculine war on Grendel's mother femininity. In Headley's *Beowulf,* the hero's venturing to Grendel's mere emphasises human violence as excessive masculinism that invades the feminine space inhabited by Grendel's mother.

It is also interesting to consider Headley's translation of lines 1545–1547.

> Ofsæt þa þone selegyst ond hyre seax geteah,
> brad ond brunecg, wolde hire bearn wrecan,
> angan eaferan
>
> She besieged/sat upon the hall-guest [Beowulf] and drew her short sword, broad and brown, wanting to avenge her only child
>
> (*Beowulf,* 1545–1547).

The exact meaning of *ofsittan* sparkled some interesting controversy among scholars, since the word may have two sense: either "besiege" or, literally, "sit upon" (Bosworth & Toller 1882). Fred C. Robinson wrote an article "Did Grendel's mother sit on Beowulf?" to tackle the issue of this word's ambiguity, because, as he claims, "like the students in our classes, the translators of the poem… are often uncomfortable with the meaning which the glossaries stipulate for *ofsittan*. To avoid the comic indignity of Beowulf's being sat upon, they fudge the verb's meaning in artful ways" (Robinson 1994: 2). Dana Oswald claims that the combat between Beowulf and Grendel's mother is sexualised and the meaning "sit upon" is intended. She pays attention to such terms as *battle-hard* and *swollen* that appear in the account of the combat. She also claims the use of *ofsittan* at line 1545 implies that Grendel's mother literally tops Beowulf (2010: 95) and that "Beowulf's passive posture, although temporary, is alarming, and it is the resulting gender instability that makes students and translators uncomfortable" (2010: 96). Strikingly, Headley's treatment of Grendel's mother in the episode does not engage the question whether Grendel's mother's violence is emasculating for Beowulf. Instead, Headley focuses on representing Grendel's "murdering" mother's threatened femininity and the trauma of her bereavement rather than entertaining various ways in which Beowulf's masculinity is undermined or deconstructed. Headley translation reads:

> She bent over his breast, held the hall-invader
> hard to the stones, and drew a long knife. The mere-wife
> meant to avenge her son, her sole heir, but Beowulf's mail
> shielded him
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 1546–1548).

For a theoretically informed reader of *Beowulf,* this is an interesting aspect of Grendel's mother's characterisation that responds to some developments in the twentieth- and twenty-first century reception of Grendel's mother, even though Headley's interpretation seems to spring from her own imaginative engagement with the poem. Rather than a sexual act, as imagined by Robinson and Oswald, Grendel's mother's topping of Beowulf is represented as heroic action undertaken by a mother desiring to avenge her child.

Grendel

Headley insists that she presents Grendel's mother as more humane than other translators do. What about Grendel? While she gives a number of examples of how translators inserted the concept of monstrosity into the poem in order to represent his mother as monstrous, it is important to observe that the translatorial practice she revises has also extended to Grendel's characterisation. In the original version of the poem he is referred to by means of words that indicated humanity and an aristocratic heroic status. He is termed "rinc" at line 722b; "se mæra" at line 760a. Both Beowulf and Grendel are called *reþe renweardas* 'angry defenders of the hall' at line 770a as they fight inside the hall. Grendel is called *wynleas wic* 'a wretched man' at line 821b. Some translations not only ignore these words, but also substitute concepts of savageness and monstrosity for them. Headley's translation acknowledges the status accorded him by the *Beowulf* narrator. She translates "rinc" as "the warrior" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 720). She translates "æglæca" (*Beowulf,* 739a) into "enemy" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 739). The poem's "reþe renweardas" (*Beowulf*, 722b) are rendered simply as "warriors" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 769). Still, she introduces the word "wight" to refer to Grendel at line 629, where there is no equivalent for this word in Old English.

Headley's alterations to the scene of Grendel's last visit to Heorot also merit attention. She does not mention Grendel's suppressed laughter (he laughs in his mind), the terrifying gleam of his eye in the darkness, and there is no equivalent for the *æglæca* 'a formidable enemy' that she problematises in her introduction. Instead she invents an extended metaphor, presenting Heorot as a nest of chickens stalked by a fox at night. Headley introduces here dark humour as this night *wyrd* brings about an unexpected reversal to Grendel's expectation that he will satiate his appetite with the roast chickens of Hrothgar's retinue, since his own "goose would be cooked, his funeral /banquet bruised and blue" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 734–735).

In Headley's translation, Grendel is unlucky and tragically fated ("fucked by Fate", Headley's *Beowulf*, 102). He suffers the results of Cain's crime even though none of the crimes that implicated the kin of Cain in their displaced subhuman condition are actually his fault ("The Lord long ago took Abel's side. /Though none of that was Grendel's doing, /he'd descended from bloodstains", Headley's *Beowulf*, 107–109).

She-dragon

In Headley's version, the dragon is female. Grendel's mother has none of the masculine traits that could be intimated from the original text. The dragon being

likewise of female sex, Headley aligns her with Grendel's mother rather than Grendel. The dragon is "scar-skinned warrior ... defending her claim, hoarding in her own hall" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2211–2212). Like in the original, she hoards treasure buried by an unknown race hundred years earlier. But in Headley's text, the unknown people confine the treasure to "Mother Earth" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2247). Like Grendel's mother's mere, the dragon's barrow is conceived of as a womb in her Headley's translation. "The curse on that stony womb was set by men /who'd impregnated it with treasure" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 3069–3070). The change of gender brings a new perspective on men's violence, too. The stealing of the goblet is another masculine invasion on a world in which women's values prevail.

The dragon is also described as a piece of military technology; in her acts of violence she is described as a military drone dropping missiles as she homes in on her targets.

> The dragon swooped low and spat flame, destroying
> Both manor, and hovel, scrawling red RSVPs in the sky.
> The winged wringer had no time for survivors. She skywrote
> Her grievances.
>
> (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2312–2315)

Beowulf's hall is destroyed in a bombing attack: "Soon Beowulf received a blistering missive. /His own hall, his heart-home, had combusted" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2324–2325). The goblet stolen from her treasure-hoard is, metaphorically, "the smoking gun, the embezzlement /that's stoked the dragon's rage" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 2402–2403).

Inaccuracies

In Headley's translation there are a number of changes to the original text that alter the meaning of some of the lines or introduce foreign elements to the Old English poem. It may be assumed that such changes are caused by Headley's domesticating approach to her translation rather than a result of her misunderstanding of the original text. Some of these changes are already noted above. Still, there are other significant alterations to the original text that bring new meanings. For instance, Scyld Scefing is "a baby in basket" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 6), as if the narrator compared the foundling to Moses found in a basket, a feature that is not present in the original poem. At Scyld's funeral, "soldiers got drunk instead of crying" (Headley's *Beowulf,* 48). Nothing of the sort happens in the poem. In addition, nowhere is drinking depicted as part of funeral rites in *Beowulf.* No meal is being eaten and no "lesser men" are serving

drinks in the Old English poem when Beowulf arrives at Heorot with his men carrying Grendel's head. Meals are never served in a hall in the Old English poem; men only drink. The northern seas are also inhabited by sharks; the kenning "shark-sea" (Headley's *Beowulf*, 505) is invented by Headley. While such changes misrepresent Germanic heroic world in the poem, they domesticate its foreign elements to modern audience and offer a grim and less sympathetic outlook on the Germanic heroic world.

Conclusion

The main strength of Headley's *Beowulf* is that it is interesting to read. It also offers an revisionist approach to a violent poem that *Beowulf* is, adapting it to the contemporary ideas on war and violence. It exposes the price that comes with violence that is taken for granted, if not actually glorified, as part of the heroic world and the conventions belonging to the genre of epic poetry. Accordingly, it makes the poem appropriate for modern discussions of war, violence, and toxic masculinity. Headley's creative translation makes the poem alive by creating a modern context in which the narrative of *Beowulf* might actually be told and received as a story. The military context of the story is strikingly appropriate for the poem, whose heroic standards of violence are anachronistic and harmful, as they glorify violence. The main weakness of the translation is its inaccuracy. The inaccuracies that Headley's translations contain means that her translation may not be considered academic, as it does not represent the Old English text to an academic audience that is required to be familiar with *Beowulf* in order to meet curricular requirements. These inaccuracies may be intentional on the translator's part, a poetic licence that she grants herself. There are passages of outstanding beauty in her text, however, especially those passages that narrate Beowulf's fight with the dragon and his demise.

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