To Thwack or Be Thwacked: An Evaluation of Available Translations and Editions of Beowulf

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Books and the Profession

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IN A SMALL VOLUME published a year or so ago,[1] *Beowulf* was satirically written off as a work characterized by a "toughness of texture" and an "aridity and stony pugnacity." Worse than this, it was called "boring as a story, . . a fine example of primitive non-art" which should "now be handed over to the historians or left to be picked apart by linguistic scholars." The disturbing thing about this diatribe is not so much who said it (for the book was seldom the barrel of laughs its cover swore it would be—just consistent displays of inability to read well), but rather that *Beowulf* so often appears on such lists of unclassic classics compiled by many more-perceptive readers as well. Invariably students detest it—students of relevance find it irrelevant, students of literature find it a poor excuse. All of which, to those of us who love the poem (and did love it even before it began paying our salaries), means that we are doing something wrong when we teach or ask students to read it.

Probably most of us do two things wrong from the very start—we select the incorrect (inappropriate) translation, and we choose an unhelpful and mis-aimed (for a given group of readers) edition. There are twelve different translations of *Beowulf* available in twelve different editions today, yet only three or four are ever seen around very much, this because their publishers have promoted these three or four better than the other eight or nine promoted theirs. Often the translator's name—Donaldson, Kennedy, Clark-Hall—lures us into choosing what are admittedly very fine versions without estimating their suitability for people not likely to be impressed at all by the fact that so-and-so is an academic big shot. Unlike a book by Faulkner, *Beowulf* is bound to bore the reader unless he is brought to it very delicately, meaning that different readers will require different translations and editions.

And so I would like to look briefly at these twelve available versions, from both points of view. Such compendium reviewing is difficult to achieve and even dangerous to attempt; but in this case the attempt, I think, is definitely necessary. Several years ago, Philip Young wrote the finest compendium review ever on the year's work in Hemingway studies,[2] but mine cannot be as good. For one thing, I neither have burnt myself with fireworks this evening nor have knocked a can of beer over on the books as I was shifting them about the floor. But shift and pile I have—and what follows are the results, first unpiled and, then, piled.

[1] Brigid Brophy, Michael Levey, and Charles Osborne, *Fifty Works of English Literature We Could Do Without* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), p. 1.

[2] Philip Young, "Our Hemingway Man," *Kenyon Review* 26(1964):676-707.

Currently Available Translations and Editions

Alfred, William, trans. "*Beowulf*," in *Medieval Epics*. Modern Library Giant, G 87. New York: Random House, 1963.
Clark-Hall, John R., trans. *Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment*. Ed. with Notes and an introduction by C. L. Wrenn. Prefatory remarks by J. R. R. Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950.
Crossley-Holland, Kevin, trans. *Beowulf*. Intro. Bruce Mitchell. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968.
Donaldson, E. Talbot, trans. *Beowulf: A New Prose Translation*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1966.
Hieatt, Constance B., trans. *Beowulf and Other Old English Poems*. Introd. A. Kent Hieatt. New York: The Odyssey Press, Inc., 1967.
Kennedy, Charles W., trans. *Beowulf: The Oldest English Epic*. New York, London, and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1940.
Morgan, Edwin, trans. *Beowulf: A Verse Translation into Modern English*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966.
Nye, Robert. *Beowulf: A New Telling*. Illus. Alan E. Cober. New York: Hill and Wang, 1968.
Pearson, Lucien Dean, trans. *Beowulf*. Ed. with an introduction and notes by Rowland L. Collins. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1965.
Raffel, Burton, trans. *Beowulf: A New Translation*. Afterword by Robert P. Creed. New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1963.
Thorpe, Benjamin, trans. *Beowulf Together with Widsith, and The Fight at Finnesburg in the Benjamin Thorpe Transcription and Word-for-Word Translation*. Introd. Vincent F. Hopper. Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1962.
Wright, David, trans. *Beowulf: A Prose Translation*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1957.

The Translations

The translations themselves seem to me to be aimed at four quite different audiences. The versions by Alfred, Nye, and Wright seem more intended for the general reader interested in "reading," not "studying," the poem. (Such grouping, of course, is necessarily facile, and possibly Wright's might be included in the second group as well.) The second category of reader is the non-specialist student who could be expected to both read it and examine its artistry, yet who would have no knowledge of Anglo-Saxon to assist him the latter regard. This classification would obviously be the largest, since *Beowulf* is generally a college literature subject. Crossley-Holland, Donaldson, Hieatt, Kennedy, and Pearson seem so oriented. The third group is the specialist, the reader with an Anglo-Saxon background who is attempting to rectify for himself the disparities between the original and *any* translation. Such is the appeal of Clark-Hall and Thorpe. And finally, in the fourth division, are the Morgan and Raffel translations in which the attempt is rather to create a new work of art than preserve and make available an old one. Both men feel that a translator must appeal to his own age on its own terms. Thus, while the texture of the translation is noticeably richer, less imitative, and more self-sustaining than any of the others, the total accuracy of the presentation is often, in one way or another, tampered with. The reader of such a translation, to appreciate fully its merits and recognize fully its limitations, would have to have in command all the approaches to *Beowulf* the other three categories allow and a thorough knowledge of poetics as well.

In order to sample each translation, I give in turn each translator's rendition of the identical passage between lines 407 and 432, the point at which Beowulf arrives

at Heorot and tells the heretofore-hapless Hrothgar, more or less, that you can breathe easily—I am Beowulf, have lots of good blood, have shed lots of bad blood in the name of good, and am now prepared to scratch Grendel—that is, if you will stand back and shut up, Hrothgar. In the original, the passage reads as follows:

'Wæs þu, Hroðgar, hal! Ic eom Higelaces
mæg ond magoðegn; hæbbe ic mærða fela
ongunnen on geogoþe. Me wearð Grendles þing
on minre eþeltyrf undyrne cuð;
secgað sæliðend, þæt þæs sele stande,
reced selesta rinca gehwylcum
idel ond unnyt siððan æfenleoht
under heofenes hador beholen weorþeð.
Pa me þæt gelærdon leode mine,
þa selestan, snotere ceorlas,
þeoden Hroðgar, þæt ic þe sohte,
forþan hie mægenes cræft min[n]e cuþon;
selfe ofersawon ða is of searwum cwom,
fah from feondum, þær ic fife geband,
yðde eotena cyn, ond on yðum slog
niceras nihtes, nearoþearfe dreah,
wræc Wedera nið — wean ahsodon —,
forgrand gramum; ond nu wið Grendel sceal,
wið þam aglæcan ana gehegan
ðing wið þyrse. Ic þe nu ða,
brego Beorht-Dena, biddan wille,
eodor Scyldinga, anre bene,
þæt þu me ne forwyrne, wigendra hleo,
freowine folca, nu ic þus feorran com,
þæt ic mote ana [ond] minra eorla gedryht,
þes hearda heap, Heorot fælsian.[3]

Looking first at the general reader grouping, Alfred conveys it this way:

"Hail, Hrothgar. I am Hygelac's kinsman and close retainer. I have undertaken many things which brought me fame in my youth. This business with Grendel came to be known to me with nothing left out, on my native soil. Sailors are saying that this hall, the finest of buildings, stands empty and useless to any man once the brightness of heaven goes under, the glow of the twilight is quenched. My men have been advising me—very fine men, wise people, my lord Hrothgar—that I should seek you out, because they know the power of a certain gift of mine. They themselves looked on when, blood-stained from my foes, I came out of several ambushes. On that occasion, I took five captive; I destroyed a whole family of ogres; and at night I killed water-monsters in the waves. I came through that hard time with no quarter given. I was taking vengeance for their attack on the Weders. They were asking for trouble. I pounded those wild foes to dust. And now with Grendel, this terrible creature, this giant, I feel the need to hold a meeting on my own. Now then, king of the glorious Danes, bulwark of the Scyldings, I want to beg this one favor of you: that, protector of soldiers that you are, lord and friend of whole nations, now that I have got this far, you do not refuse me, and this company of noble fighting men of mine, this stern troop, permission that I alone cleanse Heorot."

[3]Fr. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg* (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1928), pp. 16-17.

Assuming that the general reader would most desire readability and smoothness in a translation, I feel that this is entirely too clumsy and staggering. Alfred claims to be interested in conveying the phrase-by-phrase nature of the communication, and perhaps he does this. But in so doing he strangles the flow of his rendition. The original was listened to, not read. The audience had a rhythm and voice inflection to ease it along which one who reads a translation does not. Hence, for me Alfred's translation most resembles those which doctoral candidates hammer out for advanced Old English classes. He tries to translate the elements as they appear, hoping to clarify by repunctuating rather than rearranging clogged lines. Simple sentences abound when subordination is demanded, and complex sentences become so complex as to be intolerable. The last sentence of this Old English passage is the prime example here, though the same thing happens throughout the whole translation. Here Hrothgar is slapped with four attributes by Beowulf: king of the glorious Danes, bulwark of the Scyldings, protector of soldiers, and patron of whole nations. Two come in the "beseech" clause, two in the "don't refuse" clause. Alfred orders them almost exactly as they come in the Anglo-Saxon sentence and emerges with an involved syntax in which the mind of the reader must be operating at a fever pitch to keep subjects, verbs, and modifiers from becoming hopelessly knotted. The translator constantly forces the reader to double back and come around and through again. The diction continually shifts between the high-heroic and the banal-colloquial: Beowulf asks to "cleanse" Heorot under the "brightness of heaven" from something which is "asking for trouble." By the same token, though, Alfred is due one major compliment for his diction which perhaps only Nye is due as well. In line 418 appears the word *mægenes*, a crucial thematic word which untranslatably states the real power of Beowulf: his physical strength, his virtue, his good intention, his valour, efficiency, and efficacy—all in one word. Almost to a man, the translators slop by on this with "strength"—a point which bothers anyone who knows anything about the concept of *mægen*.[4] Alfred renders this as "the power of a certain gift of mine." Not totally accurate in terms of translation, but quite good in poetic implication. Nye, we will see, will stop and give it a whole paragraph. In the long run, however, Alfred's translation can really appeal to neither the general reader nor to the scholarly audience. Put quite simply, it plods.

Easily the best translation for the general reader (and perhaps for some students) is Wright's:

> "I salute you, Hrothgar! I am a nephew of Hygelac, and one of his followers. In my youth I have undertaken many notable exploits. I heard about the Grendel affair in my native country; for seamen relate that this great hall stands empty and useless to all once the sun sets below the horizon. So the best and wisest among my countrymen urged me to visit you, King Hrothgar, because they knew of my vast strength. They were eye-witnesses when, stained with the blood of my adversaries, I emerged from a fight in which I destroyed an entire family of giants—capturing five of them—besides killing by night a number of sea-monsters. Although hard-pressed, I destroyed the brutes (who had courted trouble) and avenged their attacks upon the Geats. And now I mean to deal single-handed with the monstrous Grendel. King of the Danes, protector of fighting men, I shall ask you one favor, which you will not deny to me now that I have come so far. It is that I alone, with my tough company of fighting-men, may be allowed to purge Heorot."

[4] Cf. J. R. R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics," *PBA* 22(1936):245-95 and H. L. Rogers, "Beowulf's Three Great Fights," *RES* 6(1965):339-55.

In his translator's comments, Wright states plainly that he thinks prose is a better medium than verse for presenting folk epics (p. 21), though he admits to having to sacrifice some color for clarity (an assumption, I feel, correctly made in the case of the non-scholarly reader). Wright claims to seek a middle style, not plain and not overly rhetorical. An example of this, I think, is his reworking of lines 413-414. Literally, these would come off something like "after the evening light is concealed under heaven's serenity." Most translators seem to have gotten into the rut of "after the light of day is hidden under the vault of heaven," a translation which, for me, is a contradiction in terms. Wright has the sun set below the horizon, and this is all the non-scholarly reader wants it to do—more obscures the meaning and begins to challenge readability once again. Wright's diction is more consistent throughout than Alfred's—at least the brutes are "courting trouble" here, and the other choices are kept on a realistically dignified level as well. *Mægen* unfortunately goes as "vast strength." The syntax is one of the smoothest in *any* group of translations, this exemplified quite well by the difficult last sentence. Here Wright reduces the superfluities of the four qualities to two (which are four meshed) and divides the whole mighty sentence into two more-controllable ones. While the flavor of the Anglo-Saxon may have been lost in so doing, the dignity has not and the clarity has been increased. From a purely story-telling point of view, I think there is no better version than David Wright's.

Perhaps the Nye volume does not even belong in this study, but it is so ingenious that I could not resist including it. Nye retells rather than translates *Beowulf*, freely rearranging and omitting sections when he deems it necessary. He elaborates when he feels a need to heighten a point at hand, reduces when he feels one has been made too clearly (as Beowulf often overclarifies about himself). The book is intended for the young general reader, to whom it would doubtless appeal. Nye more or less renders our sample passage this way, though not all in the same place (pp. 23-24, 25):

> Now, King Hygelac had a nephew, and his nephew's name was Beowulf. Beowulf was only a young man, but already he had won fame on account of his goodness and daring. . . .When Beowulf had heard all the stories about the dreadful deeds of the demon Grendel, he determined to go and help Hrothgar if he could. . . .He chose fourteen men to go with him. They were brave, indomitable fellows, well tested in battle and willing to follow their hero wherever he went. . . .He had heard enough about Grendel to know that the monster could not be killed by strength alone.

Nye converts the whole thing from dialogue to narrative and reduces it to its less ebullient particulars. Notice that he does not fall into the "strength" trap on *mægen*. Instead, he says "the monster could not be killed by strength alone," something much of his more scholarly competition has forgotten to point out. More than this, he follows up with an interpolated paragraph which puts the whole concept into much more acceptable perspective. In speaking of Beowulf's less than perfect eyesight he says:

> A setback like this did not daunt him. . . .Beowulf was the rare kind of person who made strengths of his own weaknesses. His eyes being poor, he determined to see not just as well as other people, but better than most. He did this by cultivating habits of quickness and concentration that enabled him to be truly *seeing* where others were only looking. And this matter of the eyes was typical of his whole manner of being. Beowulf had made the best of all he had, putting each imperfection to work in the

service of his integrity [*mægen?*]. Thus, his real strength lay in the balance of his person—....(pp. 24-25).

Again, Nye's is a retelling and not actually a retelling for adults. But it contains a certain approach which would well be incorporatd into more advanced versions.

We turn now to the "college level" translations—those which should do something more than clearly recount the essentials of plot, character, and setting, and even (I suppose) sacrifice a bit of the stark clarity in favor of the more literarily-artistic things. Of the five translations in this group, two are prose (Hieatt and Donaldson), two are verse (Kennedy and Crossley-Holland), and one is a weird combination of the two (Pearson).

I would like to discuss Constance Hieatt's first, since she maintains in her introduction to be primarily interested in readability; for this reason, my initial inclination was to place her in the first grouping. Her version of the sample passage goes as follows:

> "Hail, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman and retainer, and I have undertaken many a glorious deed in my youth. In my native land I heard of Grendel's doings. Seafarers say that this hall, the best of buildings, stands idle and useless to all when the evening light fades under heaven's vault.
>
> "The noblest and wisest counselors of my people advised me to come to you, lord Hrothgar, because they knew of my great strength. They themselves saw me when, bloodstained from encounters with enemies, I came from battles, when I bound five giants and destroyed their race, and killed water monsters on the waves at night; I endured great hardship to avenge the persecution of the Geats—they had asked for trouble! I ground down those fierce creatures, and now I will fight against the monster Grendel; I alone shall settle the dispute with the demon.
>
> "Chief of the Danes, protector of the nation, I want to ask one boon of you now—do not refuse me, defender of warriors and friend of the people, now that I have come so far—that I alone, with my bold troop of nobles, may purge Heorot...."

In terms of syntax, the Hieatt translation is quite readable. Note, for example, her improvement of the syntax of the final sentence by the addition of dashes. She maintains the power of the sentence (it *is* Beowulf's knock-out punch, is it not?), yet reduces two of Hrothgar's epithets and the afterthought (of how far the Geats have travelled) to a parenthetical structure which adds force to what comes before (the request for an as-yet-unstated boon) and what comes after (the boon's definition). This translation also assists readability by reducing the length of paragraphs into more obvious sense units, by excellent rearrangement and subordination of structures, and by more logical punctuation. However, the diction seems inconsistent and occasionally bad to me. Once again we have "they had asked for trouble"—a line which continually seems a colloquialist's breath of fresh air amidst an entirely uncolloquial bundle of material. Against this she will throw the word "boon"—uncolloquial to the point of archaism. Actually I like "boon" here—but it is inconsistent with the theory of translation which supposedly guides her. In general, the diction throughout the translation is more sophisticated than a "readable" one would contain: "purge Heorot," "evening light fades under heaven's vault," and the like. This translation defies accurate classification. It strives always for readability over scholarship (even to the point of eliminating extra detail), yet it achieves something that can be called applicable to an introduction to literature class, a sophomore survey, or the like. The nature of its edition,

we shall see, imposes limitations on the translation as well, since the reader would get several more Old English poems and much critical apparatus to enlarge his awareness of the poem's art and history. In short, while the translation is satisfactory enough, the whole project seems misconceived.

Donaldson's is more to the point. Its appeal throughout is always to the upper-level college student. Though I suppose it could serve for lower level ones as well, many of its advantages would go to waste:

> "Hail, Hrothgar! I am kinsman and thane of Hygelac. In my youth I have set about many brave deeds. The affair of Grendel was made known to me on my native soil: sea-travelers say that this hall, best of buildings, stands empty and useless to all warriors after the evening light becomes hidden beneath the cover of the sky. Therefore my people, the best wise earls, advised me thus, Lord Hrothgar, that I should seek you because they know what my great strength can accomplish. They themselves looked on when, bloody from my foes, I came from the fight where I had bound five, destroyed a family of giants, and at night in the waves slain water-monsters, suffered great pain, avenged an affliction for the Weather-Geats on those who had asked for trouble—ground enemies to bits. And now alone I shall settle the affair with Grendel, the monster the demon. Therefore, lord of the Bright-Danes, protector of the Scyldings, I will make a request of you, refuge of warriors, fair friend of nations, that you refuse me not, now that I have come so far, that alone with my company of earls, this band of hardy men, I may cleanse Heorot."

Donaldson, admirably, steps forward and announces that he is not afraid of "unreal" English. Beowulf was, in fact, written in unreal Old English, its vocabulary and syntax apparently quite strange to the ears of its very contemporaries. Thus, something flavorful is preserved here. What Donaldson claims mainly to be seeking, however, is combination of the "richness of rhetorical elaboration" and "simplicity of statement," something representing well the high-heroic attitudes of mere people (p. xii). If Wright's translation was Middle Style, Donaldson's is High Middle Style. It seems to me, also, that this translation encounters a problem which many others do as well and the rectification of which is virtually impossible. I speak of the contemporaneous maintenance of a special, dignified mood and a clear, readable style. Note the last sentence in the text once again. Like Alfred, Donaldson takes this one more or less as it comes in the original, attempting little rearrangement or subordination. What he achieves is a noble crescendo of statement, but it is as well a real challenge to read in connection with those which precede and follow. It is more excusable for Donaldson than for Alfred, though, given the nature of the audience—Donaldson's surely should appreciate the rhetoric more. This translator rates high, along with Alfred and Nye, for the handling of *mægen,* which is a bit more careful than most—" they know what my strength may accomplish" implies that the speaker is a good deal more than the average big guy and suggests something other than physical as well. Donaldson's rendition maintains the catalogue quality of Old English without succumbing to the easy clomp-clomp with which epic catalogues usually resound. He handles the light/sky image better than the ones we have so far discussed but still allows his diction to descend to "ask for trouble." Donaldson's is more advanced than Hieatt's in another manner, also: it recognizes that, though piling of epithet upon epithet was normally a metrical matter for the scop, generally some variation of attribute was suggested in two successive phrases. Most, like Hieatt's, will take *aglæcan* and *pyrse* and polish them both off with the single word "monstrous." Donaldson uses

"the monster, the demon" which, like the original, includes two-thirds quality, one-third quantity. In terms of a *prose* translation for advanced college students, Professor Donaldson's seems to me decidely superior.

In the realm of verse translation at this level, the distinction between eKnnedy and Crossley-Holland is not nearly so evident. For sheer duplication of the *sound* of the Anglo-Saxon, Kennedy's is exquisite:

"Hail, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's thane,
Hygelac's kinsman. Many a deed
Of honor and daring I've done in my youth.
This business of Grendel was brought to my ears
On my native soil. The sea-farers say
This best of buildings, this boasted hall,
Stands dark and deserted when the sun is set,
When darkening shadows gather with dusk.
The best of my people, prudent and brave,
Urged me, King Hrothgar, to seek you out;
They had in remembrance my courage and might.
Many had seen me come safe from the conflict,
Bloody from battle, five foes I bound
Of the giant kindred, and crushed their clan.
Hard-driven in danger and darkness of night
I slew the nicors that swam the sea,
Avenged the woe they had caused the Weders,
And ended their evil—they needed the lesson!
And now with Grendel, the fearful fiend,
Single-handed I'll settle the strife!
Prince of the Danes, protector of Scyldings,
Lord of nations, and leader of men,
I beg one favor—refuse me not,
Since I come thus faring from far-off lands—
That I may alone with my loyal earls,
With this hardy company, cleanse Hart-Hall."

Note the hammering alliteration, the heavy emphasis of the four-stress line, the clear presence of the half-lines and caesura. Kennedy does not attempt to have his lines scan according to characteristic Old English stress patterns, a wise choice in view of the unnatural combinations this would surely necessitate. Perhaps not so wise a choice is his decision to employ a longer line when translating the Sigemund, Finnsburh, Thryth, and Ravenswood material in order to, according to him, differentiate between the material of the lay and the material of the narrative and "indicate . . . the lays as allusive insertions in the narrative frame" (p. viii). In this rendition the diction is chosen, as it must be, always for sound, with the inevitable result that the poetry often overwhelms the sense. Kennedy is able, however, to rearrange at times certain syntactical elements to salvage some of the sense that normal line-by-line often loses. For instance, all Hrothgar's epithets are shifted into one extended post-nominal catalogue—something which emphasizes the mood and rhythm as well. What Kennedy is doing poetically here is difficult to maintain for 3000-plus lines, and occasionally it degenerates to "Night Before Christmas" banter (as in the description of previous battles here). Generally, though, it is powerfully done and is the best rendition by far for bringing home the peculiar qualities of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Crossley-Holland's is short on the foregoing quality, but longer on readability and general sense:

"Greetings Hrothgar!
I am Hygelac's kinsman and retainer. In my youth
I achieved many daring exploits. Word of Grendel's deeds
has come to me in my own country;
seafarers say that this hall Heorot,
best of all buildings, stands empty and useless
as soon as the evening light is hidden under the sky.
So, Lord Hrothgar, men known by my people
to be noble and wise advised me to visit you
because they knew of my great strength;
they saw me themselves when, stained by enemies' blood,
I returned from the fight when I destroyed five,
a family of giants, and by night slew monsters
on the waves; I suffered great hardship,
avenged the affliction of the Storm-Geats and crushed
their fierce foes—they were asking for trouble.
And now, I shall crush the giant Grendel
in single combat. Lord of the mighty Danes,
protector of warriors, lord beloved of your people,
now that I have sailed here from so far,
do not refuse my request—that I alone, with my band
of brave retainers, may cleanse Heorot."

He strives to echo rather than imitate the original. The stresses still number four, but they are not nearly so heavy as Kennedy's. The alliteration is present but so light as to become unnoticeable for long periods. This translation pointedly tries to avoid archaic words and involuted word order, to the benefit of clarity but at the expense of the type of poetry *Beowulf* is. Crossley-Holland advertises that he is seeking a "formal" diction but, bang!, again the foes are "asking for trouble." The diction seems to stumble at times as well—"achieve . . . exploits" is bad diction, bad grammar *and*, unlike a pretentious cigarette, bad taste. In line 413 it seems to me the light/sky material winds up making neither literal nor poetic sense. In order to accommodate his clarity and meter, the translator here is often willing to omit sections he considers superfluous—Grendel is given only size and Hrothgar is stripped of one quality. In the long run, I slightly prefer Kennedy's poetic translation, simply, I guess, because it is more *Beowulf*ian than Crossley-Holland's—and the very decision to put this enormous thing into verse would seem to imply a desire to be *Beowulf*ian. However Crossley-Holland's reads with far more ease and might eventually prove to be the better choice from the struggling student's point of view. I could not cope with Kennedy's when it was foisted upon me as a college sophomore and am still not sure when I became able to.[5]

And then there is Pearson's, the rationale of which is hard to gather. His translation is one of "vigorous, rhythmic prose in which he suggests the strong beats of the Old English poetic line" (p. 24). To achieve this, Pearson arranges his prose in

[5] The Kennedy translation is employed in George B. Woods, *et al.*, *The Literature of England*, 4th ed. (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1958) and has been retained in the 5th edition, edited by George K. Anderson and William E. Buckler (1966).

poetic lines (?) and seems to achieve the end of the line whenever and wherever the fourth beat is struck. Such odd lines as the third and fourth below occur throughout:

> "Health to you, O Hrothgar! I am
> Hygelac's kinsman and young thane; I have taken
> on many a high emprise in youth. Grendel's doings
> were no secret to me on my native turf; sea-farers
> say this matchless Hall stands bare and profitless to
> men when evening-light is hidden in heaven's vault.
> Then, Hrothgar, lord, the best and wisest of my
> people prompted me to seek you out, because they
> knew my strength, once looked on when I left the
> battle blood-flecked from my foes; I had fettered five,
> wiped out the giant race, and slain nine nicors in the
> waves; I passed through dire distress, avenged the
> Weders' woe—they asked for trouble!—and ground my
> fierce foes small. Now I shall hold a meeting with
> the monster Grendel, one against the giant fiend,
> Now, Chief of Bright-Danes, protector of Scyldings,
> shelter of the warring, noble folk-friend, I will ask
> one boon: do not forbid me, who have come so far,
> to cleanse Hart Hall alone with my banded earls, this
> bold battalion."

Alliteration, says the editor, is used when it "sits well" (p. 24). This phrase has obvious poetic connotations to recommend it, but it doesn't say much. Real alliteration (versus accidental repetition of a sound here and there) occurs in very few lines of the sample passage. More than this, Pearson takes semi-Kennedy-ish liberties in shifting into blank verse for the "more lyrical passages." As for the accuracy and clarity of the translation itself, I have mixed feelings. There is an enormous absence of connectives and subordination, causing a ringing sledge hammer effect in the reader's mind. However, the "message" comes across without much struggle on the reader's part. Occasionally I suspect mistranslation—for example, most translators (and I) agree that it was the monsters who asked for woe. Yet the arrangement of parts in the passage above seems to say the Weders asked for it! All in all, this is a translation doomed to create misconceptions of all sorts and whose purpose seems as much a mystery to the translator and to the editor as it is bound to be for any teacher who attempts to justify it to his students.

At the advanced college level, then, Donaldson (prose) and Kennedy (verse) seem to stand out, though Crossley-Holland has much to recommend it and will be seen to be in a superior edition to either of the other two.

At the scholarly level, Thorpe and Clark-Hall have such different intentions that they become virtually non-competitive. Thorpe's is a pony:

> "Be thou, Hrothgar, hail!
> I am Hygelac's
> kinsman and fellow-warrior:
> I have great deeds many
> undertaken in *my* youth.
> To me became Grendel's affair:
> on my native turf,

manifestly known:
seafarers say
that this hall stands,
this house most excellent,
for every warrior
void and useless,
after *the* evening light
under heaven's serenity
is conceal'd.
Then me counsel'd
my people,
the most excellent
sagacious men,
prince Hrothgar!
that I thee should seek;
because they of my strength
the power knew.
Themselves beheld,
when from *their* snares I came,
blood-stain'd from *the* foes,
where five I bound;
(the eoten race boil'd *with* rage)
and on *the* billows slew
nickers by night;
pinching want *I* suffer'd:
I aveng'd *the* Weders' quarrel,
(*they* sought *their* misery;)
fiercely crush'd *them*;
and *I* now against Grendel shall,
against that miserable being,
alone hold
council with *the* giant.
I thee now,
lord of *the* bright Danes,
will beseech,
protector of *the* Scyldings,
one prayer:
that thou deny me not,
patron of warriors,
friend of people,
now I am thus come from far,
that I alone may,
with the company of my earls,
and this bold band,
Heorot purify."

He is trying to be as literal as possible, and clearly he is a real trooper at being literal. This translation *cannot* be read. Thorpe has looked up the words and chosen the "best" meaning for the given line. He has added the missing words and marked them with italics. He has paired the translation up in columns with the original Anglo-Saxon text. Occasionally he does attempt a new meaning for a word or actually creates a synonym which would logically be implied by the synonyms already given in Bosworth and Toller. This version could be a real aid to the weary translator sick of turning pages in his trusty Meritt-supplemented Clark-

Hall dictionary,[6] but it can also stifle the creativity and definitely the interest of anyone who relies on it too long or too exclusively. It is a product of the nineteenth century, valuable in its day, but its day, frankly, has been seen. It has fallen almost to study-guide status.

But Clark-Hall has long stood as the model of accurate and clear, if unimaginative, translation in the canon of *Beowulf* studies:

> "Hail to thee, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman and retainer. I have in my youth undertaken many deeds of daring. Grendel's doings became plainly known to me in my fatherland. Sea-farers say that this hall, this most noble building, stands empty and useless to every man after the evening sun has become hidden under the vault of heaven. Then my people, the noble and wise men, advised me thus, lord Hrothgar,—that I should visit thee because they knew the strength of my might. They had themselves looked on, when, blood-stained from battles, I returned from the fight, where I bound five, laid lo a brood of giants, and slew by night sea-monsters on the waves; I suffered direful straights, and avenged the attacks on the storm-loving Geats—they courted trouble—ground down the fierce foes. And now I will decide the matter alone against the monster, the giant, Grendel!
>
> "Now therefore I will beg of thee one boon, thou ruler of the glorious danes, protector of the Scyldings. Do not refuse me this, defender of warriors, beloved lord of peoples, now I am come this far;—that I alone, with my band of noble warriors, this troop of doughty men, may cleanse Heorot."

Clark-Hall assures the new translator who consults his version that his own sense and accuracy are there but does not stifle him into accepting more than an occasional phrase or two of what has been provided. Clark-Hall feels that the first duty is the preservation of what the original poet has said, rather than the duplication of how he has said it. Thus, this translation seeks and for the most part achieves the delicate balance between literal accuracy and a smooth, clear flow. Its prose makes no pretense to majesty, preservation of mood, original syntactical order, or any of the other things most translators boldly stand forth to announce is hard to do but for which their ways are the best yet conceived in the minds of men. More than anything, Clark-Hall's strives for accuracy of connotation and quite often saves a kenning from too much translation in order to avoid etymological fallacy which would destroy the image the *Beowulf*-poet was attempting to create.

The Morgan and Raffel translations, the last group, would seem to have more relevance to a study of poetics than to a student of any level interested in an Old English poem called *Beowulf*. Not that they are poor or even inaccurate translations—it is simply that their philosophy is to create a *new art* rather than make available the old. In one sense every translation is a new art, since it is not really what the original writer produced. However, Morgan and Raffel seem more directly interested in exploiting these possibilities, whereas the others—to one degree or another—are content with having them appear only accidentally and are striving even to avoid them when possible. Let us look at the two renditions of the sample passage these translations contain, first Morgan's, then Raffel's:

> "Your life and health, Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's
> Kinsman and retainer; many a hard venture

[6] John R. Clark-Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. with a supplement by Herbert D. Meritt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962).

Has my youth endeavoured. Word about Grendel
Came to me clearly on my native soil:
Sea-travellers tell that his hall stands
(Building of buildings for every warrior)
Void and unused when the light of evening
Has been hidden under the hood of heaven.
And then my people, the best of men,
Deliberating well, began to advise me,
My lord Hrothgar, to seek you out,
For they were aware of the force of my strength:
Themselves looked on as I came from battle,
Bloodied from my enemies, where I took five captive,
Ravaged giantkind, and on the waves by night
Slaughtered the krakens, suffered sharp stress,
Crushed them in their fierceness, avenged Geats' grief–
They courted their hurts!–; and now I am here
For this fiend, for Grendel, to settle with these hands
The demon's account. Prince of the Danes,
I have now therefore to make you this request,
This single petition, protector of the Scyldings,
Not to forbid me, defender of fighting men,
Folk-friend endeared, far as I have come,
To try with these hands and my company of men,
This unswerving troop, to sweep Heorot clean."

* * *

"Hail, Hrothgar!
Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's
Name has echoed in our land: sailors
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
Light and life fleeing together.
My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove
Five great giants into chains, chased
All of that race from the earth. I swam
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one
By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called
Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me–
That I, alone with the help of my men,
May purge all evil from this hall."

Judging them solely from the point of view of the philosophy of translation they

expound, Raffel's seems to me the distinctly better version. Put another way, it is the better new art, the better poem. It possesses a rich diction which gives a modern strength to the character of Beowulf. Its images are particularly clear and vivid (i.e., "when the moon / hangs in skies the sun had lit, / Light and Life fleeing together" / versus Morgan's "when the light of evening / Has been hidden under the hood of heaven" /). The mood, which Raffel takes to be the most important element of any translation, is one of constant grandeur; and the phraseology and metrics continuously build to great crescendos. In attempting to create his new art form, of course, Raffel unapologetically varies whatever he feels he must, alliterating freely or omitting aliteration entirely and freeing the four-beat line from any pretension to pattern or regularity. He employs enjambment extensively, thus heightening the powerful flow of his rendition. In every way it is quite a rich and attractive translation, though it fits into none of the previous three categories.

Morgan's by contrast, staggers. Its unnatural phraseological patterns both hinder comprehension and mutilate metrics. He claims in his preface to have adapted the four-stress line to avoid offense to the modern ear, but personally I feel this translation offends the ear more than most others. Note particularly how the placement of Hrothgar's four epithets in the last seven lines destroys everything in those lines. Also in his preface, he talks of speaking to his own age by avoiding archaic diction, yet what current reader is likely to feel familiar with "kraken," "folk-friend," and things of this sort. Perhaps this last comment is not totally fair, since quite often the Morgan translation *does*, in fact, remain within the common idiom —but still the lapses are quite obvious throughout.

In terms of fulfilling their intentions, then, I consider Raffel's the superior of the two.

The Editions

While the Wright, Donaldson, Kennedy, Clark-Hall, and Raffel seem the best translations within their respective classifications, often the edition can aid or hinder the reader's encounter with the poem as well. It is an unfortunate fact that the best translations are not always accompanied by the best equipment; and just as frequently a very good edition is just not appropriate for all audiences.

In the first class (General Reader—Alfred, Wright, Nye) there is little problem in selection, for only Wright's comes with any real critical or historical material at all. In his introduction Wright has several good generalized discussions of such things as the conflict of good and evil, the fear of darkness, the nature and purpose of heroism, and the idiosyncrasies of the Anglo-Saxon outlook and imagination. He spends a good amount of time on the structure of the poem, proving its unity and refuting those who would call it unsophisticated. On the whole, however, the introduction seems a bit helter-skelter since it includes such varied considerations with no apparent thesis around which to group them. He is very murky on some points as well, abandoning the Christian-pagan dichotomies in total confusion. Wright avoids discussion of such things as metrics and style, and in most ways his introduction is properly aimed at the non-scholarly reader. Only his assimilation of material requires improvement.

In regard to the other two editions in this category, Alfred's translation appears in a volume with three other epics and is clearly designed for a hero-hungry audience. The introduction itself is likewise oriented toward the epic tradition rather than anything peculiarly Anglo-Saxon. While it includes a few interesting

Translation	Alfred	Clark-Hall	Crossley-Holland	Donaldson	Hieatt	Kennedy	Morgan	Nye	Pearson	Raffel	Thorpe	Wright
Price[a]	3.95	2.10	1.95	0.95	1.25	3.50	0.95	3.95	1.65	0.75	2.25	0.95
Total Pages	590	43 &194	14 &146	15 &58	8 &119	65 &121	34 &94	116	127	160	22 &230	122
Cover[b]	H	H	P	P	P	H	P	H	P	P	P	P
Type	Pr	Pr	Ve	Pr	Pr	Ve	Ve	Pr	PrVe	Ve	Pr	Pr
Other Poems	x[c]	x[d]	x[e]		x[f]						x[g]	
Trans. Introd.		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Ed. Introd.	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x
Metrics Disc.	x	x	x		x		x		x	x		
Structure Disc.		x	x		x	x				x		x
Style Disc.	x	x	x		x		x		x	x		
Plot Summary	x	x	x		x	x					x	x
Theme Summary	x		x	x	x	x	x		x	x		x
Old English Sampling		x	x		x		x		x	x	x	
Genealogy			x	x	x				x	x	x	x
Bibliography	x	x	x		x	x			x	x		x
Glossary of Names			x			x	x			x		x
Footnotes		x		x	x				x		x	x
Text Divisions		P43[h]	22[i]	P43	17	17	5	16[j]		P43	P43	P43
Summarial Headings		x	x[k]	x	x	x	x	x				
Line #'s Clear?	x	x	x			x	x		x	x	x	x
Illustrations			x[l]					x[l]			x[m]	
Other Appendices			x[n]							x[o]		x[p]

[a] Prices are those current in 1969.
[b] Paper or hard covers, as available in 1969.
[c] *The Song of Roland, The Nibelungenlied, The Cid.*
[d] *The Finnesburg Fragment.*
[e] *The Finnesburh Fragment.*
[f] *The Battle of Brunanburh, The Battle of Maldon, The Wanderer, Doher, The Dream of the Rood, Judith, The Seafarer.*
[g] *Widsith, The Fight at Finnesburg.*
[h] "P43" indicates the standard Prologue and 43 sections used by most translators working from the Klaeber transcription. Clark-Hall's is further subdivided by summarial headings within the sections.
[i] Divisions are summarized in the introduction and not in the text itself.
[j] Nye's divisions are sixteen individually-titled chapters which cannot be equated with certain lines, since Nye rearranges whole sections freely.
[k] Again, the headings are in the introduction only.
[l] Seven full pages and one double page pencil drawings of several plot incidents.
[m] Frontispiece is photograph of the first leaf of Cotton Vitellius A.xv.
[n] "Notes on Episodes and Digressions."
[o] Much more elaborate discussion of each proper name than most glossaries provide.
[p] "The Author, Manuscript, and Bibliography of Beowulf," "Sutton Hoo."
[q] Map depicting geographical relationships of various tribes.

points that others omit, it is generally a bare-bones effort. If it stresses any one significant point, it is that earthly goals and ideals are insufficient for men and that the poem then is a progressive realization by Hrothgar, Beowulf, and Wiglaf of this essential fact. Alfred discusses the contrast between Tacitus and Alcuin on this point, though at no great length. The rest of the essay is a collection of fleeting nods to many of the things one is theoretically supposed to "know" before he dares crack the book. Nye's edition has almost no extra material except for the author's note that he is retelling (not translating) and attempting to elucidate "myth" more than any other facet. Whereas Alfred has no textual divisions and Wright has the standard Prologue plus 43 sections, Nye divides his rendition into 16 titled chapters. The titles themselves are obviously aimed at the interest and enthusiasm of the younger reader: "A Hall Full of Blood," "Revenge," "Beowulf Against the Firedrake," etc. Some are curiously metaphysical, though, such as the first ("A Ship Without a Sail") and the last ("Bees"). To further stimulate the young mind, the Nye edition is nicely and excitingly illustrated by Alan E. Cober.

I suppose most of the space allotted to editions should be given to the second category (Non-specialist Student—Crossley-Holland, Kennedy, Donaldson, Hieatt, and Pearson), for here is where the edition becomes an especially essential factor. Referring to the chart on page 335, it is clear that, in breadth of items covered, the Crossley-Holland edition (a translation I felt was a pretty good alternative to Kennedy's) is the most inclusive. The introduction, written by Bruce Mitchell, is particularly excellent in that it suggests all the major interpretations for various things in the poem but challenges the validity of all of them, thus leaving the intelligent student with a framework within which to judge things for himself. It handles such traditional introductory material as date of composition, history of the manuscript, authorship, monsters, Christian elements, and has a good long section simply called "The Meaning of *Beowulf*." Mitchell pares down the discussion of poetics from the seminal study in the Clark-Hall edition to its most important aspects and transcribes as well the latter's effective comparison of Anglo-Saxon to Modern verse. The introduction concludes with an invitation to "enjoy" *Beowulf*, something which many students (and teachers) forget is possible and which this fine edition makes *very* possible. The Crossley-Holland edition also includes appendices which deal pointedly with the major episodes and disgressions and make them much more meaningful than absolutely any other edition available. The bibliography here is one of the best as well. What Mitchell has done, in short, is select the most helpful material from all the other editions and combined it into one—it is thus the most comprehensive volume available.

Not nearly so comprehensive, the other poetic edition (Kennedy's) is exceptionally scholarly in the matters it chooses to treat. This is most certainly the finest edition for source study, since its thesis is that the ultimate art of *Beowulf* derives from the expert weaving together of history and legend into a new unity. In a lengthy section on Scandinavian and Icelandic analogues, Kennedy traces similarity of plot incident between *Beowulf* and various Northland sagas, the most noteworthy comparison being made with the *Hrolfssaga*. He also explores the possibility of identity between Beowulf and Bothvarr Bjarki. His examination of the historical actuality of people and events described in the poem is especially well done, and the reader can follow his arguments with clarity since he continually gives the line numbers to which he is referring. He ventures the opinion that Beowulf is out of place in the Geatish royal house, both on the basis of historical fact and on the other-than-kingly qualities Beowulf manifests. There are good

sections here on Christian and classical influences, attempting to show that *Beowulf* is a poem of emerging Christianity in which the echoes of paganism are still heard but are indistinctly dying away. In summary, the edition emphasizes the sources of the poem rather than the art of the poem, though strangely it lacks any genealogical tables whatsoever. Its division of the story into 17 titled segments is, I think, more clear than most other versions.

Rivalling the Crossley-Holland edition in this category for comprehensiveness is Constance Hieatt's. From the first she has insisted that her translation is not for the scholarly audience, and her husband obeys her insistence with a very well-rounded introduction which covers a multitude of subjects with extreme clarity. Throughout he emphasizes that the reader should first see *Beowulf* as a poem "which mobilizes mythical feelings and creates a mythical picture of life in a supremely artful way" (p. 12). The artfulness, he feels, lies in structure and style, both of which receive lengthy, though superficial, discussions. It is in this volume that the reader is given the best selection of other Anglo-Saxon poems and is, thus, to some extent an anthology. It might be particularly applicable in a situation where the emphasis will be on *Beowulf* as *an* Old English poem rather than as *the* Old English poem.

Though I do not feel that the Hieatt translation is as good as Donaldson's in the realm of prose, certainly her edition is better than his—for his is skimpy in almost every way. Though he adds several nice touches to the canon of openings to *Beowulf*, he is strictly theme oriented. He handles the warrior society, the relationships of man-to-man and man-to-God, and examines it all in the context of fate and doom within which the Anglo-Saxon civilization is enveloped. It is not a good introduction, though, on the questions of sources, poetics, structure, or style; and even such helpful things as a bibliography and glossary of main characters are omitted. This is surprising considering the quality and thoroughness of both Donaldson's usual work and Norton's typical publications. One is almost on the verge of saying that Donaldson's is a translation only, leaving the teacher to carry the burden of introducing the poem in almost *every* other way.

Rowland L. Collins has provided an adequate introduction to Pearson's strange translation. Though the discussions of life, times, and poetics are hasty, Collins is unique in his addition of how the Anglo-Saxons came to write the sort of poetry they did—he uses Caedmon as his prime example. He goes, in fact, so far as to question whether the *Beowulf*-poet was literate, a point he discusses less than convincingly. He is much stronger in his consideration of Beowulf as a declining hero, though he interestingly attributes the hero's fall more to love for his people than to self-interest, as several others do.[7] As the chart indicates, Collins is fairly broad in his coverage, though much of it remains too superficial to make a real impression on the user. Of the college editions of *Beowulf*, then, the Crossley-Holland book stands out for its comprehensive attention to nearly all important matters, but the Kennedy version rates special notice as well for its treatment of sources and the subsequent clarity of reading this permits.

In the third category (scholars—Clark-Hall, Thorpe), all the evidence is on the side of Clark-Hall. In fact, aimed at the highest levels of *Beowulf* scholarship as it is, the introduction is the best of all twelve editions and is the one single source upon which most of the later ones base themselves. Two separate introductions

[7] For the alternative position, cf. especially H. L. Rogers, *loc. cit.*

actually are involved here. The "Prefatory Remarks" by J. R. R. Tolkien cover the whole matter of translation with distinctive thoroughness. His discussion of metrics is a primary treatment of the subject, for he discusses in detail the various types of line patterns, their possible variations, provides samples of each, and generally handles well the rationale behind it all. He does the same for alliteration, demonstrating, in both regards, their essentiality rather than their decorativeness. The other introduction, by C. L. Wrenn, covers the history of the manuscript, the origin of the poem itself, a deduction about the character of the poet, the sources behind the poem's material, the relationship of the Christian coloring to the pagan heroic ideal, and several other lesser curiosities. The Clark-Hall text divisions conform initially to the standard Prologue-plus-43; however, each division is further subdivided and summarized, making this the most thoroughly-outlined of any translation available. It is the most scholarly available as well, though it does omit certain things found in other volumes. For example, the nature of their audience enables the editors to dispense with the more mundane elements of introduction, such as summarizing themes and cramming in appendices which outline various peripheral things which would be well-known to scholars working with the Clark-Hall translation. Strangely though, genealogical tables and a glossary of characters are missing, items no one ever feels confident enough to be without in reading *Beowulf*. *In toto*, however, this is one of the most beneficial and scholarly editions ever made available, though it is certainly not applicable to students who have not yet reached the more advanced stages of *Beowulf* study.

The Thorpe translation, edited by Vincent F. Hopper, once again makes little pretension to be anything but a trot. It does provide texts and translations of two other poems, and its footnotes on variant readings of the manuscript are probably the most thorough available unless one goes to Klaeber or to Dobbie. One confusing facet of this edition is its policy of counting each Anglo-Saxon half-line as one whole line, thus almost doubling the total number of lines in the poem. I say "almost," because it does not count the lines involved in the lacunae (as the better-known Klaeber transcription does) and consequently throws the final count into some hard-to-rectify figure (6347, whereas doubling the Klaeber count would give 6364). This makes spot consultation of translation extremely difficult.

The New Poem category (Raffel, Morgan) contains two adequate editions, though again the Raffel seems superior to the Morgan. Raffel's contains an introduction by the translator and an afterword by Robert P. Creed. The former, naturally, emphasizes the role of the translator as a new poet; and *Beowulf* is considered only a poetic entity, not a thematic, linguistic, or archaeological one. Raffel admires the original poet's descriptive powers, always playing down the role his fancy played in his writing (citing the Sutton Hoo find as evidence of the fantastic things that were truly available). He is particularly impressed by both the poet's mastery of the long epic form and his handling of the shorter forms which appear in the self-contained Finn episode and the like. Poetically, Hrothgar and Wealhtheow are more interesting for Raffel than Beowulf, Wiglaf, or the monsters—the irony with which they speak makes them more in tune with modern notions about dramatic poetry. Creed's afterword spends a bit too much time lauding Raffel, but on the whole it is a good discussion tightly constructed. In contrast to the introduction, it handles the traditional historical, thematic, and Old English metrical topics, with a particularly fine discussion of the fusing of epic and Christian materials. He is a bit too precious when he likens Raffel to a modern scop, but he disentangles himself from this and provides a concise presentation of

the role of the harp in the oral presentation of the poem. Perhaps all of this should have come before the text of the poem, though, since afterwords are usually read afterward; but this once again emphasizes the nature of this translation as a study in modern poetry more than in anything *Beowulf* translations are normally involved in. As reference to the chart will quickly evidence, it is, generally, a quite thorough edition.[8]

Morgan's is slightly different, though his intentions are even less to deal with the typical things in *Beowulf* study than Raffel's are. He does not go in at all for discussions of plot or structure, genealogy or bibliography. Rather his introduction is an essay, which deserves and has gotten recognition in its own right, entitled "The Translator's Task in *Beowulf*". Here he examines the poet-scholar opposition among translators, calling it a disparity between vigor and fidelity. He claims to be attempting a "full translation" (both) here, though his concern is usually more for the vigor than for the fidelity. He finds three types of translators of *Beowulf*: the literalist (*vis à vis*), those who paraphrase for vigor, and those who attempt duplication or emulation of Anglo-Saxon poetics. Implying that he seeks the best of all three, Morgan—as I remarked in discussing his translation itself—seems to me to have accidentally achieved a staggering jumble, a comment perhaps on the impossibility of an anywhere-close-to-perfect translation of this poem. Morgan, in pursuing his ideal combination of everything, calls the best translation one which would be "an adaptation of the English, irregular, four-accent measure sufficiently like the Anglo-Saxon line to suggest it at once and inevitably, yet not so unlike the English line as to sound strange to the modern ear" (p. xix). Such a trend, he feels, was begun by Hopkins and advanced by Bridges and Eliot, reaching its ultimate development in Auden's "The Age of Anxiety" and, especially, in Richard Eberhart's *Brotherhood of Men.* Morgan even implies that he is modelling his translation on Eberhart's poem. The second half of Morgan's introduction, "The Art of the Poem," is a definitely advanced discussion of how the translator must attempt to preserve the elements which make *Beowulf* distinctly *Beowulf* and presupposes rather than provides a knowledge of the background of the poem. For this translator, mood is the most important thing to preserve, and he gives a fine example (the Unferth scene) in which the mood can easily be misrepresented if the translator does not struggle hard to retain it. This treatment is couched in the jargon of modern literary criticism, justifying (for example) the oft-criticized episodes as equivalent to the flashback technique of the modern novel. Morgan's is a more advanced and certainly more limited discussion than Raffel's in almost every way.

* * *

What I have said should, properly, lead one to believe that most current translations of *Beowulf* have some merit, as long as the merit is realized within the terms established for it by the translator himself. Which is also to say, once again, that translations should be read and employed by the proper people in the proper situations. Only the translations by Alfred, Pearson, and possibly Thorpe seem unworthy within their respective groups. Wright's, Kennedy's, Crossley-Holland's,

[8]For a further discussion of the differences between the Raffel and Morgan versions, see Raffel's article "On Translating *Beowulf*," *Yale Review* 54(1965):532-46.

Donaldson's, Clark-Hall's and Raffel's seem to stand out as being better than normal, though Donaldson's competitor (Constance Hieatt) provides a far better edition. And Mr. Nye's, aimed as it is at the younger reader, should not really be held up to the others for comparison. Within the limits it sets for itself, it is really superb.

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Teaching Medieval English Literature: Texts, Recordings, and Techniques

IN THE FACE OF SO MUCH revisionist criticism in recent years concerned with oral literature and the nature of narrative, those of us who teach medieval English literature to undergraduates perhaps need to revise many of our own approaches to a literature which has seemed to many students (and often to fellow faculty) not "with it." One senses this sort of questioning of the value of the study of earlier literature even as one is impressed with the scope of current offerings in medieval studies. Pedagogical conservatism has failed adequately to digest and correlate widely scattered and adventurous scholarship in terms of specific classroom practice. Certain remedies are needed in the areas of better preparation of texts, broader use of recordings, and the application of more distinctive techniques of teaching. As early as 1945 F. J. Chaytor characterized medieval literature in a way suggestive of innovative techniques:

> Such a difference between medieval and modern standards of taste was inevitable before the invention of printing. To savour the finer points of literary style, as we understand it, to appreciate the exact choice of words, the cadence of phrases and even the logical sequence of ideas, we require to read and re-read the matter presented to us. But it was not to a reading public that the medieval writer appealed. An unlettered audience cannot be treated tenderly; points must be vigorously emphasized; statements must be repeated, variety of diction must be introduced. The story-teller will present his characters in person, in conversation with each other, and by change of voice, intonation and gesture will make them live in the minds of his hearers; he must be something of an actor as well as a narrator. . . .The quality that we now call style was, in medieval times, largely provided by the personality of the speaker or reciter, and the appeal of style was to the ear alone.[1]

Observations of this sort seem to have had relatively little effect on pedagogy at the college level or even at the secondary level where innovations are perhaps more eagerly received. The implications of the scholarship and critical acumen of Milman Parry, Albert Lord, Northrop Frye, D. W. Robertson, and even Claude Lévi Strauss—as well as the value of the more popular work and "probes" of Marshall McLuhan—have gone largely unheeded in the classroom.

To look positively at pedagogy I would suggest that we ponder what Northrop Frye has said about the "radical of presentation":

> The basis of generic distinctions in literature appears to be the radical of pres-

[1] H. J. Chaytor, *From Script to Print: an Introduction to Medieval Literature* (Cambridge at the University Press, 1945), pp. 5-9.