Empire, Shame, and Medieval Text Editing: The Case of *Beowulf* Line 1382a

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In an important recent article reevaluating the legacy of J. R. R. Tolkien, Kathy Lavezzo describes a meeting between this influential philologist and the major intellectual Stuart Hall when the latter was still a student. It seems that Tolkien advised Hall not to become a medievalist because he believed medieval studies scholarship would not welcome Hall's approach to the subject matter.[1] It is an uncomfortable truth that Tolkien's advice not only deprived medieval studies of one of the great critical minds of the twentieth century, but also provided Hall with good advice that likely benefited his career. Medieval studies has indeed found it very difficult to reckon with the legacies of empire that Hall's work has done so much to uncover, and there is every reason to expect that the field would have marginalized and ignored his towering intellect in the same way that it has marginalized and ignored so many of the medievalists who entered (and, in many cases, left) the field in the decades after his conversation with Tolkien, and who have shared Hall's research interests.

Lavezzo's essay is only one among several recent works of scholarship that have highlighted how medievalists in the present are confronted with our shame about the field's past and our struggle to find productive ways to contend with that shame. Particularly noteworthy contributions to this discussion include the important special issues of *Literature Compass* and *postmedieval* (edited respectively by Dorothy Kim and by Mary Rambaran-Olm, M. Breanne Leake, and Micah James Goodrich), which have documented and contributed to still-unfolding conversations about medieval studies' obvious and ongoing complicity in structural racism and white supremacy.[2] The present essay is intended as a modest contribution to this major conversation. I aim specifically to demonstrate that the textual criticism and editing of medieval texts have been particularly shaped in the

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last century by the inability of medieval studies to productively name or address its shame about its history.

First, I survey the range of critical interpretations that have arisen about a single half-line of *Beowulf* concerning the poem's likely date of composition. *Beowulf* is a poem with a complex editorial history that has unfolded through one of the most affectively charged textual-critical debates in the history of English letters.[3] My analysis applies the critical concept of "postimperial melancholia" to account for this affective charge, drawing on the influential work of Hall's student Paul Gilroy describing postwar white British identity. More specifically, I argue that the closed and nonrecuperative temporality of melancholia is manifest in the principal development in postwar editing practices for medieval texts, which has been to abandon the notion that scholarly interventions constitute refinements to an unfolding narrative of progress toward "better" understanding a given text in favor of imagining such interventions as expansions of a spatialized critical field around identifiable nodes of dissent.[4] This approach is well-instantiated by the "agnostic" position on the date of *Beowulf*, which typically holds that the question is not only insoluble but is also a sort of scholarly Rorschach test that prompts critics to reveal their personal investments. The half-line I focus on here has served as important evidence in the debate about the poem's date, and so it is particularly useful for unpacking the origins and implications of this view.

As my discussion will illustrate, the turn of *Beowulf* textual critics away from recensionist editorial methods and toward more decentered and rhizomatic conceptions of textual transmission is a turn that expresses the postimperial melancholia of Old English studies, and instantiates the larger field's dominant strategy for navigating the double-bind of its historical complicity in nationalist and imperial ideologies. "Agnostic" repudiations of specifically nineteenth-century editorial practices commonly express an implicit repudiation of the ideologies of empire dominant in that period, though it is uncommon for agnostic critics to say so explicitly.[5] Though it is certainly true that the philologists of the British Empire's peak were incorrect to posit that their methodologies might bring them closer to a "true" original text, the postimperial tendency to critique these methodologies only on their own terms reveals how the field has come to practice a melancholic self-constitution through loss that now prevents the field's participation in the development of more productive futures. The history of editing line 1382a of *Beowulf* provides a useful encapsulation of this larger tendency.

The contours of *Beowulf* criticism have been described many times,

in surveys directed at specialists in the field who are familiar with the basic methods of medieval scholarship and want to get a sense of the array of different results that they have generated.[6] Because my aim here is neither so synthetic nor so oriented toward critics of the poem, I address these fuller histories only indirectly. Nor do I engage with the many readings of the poem informed by postcolonial theory, productive though such examinations have been.[7] Instead, this essay focuses on the more implicit expressions of postimperial melancholia discernible in the shifting textual-critical methodologies used by *Beowulf* editors in one representative textual crux, as it is described in the 2008 fourth edition of *Klaeber's "Beowulf"* edited by R. D. Fulk, Robert Bjork, and John Niles.

In this re-editing of Klaeber's standard text, lines 1380–82 of the poem read:

> Ic þe þa fæhðe feo leanige,
> ealdgestreonum, swa ic ær dyde,
> wundnan golde, gyf þu on weg cymest.
>
> [I will pay you for that battle with wealth as I did before—with ancient treasures, with twisted gold—if you return alive.][8]

The word *wundnan* in line 1382a is an editorial emendation. On folio 163v of the unique *Beowulf* manuscript, line five begins with the *d-* of *wund-* followed by four minim strokes that appear identically and could be part of the letters *n*, *u*, *m*, or *i*.[9] For this reason, four minims in sequence is highly ambiguous and could have been intended to refer to several combinations of letters, none of which are obviously appropriate in this context. This has led many editors to suppose, first, that the word is a transcription error; and second, that we may infer the intended word to be a past participle of the class 3 strong verb *windan* used as a weak adjective in the singular instrumental and dative cases.[10] The question posed to the critic by the evidence, then, is twofold: first, what should we understand these actual letters to be, and second, what should we assume they were in the scribe's copy text?

This problem is particularly useful for the present task of describing the postimperial melancholia of *Beowulf* editing, because the debate has absolutely no bearing at all on the literal meaning of the "original" medieval text. The proposed emendations that I discuss—*wundnum* (in most editions), *wundini* (in the second supplement to Klaeber's third revised edition), *wundnan* (in Klaeber's fourth edition), and *wundun* (in the fourth edition of Kevin Kiernan's *Electronic "Beowulf"*)—are all past participles of the class

3 strong verb *windan*.[11] Whether we read this word as an adjective or as the first element of a compound, the meaning of line 1382a is still "with twisted gold." There is no scholarly disagreement about the translation of the line, and the line's reading is only meaningful insofar as it facilitates the construction of virtual fields of contrasting scholarly opinions.

Hence the debate is useful for this essay's task of exposing the affective dimensions of these virtual fields to critical view. There is no question about what the poem *says* in 1382a, but only about where the poem *comes from* and so about what the poem *means* as a cultural object. Disagreements about the poem's date have been focalized through disagreements about the methodological framework underpinning approaches to this question: can the date of the poem be determined, and why should it matter either way? Before I can explain the difficulty of this question, I must briefly explain why the term *melancholia* is an apt one for describing the structures of the investments that have informed the scholarship that aims to answer it.

Traumatic history and textual criticism: Starting premises

In one of her several influential studies of modern methodology and medieval historiography, Gabrielle Spiegel describes a "massive" interpretive shift in North American medieval studies beginning in the 1970s, "from an optimistic and 'progressive' decoding of the past to a reappropriation of its otherness, an alterity now construed not merely as the boundary demarcating the premodern from the modern, but as a radical form of 'otherness' that almost defies comprehension." As she rightly notes, this shift is clearly connected to the growing diversity of higher education, as people who had experienced marginalization due to race, gender, and sexuality came to constitute "a clientele whose interests needed to be addressed and a pool from among which future professionals could, and would, be recruited."[12] I follow Spiegel to presuppose that there is a tension in recent medieval studies historiography between the unavoidable necessity of recognizing the embodied, individual experiences of marginalized folk and the melancholic desire to nonetheless avoid recognizing these experiences. As I will demonstrate, this tension has led the critical conversation about medieval texts to develop an unproductive melancholic attachment to its very loss of a center, characterized by Spiegel as a "reappropriation of [the medieval past's] otherness."

Certainly Spiegel herself uses decidedly melancholic language when she says of medieval studies that "the tension between our sense of the past's erasure through the annihilation of memory and our desire for history har-

bours a longing for presence, a presence we simultaneously acknowledge as always already absent, and thus, like the past itself, an unattainable object of desire."[13] As stated above, I frame this "longing for presence" discernible in medieval studies' textual-critical methodologies as an instance of the "postimperial melancholia" described by Paul Gilroy. In its original usage, Gilroy's term refers to a condition of contemporary white British identity characterized by "an inability to face, never mind actually mourn, the profound change in circumstances and moods that actually followed the end of empire and consequent loss of imperial prestige," and "the shock and anxiety that followed from the loss of any sense that the national collective was bound by a coherent and distinctive culture."[14] In England, this melancholic mood may be traced back to the period of the British Empire's disintegration.[15]

Old English studies in the English-speaking world were profoundly impacted by this disintegration. *Beowulf* in particular was first closely studied by Germanic philologists in the wake of that discipline's invention, by scholars in the generation of Grimm and Lachmann who contributed to a discourse heavily shaped by British and German imperial ambitions.[16] We may localize the introduction of melancholia to just after the rise of the Nazis before World War II, in Tolkien's famous 1936 essay on *Beowulf* "The Monsters and the Critics." This highly influential work is a major early instance of a self-conscious break with nineteenth-century philology through a "close reading" of a medieval text, which helped to establish the place of the poem at the beginning of an English literary canon extending (as many course titles have said) "from *Beowulf* to Virginia Woolf."[17]

Tolkien's essay also anticipates the mood of of his famous *Lord of the Rings*, which has often been (mis)read as a direct allegory of the white British experience of World War II because it is arguably the single most influential articulation of postimperial melancholia written in any language.[18] Certainly it is striking that the most famous passage of Tolkien's essay is correctly read as an allegory, which compares *Beowulf* to a tower built from a ruin by a farmer whose descendants are angry with him for disturbing an archaeological site, unaware that the farmer built the tower in order to have a view of the sea. The allegory suggests that while we may not know the myths and histories informing the original "ruin" of the poem, we may be certain that a poet has repurposed this inherited cultural knowledge for legible aesthetic purposes. Most importantly, we are encouraged to imagine the long-dead poet as a melancholically tragic figure, who patiently rearranged the ancient stones to create something beautiful that his descendants were too foolish to appreciate.

It is my contention, then, that the profound influence of Tolkien's melancholic reading of *Beowulf* on the poem's postwar reception should be understood as symptomatic of postimperial melancholia in medieval studies more generally, which instantiates how this melancholia has been encoded directly into the reinvention of the medieval past as the "radical form of 'otherness'" described by Spiegel. In particular, Tolkien's "othering" of irrecoverable Old English pagan culture anticipated the efforts of his successors to describe and model the very irrecuperability of manuscript culture's alternative systems for organizing textual authority, which efforts have bound medieval studies to a sort of virtual network of self-analysis that navigates between the permanent opacity of the archival evidence itself and the infinite variability of its critical reception. As a result, the field has found itself trapped in a cycle of parsing smaller and smaller variations in opinion about smaller and smaller corpora of primary evidence. Certainly it has been commonly observed that Tolkien has far more to say about the critics reading *Beowulf* than he does about the monsters in *Beowulf*. In postwar medieval studies, this emphasis in his analysis has become a pragmatic necessity: if scholars agree they cannot reconstruct the ancient stories about life in the medieval world (the ruin has been tampered with), they can nonetheless reconstruct the more recent stories about the authors of their own scholarly apparatus (who has tampered with it, why they did so).

But for all of its criticisms of Tolkien's peers and predecessors, Tolkien's Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture at the British Academy resolutely avoids the point about these critics that could not have been any less apparent in 1936 than it is almost a hundred years later: many of the prominent philologists in England and Germany who were the targets of his ire dug through the ruins of *Beowulf* with the specific, overt goal of fashioning white supremacist ideologies of empire. In the next section, I identify a similar reticence in the textual criticism of *Beowulf*. On the one hand, editors of the poem have drastically revised their methodologies in recent decades to distance themselves from the white-supremacist ideological investments of their predecessors. On the other hand, they have avoided explicit acknowledgment that this distancing is their motivation, as they tend to frame the shortcomings of those predecessors as a mere lack of rigor or insight. Nonetheless, there is a tendency to evoke abstract liberal values as a justification for their efforts, which figure their scholarship as an ethical corrective as well as a methodological one. *Beowulf* line 1382a, its emendations, and the justifications for those emendations provides a useful illustration of the way this tends to work.

"Old" philology and the origins of *Beowulf*

In his article on digital facsimile editions for the Text Encoding Initiative's guide to digital editing, Kevin Kiernan follows in the wake of the shift described by Spiegel when he calls editorial decisions like word division, punctuation, and page formats "radical modernizing translations of source documents," which respect neither the relative indeterminacy of the medieval artifact nor the alternative determinacy of its own internal logic.[19] Kiernan considers such ideological interventions to be the unfortunate consequences of the intrinsic, material limitations of print technology. Because print is "an extremely inefficient and inadequate means for representing manuscript texts," the editor of medieval texts for print editions has been forced to take the role "of a solitary scholar, imbued with great authority by rare knowledge of primary sources, transferring a text from unique script to generic print for the less erudite masses."[20]

This remarkably one-sided framing of print, a technology whose emergence is elsewhere associated with the Enlightenment and the advent of modern democracy, positions it as a tool of the scholarly oligarchy for creating distance between the average citizen and publicly owned treasures like the *Beowulf* manuscript.[21] Kiernan's entire essay contrasts print scholarship with digital facsimile editions like his own, which promise a level of engagement with the manuscript equal or perhaps even superior to an analysis of the manuscript in real life. One specific affordance discussed below is the way that his high-resolution scans, which may be increased in size and subjected to black-light filters, help to reveal parts of the text that have been erased or otherwise obscured. Such comments about the potential of the digital medium for medieval studies scholarship are hardly unique, and they proceed from a widely shared skepticism in the field about what Hoyt Duggan calls "the limitations of print," which is to say the structural biases of print-based scholarship against manuscript evidence which might be corrected by the affordances of digital hypertext.[22]

In the remainder of this essay, I contextualize the affective dimension of Kiernan's digital humanities textual-critical discourse, instantiated here by his reliance on a language of social justice and counter-hierarchical democratization to describe the benefits of digital editing. It is not self-evident that an edition requiring additional skills in palaeography to use properly will be less beholden to the "rare knowledge" of authoritative, solitary scholars, especially when the taxonomies of Old English palaeography and manuscript description have been so heavily dependent on the aesthetic

judgments of its most famous practitioners.[23] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun has written on the contrary myths of radically democratic freedom and radically hierarchical control that have structured, respectively, the rhetoric of praise and blame used to describe the Internet's potential, and she has demonstrated how these positions express affective responses to biopolitical changes in the constructs of race and gender contemporary to the Internet's rise.[24] Kiernan's rhetoric of praise for digital facsimiles is an example of affective responses described by Chun that have been shaped by the particular conditions of medieval studies. In this section and the next, I identify other instances where the mood of the postimperial melancholia is discernible in the discourse of *Beowulf* editing. Whether or not the *Electronic "Beowulf"* is actually able to accomplish the laudable goal of democratizing access to the poem, Kiernan's expression of the goal itself articulates a widely attested critical desire to somehow atone for the exclusionary injustices imbricated with the poem's critical histories without ever naming these injustices directly.[25]

Kiernan's most famous intervention as a critic of *Beowulf* is his suggestion of a firmly late date for the poem, which breaks faith with the two other major positions cited above: first, of critics who use empirical methods to argue for an early date; and second, of agnostics who observe that the evidence is highly ambiguous and may just as easily suggest that the poem as we know it has a late date. It is fitting that the editor of the digital *Beowulf* should also be the holder of such an unorthodox position, which exemplifies the sort of lateral approaches to familiar questions that the digital humanities have sought to afford. As I go on to argue, the various readings of *Beowulf* line 1382a contextualizing Kiernan's position reveal what is implicitly political about such lateral thinking. If the alternative technological framework of the digital edition may break Old English studies free from the inherited ideological entanglements informing both the early-date and agnostic positions, then Kiernan's digital *Beowulf* may be the basis of a more decentralized and socially-just critical debate than printed editions could ever allow.

It is noteworthy that the editorial team of the fourth edition of *Klaeber's "Beowulf"* has heterogeneous views on the question of the poem's date. Co-editor Fulk is an ardent early dater, and his position as such is balanced by Niles, who has argued for a date after the tenth-century reign of Æthelstan.[26] In their shared commentary on Klaeber's fourth edition, the editors provide a hypothetical narrative of textual transmission, explaining how they arrived at their emendation of *wund* plus four minims as *wundnan*. They posit that the manuscript ought to be read *wundnu*, and that this

reading is a transcription error for *wundnū* that drops the macron indicating an abbreviated *m* or *n*—a common scribal error. Meanwhile, they believe that this reading in the manuscript's exemplar must itself have been an erroneous transcription of an earlier witness, reading *wundnā*; at this point *u* would have been accidentally substituted for *a* in another common scribal error. Their argument is grounded by the appearance of the identical phrase *wundnan golde* in the Exeter Book poem *Widsið* at line 129b, an analogue suggesting that the phrase may have been formulaic in Old English heroic poetry.[27] As we shall see, this use of formulae to justify their emendation provides crucial context for exposing the affective attachments implicit in their editing methods.

The reading of line 1382a presented in this 2008 edition based on Klaeber's work differs from the final reading published by Klaeber himself near the end of his life, in his own second supplement to his third revised edition of the poem added in 1950. In the supplement, Klaeber also reads the word as a participial form of *windan*, but he revises this long-standing emendation *wundnum* (a strong dative form of the same adjectival participle proposed in the fourth edition, appearing in all of Klaeber's earlier editions) to read the four minims as *wundini*.[28] As the commentary of the fourth edition notes, Klaeber's reading follows the argument that the *–ini* ending of the word was an archaic and extremely rare form of the instrumental case. Kenneth Sisam summarizes and explains the flaws with this theory: first, "in the recorded [occurrence of the archaic instrumental form *-numini*], all the examples of which may go back to a single late-seventh-century gloss, the stem is short," while the stem *wund-*, ending with two consonants, is long; and second, "it is most unlikely that this extraordinary ending would survive for three centuries, in a common word and phrase, to appear in the *Beowulf* MS."[29] The reading, then, appears to reflect a late-life failure of Klaeber's famous methodological rigor, and the decision of the fourth edition editors to modify the text suggests that they agreed with Sisam's rejection of the *-ini* hypothesis. Indeed, Fulk has written elsewhere that *wundini* is a paradigmatic instance of the principle that an editor's decision *not* to alter a manuscript reading can be more conjectural than changing it.[30]

Kiernan, meanwhile, reads the manuscript form not as *wundini* but *wundmi*, and argues that the *wundini* reading is derived from Thorkelin's eighteenth-century transcription and not from the manuscript itself.[31] Unlike *wundini*, *wundmi* is clearly an error, and hence even the most conservative editors would agree that it must be emended. The emendation Kiernan proposes is closer to the manuscript than the *wundnan* reading proposed

by the fourth edition editors: Kiernan suggests that the copy text must have read *wundun*, an alternative spelling of the uninflected past participle *wunden*, and hence that the correct reading is a compound word that we may render either *wundungolde* or *wundengolde*. Like the Klaeber fourth edition editors, Kiernan is able to support this reading with reference to formulae, as *wunden-* appears as the first element of several other compound words in the Old English corpus.[32] Thus Kiernan is able to maintain a conservative allegiance to the manuscript, respect the formulaic nature of Old English poetry, and serve his overarching argument for the text's later date, thereby squaring a circle whose curvature I trace below.

For now, the most significant point to make about Kiernan's electronic edition is that his efforts to find support for his reading *wundmi* are greatly facilitated by his ability to cite high-quality digital scans of the folio in question, which enable even amateur readers of the poem to see the marks on the parchment that are the basis for his argument. In this way, his digital edition is a natural progression from his argument for the late date of the poem, at the same time that his argument for the late date is an illustration of the sorts of innovations that digital editions generally can make possible. What remains to be contextualized are the precise political resonances of this gesture on Kiernan's part, and how they constitute a response to the problem of white supremacy in Old English studies.

In his description of the *wundini* reading, Keirnan observes the crucial importance of this single spelling for Klaeber's larger argument that the text as we have it is a sort of palimpsest of dialects, recording many regional forms and spellings that together suggest a long transmission history.[33] *Wundini* is the only one of Klaeber's examples that cannot be anything but an early form if it is not simply an error. This importance of the word to his hypothesis seems to inform not only Klaeber's final decision but also the appearance of *wundini* in the editions of Raymond Chambers, Charles Wrenn and Whitney Bolton, and Else von Schaubert, who all tend to bring up the form in the course of arguments for the poem's early date.[34] In this context, the *wundini* reading looks troublingly like a bit of doctored evidence, and Kiernan rejects it as such.

Klaeber's final reading is all the more concerning when we consider how the argument about the date of *Beowulf* is a particularly notorious example of how a philological-critical discussion may become thoroughly co-opted by nationalist ideologies.[35] Certainly these implications appear to trouble the editors of Klaeber's fourth edition, who expose the political subtext of the problem when they suggest that Klaeber's judgment can be attrib-

uted to his "reverence for Grimm."[36] The suggestion has merit, as this is not the only indication that Klaeber felt reverence for this influential father of philology. For example, as Stefan Jurasinski has demonstrated, Klaeber also proposed emendations based on Grimm's overly enthusiastic hypothesis that certain phrases in the poem are corruptions of pan-Germanic legal formulae also recorded in other Germanic languages.[37] At the same time, the foundational importance to the discipline of this co-author of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* has not prevented him from becoming synonymous with the worst excesses of the philological tradition, and in particular its contributions to the formulation of white supremacist ideologies.

The full reasons for Grimm's poor reputation have been exhaustively surveyed and need not be rehearsed here.[38] For our purposes, it suffices to cite Grimm's own loaded vocabulary of "strong" and "weak" morphologies in nouns, adjectives, and verbs, terms referring to both the morphology of the words and the ethnic destiny of the German people. For example, the "strong" root changes of past-tense verbs (e.g., "I *wind* the gold today" but "I *wound* it yesterday") are found in a higher proportion of the verbs seen in early Germanic languages than they are in later Germanic languages like modern English, which in turn tend to prefer "weak" dental preterite endings ("talked," "wept"). These changes are utterly unrelated to the "strong" and "weak" forms of Old English adjectives, except that again the strong adjectives are similarly more Germanic. Insofar as Grimm supposed the history of Germanic languages is to be the history of the peoples who spoke them, then, Grimm's terminology implies a movement from the primitive strength of the tribes who (in his understanding of history) toppled Rome to the contemptible weakness of their descendants, who have abandoned the root vowel changes of their proud ancestors and meekly submitted to the decadent suffixes of Christian hegemony.

And again, it is not only Klaeber but all scholars of Old English who implicitly promote such frameworks designed to assert the preeminence of "Germanic" races, when we use Grimm's standard terminology in our classes and our publications—including myself in the present essay, where I have used the standard terms "strong" and "weak" above in my discussion of *wundnan* and its participle's adjectival forms. I have been advised by the anonymous reader of this article to replace these terms, but I have elected not to because I believe the tension between my use of them and my critique of their origins is a useful illustration of the contradictory mandates that have occasioned the field's lapse into melancholia. There is an irreducible danger that I have undermined my own critical authority by using these terms, and

the most obvious way of avoiding that danger would be to use other words and avoid discussing the problem; then again, avoiding the problem would not make it go away, or absolve me of my complicity in its underlying causes.

Similarly, the question raised by Kiernan and the fourth edition editors about Klaeber's reading of line 1382a can be more precisely framed as an attempt to address the question of whether or not this prominent editor has crossed some invisible line dividing our (self-servingly determined) normal, acceptable level of complicity in historical injustice from the more actively racist and unacceptable complicity of scholars like Grimm. Even though their commentaries seem to be intended as a gracious statement to the effect that Klaeber's judgment could only be impaired by his loyalty to the tradition as he inherited it, the statement also and by the same fact drops Klaeber into one of the most notorious streams of old-world romantic nationalism, which directly informed the rise of the Nazis in Germany during Klaeber's lifetime. Thus we find ourselves in the extraordinary (but not, in Old English studies, unusual) circumstances wherein we see scholars on the verge of suggesting that an illustrious predecessor might have been a Nazi, simply as a consequence of acknowledging that this elder scholar's late-life views on a minor point may reflect their allegiance to an early luminary in the field.

Were Kiernan and the Klaeber fourth edition editors to acknowledge even the possibility that someone might read Klaeber's allegiance to Grimm this way, it would invite readers to ask: How actively, and with what criteria for judgment, ought future editors of *Beowulf* address the possibility that Klaeber himself may have been personally complicit in white supremacy, and what bearing ought this possibility have on their assessment of Klaeber's decision to abandon his career-long emendation *wundnum* for *wundini* in his final publications on the subject? What bearing ought the possibility of Klaeber's complicity have on our assessment of the scholars that cite his edition, or on the scholars who cite the work of scholars who cite his edition? What are the consequences of acknowledging these problems, and what are the consequences of ignoring them? Is the baseline of normal complicity among Old English scholars in fact acceptable, as we have generally held, or are radical reforms of the entire field and its nomenclature necessary? Either way, was it appropriate for the editors to undertake the project of a "Klaeber's fourth edition" in the first place? If not, what alternatives were there? Are there other alternatives we could pursue in the future?

And again, these are not even questions that I myself can ask without anticipating that they will be directed against myself as well. Who am I personally to make any of these points or ask any of these questions, given

that I am a white, cisgendered, straight man who uses problematic terminology like "strong" and "weak" in my writing about Old English? Is there a way forward for the discipline that may adequately answer or at least circumvent these very awkward questions, which may arise even in textual-critical debates about single words whose resolution will have no impact on the translation of the poem? What role ought I personally to play in such advancements?

I should make it clear that I do not unpack these messy implications of the fourth edition commentary on line 1382a to slander the memory of Klaeber, who appears to have been revered by those who knew him. On the contrary, I use his example to demonstrate how the specter of personal complicity in historical atrocity may be raised about even the most grounded and thorough quantitative analyses of Old English texts, because the inventors of those quantitative methods openly promoted the toxic ideologies of racism and nationalism in explicit continuity with their scholarly practices. Twin impossibilities, of either rehabilitating the legacy of Grimm and his project or of studying Old English without reference to his work, serve together to demarcate the shameful condition of postimperial melancholia which so profoundly informs *Beowulf* criticism to this day, and from which this essay can claim no critical distance. Not only Klaeber but Kiernan, the fourth edition editors, myself, and all other scholars of Old English remain forever in conversation about the possibility that we are particularly complicit with white supremacy by the very fact of our decision to teach and study *Beowulf* and its language when so many important scholars of the text have proven so personally suspect. The widely felt pressure to develop methodologies that may cleanse Old English studies of this legacy as surreptitiously as possible has had an enormous impact on not only the editing of *Beowulf*, but more generally on the postwar critical consensus around virtually every question, interpretive or textual-critical, pertaining to Old English writing.

My larger claim, then, is that such pressures on the field directly shaped the so-called "new philology" that became popular in medieval studies after the 1970s, and which have advocated for a paradoxically fierce agnosticism on the question of the date of *Beowulf*. There is indeed a close historical relationship between the logic of evolutionary biology that informs modern racism and the logic of stemmatic text-editing, and a resistance to this racial logic has led editors in this time to favor more spatialized and rhizomatic conceptualizations of manuscript textuality.[39] What is striking to me is that the political motivations for this resistance and for the new methodologies it occasioned are rarely acknowledged explicitly; far more typical

are statements like Kiernan's, which allude to abstract values of democratization and openness rather than the specific historical injustices with which the field is known to be complicit. As I will show in the next section, the fourth edition's rendering of line 1382a as *wundnan* makes a similar elision, which is moreover consonant with the melancholic attachment to alterity described by Spiegel.

New philology and the *Beowulf* matrix

In her essay "Medieval Studies," Anne Middleton describes how the contrast between the medieval and the so-called "early modern" periods has framed the medieval period as an inversion of modernity, so that Europe during the medieval millennium is united by its "monolithic otherness, rather than political and linguistic continuity." Middleton observes that medieval studies in the latter half of the twentieth century has developed a "marked increase in methodological explicitness and a general internalization of critical ambitions, at least in principle," which led to "the enabling premise that principles of artifice, not laws of nature, were the central objects of critical analysis and explanation." As Middleton observes, such works of scholarship "implicitly positioned their own enterprises as forms of cultural critique, as means of assuming a perspective on pre-existing 'philological' inquiry in its narrower and more positivistic forms."[40]

Crucial to the emergence of this "cultural critique" was the popularization of the idea that oral traditionalism and manuscript technology is radically "other" to the technology of the printed book, and hence that oral and manuscript texts have different formal structures from those we see in printed works.[41] The recognition of this difference made it possible to recognize that the resistance of medieval evidence to basic critical questions like "Who wrote this text, and when?" is not a reflection of the perversity and laziness of medieval writers, but rather of the presentism of the questions themselves. Like Spiegel, Middleton suggests that the uncritical positivism of philologists like Grimm was replaced by a far more relativist critical desire to engage with "radical contingencies: of chronology, of anachronism, of conflicting subjects, of representation." This "new philology"—whose methodological breaks with "old" philology, we must emphasize, are not quite so radical as it is sometimes useful to claim—still used the inherited methods of textual criticism to analyze the same sort of local problems exemplified by the problem of line 1382a, but they imagine themselves engaging with these questions in different ways.[42]

Middleton is worth quoting at length:

> What has lately come to be called the "return" to the manuscript text may be something of a misnomer, for the concerns of recent scholars do not greatly resemble those that motivated the editing and textual study of medieval writings a century ago. The current turn to manuscript textuality, both within and beyond medieval studies, has been driven most fundamentally by theoretical and critical interests, not simply a positivistic insistence on the ineffably unique instance or a resistance to comparative or synthetic statement. Its force and effect has been to discern in medieval textual practices the indigenous systems of order, and terminological distinctions, that supported generic systems and denoted practical criteria of literary form. . . . It is thus only one more of several paradoxical reversals within this field that an interest in the materiality and diverse circumstantialities of medieval texts also disclose a need, and some possible sites, for theoretical reflection.[43]

Accounts of "new philology" from the 1990 *Speculum* issue onwards commonly connect the "theoretical and critical interests" cited here to those of French poststructuralist theory. However, this is likely too narrow a scope. For example, as Andrew Taylor observes, the reception of poststructuralist theory in Anglophone literature departments of the 1980s was heavily mediated by the synthetic work of Catherine Belsey and Terry Eagleton, which clearly expresses these authors' debt to the New Left intellectual tradition originated by scholars like Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams.[44] In the conclusion to his own volume (subtitled "Political Criticism"), Eagleton summarizes his view of poststructuralism and other developments in literary theory as follows: "Even in the act of fleeing modern ideologies . . . literary theory reveals its often unconscious complicity with them, betraying its elitism, sexism or individualism in the 'aesthetic' or 'unpolitical' language it finds natural to use of the literary text." Eagleton traces this bad faith back to the very invention of the discipline of English, which in his account follows the decline of "old" philology not because of the high ideals articulated by early critics like F. R. Leavis, but as a by-product of British imperial ideology and World War I jingoism.[45]

The importance of Eagleton's volume to the critical trends driving the "linguistic turn" in medieval studies, as it is also sometimes called, reflects how new philology responded not only to French poststructuralism

but also to the attendant anxiety in the Anglophone academy that, for all its promise, poststructuralism might not finally be able to disentagle English literary studies from its foundational complicity in British imperialism.[46] So also does Eagleton's allusion to "the act of fleeing modern ideologies" nicely encapsulate an implicit project of the new philology, whose practitioners are not bound together by any unified approach or method or even subject of study, but rather by their shared rejection of their fields' complicity in historical atrocity, and their shared wish to refound their methods and fields of study on some new basis.

Middleton is not the only scholar to elide the embodied, affective, and political dimensions of the trends when she frames them as primarily methodological and theoretical. Nonetheless the implicit political concerns leave their traces in the criticism itself, as may be seen if we return to the emendation of line 1382a as *wundnan golde*, offered by the Klaeber fourth edition editors. As I have stated above, this rendering posits not one but two stages of "corruption" in the transmission of the line, and it is justified by analogy to a similar half-line in *Widsið*. This hypothesis may seem at first to strain credulity even further than Klaeber's reading, as the elder scholar has at least found a way to make the scribal version work. This adoption in the fourth edition, however, reflects the broader shift in methodological approach described by Middleton, which moreover expresses the impossible desire in Old English studies to atone for the field's role in the traumas of the twentieth century.

Klaeber's reconsideration of *wundnum* in his third edition's second supplement to finally opt for *wundini* is surely connected to his application of the editorial principle that one ought to preserve an archaic *lectio difficilior* ("more difficult reading") when it appears in the manuscript. After the changes in methodology summarized by Middleton, this principle has been considered deeply suspect because it regards scribes with unjustifiable disdain, assuming on principle that they will always prefer an easier or more conventional reading to one that is more challenging and interesting. In recent decades, it has been presumed instead that Anglo-Saxon scribes did not value exact copying of texts as we do today, and so the pejorative concept of "corruption" that informed earlier textual editing practices should be reimagined as scribal "performance."[47] This shift in critical perspective exemplifies the way in which the linguistic turn has led to a reconsideration of even the most basic assumptions about medieval textuality. Before we may ask "What sorts of mistakes did scribes commonly make?," we must ask questions like "What did scribes imagine their job to be, and what would

they have considered a mistake, or even a change, to their source texts?" What, indeed, was a medieval "text," and might we misrepresent it if we imagine it as a singular, coherent, and persistent object rather than a porous, modular assemblage?

The *wundnan golde* emendation in the fourth edition is exemplary of how this new understanding of medieval textuality has shaped editorial methodologies. One key idea that became popularized in recent decades is the notion that Old English poetry is "formulaic" in a manner that represents its debt to oral tradition, and that scribal interventions might often be occasioned by scribes' greater familiarity with these formulae than any modern critic could ever hope to have.[48] The high number of parallel phrases between poems with few other obvious links between them suggests that poets built their texts out of patterns of words and lines that in some cases appear traditional and in other cases appear to be reworked from authoritative sources. *Beowulf* witnesses a huge number of such formulae, and if the *wundnan golde* half-line from *Widsiđ* is another occurrence of the same formula witnessed in line 1382a, then the weak form of the adjective in *Widsiđ* may be ascribed greater significance in editorial decision-making.[49] And so it is implicit in the fourth edition's commentary on this line that the existence of this compelling parallel in a poem that has many other linkages to *Beowulf* may serve to counteract a charge we may otherwise anticipate, that the two-step emendation is only put forward by the editors in the service of an argument for an early date.

Once medievalists derived such so-called "indigenous" systems of order from synthetic analyses of manuscripts, manuscript texts could then no longer be imagined as the works of authors imperfectly recorded by scribes. Instead, they were reconceived as the works of scribes produced in collaboration with both their copy texts and with the formulaic literary traditions out of which they emerged, participating in a series of complex relationships that were renegotiated with every new manuscript. Attention to scribal performance makes even basic distinctions between an "original" and a "copy" seem presentist when applied to an object like the *Beowulf* manuscript, as Thomas Bredehoft is only among the most recent to argue.[50] The elimination of such distinctions undermines the very project of trying to reconstruct a single act of composition, much less of identifying textual evidence that it took place at a single identifiable "early" or "late" historical moment. In this new context, Klaeber's *wundini* reading reveals his ideology not only because it betrays his allegiance to Grimm and his imperial project, but also because it reveals his anachronistic concept of textual authority,

which makes unwarranted assumptions about the roles that scribes might have played in shaping the text as we have it. Thus we find ourselves in the happy position of rejecting Klaeber's reading as ideologically suspect without having to even acknowledge the problems for the field that attend the (probably unanswerable) question of whether or not he was actively white supremacist.

It is striking, then, that even as this reconfiguration elides the original problem of historical complicity in white supremacy, it also seems to yearn toward reparation. It is surely no coincidence that the most influential theories of orality in Old English were heavily influenced by studies of the performance practices of colonized peoples, such as A. N. Doane's classic essay on scribal performance in Old English, which borrows its framework from Dell Hymes's study of Indigenous storytelling in the Pacific Northwest.[51] Certainly in the scholarship studying the literary and cultural products of colonized peoples, it has long been commonplace to suppose that, if the limiting presuppositions of "Western literature" could be overcome, then it may correct both the overt racism of classical anthropology and its more covert holdovers in the theories of "oral man" promoted by scholars like Albert Lord, Marshall McLuhan, and Walter Ong, as these have often led critics and policymakers to focus on the wrong problems.[52] Given especially that the colonial governments of North America have a long history of rejecting oral and traditional claims for land rights made by colonized, Indigenous peoples, there is indeed an implicit political urgency to the task of understanding the "indigenous" practices of Anglo-Saxon scribal performance. Such an understanding may expose contradictions in the modern ideologies of the former British colonies who continue to imagine *Beowulf* as part of their cultural heritage.[53]

Hence even if the emendation *wundnan* were ultimately erroneous, the possible echo of the earlier formula is nonetheless a feature of the text worth preserving, because it is in such formulae that the alternative, premodern modes of authority in Anglo-Saxon poetry are most distinguishable from the modes of textual authority discernible in later periods. The emendation could then instantiate the principle that the preservation of alterity is a desirable end in its own right, even when it might be coincidental. If criticism can no longer answer basic questions about historical narrative like who wrote *Beowulf*, when was it written, and whether the same poet wrote *Widsið*, it can nonetheless establish fields of relation and possibility among the evidence. Such fields may not only lead us to uncover new knowledge about the evidence, but also expose the dangers of our assumptions, in ways

that may lead to acts of resistance that could positively impact the lives of marginalized, colonized peoples.

Needless to say, there is a reason that such redemptive possibilities are only ever hinted at. It is quite unlikely that the identification of formulae in *Beowulf* could ever accomplish concrete forms of decolonization or reparation. Nor does manuscript "orality" hardly lead us away from the sins of our predecessors: oral formulaic theory was introduced to Old English studies by F. P. Magoun, who openly supported the Nazi regime.[54] Nonetheless, a guarded hope for redemption has colored the matrix of melancholic desire surrounding the borrowings from oral-formulaic theory that have informed *Beowulf* textual criticism in recent decades. But without naming the shame that is the occasion for this hope, the possibilities for both methodological and ideological revisions to the field remain ultimately unexplored.

Thus the conversation about line 1382a that may be read between Klaeber's three editions (*wundnum*), the second supplement to his third edition (*wundini*), the 2008 fourth edition (*wundnan*), and the *Electronic "Beowulf"* (*wundun*) provides a clear example of how methodological innovation and melancholic shame serve as the contrary forces whose collisions create the subatomic particles of critical debate, bringing heat and sometimes light to our critical conversations. For decades medievalists have recognized that the critical history of a text like *Beowulf* does not unfold as a refinement of methodologies in response to changing evidence—there is only one manuscript witness for the poem!—but rather as a proliferation of methodologies, categories of evidence, schematizations of the interrelations of both, and, as a result of these proliferations, of evidence itself. One need only hold back-to-back the spines of the 1950 third revised and 2008 fourth editions of Klaeber's work to see how much more information has been added to the latter as a consequence of the larger disciplinary shift in the intervening fifty-eight years. Within such circumscribed fields of ambiguous possibility, any individual critic may assume any position he or she wishes, as long as protocol is followed by citing the evidence and precedent for a given position and thereby avoiding pure, disruptive, ideologically motivated speculation. This is the uneasy, melancholic status quo that has dominated the field since Tolkien, and that has not been sustainable for some years now.

The task, then, of *Beowulf* critics in the twenty-first century is to find ways of representing this matrix encompassing manuscript production, manuscript circulation, and critical reception, in a manner that openly acknowledges the harmful ideological content of inherited scholarship and our own complicity in its perpetuation. Such truths must precede any acts

of reparation that might allow us to preserve the gains to our knowledge of the text that this scholarship has allowed. Rather than hide the fact that so many of our interventions have been compromises and half-measures, which have dodged and elided the true problems that occasioned our innovations, we must name our shameful histories and histories of shame as a necessary step toward compromising less and taking fuller measures. If the field were ever to reckon openly and honestly with its origins, then fuller revisions to the methodologies of new philology might indeed lead us to contribute to the various projects of decolonization, indigenization, and other strategies for dismantling structures of harm that Stuart Hall was neither the first nor last critic to recognize as possible futures for medieval studies.[55] I hope that this essay has made some small contribution toward these ends.

Notes

1 Kathy Lavezzo, "Whiteness, Medievalism, Immigration: Rethinking Tolkien through Stuart Hall," *postmedieval* 12, no. 1–4 (2021): 29–51, at doi.org/10.1057/s41280-021-00207-x. This passage is discussed also by Mary Rambarn-Olm, "A Wrinkle in Medieval Time: Ironing Out Issues Regarding Race, Temporality, and the Early English," *New Literary History* 52, no. 3–4 (2021): 385–406, at 390–91.

2 Dorothy Kim, ed., special issue "Critical Race and the Middle Ages," *Literature Compass* 16, no. 9–10 (2019); Mary Rambaran-Olm, M. Breann Leake, and Micah James Goodrich, eds., special issue "Race, Revulsion, and Revolution," *postmedieval* 11, no. 4 (2020).

3 The currently predominant "agnostic" positions on the poem's date may be traced back to Colin Chase, ed., *The Dating of "Beowulf"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). See also Roberta Frank, ed., *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts: Papers Given at the Twenty-Seventh Annual Conference on Editorial Problems, University of Toronto, 1–2 November, 1991* (New York: AMS Press, 1993); Peter Orton, *The Transmission of Old English Poetry* (Turnhout, Belg.: Brepols, 2000); Eric Weiskott, *English Alliterative Verse: Poetic Tradition and Literary History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 23–52. For a recent example of work that argues *Beowulf* may be assigned a specific early date, see Leonard Neidorf, ed., *The Dating of "Beowulf": A Reassessment* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2014).

4 Though the best application of the distinction is broadly contested, nonrecuperative, circular melancholia has been distinguished from recuperative, progressive mourning since the classic essay by Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia": see Ranjana Khanna, *Dark Continents: Psychoanalysis and Colonialism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003). My use of the concept here draws heavily on the study of post-imperial melancholia in contemporary literary studies found in Cynthia Quarrie,

"Sinking, Shrinking, *Satin Island*: Tom McCarthy, the British Novel, and the Materiality of Shame," *Journal of Modern Literature* 41, no. 2 (2018): 147–64.

5 On philology and empire in this period, see Haruko Momma, *From Philology to English Studies: Language and Culture in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

6 See, e.g., Jodi-Anne George, *Beowulf: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Manish Sharma, "*Beowulf* and Poststructuralist Theory," *Literature Compass* 6, no. 1 (2009): 56–70; Eileen Joy and Mary K. Ramsey, eds., *The Postmodern "Beowulf": A Casebook* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2007); Robert Bjork and John Niles, eds., *A "Beowulf" Handbook* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

7 Adam Miyashiro, "Homeland Insecurity: Biopolitics and Sovereign Violence in *Beowulf*," *postmedieval* 11, no. 4 (2020): 384–95, at doi.org/10.1057/s41280-020-00188-3; Seth Lerer, "'On fagne flor': The Postcolonial *Beowulf*, from Heorot to Heaney," in *Postcolonial Approaches to the Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 77–102; Jonathan Wilcox, "Digging for New Meanings: Uncovering a Postcolonial *Beowulf*," in *Language Studies: Stretching the Boundaries*, ed. Andrew Littlejohn and Sandhya Rao Mehta (Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 147–61. Perhaps the clearest evidence for the importance of such readings is found in the many popular depictions of the figure Grendel that represent him as a colonized subject, as are surveyed in Michael Livingston and John William Sutton, "Reinventing the Hero: Gardner's *Grendel* and the Shifting Face of *Beowulf* in Popular Culture," *Studies in Popular Culture* 29, no. 1 (2006): 1–16.

8 Robert D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf" and "The Fight at Finnsburg,"* 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), lines 1380–82. The translation is my own.

9 See British Library, MS Cotton Vitellius A.xv, fol. 163v, at *British Library Digitised Manuscripts*, www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=cotton_ms_vitellius_a_xv_f163v, where the word is divided across the end of the fourth line and beginning of the fifth one: *wun* / *diii* (with *i* representing a minim stoke).

10 Note that the terms "strong" and "weak" are problematic, as discussed below. I use them here both for the sake of clarity and to signal my own positionality in relation to the issues discussed in this essay.

11 Friedrich Klaeber, ed., "*Beowulf" and "The Fight at Finnsburg,"* 3rd rev. ed., with first and second supplements (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1950); Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf"*; Kevin Kiernan, ed., *Electronic "Beowulf,"* online 4th ed., programmed by Emil Iacob (London: British Library; Lexington: University of Kentucky, 2015), at ebeowulf.uky.edu. In the 4th ed. of the *Electronic "Beowulf,"* because Kiernan's foliation differs from that of the British Library *Beowulf* manuscript, the word in question appears at line 1384a rather than 1382a.

12 Gabrielle Spiegel, "In the Mirror's Eye: The Writing of Medieval History in North America," in *The Past as Text: The Theory and Practice of Medieval Historiography* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 57–82, at 75 and 78, respectively.

13 Spiegel, 80.

14 Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Literature* (London: Routledge, 2004), 91. Gilroy himself uses the phrase "postcolonial melancholia," but here I use the term "postimperial," following Cynthia Quarrie, to distinguish the melancholia of white-identified British subjects (and in particular of white-identified critics of British literature) from the postcolonial melancholia of marginalized and formerly colonized peoples, imagined by postcolonialists like Ranjana Khanna to be far more positive and productive than the melancholia described by Gilroy. See Quarrie, "Sinking, Shrinking, *Satin Island*," 149–56, citing Khanna, *Dark Continents*.

15 Quarrie, "Sinking Shrinking, *Satin Island*," 152, citing Jed Esty, *A Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

16 Thomas Shippey and Andrew Haarder, *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* (New York: Routledge, 1998). For the generation of Grimm and Lachmann, see esp. 77–334.

17 J. R. R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936): 245–95. See, however, Rambaran-Olm's observation that Tolkien's contribution here is overstated and erases the contribution of Howard University professor Gordon David Houston ("A Wrinkle in Medieval Time," 392–93).

18 See Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics"; and for Tolkien's response to the allegorical reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, see his "Forward to the Second Edition," *The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), xxiii–xxvii. On Tolkien as proto-New Critic, see, e.g., Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, eds., *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 4th ed., cxxiii–cxxiv. On Tolkien's ideological investments, see Lavezzo, "Whiteness, Medievalism, Immigration."

19 Kevin Kiernan, "Digital Facsimiles in Editing," in *Electronic Textual Editing*, ed. Lou Burnard, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, and John Unsworth (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 2006), 262–68, at 262.

20 Kiernan, 263.

21 On print and Enlightenment, see, for example, the formative arguments of Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Communications and Cultural Transformations in Early-Modern Europe*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

22 Hoyt Duggan, "Some Un-Revolutionary Aspects of Computer Editing," in *The Literary Text in the Digital Age*, ed. Ruth Finneran (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 77–98, at 79.

23 Elaine Treharne, "The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly: Old English Manuscripts and Their Physical Description," in *The Genesis of Books: Studies in the Scribal Culture of Medieval England in Honour of A. N. Doane*, ed. Matthew T. Hussey and John D. Niles (Turnhout, Belg.: Brepols, 2011), 261–83.

24 Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Control and Freedom: Power and Paranoia in the Age of Fiber Optics* (Boston: MIT Press, 2006).

25 For one criticism of the *Electronic "Beowulf,"* see Edward Christie, "The Image of the Letter: From the Anglo-Saxons to the *Electronic 'Beowulf,'*" *Culture, Theory and Critique* 44, no. 2 (2003): 129–50.

26 John D. Niles, *Homo Narrans: The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 134–40. For a recent articulation of

Fulk's views, see R. D. Fulk, *Beowulf* and Language History," in *Dating of "Beowulf": A Reassessment*, ed. Neidorf, 19–36.

27 Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 202.

28 See the apparatus to line 1382a in Klaeber, ed., *"Beowulf" and "The Fight at Finnsburg,"* 3rd rev. ed. Klaeber gives the emendation *wundnum* in his first edition (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1922), 2nd ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1928), 3rd ed. (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1936), and 3rd ed. with first supplement (Boston: D. C. Heath, 1941). On his changes to the second supplement in 1950, see also Frederick Klaeber, "Anmerkungen zum Beowulftext," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen*, no. 188 (1951): 108–14.

29 Kenneth Sisam, "The Authority of Old English Poetical Manuscripts," in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 29–44, at 36.

30 Robert Fulk, "The Textual Criticism of Frederick Klaeber's *Beowulf*," in *Constructing Nations, Reconstructing Myth: Essays in Honour of Thomas Shippey*, ed. Geoffrey Russom (Turnhout, Belg.: Brepols, 2007), 131–53, at 141.

31 Kevin Kiernan, *"Beowulf" and the "Beowulf" Manuscript* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 33–35.

32 Kiernan, 36. In the current fourth edition of the *Electronic "Beowulf,"* Kiernan presents the form *wundun*.

33 Kiernan, *"Beowulf" and the "Beowulf" Manuscript*, 23–37.

34 Kiernan, 31, citing the editions of *Beowulf* by Chambers, Wrenn and Bolton, and von Schaubert.

35 Even in the reviews of Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin's first printed edition of *Beowulf* in 1815, written by nationalist scholars Nicholaus Outzen and Friedrich Dahlmann, the debate about the date of *Beowulf* was already shaped by the politics of German unification. See Shippey and Haarder, *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage*, 13–15 and 106–13.

36 Fulk, Bjork, and Niles, *Klaeber's "Beowulf,"* 202.

37 Stefan Jurasinski, *Ancient Privileges: "Beowulf," Law, and the Making of Germanic Antiquity* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press), 23–38.

38 For one account, see Joep Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 177–85.

39 See Will Robins, "Editing and Evolution," *Literature Compass* 4, no. 1 (2007): 89–120.

40 Anne Middleton, "Medieval Studies," in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992), 12–40, at 14, 17, 20.

41 See, e.g., John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The "Odyssey," "Beowulf," and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 201–39, 329–58.

42 On the continuities between "new" and "old" philology, see R. Howard Bloch, "New Philology and Old French," *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990): 38–58; and Daniel Donoghue, "Language Matters," in *Reading Old English Texts*, ed. Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 59–78.

43 Middleton, "Medieval Studies," 29.

44 See the special issue "The New Philology," ed. Stephen G. Nichols, in *Speculum* 65, no. 1 (1990); and Andrew Taylor, "Getting Technology and Not Getting Theory:

The New Philology after Twenty-Five Years," in the special issue "Rethinking Philology: Twenty-Five Years after The New Philology," ed. Markus Stock, *Florilegium* 32 (2015): 131–55, at 137–38, referring to Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Routledge, 1980), and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

45 Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 171 and 24–26, respectively.

46 Julie Orlemanski, "Philology and the Turn Away from the Linguistic Turn," in *Florilegium* 32 (2015): 157–81.

47 See A. N. Doane, "The Ethnography of Scribal Writing and Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Scribe as Performer," *Oral Tradition* 9, no. 2 (1994): 420–39; and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

48 See F. P. Magoun, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," *Speculum* 28, no. 3 (1953): 446–67; Carol Braun Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to "Beowulf"* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Mark Amodio, *Writing the Oral Tradition: Oral Poetics and the Literate Culture in Medieval England* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); Renée Trilling, *The Aesthetics of Nostalgia: Historical Representation in Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Thomas Bredehoft, *Authors, Audiences, and Old English Verse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

49 For a list of formulae in *Beowulf*, see Orchard, *Critical Companion to "Beowulf,"* 274–326.

50 Thomas Bredehoft, *The Visible Text: Textual Production and Reproduction from "Beowulf" to "Maus"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

51 Dell Hymes, "Language, Memory, and Selective Performance: Cultee's 'Salmon's Myth' as Twice Told to Boas," *Journal of American Folklore* 98, no. 390 (1985): 391–434, cited by Doane, "Ethnography of Scribal Writing and Anglo-Saxon Poetry," 420.

52 For critiques of these figures, see, for example, Leroy Vail and Landeg White, *Power and the Praise Poem: South African Voices in History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), 1–39. For alternative configurations, see Christopher Teuton, *Deep Waters: The Textual Continuum in American Indian Literature* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2010), 1–52.

53 On the pertinence of oral tradition to Indigenous rights, see, for example, Brendan Tohn, *Indigenous Peoples, Customary Law, and Human Rights—Why Living Law Matters* (London: Routledge, 2014).

54 Stephen H. Norwood, "Legitimizing Naziism: Harvard University and the Hitler Regime, 1933–37," *American Jewish History* 92, no. 2 (2004): 189–223. My thanks to the anonymous reader of this essay for this important observation and citation.

55 On Indigenization in medieval studies, see Tarren Andrews, "Indigenous Futures and Medieval Pasts," *English Language Notes* 58, no. 2 (2020): 1–17, and the other articles in this special issue.