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# Epistemic Violence in Beowulf

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# EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE IN *BEOWULF*

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

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Throughout the more than two centuries of scholarship on *Beowulf* scholars have engaged in a consistent controversy in interpretation revolving around the issue of Christian versus pre-Christian content in the poem. While scholars largely agree that the understanding of the poem depends on understanding this content, scholars still widely disagree on what that understanding should be. The history of this problem is summarized, moving from viewing the poem as primarily pre-Christian, to general agreement that it is primarily Christian, to the current climate of viewing the text as hybridization. The thesis then proposes that, following the theories of Michel Foucault and Gayatri Spivak, the poem is best understood when the presence of Christianity is seen as epistemic violence: the erasure of one episteme by the invasion of another episteme, as part of an exercise of social power.

# DEDICATION

To my wife Amanda for her patience, love and support in this endeavor and in all things; to my children Andrea, Alec, Ava and Amelia for their understanding and enthusiasm; and to my mother, father, sister and brother for their life-long contributions in time, love, and support to me and my life.

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I would also like to acknowledge and thank all the faculty and staff who comprise and support our library resources, both in physical form and online. Too, too often your hard work, expertise, and contributions go unrecognized, though those efforts are at the heart of all scholarly production, not the least of which is this thesis.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

There is a long-standing debate within the scholarly community on how to view the Christian and pre-Christian cultural content within the poem *Beowulf.* This thesis proposes that resolution of the debate, and understanding of the poem, is best achieved when the poem is viewed from a post-colonial perspective, taking into account primarily the works of Michel Foucault and Gayatri Spivak. Viewing the text in this way, this thesis asserts that *Beowulf* is best understood as an artifact of epistemic violence.

This proposal more fully resolves and answers two debates that have overshadowed all *Beowulf* scholastic activity since *Beowulf's* reintroduction to the English literary scholarly canon in the early 19th century: primarily, conflicts about whether the text is fundamentally Christian, fundamentally pre-Christian, or a blend of the two; second, conflicts about the date and possible authors of the text. The view proposed in this thesis also best reconciles longstanding debates and conjectures about the many other aspects of the work, including the interpretation of specific lines within the text and the motivations of the characters within the work, especially Beowulf.

The scholarly analyses of the poem have moved from the assertion that the text is primarily pre-Christian, to the assertion that it is primarily Christian, to the assertion that it is a hybrid, a text that reflects a culture in transition from the pre-Christian to the Christian. This thesis marshals evidence to support a different hybridity: not the hybridity of an apologist, attempting to merge different traditions together, nor a hybridity secondary to a transitional

culture, where ideas that appear disparate through the lens of a millennium are, at a moment in time, unified. Rather, this thesis proposes that the hybridity that appears is that of an invader and the invaded. This investigation, applying the tools and perspectives developed in post-colonial theory, suggests that the *Beowulf* text is an assault caught in still-life, a snapshot of epistemic violence in progress. And at the end of the investigation, it becomes apparent that *Beowulf* is an artifact of a pre-Christian culture, stolen by the invading Christian culture, and intentionally written over.

**Overview**

The thesis begins, in Chapter 2, with a review of the Christian versus pre-Christian debate over the past two hundred years of scholarship, and then a review of the debate about the authorship of the manuscript. The thesis continues with a review of the primary concepts within the work of Michel Foucault, primarily his *Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*, and the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, primarily her "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Chapter 3 first locates and assesses the appearances of Christianity within the text. After addressing several considerations about how to quantify each such appearance, the frequency of those appearances is calculated. Conclusions about the appearances are made, and with those conclusions in mind, the second section of chapter 3 applies Foucault's and Spivak's theories to the text. In the final section of that chapter, three areas of particular controversy regarding the Christian versus pre-Christian interpretation of the poem are addressed in view of the application of the theories to the text.

In the final section, the new view of the text is summarized, and additional applications of the proposed of this thesis are considered. As a final thought, the place of *Beowulf* within the canon of English literature—and in literature in general—is addressed in light of this new

positioning. The thesis proposes that, viewing *Beowulf* as exemplar of epistemic violence, *Beowulf* enters a new phase of its own life: not just an artifact of an English literary tradition (if such a thing is assumed both to exist and to be a useful concept), but a modern identity as a ready exemplar for a post-modernist and post-colonialist discourse, an artifact of the process of cultural invasion.

**Approach and Limitations**

The thesis primarily reviews the text of the poem *Beowulf,* various scholarly analyses and approaches to the *Beowulf* text over the past two centuries, and the works of Michael Foucault and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Since *Beowulf* exists in Old English, not modern English, review of the text will be both by recourse to the original manuscript, using various scholarly approaches to individual words and phrases to argue for their possible meanings and values to the thesis, and also to several translations of the original manuscript into modern English, with reference to Old English dictionaries to aid in interpretation.

The thesis takes two separate approaches. First, in a quasi-new critical approach, the thesis focuses primarily on the text itself, the words of the text and their meanings, in an attempt to derive an overall value of the poem itself from close analysis of the words and text itself supplemented by critical commentary to the text. The second critical approach will be post-colonial. This approach will examine the text and the atmosphere of the era and location from which the written text arises to analyze the text as an artifact of a colonialization.

The premier limitation is absence of certainty in the provenance of the text. The manuscript can be traced to a bookshelf in one individual collector's library; more than this is conjecture and the subject of scholarly disagreement. It is not known at all who the author of the text was, nor even if it was one, more than one, or the result of the collective efforts of many.

Further, it is unknown what year—and even what century—the primary text was written, nor is it certain what kingdom, tribe, or culture is the context for the creation of the work. The further limitation that there are very few contemporary works with which to compare and supplement research on the work itself is further exacerbated by this fact: scholars do not know and cannot say what place and time is contemporary to the work.

The absence of author and place and time of provenance significantly compromises any effort at making declarations about the text, since it is predominantly without ground or reference point. However, it is exactly this limitation that provides the context for this thesis. The lack of grounding for scholarly statements about the work has left multiple aspects of the text subject to long-standing debate. The proposal in this thesis serves to close multiple interpretive fissures.

# CHAPTER II

# REVIEW OF LITERATURE

## 2.A. History of Scholarly Views

### 2.A.1. Christian and Pre-Christian

From the first discovery—or better stated, recovery—of the *Beowulf* manuscript in the 18th century and the first published copy in the early 19th century, to the scholarship extending through the 20th and into the 21st century, there has been a steady conflict about the essential nature of the world-view of the poem and the poet—or poets—who may have written it. Initially, the poem was recovered for its value in the burgeoning nationalism that was rising on the continent of western Europe and in Britain. For the first century of the poem's reception, the desire to have the poem as one of the cornerstones of a native literary tradition—a tradition that would often be measured by comparison to the ancient tradition inherited from the Greeks and Romans, a way for a nation to be an equal to or on par with the great literary traditions of the ancient European and near-Eastern world—was the driving force behind much of the scholarship surrounding the poem.

The view of the poem changed as the 19th century changed into the 20th. Within the scholarship, a new currency of finding the intrinsic Christianity of the poem became the standard. As new criticism took hold of the English departments in the early to middle part of the 20th century, new analyses of *Beowulf* continued to explore its recesses, along with close lexical textual study, with the high point of the scholarship being J.R.R. Tolkein's "*Beowulf*: The

Monsters and the Critics." From this point, critical theory was itself becoming a field, and the various critical theories that were rising into the toolkits of scholars were applied to *Beowulf* in their turn. But throughout the middle of the 20th century, as new theories emerged and ever-increasing resources in the form of access to scholarship and the cross-pollination between one field of study and another affected and effected the understanding and view of the text, the combat between the pre-Christian and Christian apologists continued.

Scott Gwara, in the introductory paragraph of his 2008 book *Heroic Identity in the World of* Beowulf, noted the long-standing and continuing division:

> *Beowulf* criticism has been marked by persistent contradictions, chief of which is the relevance of the poem's Christian elements. Even the very last word *lofgeornost* "most eager for praise" (designating Beowulf) is the target of apologists who debate whether the social milieu of *Beowulf* is 'essentially' Christian, secular, or mixed. (1)

Gwara's book is entirely dedicated to an attempt to explicate and resolve the long-standing division on the scholarly view of the character Beowulf, a view largely contested because of how the Christian versus pre-Christian elements appear in the text and what they must mean when read together. Suffice it to say, the debate on this dichotomy continues.

**Edward Irving's "Christian and Pagan Elements"**

For Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles's Beowulf*: A Handbook*, Edward B. Irving undertook the task of summarizing the history of the Christian and pre-Christian elements, and scholarly views of the text. Irving views the scholarly history of the text as one which, in the 19th century, was focused on the pre-Christian elements, in the 20th century, on the Christian elements, and in the late 20th and into the 21st century as various attempts to view the work as a blending or hybrid of the two. Writing in 1996, he stated:

> Earlier scholars tried to make the poem fundamentally pagan in ethos and message, while in this century there has been an equally vigorous attempt to read it as a cleverly masked theological work. Most recently, scholars have tried in various ways to describe a complex blending or balancing of the two traditions, with the honored values of an older heroic society placed in a familiar Christian context. . . . (Irving, "Elements" 175)

Irving begins his analysis by stating "To many . . . the combination of pagan and Christian elements has seemed a problem demanding clearer resolution" (177). He immediately moves into a consideration of the word "pagan," which he describes as having three different possible meanings: "the literal, the vestigial, and the ethical" (177). After spending some two pages in this distinction, Irving moves on to the central theme of his work, where he declares that "[t]he history of this controversy over 'Christian and Pagan' is long, complex, and central to succeeding interpretations of the poem; every general essay on *Beowulf* has been obliged to deal with the problem" (180). That Irving would characterize this dichotomy as being so fundamental to the consideration of the poem turns out not to be exaggeration. It is hardly possible to summarize a history of the problem, since it is true that any article of any kind that deals with the poem must at some point address or incorporate either its Christian or pre-Christian elements, or both. Thus, the history of this dichotomy within the poem is also a history of everything that has been written about the poem.

Looking at the 19th century scholarly reception and view of the text, Irving briefly traces the history of scholarly recruitment of the text as cornerstone of a nationaly literary tradition. Among the evidence Irving musters, Irving notes that in the preface to the first edition of *Beowulf*, published by Thorkelin (1815b), "Thorkelin had such readers in mind when he wrote 'Some will claim this epic cannot be genuine since it is full of Christian doctrine concerning the

one and only God'" (Irving, "Elements" 181). Irving summarizes the early history of the scholarly view of the poem:

> the earliest nineteenth-century readers of *Beowulf*, most of them northern Europeans, were involved in the Romantic search for national origins and in a revolt against Mediterranean traditions; hence they tended to welcome, and exaggerate, any pagan elements as authentically Germanic and to discount the Christian elements. (181)

These remarks are particularly telling, since they underscore a critical scholarly understanding: there was an agenda within the scholarly world (which agenda was reflected in the western European world in general) which surrounded the *Beowulf* manuscript at the point of its rebirth. The scholarly world was looking for evidences of northern Europe's own history. The scholarly world, and the culture in general, was looking outside of Christianity, outside of the Greco-Roman (and Israeli-Middle Eastern) Mediterranean heritage, outside of the inheritance of the renaissance, looking for something that was itself, searching for its own identity. We can see here that the world that surrounded the re-discovery and publishing of *Beowulf* was the same as—in this element, at least—the world in which the many authors of twentieth century post-colonialist writing found themselves: a world where they felt that their own native culture had been taken, overwritten, co-opted or outright stolen, and who searched and campaigned for a native identity.

This desire for identity is important to considering the reason that *Beowulf* was preserved at all, much less studied. But there is another element that is equal in importance to this desire for identity to that preservation and study. This other element was an epistemic assumption operating at the heart of western European culture. The epistemic assumption was the idea that texts should be preserved, and the related assumptions about how they should be preserved. This

epistemic assumption is a mixture of both the "native" instinct of the people indigenous to northern Europe (if such a people existed at any time since the arrival of Rome and written accounts of the territory now known as England) and the imported Mediterranean culture, an epistemic assumption in the scholarly/monastic community to write and to preserve texts that are written. That is, both the instinct to publish the manuscript and herald it as an icon of a "native" culture, and the instinct to have preserved the text in the first place, are both blends of "native" and imported epistemes.

Throughout the 19th and into the early 20th century, scholarship in the field bent toward viewing the work as essentially pagan. The presence of Christianity at all was apologized away. Irving, for example, notes that, among the explanations given in scholarship of the 19th and early twentieth centuries, was the argument "that before its scribes copied such inflammably pagan material, the church had to add some 'Christian coloring' (to use a now famous phrase) to mask and justify the process" (181).

But, beginning in the late 19th century, the Christian elements of the manuscript were being given more consideration. Irving, tracing this burgeoning emphasis on the Christian elements within the scholarly field beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, indicates "Klaeber, who published in 1911 and 1912 a series of articles that studied and documented the Christian elements in the poem responsibly and in great detail" (181), as the turning point where the scholarly world turned from an essentially pagan to an essentially Christian view of the text. For Irving, Klaeber's writing is the turning point because Klaeber, "made the indisputable claim that the so-called Christian coloring was not laid late and lightly on the surface of but was worked deeply into the very tissue of the poem" (181).

Irving identifies a growing trend toward viewing the poem as Christian, including Levin L. Schucking's 1929 essay "Das Koenigsideal im *Beowulf*," and Arthur E DuBois's 1934 essay "The Unity of *Beowulf*." But Irving identifies "Tolkien's renowned essay of 1936 that . . . started a powerful new wave of Christian interpretation" (182). Irving continues his brief history of the controversy by identifying the "still fairly cautious and temperate Christian view of Marie P. Hamilton in 1946" (182), and then the "the moderate attempt to deal with . . . the poem as fundamentally Christian was that of William Whalon in 1962" (182). Irving sees that time as a watershed, marked in the following year, as he notes that "1963 can be remembered for several much more radically Christian interpretations" (182), highlighting the works of Robertson, Goldsmith, and Stanley. Irving's highlight of Stanley's conclusion is an important standard of the Christian estimation of the work, and of Beowulf's character: "He is a pagan, virtuous, all but flawless. His flaw being this, that ignorant of God he, in the hour of his death, could think of nothing other than self and cenotaph; avarice and vainglory" (Stanley qtd. in Irving, "Elements" 182-183). Irving goes on to point out how, by this point in the history of *Beowulf* scholarship, commentators such as Stanley were able to write "a series of short articles . . . [about] the stubborn and long-lasting attempt by many scholars and critics . . . to deny utterly the Christian nature of poems like *Beowulf*" (183). Scholarship, by the mid-twentieth century, had swung strongly to Christian interpretation. This view becomes so strong that one study, as Irving highlights, proposes that the poem be interpreted with the hero in *Beowulf* as a Christ-figure.

Irving indicates that soon after this strong push toward Christianization in the interpretation of *Beowulf*, there begins a growing trend toward bringing in the Icelandic, and other pagan texts contemporaneous to the *Beowulf* era, in order to contextualize the poem. But the current of Christianization in the understanding of *Beowulf* remains strong in Irving's

estimation of this scholarly history, as this Christianization takes two opposing currents. First, there are those commentators who want to characterize Beowulf as a Christ-figure, or at least as paradigmatic of a Christian hero, even if one ignorant of his own Christian virtue. The second group are those commentators "who claim that, far from being a figure of Christ, Beowulf is an active sinner who deserves damnation . . . " (184). Even acknowledging that the two groups are directly opposed in their view of Beowulf's character, both still see the work as being one primarily concerned with Christian standards, and thus a poem of primarily Christian nature. This view of Beowulf, and of *Beowulf*, continues through the 1970s and to the end of the 1980s. Irving further supports this view by noting that throughout the period from the 1940s through the 1980s, scholars attempted various other approaches to Christianizing the text in various forms, including attempts at bringing various words in the text into translation from Latin roots, with various results obtaining from such glosses.

During this period, however, Irving points out that "opposition to the more extreme Christian interpretations has been steady and sometimes acrimonious" (185), including citing the essay of John Halverson in 1966 and Charles Moorman in 1967, and later, Michael Cherniss's *Ingeld and Christ* in 1972.

Irving, who was writing his summary in 1997, concludes with a summary of the scholarly views that "the 'mixed' or 'blended' nature of the poem is now agreed on by almost everyone" but he goes on to discuss the fact that "scholars differ in how to describe or account for it" (186). Irving recounts the various theories, among which are: that a mixed audience necessitated the blended narrative; that there is an implicitly Christian message in the triumphant Danish part, and a sense of loss in the later Geatish part; or that the work is the intentional recapturing by the poet of a great and noble pagan past but which was then viewed through the enlightenment of the

Christian faith. This view can be seen to begin with Tolkien, some sixty years earlier; and the instinct, the scholarly necessity to synthesize the pre-Christian with the Christian persists.

Irving ends his analysis with reference to a few of the "hot spots of past discussion, these hooks on which so much has depended" (189). He looks at the sermon of Hrothgar, which has been repeatedly invoked not only as a central element in the Christian nature of the poem, but also a statement of theme for all the commentators who would show the *Beowulf* poet's agenda was to say "we should all remember that we are vulnerable to fate and death or we will suffer dire consequences" (189). Irving notes two other locations of controversy: lines 2327 to 2332, which is Beowulf's reaction to news of the dragon, and lines 2817 to 2820, which is Beowulf's disposition to entering the funeral flames upon his death. Both show the significant rifts that exist between the pre-Christian and the Christian epistemes within the text, rifts that have been the site of controversy about the ultimate orientation of the text for two centuries. Irving ends with the conclusion that "a consensus is now forming, or has formed, on the subject: namely, that *Beowulf*, is at all points a smooth blend of pagan/secular elements with Christian ones, with its chief purpose to express and celebrate the heroic ethic" (191).

But other commentators note that this trend toward a blended view does not sit entirely comfortably. Scott Gwara summarized Irving's argument as one where

> Christianity moderates the poem's triumphant secularism. The pagan characters of *Beowulf* espouse this anachronistic "tailored" Christian virtue and that their actions should be measured against it, as sanitizing or authorizing. The argument has wide appeal, as Irving concludes. . . (4)

But then Gwara himself takes issue with that, as he claims that "Irving's model . . . inadequately . . . accounts for the characters' behavior" (4).

**Andy Orchard's *Critical Companion to Beowulf***

For his book *A Critical Companion to* Beowulf, published in 2003, Andy Orchard also took up the history of the controversy surrounding the Christan versus pre-Christian elements. Orchard begins by noting that "The older view that . . . *Beowulf* represents a Christian re-working . . . of an originally pagan text is no longer in vogue" (130), but goes on to note that "there remain a number of issues of crucial importance to any understanding of the poem" (130).

For Orchard and the critical and scholarly position that he is conveying in his book, the Christian part of the poem is indispensable: "there seems no getting rid of the poet's clear references to the biblical tales of Cain and Abel . . . and the subsequent story of the Flood . . . without doing irreparable damage to the transmitted text" (131). But Orchard emphasizes the history of the debate, stating "[t]he difficulty of assessing how far *Beowulf* can be described as a truly 'Christian' poem has exercised many of the finest and most subtle of *Beowulf* scholars" (131), citing both Klaeber and Tolkien as first examples, and Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson's introduction to their edition of the poem as second.

Orchard lists six separate "book-length studies of the putative influence of Christian themes on *Beowulf*" (131, fn 6), and then lists 33 separate "important and interesting articles on the topic [of Christian themes]" (131, fn6), and references three overviews of the problem, including Irving's essay, detailed above. These works dedicated to the Christian themes contrast with the attempts to read the pre-Christian meaning of the text, in support of which Orchard cites three separate works that themselves only undertake to catalog and summarize the history of the attempts of such readings.

Orchard continues his catalog by examining the history of attempts to connect Greek and Latin heroic epics as influences or templates for *Beowulf*. By and large, Orchard summarizes

these attempts as being fruitless. It is interesting to note, however, that Orchard, in discussing the potential influence of such heroic texts, especially the writings of Virgil, states "a more promising line of inquiry might . . . compare the ways in which later authors and poets appropriated the pagan heroic material of the Classical past into undoubtedly Christian contexts" (133). Orchard is here suggesting, as one avenue of investigation, investigations of the type that this thesis is undertaking.

Orchard examines the example of the *liber monstrorum*, stating that "recent work . . . has shown it to be a highly sophisticated piece of work, based on a careful combination of three kinds of material, namely Christian prose sources . . . pagan prose sources . . . and Vergil," but Orchard points out how "[t]he Christian author implicitly undermines and condemns the pagan and heroic material that he has apparently collected with care, and presents the whole piece as a warning against the seductive power of pagan literature" (Orchard 134-35). Orchard points to another text, *Waltharius*, for various parallels with *Beowulf*. Most important, it seems, is the idea that, for Orchard, it is clear that "the *Beowulf*-poet was not the only Christian author to make use of Germanic legend in service of Christian verse" (Orchard 137).

As is shown by the summaries above, the very task of trying to summarize all the scholarship that has taken up the question of Christian versus pre-Christian within *Beowulf* is itself a book-length undertaking. However, review of the summaries, and extensive review of the texts mentioned in various summaries and compilations, as well as many other texts outside of them, shows that the concern over the presence and importance of Christian and pre-Christian elements has been central to *Beowulf* scholarship over the last 200 years, and that the question of the valuation of Christian and pre-Christian elements is central to any reading or understanding of the poem.

### 2.A.2. Date and Author

As vital and active an area of scholarly activity as the controversy about the Christian versus pre-Christian essence of the poem is the controversy about where the poem comes from: who wrote it, where, and when? Scott Gwara summarized the centuries of scholarship that have worked on the attempt to locate the manuscript in time, place, and authorship:

> *Beowulf* has resisted any firm dating. Although the manuscript Cotton Vitellius A.xv can be dated paleographically no later than *ca.* 1010, scholars have ventured a point of originary composition anywhere between *ca.* 650 and 1016 and have backed Northumbria, Mercia, Wessex, and East Anglia as a place of origin. (2)

Roy Michael Liuzza, in the opening of his "On the Dating of *Beowulf*," similarly noted:

> the traditional dating of the poem to the somewhat elastic 'Age of Bede' [has] come under increasing suspicion . . . Around 1980 the question of 'the probable date of the effective composition' of *Beowulf* was reopened . . . the debate dating [shifted] from relative consensus to relative chaos. (281)

When locating the origin of *Beowulf*, there is within the scholarship a second layer of complication. As hinted above in the words of Liuzza, and as Robert Bjork and Anita Obermeier observe in their "Date, Provenance, Author, Audiences," there is a "perplexing question about the poem's genesis . . . What exactly are we trying to date? Is it the poem as preserved in the manuscript or some urtext, in whatever form or forms?" (18). Some questions about the origin of *Beowulf* can be answered by investigation of the manuscript; other questions may be answered by comparison of the poem to other social, historical, and literary facts or works. But the distinction means more than the catalog of different approaches to dating the text. The question also emphasizes the distinction, embedded in the manuscript, between the physical item, created

a millennium or more ago that still exists today, and the poem that the letters on the page represent—the discursive statements, reflective of and representative of a discursive formation, that this manuscript represents.

Although the first publisher of the manuscript, Grimur Thorkelin, dated the poem at 340 AD, the majority of scholars since have given a range of between the 6th and 11th centuries AD as the poem's date of composition. This date is given its earliest boundary by the correlation, first made by N.F.S. Gruntvig in 1817, who "identified Hygelac in the poem with the historic figure Chochilaicus, the king mentioned by Gregory of Tours as having been slain in Frisia on a raid, probably between 515 and 530" (Bjork and Obermeier 17). Following the paleographic dating, scholars proposing dates of composition by conjecture from analogy to other texts, archaeology, history, or manuscript study have suggested, at the latest, the 11th century. Scholars have put the composition of the poem as late as the court of Cnut.

Scholars have attempted various methods to muster evidence as to the origin of the poem. Historic evidence, such as Gruntvig's relation of Hygelac with Chochilaicus, is also located in conjecture about the presence of "Merewioingas" (2921), which scholars have associated with the Merovingians. The word appears only the one single time in the poem. But as is now the case with attempt to date the poem, the import of the "Merewioingas" association remains in controversy. Some scholars assert that the poem could not have been composed later than the end of Merovingian line and the rise of Carolingian dynasty, while other scholars dismiss the suggestion, leaving the reference to mean nothing other than that the poem could not have been composed before their line, but could have been composed at any time after. Certainly, however, if "Merewioingas" does refer to the Merovingians, the characters who inhabit the poem at the

poem's end are contemporaneous to them, placing the action of the poem somewhere in the fifth through eighth centuries.

Some scholars have focused on the language used in the poem, comparing word choice, diction, and spelling to other known exemplars. Among these is R.D. Fulk, who, examining patterns in the meter of the poem, concluded "*Beowulf* almost certainly was not composed after ca. 725 if Mercian in origin, or after ca. 825 if Northumbrian" (390). Bjork and Obermeier summarize the scholarship in this area, with the conclusion that the language is "predominantly West Saxon (mostly late) with an admixture of mainly Northumbrian and Mercian elements, the poet's language also shows signs of Kentish influence" (25).

Other scholars have read the poem as political allegory, and suggested direct sources in political and historical events from the 7th through the 11th centuries. Linguistic analysis has yielded results indicating a similar range of possible dates, with many scholars concluding that "we could not call any date in the Old English period impossible" (37).

The only way to sum up all of the scholarly activity in dating the poem to all available referential sources is to say that no conclusion can be reached with certainty, except that the poem must have come from the late dark ages or early medieval period.

While the majority of approaches, by volume and variety, look at the poem to find relations between its contents and other sources, other scholars have focused on the manuscript itself. Mentioned above, paleographic dating of the text looks at the script in which the poem is written. In this vein, Michael Lapidge, in his "The Archetype of Beowulf," studied the script itself and the errors in that script and concluded the composition of the poem could be no later than *ca.* 800. But the important distinction, indicated earlier, arises here: the distinction between

the original composition, not later than 800, and the multiple copies made, resulting in the manuscript as it exists now, penned in the 11th century.

The premise of Lapidge's work is that when a manuscript is copied from one type of letter-formation to another—what we might analogize as moving from one font to a different font—errors in copying arise, and these errors form a pattern. The field in which Lapidge is working analyzes and systematizes the types of errors that happen by studying known transliterations, and then, in what might be called a "manuscript forensics," applies the known types of errors to manuscripts whose antecedents are unknown in order to hypothesize the antecedent. Among the items in Lapidge's work that are important to this thesis is that Lapidge asserts that "there is general agreement that the unique surviving manuscript is a copy of an earlier (and lost) exemplar" (6-7), noting the exception and the scholarly objections to that exception in the footnote of his work. After noting this premise, Lapidge summarizes the goal of his work:

> there are numerous errors . . . where all editors agree correction is necessary; and . . . many . . . can plausibly and economically be explained at a stroke in terms of faulty transliteration from an unfamiliar system of script. Furthermore, the individual nature of these errors will allow reasonable deductions about the script of the archetype. (7)

It is also important to note that Lapidge takes as a given that "[a]s preserved, the manuscript was written by two scribes" (7). Lapidge goes on to summarize the scripts:

> Scribe I wrote the first . . . 1939 lines of *Beowulf*, Scribe II then took over the copying of *Beowulf*, which he completed. The script of Scribe I is . . . a system of script which began to be used for copying vernacular texts from *c.* 1000 onwards . . . Scribe II,

> however, is Square miniscule, which on the face of it is much earlier in appearance than the script of Scribe I. (7-8)

Lapidge undertakes more than twenty pages of analysis, with exemplars, of the different scripts and how errors from one script to another not only occur, but how they occur and why their occurrence is a consistent kind of occurrence. He concludes that the manuscript that exists today is a copy from "a manuscript in Anglo-Saxon set miniscule script, written before *c*. 750" (34). And his further conclusion that "*Beowulf* existed in written form in the first half of the eighth century" (35) is tempered by his acknowledgement that it is likely that a sequence of copyings in the eighth, ninth and tenth centuries, each introducing different elements of linguistic and script modification, led up to the final copy made in the early 11th century and received today.

It was David Dumville, long-time scholar of the textual analysis of late dark ages and early medieval texts, that first adduced this compelling evidence. Dumville analyzed the writing of the manuscript and determined that it was penned by two different persons, writing in distinct writing styles. "The *Beowulf*-manuscript itself is the work of two scribes, writing quite distinct styles of Insular miniscule script" (Orchard 19-20). Dumville explains:

> "Scribe A . . . was responsible for lines 1 -1939 . . . Scribe B . . . completed the poetic half-line and the poem, lines 1939-3182. Both scribes were also responsible for writing other texts now contained within the Nowell Codex . . . No other specimen of either scribe's work has ever been discovered; nor have any closely related scribal performances been identified." (50)

These identifications become critical pieces of evidence in the recognition of *Beowulf* as a work that exists now as a result of epistemic violence.

Lapidge, in his conclusion, summarizes some deductions made in the wake of his conclusions and the work of other scholars working in the same field:

> The several acts of recopying arguably introduced into the text linguistic features later in date (and different, perhaps, in terms of dialectical origin) than the original, as represented by the early-eighth-century archetype. But alteration of a more substantial nature is also probably in question. One of the most important gains of recent scholarship has been the demonstration by Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe that Anglo-Saxon scribes, in the process of copying Old English verse, very frequently interfered with what they were copying by substituting metrically (and often lexically) acceptable words and phrases into the copy-text which lay before them; in other words, the scribes copying in their own vernacular evince a freedom in altering their copy-text which would not be thinkable in the case of a Latin text. (36-37)

Lapidge goes on to note the work of Roy Michael Liuzza, in his "On the Dating of *Beowulf*" and Liuzza's examination of these questions. Liuzza notes that:

> Scribes did not practice their craft with the honest simplicity and good intentions that metrical dating studies require. Most manuscripts contain, of course, a number of . . . errors . . . [but] Scribes not only made mistakes; they also changed spellings and readings, rewrote passages they did not understand or thought their readers might not understand, made connections between previously separate texts, omitted and recombined phrases, and generally participated openly and actively in the recomposition of the vernacular texts they copied. (291)

Liuzza notes at this point two different examples. First, *Bede's Death Song*, which contains no emendations and no changes beyond those very few that should be attributed to

simply clerical errors. He distances this work as more aberration than representative, stating "the careful, often mechanical, copying of the scribes . . . is not representative of the Old English scribal tradition" (291). He counters this aberration with another example, *Caedmon's Hymn*. Comparing several copies of an earlier known original, he notes that "in eighteen half-lines, there are five significant metrical variants" (292). After considering research on the issue from the scholars Kenneth Sisam and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, Liuzza concludes that "[i]n other words, the scribes were collaborators in the construction of the text" (292).

Liuzza goes on to survey a number of texts copied during the early medieval period where two or more copies exist. In his survey of the texts, where he compares the metrical variations of half-lines, he finds the frequency of differences ranges between seven and more than thirty percent, concluding that "the average percentage of variation in multiple-copy poems in Old English is 21.6%" (293). He goes on to note that

> It should be stressed that this is not the same sort of scribal interference with meter condoned by traditional metrical-dating studies, such as the writing of contracted monosyllabic forms where the meter requires a disyllabic form; these are alterations of the metrical shape of the half-line which do not, for the most part, result in nonmetrical or nonsensical lines, but in alternative acceptable versions. (293)

Here, by "acceptable" Liuzza is meaning metrically and within the logos of the work. But the study shows that the lines were changed, from one meaning to a different meaning altogether. Liuzza goes on to put the same information into still more impactful form: "in a hypothetically average copy of an average Old English poem, approximately one half-line in five will vary from the author's original words" (293).

The study of the origin of the poem has been as fruitful, and as controversial, as the scholarly activity surrounding the Christian versus pre-Christian character of the poem. The many studies in the field have settled that all the strongest evidence places the poem's creation somewhere between 750 AD and 1050 AD, and places the writing of the version that still exists as being somewhere between 1000AD and 1050AD, written somewhere in the east-central area of the island of England. But just as scholars' studies located the creation of the poem in place and time, those same studies yielded important information about the creators of the poem as it exists today. The evidence is strong that the poem as it now exists was not created all at once and was not created by a single author. Although it is true that, based on the foregoing alone, it is possible that a single author originally penned the poem, it is no longer the subject of serious debate that the copy extant today is not the result of that hypothetical poet's hand.

### 2.B. Literary and Interpretive Theory

Post-colonial theory, in the broadest and perhaps least accurate way of expressing it, examines how the colonialism of western Europe—largely Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Germany, France and England, but often in a more restricted sense primarily this last one or two—affected the peoples native to the lands where these western powers established colonies. Post-colonial theory primarily leverages Marxist and Post-Structuralist theory to examine the effect of the colonial event upon the colonized. For the purposes of this thesis, the aspect of post-colonialist theory that will be employed is that element which examines how a colonizer, which may also be read as invader, affects the culture of the colonized/invaded—and here specifically, one object of an invaded culture, to wit: the manuscript commonly referred to as *Beowulf*.

Gayatri Spivak theorized the event of *epistemic violence*, where the invading culture re-writes the invaded culture at the most fundamental level. Spivak developed this theory upon

foundations laid by Michel Foucault as expressed in a number of his works, by Jacques Derrida in his *Of Grammatology*, by Edward Said in his *Orientalism*, and incorporating multiple theoretical underpinnings of Marxist and socialist theory. In order to understand how the idea of *epistemic violence* applies to the understanding of *Beowulf*, a review of some of the concepts leading up Spivak, as well as a review of Spivak's theory, is necessary.

### 2.B.1. Michel Foucault: Discourse and Episteme

In the 1960s and 1970s, Michel Foucault wrote a series of works in which he investigated the history of different fields of knowledge and activity. These works both chronicle the development of, and explicate, his theory of an alternate approach to, or alternate formulation of, history. In these works, Foucault proposes and undertakes a post-structuralist examination of certain portions of history and develops his theories by which any division of history might be reviewed. He names his activity, his approach, and the theory of it, as *archaeology*, or the *archaeology of knowledge*. He opposes this archaeology of knowledge against what he terms the history of ideas, which is the traditional approach of historians to history. As he develops his archaeology, he also develops his ideas of discourse and episteme, which later theorists, including Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak, use in developing their own work.

A complete examination or recapitulation of Foucault's approach is outside the scope of this thesis. However, explication of certain of Foucault's ideas are necessary in order to understand both how they apply to any understanding of the theories of Gayatri Spivak, but also necessary to understanding how the theories of Foucault and Spivak apply to *Beowulf*. The terms fundamental to this thesis's examination are Foucault's *discourse*, or *discursive formation*, and his idea of the *episteme*.

Foucault's first three works in this series of archaeologies are *The History of Madness* (1961), *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), and *The Order of Things* (1966), in which he applies his archaeology to, respectively: psychology and psychiatry; medical practices; and biology, grammar, and economics. In 1969 he published *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, in which he attempted to explain, systematize and formalize his archaeological theory. In the later years of the 1970s, he wrote *Discipline and Punish* (1975), where he applied the approach to the history of crime and punishment, and *The History of Sexuality* (1976), where he applied the approach to sexuality. In each of these works, Foucault focuses his inquiry on the period that he names the *classical period*, which is for him a period of Western European history that begins roughly post-European Renaissance, and continues through the end of the 19th century.

It was in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that Foucault attempted to systematize, or at least explicate directly, his *archaeology.* At no point does Foucault give a one-sentence explanation of his term or his method; it is possible to argue that the aim of the whole of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (*Archaeology*) is to explain what Foucault means when he uses the term *discourse* or *discursive formation*—the point being that there is no one phrase or passage that could be quoted to sum up what any term means. But there are several passages that serve as useful guideposts for his approach.

He begins by asserting that the traditional approach to history, the approach that Foucault calls the "history of ideas," (*Archaeology* 4), is an approach that attempts to unify history: it attempts to find themes, threads, progressions, evolutions. The history of ideas attempts to take multiple disparate facts and meld them together into a whole. The history of ideas postulates origins, and from those origins, creates the track of a supposed evolution, of a development that leads to a result. What Foucault argues, though, is that this attempt to unitize history

intentionally obscures and deletes the disparities, the contradictions, that exist within history. He argues that history is much more discontinuity than continuity. Thus, his archaeology will focus not on creating a unity, but on exploring the contradictions.

Foucault has long been linked with structuralism and post-structuralism. His archaeology is, in fact, a deconstruction—not of history, but of the history of history; it is a deconstruction of the underlying values by which historians have traditionally assembled history. Foucault is taking a view of history that is itself a deconstruction of history, or more accurately, a deconstruction of both the way that historians organize history, and a deconstruction of the historians' attempt to organize history. One of the hallmarks of this effort, which is also one of the chief aims of deconstruction, is the recognition of the construction of the Subject, and the effort to deconstruct that Subject.

In the case of Foucault's archaeology, the Subject that is being deconstructed, however, is the Subject of history itself. Foucault emphasizes that, embedded within the history of ideas is the requirement that the Subject position be filled:

> If the history of thought could remain the locus of uninterrupted continuities . . . it would provide a privileged shelter for the sovereignty of consciousness. Continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject: the guarantee that everything that has eluded him may be restored to him; the certainty that time will disperse nothing without restoring it in a reconstituted unity; the promise that one day the subject—in the form of historical consciousness—will once again be able to appropriate, to bring back under his sway, all those things that are kept at a distance by difference, . . . [m]aking historical analysis the discourse of the continuous and making human

> consciousness the original subject of all historical development. . . to preserve, against all decentrings, the sovereignty of the subject. (*Archaeology* 12)

The aim of Foucault's archaeology is to dismantle the Subject, and without reorganizing it, place the Subject under the same observation, and in the same moment, as the observation of the statement and the discursive formation: "discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but, on the contrary, a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may determined" (*Archaeology* 55). Foucault proposes that his archaeology, focused as it is on the discontinuities, will have as its goal to be exempt from the concerns about the subject: "to define a method of historical analysis freed from the anthropological theme" (*Archaeology* 16).

Concomitant with the sovereignty of the Subject is the search for and creation of the origin, which can be read in its analogousness to the idea of the *center* as articulated by Jacques Derrida. Foucault's archaeology, and its orientation within deconstructionism of the type championed by Derrida among others, is never better exemplified that when Foucault states, "beyond any apparent beginning, there is always a secret origin . . . an ever-receding point that is never itself present in any history; this point is merely its own void" (*Archaeology* 25). Foucault condemns the history of ideas both for its requirement of Subject, and for its insistence and reliance on this center, this origin which is itself a fiction.

Foucault begins his explication of his archaeology by defining the *object*. The *object* is the smallest element of Foucault's archaeology, and from there, in sequence, the *enunciation* or *statement*, the *discursive formation*, and then the *discourse* and *episteme*. The object is a single discursive element, a single idea within a discursive practice. It is important to remember that,

just as Foucault condemned the orientation of the history of ideas to the fictional origin, none of his terms or concepts have a reference to an origin:

> What, in short, we wish to do, is to dispense with 'things'. To 'depresentify' them. . . . To substitute for the enigmatic treasure of 'things' anterior to discourse, the regular formation of objects that emerge only in discourse. To define these *objects* without reference to the *ground*, the *foundation of things*, but by relating them to the body of rules that enable them to form as objects of discourse . . . To write a history of discursive objects that does not plunge them into the common depth of a primal soil, but deploys the nexus of regularities that govern their dispersion. (*Archaeology* 47-48)

It is thus important to understand the relation between discourse and its objects: "[a] task that consists of not—of no longer—treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (*Archaeology* 49).

The next level of analysis for Foucault's archaeology is the level of the *statement*. A *statement* is differentiated from a sentence, which has a grammatical formation, and a proposition, which has an argumentative logos. Of this, Foucault states, by way of analogy:

> the statement is not the same kind of unit as the sentence, the proposition, or the speech act; it cannot be referred therefore to the same criteria; but neither is it the same kind of unit as a material object, with its limits and independence . . . It is . . . a function that operates vertically in relation to [other] various units . . . and which enables one to say of a series of signs whether or not they are present in it. The statement therefore is not a structure . . . it is a function of existence that properly belongs to signs. (*Archaeology* 86)

From the statement can be deduced the construction of the *discursive formation*. Just as a statement is a function of construction, and just as an object is an element within such a construction, the discursive formation is the collection of several objects within their dispersion among several statements. In concluding his chapter in which he begins to tease out the notion of a discursive formation, we can see where Foucault develops a concept similar to that he used in analogizing statements, where he indicates that his proposed method, his archaeology

> would study forms of division. Or again: instead of reconstituting *chains of inference* (as one often does in the history of the sciences or of philosophy), instead of drawing up *tables of differences* (as the linguists do), it would describe *systems of dispersion.* (emphasis in original) (*Archaeology* 37)

In that same construction, then, Foucault goes on to clarify that "Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion . . . we are dealing with a *discursive formation*" (*Archaeology* 38). In defining this discursive formation, Foucault also states that:

> Discursive formation are not . . . internal to discourse: they do not connect concepts or words with one another . . . [t]hey are, in a sense, at the limit of discourse: they offer it objects of which it can speak, or rather . . . they determine the group of relations that discourse must establish in order to speak of this or that object, in order to deal with them. (*Archaeology* 46)

It is of central importance to understand that for Foucault, a discursive formation, or a discourse, within the type studied by his archaeology, comprises not only systems of verbal or written statements; that is, it is not only statements composed of language. Discourse includes all the systems of meaning, and all the related systems, that enter into, participate in, and formulate the whole of the discourse. It is not just language, but also social structures,

institutions, etc. As Robert Con Davis and Ronald Schleifer stated in their introduction to Foucault:

> Foucault is less concerned with language at the level of the sign and much more concerned with the relationship of language and social institutions, a relationship he calls "discourse." To examine language at the level of discourse is to identify the institutional rules that make possible particular significations and, consequently, make possible particular forms of knowledge. (262)

In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault goes on to examine the processes by which objects and concepts within a discursive field—and thereby, the discursive field itself—emerge. Foucault examines several types or paths by which the objects and concepts emerge. As a corollary to the various paths, Foucault remarks on one similarity that each of the paths have, a similarity that is critical in order to understand both Spivak, and to understand the event that happened in the manifestation of the *Beowulf* manuscript:

> one tries to determine according to what schemata . . . the statements may be linked to one another in a type of discourse . . . These schemata make it possible to describe . . . their anonymous dispersion through texts, books, and *oeuvres*. . . . an analysis, then, [that] concerns, at a kind of *preconceptual* level, the field in which concepts can coexist and the rules to which this field is subjected. (*Archaeology* 60)

So, Foucault goes on to say, then, of his discourse as it "denote[s] a group of verbal performances . . . the term discourse can be defined as the group of statements that belong to a single system of formation" (*Archaeology* 107).

Looking at the way discursive formations, and discourses, exist, Foucault locates what he terms *strategies*: "certain organizations of concepts, certain regroupings of objects, certain types

of enunciation, which form, according to their degree of coherence, rigour, and stability" (*Archaeology* 64). In examining the strategies, Foucault emphasizes that the discourses evolve not in a vacuum, but by a Subject, an *authority*. This authority develops the discourse under three important characteristics: first, that every discourse evolves "by the *function* that the discourse . . . must carry out *in a field of non-discursive practices*" (*Archaeology* 68), that the Subject/authority "is characterized by the possible positions of desire in relation to discourse" (*Archaeology* 68), and

> [t]his authority also involves *the rules and processes of appropriation* of discourse: for in our societies (and no doubt in many others) the property of discourse—in the sense of the right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices—is in fact confined . . . to a particular group of individuals. (*Archaeology* 68)

It is important, Foucault notes, to remember that each of the above characteristics is not exterior to the formation of the discourse, but constitutive of it: "They are not disturbing elements . . . but, on the contrary, its formative elements" (*Archaeology* 68). Foucault also notes how these characteristics are related to the ensuing idea of the episteme:

> Thus . . . the Analysis of Wealth played a role not only in the political and economic decisions of governments, but in the scarcely conceptualized, scarcely theoreticized, daily practice of emergent capitalism, and in the social and political struggles that characterized the Classical period. (*Archaeology* 68)

That is, the discourses are formed by the Subject(s) that also constitute the objects of the discourse, and the discourses, their objects and their subjects, participate equally in a subjection

to and the formation of power structures within the society, and, at the most fundamental level, the subjection to and formation of the loci by which value is formed, valuation is made, and the processes of thought are formulated and prioritized.

Foucault's archaeology, then, "individualizes and describes discursive formations" (*Archaeology* 157). But Foucault repeatedly notes that the discourse, and his archaeology, are not operating at the level of linguistic activities, or even at the level of thoughts as divorced from other factors of existence:

> When it is concerned with a particular type of discourse . . . it is in order to establish, by comparison, its chronological limits; it is also in order to describe, at the same time as them and in correlation with them, an institutional field, a set of events, practices, and political decisions, a sequence of economic processes that also involve demographic fluctuations, techniques of public assistance, manpower needs, different levels of unemployment, etc. (*Archaeology* 157)

It is this emphasis on the orientation of a statement, an enunciation, and its related discursive practice, to the entire world of elements that surround it—and further, the emphasis that these elements do not surround it, but rather, are constitutive of it—that defines Foucault's archaeology. So it is shown that Foucault has his concern not just with language or with thought in the abstract, but has his "concern with underlying rules that govern the production of knowledge" (Davis and Schleifer 262), and further, "Foucault identifies the conditions that made possible the emergence and development of modern areas of knowledge and their corresponding institutions" (262), such that a "*discourse* is a social language created by particular cultural conditions at a particular time and place, and it expresses a particular way of understanding human experience" (Tyson 285). It is this location of discourse within the field of all elements

that constitute it that "led Foucault to an analysis of the exercise of power through social practices, including uses of language or 'discursive practices'" (Davis and Schleifer 262). Further, we can see in this analysis how Foucault identifies that "power *circulates* in all directions, to and from all social levels, at all times. And the vehicle by which power circulates is a never-ending series of proliferation of exchange" (Tyson 284). It comes full circle, then, when in consideration of that topic that is the concern of this thesis, literature in the broader sense, and *Beowulf* in the more narrow, that Foucault's theory is also said to recognize "literature as a socially determined discursive practice" (Davis and Schleifer 263).

It is to this point that Foucault's *archaeology* arrives, and in which the nascence of the idea of epistemic violence, derives. For Foucault's archaeology is concerned with difference: "If there is a paradox in archaeology, it is not that it increases differences, but that it refuses to reduce them—thus inverting usual values" (*Archaeology* 171). And the differences with which it is most concerned are those "at which the substitution of one discursive formation for another takes place . . . These events, which are by far the most rare, are, for archaeology, the most important: only archaeology, in any case, can reveal them" (*Archaeology* 171). But the change of discursive formation, and the epistemic values that underlie such changes, are not of a character of complete changeover. As Foucault states:

> To say that one discursive formation is substituted for another is not to say that a whole world of absolutely new objects, enunciations, concepts, and theoretical choices emerges fully armed and fully organized in a text that will place that world once and for all; it is to say that a general transformation of relations has occurred, but that it does not necessarily alter all the elements; it is to say that statements are governed by new rules of formation, it is not to say that all objects or concepts, all enunciations or all theoretical choices

> disappear. . . . One of these elements—or several of them—may remain identical, . . . yet belong to different systems of dispersion, and be governed by distinct laws of formation. (*Archaeology* 173)

From these foundations, the concept of the episteme can be engaged. The episteme is the underlying set of presuppositions that inform and, in a sense, govern all the discourses of a place and time. Foucault defines his episteme:

> The analysis of discursive formations, of positivities, and knowledge in their relations with epistemological figures and with the sciences is what has been called, to distinguish it from other possible forms of the history of the sciences, the analysis of the *episteme.* This episteme may be suspected of being something like a world-view, a slice of history common to all branches of knowledge, which imposes on each one the same norms and postulates, a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape . . . By *episteme,* we mean, in fact, the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalized systems. (*Archaeology* 191)

For Foucault, this idea of episteme is the idea that there is a set of assumptions, of presuppositions, that underlie the approach, the process, and the constituents of the various discourses that populate a discursive group, a Subject as conceived on the societal scale. And for these epistemes, there are points of change from one episteme to another: "there are the epistemological acts and thresholds . . . [that] suspend the continuous accumulation of knowledge, interrupt its slow development, and force it to enter a new time" (Archaeology 4). It is at the level of the episteme that the constitution of one culture, as differentiated from another culture, can be identified. It is at this level that Edward Said, in his *Orientalism,* showed that the

western European Subject had constructed an *East*, an *Orient* as an Other. It is into this discursive field that Gayatri Spivak entered her post-colonialist perspective, and asked her question in the form of a journal article, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

### 2.B.2. Gayatri Spivak: Epistemic Violence

In the broadest terms, Spivak is writing about the ability, or opportunity, for the Other to take or reclaim a Subject position. Spivak begins her paper with an examination of a certain intellectual tradition, stating that attempts from within that tradition to criticize the Western Subject actually do the most to continue to preserve the West as subject: "The much publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject" (66). Spivak focuses on the tradition, within French poststructuralist theory, that "intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other" (66). Spivak, noting that the intellectual tradition states that it undertakes a critique of the sovereign subject, too often employs an Other as Subject as a cover which maintains the dichotomy and makes the supposed subject transparent. The intellectual tradition says it is subjectizing the disenfranchised, but the speech acts of the intellectuals still name and subjectize the intellectuals while keeping the proposed empowered subject silent. Spivak points out that poststructuralist political theory uses terms like "the workers struggle" (67) which ignores the reality of the difference between workers in France or other first-world capitalist cultures and those in third-world locations within the global economy. The intellectual tradition, when it employs terms like 'the worker's struggle' but uses such terms to refer to workers in all locations and in all countries ignores the international division of labor. The attempt to identify the first-world worker with the third-world worker ignores necessary divisions, necessarily placing the third-world worker outside the narrative.

Her discussion here is largely about how that tradition claims to be working on behalf of a disenfranchised Other—in this case, the working class—but, as it proceeds, is in fact perpetuating the division between Subject and Other that it claims to be working against. This is especially true, for Spivak, in the disalignment between a working class Other as constructed within a first-world, or western European context, and the Other that exists within a globalized context, where the Other belongs to the former colonies. She identifies also that within the intellectual tradition, there is the recurrent "valorization of the oppressed as subject" (69), that within the tradition works together with a conviction that the disenfranchised know themselves—as in know their subject position, know their desire—and need only for space to be cleared in which to speak for themselves. But Spivak decries this assertion, stating instead that the intellectuals, by the very actions in which they claim to be dismantling the subject-object oppression, in fact continue its construction, that "the intellectual within socialized capital . . . can help consolidate the international division of labor" (69).

Spivak points to another important element of the intellectual tradition that she is criticizing, a "verbal slippage" (69) between two senses, or meanings, of the word *representation*. For Spivak, the intellectuals—who have intentionally entered into the interchange among power, economics, politics and theory with the expressed aim of dismantling the power-oppression dynamic—are guilty of being careless about the two different uses and meanings of the same word within the interchanging traditions. "Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as 'speaking for', as in politics, and representation as 're-presentation', as in art and philosophy" (70). Spivak here is talking about the discussions about the reality of the working class(es), which the intellectual does not have any actual experience of, yet it is the intellectual that is doing all the speaking, creating all the words and thoughts that

define the experience of the working class(es). The distinction is "the contrast . . . between a proxy and a portrait" (71). She points out that they are related but "irreducibly discontinuous" (70), and suggests that the conflation of the two words and the ignoring of their difference is a Subject privileging, and that this means that intellectuals who speak for the workers may be representing politically, but are not re-presenting in the sense of showing, of actually being the present worker, the voice of the worker. The conflation means that the intellectual is still the speaking Subject, not the workers speaking for themselves. "The banality of leftist intellectuals' lists of self-knowing, politically canny subalterns stands revealed; representing them, the intellectuals represent themselves as transparent" (70). Spivak insists that this distinction is critical if the stated goal of the intellectual tradition that she is examining is to be achieved: "If such a critique and such a project are not to be given up, the shifting distinctions between representation within the state and political economy, on the one hand, and within the theory of the Subject, on the other, must not be obliterated" (70).

After examining the verbal slippage and its manifestations within the intellectual tradition, Spivak goes to note the constructed character of otherings, especially the othering of class distinctions. "The formation of a class is artificial and economic, and the economic agency or interest is impersonal because it is systematic and heterogenous" (71). But the point here goes beyond the constructed nature of the class. The point is that a class—specifically the working class—is constructed from without, from outside itself, by one factor only—economics—and that factor is a factor that is alien to the class. Spivak's point is that there is nothing essential to the class, because the class is created not by a unity from within the class, but rather, by factors exteriors to the class. A class—in the economic sense—is not organized or unitized because of an element shared by or among the members of the class, but by a designation exterior to the

members of the class; class members are members because the system put them there. So their desires cannot be assumed to be identical; their desires are heterogenous. "There is no such thing as a 'class instinct' at work here" (71). This is critically important to understand, because the implication is that there cannot be a desire within the class, since the class's only unifying characteristic is alien to the class, not shared among it. If there is no desire common to the group, or to the speaking position, then there cannot be any unified utterance which to express: the class cannot speak because there is nothing to say, and cannot become a speaking Subject because it has no common ground within which such a Subjecthood may cathect. Spivak goes on to note that "running them together, especially in order to say that beyond both is where oppressed subject speak, act and know *for themselves* leads to an essentialist, utopian politics" (71). Spivak's point is that it is disingenuous, or better yet, simply wrong, to conflate the two meanings of representation, and such conflation is part of an activity (if not agenda, which suggests intentionality that is not necessary) that allows the persistence of the incorrect idea that the oppressed can form a subject, can have their own desire, can speak for themselves, or that the intellectual can know the subject-position and speak from, or on behalf of, that subject position. The conflation of the two meanings hides the illusion of the belief that the intellectual may attempt to speak for, and blurs the line between the speaking for versus actually presenting the subject position of the oppressed class; that the oppressed class can speak for itself, or even has a self that could, under the right circumstances, speak. Spivak notes another manifestation of the representation dilemma:

> the small peasant proprietors cannot represent themselves; they must be represented. Their representative must appear simultaneously as master, as an authority over them, as

> unrestricted governmental power that protect them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above. (71)

The representor—the non-class member—is the sovereign subject of the class, and the class does not speak for itself.

Spivak closes the first section of her paper by reiterating the importance of these distinctions, and of recognizing and dealing with these distinctions if the integrity of the aims of the intellectual tradition are to be achieved—both the aim within the political and class struggle, and the aim within the theoretical tradition which is its voice and its critic. "My view is that radical practice should attend to this double session of representations rather than reintroduce the individual subject through totalizing concepts of power and desire" (74). Spivak summarizes her argument, that the error from within intellectual tradition is that "the oppressed can know and speak for themselves. This reintroduces the constitutive subject on at least two levels: the Subject of desire and power as an irreducible methodological presupposition; and the self-proximate, if not self-identical, subject of the oppressed" (74). Spivak also reintroduces the idea that

> [t]his S/subject [the intellectual], curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiter's side of the international division of labor. It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe. (75)

Spivak uses this point, in conjunction with the reminder that

> [h]owever reductionist an economic analysis might seem, the French intellectuals forget at their peril that this entire overdetermined enterprise was in the interest of a dynamic

> economic situation requiring that interests, motives (desires) and power (of knowledge) be ruthlessly dislocated, (75)

to move into her larger point about the specific method by which such disenfranchisements occur within the colonial dynamic.

The idea that the intellectual tradition does not dismantle the Subject/Object dynamic as effectively as it claims or wants, that the speakers within the Subject cannot know or speak for the occupants of the Object position, and why and how this is true, both because of the representation slippage and because of the disjunction between the lack of a class unity within the working class and that result that it has no class desire, has no class voice, and therefore no possibility of a Subject position, are building blocks for her ultimate point: that there cannot be a voice for the subaltern, the class occupant who is divorced at all levels from speech and from Subjecthood.

**Epistemic Violence**

It is this agenda for perpetuation of a certain Subject/Object dichotomy, this rallying of forces economic, political, military as well as intellectual, philosophical, legal and religious that forms the agent and location of Spivak's *epistemic violence*. Or, perhaps better stated, *epistemic violence* is the role that the intellectual, philosophical, legal and religious has in the perpetuation of power, working in conjunction with forces economic, political, and military. "The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (76). But it cannot be lost that, just as for Foucault, all the forces are working together in the creation of the discourse, and that the distinction between the forces, for the purposes of examining the discourse thus created and of which these forces are constituent members, is often salutary. Spivak goes on to further

recognize her definition of epistemic violence, in that "[i]t is well known that Foucault locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century" (76).

To show how epistemic violence works, and how epistemic violence is the *modus operandi* of the intellectual participation in the perpetuation of power, " . . . the codifying legal practice of imperialism" (82), especially as exhibited in class distinction and exploitation, the international division and exploitation of labor, and the Subject/Object dichotomy, Spivak looks to the colonization of India by the British: "To elaborate on this, let us consider . . . British codification of Hindu law" (76). Spivak gives several examples of how epistemic violence works—or, at least, examples of how it worked within the context of the colonization of India by the British. She gives, "a schematic summary of the epistemic violence of the codification of Hindu law," which she gives in the hope that it "clarifies the notion of epistemic violence" (76).

**The Interpreter**

Among the examples there is one most notable for its application to the discussion of *Beowulf*, what might be called the interpreter. In this case, however, the interpreter is not one of aligning the signifiers, but the interpreter between cultures, and between epistemes. For Spivak's case in the colonization and homogenization of India by the British empire, Spivak notes the British agenda to create a group of persons that come from the Object group but are indoctrinated into the Subject group consciousness:

> Consider the often-quoted programmatic line from Macauley's infamous 'Minute of Indian education' (1835): 'We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we

> may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population.' (77)

The British empire, subscribed and aided by the native brahmans, created a class of native speakers who were English-educated. This obviously created an intellectual class, similar to that described earlier in this paper, as subject. But this class, while still part of the subject class, was also a subject-surrogate, as it perpetuated the illusion that there was a communion between the subject and the object class. For the subject class, in this case the English, the intermediary gave the illusion that the subject class was getting some kind of real access to the object group. That is, the belief was that because they were native, they would still participate in native understanding of the native position and tradition. For the native class, the illusion was that the intermediary was representative of that native tradition, a proxy and portrait within the colonizer of the colonized's position. But this, as Spivak notes, was an illusion. The transformation, or infection, of the colonized by the colonizer, was complete:

> A version of history was gradually established in which the Brahmans were shown to have the same intentions as (thus providing legitimization for) the codifying British: 'In order to preserve Hindu society intact [the] successors [of the original Brahmans] had to reduce everything to writing and make them more and more rigid.' (77)

**The Subaltern**

Spivak, after her discussion of the methods of epistemic violence by the British in India, returns to the main thrust of her argument, remembering that "when I say that the Other as Subject is inaccessible to Foucault and Deleuze. I am thinking of the general nonspecialist, nonacademic population across the class spectrum, for whom the episteme operates its silent

programming function" (78). Spivak goes on to note the impossibility of the constituents of the Other to have access or voice in the wake of the investiture of colonized through epistemic violence.

> Let us now move to consider the margins (one can just as well say the silent, silenced center) of the circuit marked out by this epistemic violence, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat. According to Foucault and Deleuze, the oppressed, if given the chance, and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics, can speak and know their conditions. We must now confront the following question: on the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside and outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, can the subaltern speak? (78).

Spivak takes as part of her agenda "Antonio Gramsci's work on the 'subaltern classes'" (78). But she decries some of Gramsci's as not correctly accounting for the "legal and disciplinary definitions accompanying the imperialist project" (78).

In defining her subaltern—which, for Spivak, will be exemplified in the female constituent of the indigenous people of colonized India—she works by way of example. After recognizing that in India, there was both a colonizing elite, and an indigenous elite, both equally divorced from the subaltern, she notes that

> [a]gainst the indigenous elite we may set what Guha calls 'the politics of the people', both outside ('This was an autonomous domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter') and inside ('it continued to operate vigorously in spite of [colonialism], adjusting itself to the conditions prevailing under the

> Raj and in many respects developing entirely new strains in both form and content') the circuit of colonial production. (79)(quoting Guha, *Studies* 4)

Spivak denies this construction to the extent that, for her, it retains too great an "insistence of determinate vigor and full autonomy" (79), which Spivak claims the subaltern is entirely without. But from this example she can begin to outline the place where the subaltern locates. Distinguishing the suggested subaltern provided by Gramsci and others, Spivak insists "[f]or the true subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself" (80). Here, the earlier cautions about the meanings and verbal slippages of representations maintain their currency. In this construction, Spivak means that every subaltern subject that can be claimed to know and speak itself is always a subject that exists through a representation: either representation by the elite, by the intermediary class or interpreter, or by some local or regional authority. For Spivak, this will take on an extra dimension for the female subaltern of the colonized people: every purported speaking or writing (that is, expression of Subject), every purported desire or knowledge (that is every origin or constituency of Subject), every possibility for subjecthood is always through an intermediary, and is never a presentation of the subaltern as subject, but always a representation, a re-presentation, which in turn is an intermediation, and an intermediation by a representative that cannot cathect the subaltern Subject position.

**Resistance to Epistemic Violence and the Possibility of Subaltern Speech**

Foucault, Spivak remarks, argues in favor of resistance to power, instead of resistance to exploitation. Exploitation, according to Spivak's argument, is class-specific, and thus it can be resisted only by the working class that is exploited. Power, however, can be resisted by all classes, whoever may "acknowledge it as intolerable" (85). Thus agency, and resistance from a

subject position, are possible. This is contrasted with the earlier argument, that the subaltern cannot speak, and the first-world intellectual cannot represent; here, everyone can participate in the resistance against power, in their own selfhood, in their own subject or subject-of-oppression position.

Spivak then investigates the question of "how to keep the ethnocentric Subject from establishing itself by selectively defining an Other" (87). She goes on to note that "[f]or those of us who feel that the 'subject' has a history and that the task of the first-world subject of knowledge in our historical moment is to resist and critique 'recognition' of the Third World through 'assimilation', this specificity is crucial" (88). It is her belief, and her ultimate agenda, to propose a program wherein the space can be cleared for the subaltern to speak, for the subject/object dichotomy to be defused, and for the epistemic violence of the colonizer to be dissolved. As part of this agenda, Spivak analyzes the activity of other theoreticians, primarily Jacques Derrida, in their efforts to dismantle the western subject. While critiquing the shortcomings of the work, she nevertheless applauds the continuation of such work, especially deconstruction, as the best opportunity for such a dismantling to occur. As she states, "what I find useful is the sustained and developing work on the mechanics of the constitution of the Other . . . On this level, what remains useful in Foucault is the mechanics of disciplinarization and institutionalization, the constitution, as it were, of the colonizer" (90). Spivak's point is that the efforts against the subject/object dichotomy have been largely driven toward finding the subaltern subject, locating its/her/his voice, searching for the other in the same sense that the empiricists continue their fruitless search for lost origins, for absent centers. In her construction, the primary emphasis should be on dismantling the subject; quarantining that subject out of the

subject-object dichotomy, and training observers (intellectuals/theorists) who can be skilled at exiting the subject-object dichotomy in their observations.

From this point, Spivak makes her suggestion as to possibility of the subjecthood and speech of the subaltern:

> In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual *systematically* 'unlearns' female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized. (91)

Thus, Spivak's initial prescription stems from the root of the deconstructionist method: the Subject-occupying intellectual tradition must systematically undertake an agenda to dismantle itself. In conjunction with that dismantling, the tradition must also take an active role in the clearing of space by a process of continuous self-observation. This self-observation, more than just looking at or being vigilant about itself, must insist on a new method: a speaking to, instead of a listening to, or a speaking for, the previously erased subaltern. For the development of the project, Spivak had earlier noted an entry point:

> Pierre Macherey provides the following formula for the interpretation of ideology: 'What is important in a work is what it does not say. This is not the same as the careless notation "what it refuses to say", although that would in itself be interesting: a method might be built on it, with the task of *measuring silences*, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged. But rather this, what the work *cannot* say is important, because there the elaboration of the utterance is carried out, in a sort of journey to silence." (81-82, qtg. Macherey 87)

And Spivak, taking this earlier starting point, had already begun the process of reformulating her agenda thus:

> When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work *cannot* say becomes important. In the semioses of the social text, elaborations of insurgency stand in the place of 'the utterance' . . . the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamor of his or her own consciousness (or consciousness-effect, as operated by disciplinary training), so that the elaboration of the insurgency, packaged with an insurgent-consciousness, does not freeze into an object of investigation. (82)

For Spivak, the only method for the subjecthood of the subaltern is for the Subject observer/receiver of the subaltern's expression of subjecthood to suspend his or her own subjecthood, and in the same time suspend the temptation to observe the expression as an object. This method is a controlled suppression of the subject-object relationship, a controlled erasure of the colonizing dichotomy that will frame and recast any utterance into a new subject-object construction in which the subaltern's possibility of subjecthood is re-written back into the system of subaltern silence.

As a final thought, Spivak is consistently careful about the range that her particular approach may have. While on the one hand she cautions that "the Indian case cannot be taken as representative of all countries, nations, cultures and the like that may be invoked as the Other of Europe as Self" (76), she also asserts that "[t]he narrow epistemic violence of imperialism gives us an imperfect allegory of the general violence that is the possibility of an episteme" (82). In this second statement she is bridging between the epistemic violence of imperialism on the one hand to the persistent violence inherent in the objectification and silence of the woman on the

other. But the bridge is also the reminder of the open nature of the critique that she undertakes, and which may be undertaken wherever epistemic violence may be suspected, or located. In the footnote to this last statement, Spivak adds,

> [t]his violence in the general sense that is the possibility of an episteme is what Derrida calls 'writing' in the general sense. The relationship between writing in the general sense and writing in the narrow sense (marks upon a surface) cannot be cleanly articulated. The task of grammatology (deconstruction) is to provide a notation upon this shifting relationship. In a certain way, then, the critique of imperialism is deconstruction as such. (108, FN47)

Spivak here acknowledges that the task she is undertaking, though she is undertaking it in a way that is specific to a unique iteration of epistemic violence, that is, "the Indian case," is a task that is one of deconstruction in the general sense: the epistemic violence is a possibility endemic to every episteme; and as such, the program to dissipate the violence will rely upon the same tools and approaches at each iteration.

# CHAPTER III

# ANALYSIS OF *BEOWULF*

## 3.A. The Occurrence of Christianity

Analysis of the poem can be undertaken to identify all the points at which the specifically Christian references, or Christian episteme, occur within the poem. Contrary to the assertion by Klaeber, most notably among many others, the Christian element in the poem is not so embedded within the text that it cannot be identified separate to the remainder of the text. Further, such analysis reveals how little of the poem actually does contain such Christian references, and of those references, their interjected nature. Further, analysis reveals strong evidence that the Christian element was a late addition to a poem that was already in existence in a pre-Christian form.

Irving undertook very valuable work in this vein when he studied the frequency of Christian references throughout the work. In his "The Nature of Christianity in *Beowulf*" he counted the frequency of Christian references throughout the text. As he later summarized:

> I used a rough quantification of what are generally accepted as Christian references . . . to give a better sense of relative densities, I counted single words . . . one important finding was that lines 1-1887 of the poem contain one hundred forty-two such references while lines 1888-3182 contain only thirty-six. ("Elements"185)

Irving posits that one reason for this disparity might be that the character of Hrothgar makes more Christian references than any other character, and he does not appear in the final

third of the poem: “The most thoroughly Christian speaker of the poem, Hrothgar, is absent in part 2” (185). Irving also posits that because Grendel is associated with Cain, and thus is a direct Biblical reference, in a way that the dragon is not, it follows naturally that this section should be more overtly Christian.

Both the Hrothgar explanation and the Grendel/Cain explanation, however, seem to be arguing the method from the result. Though Hrothgar’s speeches are a main contributor of Christian references and the character doesn’t appear in the second part, there is still the Hygelac character taking the same king role, and there is the retainer Wiglaf who has multiple opportunities to work Christian references into his speeches—which he does, just not in the same volume as Hrothgar. So, too is the explanation about Grendel. While Grendel admittedly doesn’t appear in the second half, a dragon does, and there is no inhibition against dressing the dragon with as much Christian representation as Grendel is. Why is the dragon not referred to in more strongly Biblical terms? Why do Hygelac and Wiglaf not give the speeches steeped in Christian terms with the same vigor as Hrothgar? In each case Irving’s explanations only beg the question: Why the disparity?

Irving concedes that it is possible that the poem *Beowulf*, as we have it now, is cobbled together from various sources, and thus one section comes from a source that was more thoroughly Christianized than the source for subsequent sections. While this explanation is certainly possible, direct evidence for the multiple source theory is non-existent, and the circumstantial evidence is nothing more than the theory itself, and conjecture about a tradition of such compositions. Irving draws in other suppositions as to the reason for this change in density, but ultimately concedes that “why this uneven distribution of Christian references remained in the final composite version is unclear” (186).

Irving never seems to consider what appears to be obvious, and this oversight may be because he assumes, as remains the strong assumption among many scholars, that *Beowulf* was composed by a single author. This theory concedes that it may have been a single author that was working from multiple references, or one that was working from one or more oral sources—but one author none the less. However, as Andy Orchard points out early in his work *A Critical Companion to* Beowulf, there are "two scribal hands" (8). Citing the work of David Dumville in his "*Beowulf* Come Lately," among others, Orchard highlights the evidence supporting the conclusion that there were two scribes who penned the text as it exists today.

What is especially compelling is the point at which the scribes change. The first writer, scribe A, composes up to the mid-line, or caesura, of line 1939; the second author, scribe B, beings at the half-line and completes the poem. If Irving's analysis worked from the assumption of a division point between 1887 and 1888, this breaking point is, within the context of this analysis, the identical breaking point of the change in scribal hands. The two break points are only 41 lines apart, only slightly greater than one percent of the text apart from each other. Moreover, as analyzed below, no Christian references happen near to these two break points, so for analytical purposes the two points are identical.

The break point that Irving has selected is a break point of the narrative, a natural point for analysis: the division line between what Irving refers to as the "Danish" and the "Geatish" part of the narrative. ("Elements" 185). The same analysis would yield the conclusion that the actual break point in the frequency of Christian reference is at a more compelling point, but one that has nothing to do with *logos* of the poem itself. The conclusion, therefore, seems obvious: the change in Christian episteme happens when one scribe leaves off, and the second scribe begins. And the resulting conclusion from that seems equally obvious: the scribes were doing

their own re-writing or emendation of the text as they were transcribing the poem from some other source, with the first scribe being more diligent—or more enthusiastic—than the second.

For the purposes of this thesis I undertook a similar analysis of the frequency of occurrence of Christian references, or the appearance of an element of the Christian discursive formation, in *Beowulf*. In conducting this analysis, there are several issues that must be addressed before such an analysis is possible. The issues also form both the caveats to be understood in assessing the results of the analysis, and the limitations of what the analysis will and will not show.

Irving undertook his analysis by counting individual words that come from the Christian episteme. While this is an excellent method for producing a result that is quick, relatively time-effective, and produces a meaningful result, it is not the best method to achieve the most accurate results. The primary gap in Irving's analysis is the degree to which each individual word could be argued as being either Christian or not-Christian. For example, is the word "lord"—as it often appears in the text, *dryhten, Frean*—a Christian reference, or not? Certainly a reference to Cain, as in *Caines cynne* ("Cain's kin"; my trans.) in line 107, cannot be argued as anything but a reference to the Christian episteme. But what of the *gigantas*, the "giants," (my trans.) who in line 113 are fighting against God in a clearly Christian context? Should every reference to giants throughout the manuscript be considered a reference to Christianity—even if there is clearly no Christian reference involved, as for example when the sword that Beowulf finds when battling Grendel's mother is *giganta geweorc*, the "work/creation of giants," (my trans.) in line 1562? These references are subject to varying levels of debate.

Of the problematic words, a few deserve special consideration. The word *sawol*, also its related spellings *sawl, sawel, sawul*¸ can be translated as soul, life, or spirit. The word can be

traced back into multiple roots in various languages of the peoples surrounding the north sea, but there is no reference by which it can definitively established that the word is or is not strictly Christian. Does the word *sawol* have an existence in the pre-Christian lexicon? Or does the arrival of Christianity also bring the *sawol* into existence? Because the word has no other origin from another language (for example, Latin, Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew), it appears that the word is of proto-Germanic/Old Englsh origin. This root then, would lead to the conclusion that the appearance of the word *sawol* should not be counted as Christian. But this does not conclude the debate, because of the related issue of whether, by the time of the writing of *Beowulf*, the word had not already taken on an entirely Christian meaning, regardless of origin. If the word had lost any other meaning by the time of the writing, or the transcription/scribing, of the manuscript, a case may be made that the appearance of *sawol* should be counted as an appearance of the Christian episteme within the poem.

Looking at the word *sawol* reveals the depth of the problem in assessing the appearances of Christianity with in the poem: the debate on the meaning of *Beowulf* goes all the way down to the words themselves, many of which cannot be said with certainty to have or not have a Christian meaning apparent on its face. The investigation of how some English words developed their meanings through Old English and by adoption from other languages is a field of study unto itself, and much work has been done in this field. The slow process of insertion, adoption, and absorption of words from Latin, French, and other foreign languages has been documented, including studies specific to how Christian words with specifically Christian meanings entered into English. Among such studies are H.S. MacGillivray's *The Influence of Christianity on the Vocabulary of Old English*, the very first to consider such roots in Old English. MacGillivray's study, more of a documentation than an argument, includes exhaustive examples of how words

specific to Christianity make their first appearances throughout the earliest stages of Old English. More than a century later, John G. Newman undertook a more specific look at how ten Christian concepts evolved from using words native to Old English into using words adopted from Latin. His conclusion is that the

> evidence . . . indicates that these native nouns were functioning to signify Christian identities in Late Old English and Early Middle English, yet it also shows that they were being displaced or superseded by Latin or French 'equivalents' in Early or Late Middle English. (166)

Both of these studies, and others like them, underscore the problem: constituents of the Christian episteme could not simply appear within the pre-Christian episteme, either lexically or conceptually. Either a word native to the pre-Christian episteme had to be borrowed by the Christian, or alternately, a Christian word—most often Latin—would be used by a Christian speaker, but which word would have to be separately defined. This process of assimilation of words from one language/episteme and into another is part of the epistemic violence that is undertaken. More specifically to the immediate concern, it also underscores that for this analysis, it is impossible to say, with certainty, whether a particular word should be considered an appearance of Christianity or not.

In the counting of the appearances of Christianity for the purposes of this inspection, I have not counted the appearance of the word *sawol* or its variations as, by itself, the appearance of Christianity. The appearance of the word in line 2820, where, "him of h[r]æðre gewat / sawol secean soðfæstra dom" 'from his breast flew his soul to seek the judgment of the righteous' (Liuzza 223) exemplifies the reason why: while the image clearly aligns with a Christian epistemic construction, it also could be a pre-Christian construction. The notion that the

spirit/life-force/soul/human essence, through the burning on the pyre, left the body and proceeds into the afterworld is an image and concept equally at home in the pre-Christian as the Christian episteme. Alternately, when the word has a specifically Christian context, the context is counted as an appearance of the Christian episteme regardless, as will be examined below.

The word *syn,* "sin," and its many appearances as a prefix, as for example in *synscaða*, "sinful hurter," (my trans.) exhibits the same problem. The word "sin" as we know it today originates from the Old English *synn,* and tracing its etymology further than that is uncertain at best. Another problematic word is *heofenum*, "heaven," and related words like *roderum*. While the reference can clearly be a Christian one, as it appears in the text it usually is not necessarily Christian—each appearance of the word could mean a specific reference to a Christian afterworld, but it could as easily be a reference to the physical location of the sky and the fact that the sky is above everything. The first appearance of such a word, *wolcnum,* "cloud," in line 8, exemplifies the point. Here there is no reason to suspect that the word is being used with any Christian sense except a supposed residual. And it is this residual sense that we must resist, as outlined elsewhere in this thesis, because it is this sense that carries the risk of being put into the text by the reader, as opposed to being found by the reader from within the text. Since the referents aren't necessarily Christian, for my analysis they were not counted. So is the analysis of *feond*. While the word can be translated as "fiend" or "devil," giving it a more clearly Christian coloring, the word can also mean "adversary," "foe," or "enemy." And the same is also true of *helle*, "hell," another word that now carries a specific Christian valence, but the etymology of which shows it to be Old English or Germanic in origin. In each case, unless the context clearly calls for it, the word by itself is not counted as necessarily Christian.

In addition to the problem of which words show the presence of Christianity within the poem is another problem with Irving's system and with how to quantify the presence of Christianity in the poem: how much value the analyst is going to assign to each occurrence of Christianity, or, put alternatively, what event counts as one occurrence and what counts for more than one. For example, should the word "Liffrea" 'the Lord of Life' (16; Liuzza 55), count as one because it is one reference, one because it is one word in Old English, or four because it is four words in modern English? Counting the words in Old English seems the better practice if we are counting words, but it still doesn't answer the question of how we are going to count references, or how we are going to count the amount of Christianity, by volume, that appears in the text, and where it appears. But if we aren't counting words, then what are we counting? Thoughts? And if we are counting thoughts, then how are we going to count them, except by the words in which those thoughts are represented?

My solution to these problems is to count lines in which a Christian reference occurs, or in which the Christian episteme is incontrovertibly present. This has the advantage of lessening the impact of word count problems, as whether the reference is one word or more within a line, it still counts as one. It is balanced by the fact that if the reference occurs across more than one line, the count is increased by the number of lines in which the reference appears.

Another problem in how to count the Christian references, and their frequency, is that any one Christian reference is not always directly about the words used, but their meaning in context. Words that by themselves have no Christian meaning are clearly Christian referents in the sentence they construct. Take, for example, the following translated passage:

" . . . He who knew (90)

how to tell the ancient tale of the origin of men

said that the Almighty created the earth,
a bright and shining plain, by seas embraced,
and set, triumphantly, the sun and moon
to light their beams for those who dwell on land,
adorned the distant corners of the world
with leaves and branches, and made life also,
all manner of creatures that live and move.
Thus this lordly people lived in joy,
blessedly, until one began
to work his foul crimes, a fiend from hell.
This grim spirit was called Grendel,
mighty stalker of the marches, who held
the moors and fens; this miserable man
lived for a time in the land of giants,
after the Creator had condemned him
among Cain's race—when he killed Abel
the eternal Lord avenged that death.
No joy in that feud, the Maker forced him
far from mankind for his foul crime.
From thence arose all misbegotten things,
trolls and elves and the living dead,
and also the giants who strove against God
for a long while—He gave them their reward for that. (Liuzza 61)

There is perhaps little problem with the Old English "Ælmihtiga" 'Almighty' (92) as clearly a Christian presence. There is no record that this word or its meaning should be otherwise. So, too, with the phrase "Caines cynne" 'Cain's race', as a clear and uncontestable Christian reference. But what to do about lines 93 through 98? There is no single word here that must be translated as an exclusively Christian word or direct Christian reference, yet this is clearly a reference to a Christian discursive formation based on the Christian creation myth. So that although there is no specific Christian word in lines 93-98, these lines should still be counted as Christian reference, or as the presence of the Christian episteme within the poem. Contrast this with lines 102-105, where there is nothing present that is necessarily Christian, nor necessarily pre-Christian, unless we choose to interpret "fifelcynnes" 'giant's people, race of sea-monsters' (104) in a non-neutral, specifically Christian way. It is certainly possible to count this as being part of a passage, looking at lines 90 through 114, that is a Christian passage, and these few lines in the middle are no less part of that larger passage. But it seems that counting these lines as Christian has more of an effect of skewing the result than of trying to accurately assess the presence of Christian episteme within the work. It seems that these lines should not be counted as Christian. Scholarly—if not scientific—prudence dictates that unless the passage is clearly more Christian than not, the object of the inquiry is not achieved unless the passage is counted as not Christian.

Taking this approach, and using the passage above as an example of the method, I counted each of lines 92-101 as being Christian-positive, that is, having the presence of the Christian within the passage. I counted 102 – 105 as having no Christian presence. Lines 106-110 each received a Christian-positive count. Lines 113 and 114 will clearly receive a positive count, but lines 111 and 112 are more problematic. Line 111 clearly refers to a Christian-based

creation episteme, and line 112 continues the same thought, so that although line 112 refers to what appears to be clearly not dogmatic Christian items, specifically, trolls and elves, it is also clear that this is part of the re-writing of the values of the non-Christian elements. This line, in fact, is by itself an example of epistemic violence, of the re-ordering of the pre-Christian episteme in order to satisfy the organizational and codifying principles of the invading episteme. Thus, both 111 and 112 must be counted as Christian-positive as well.

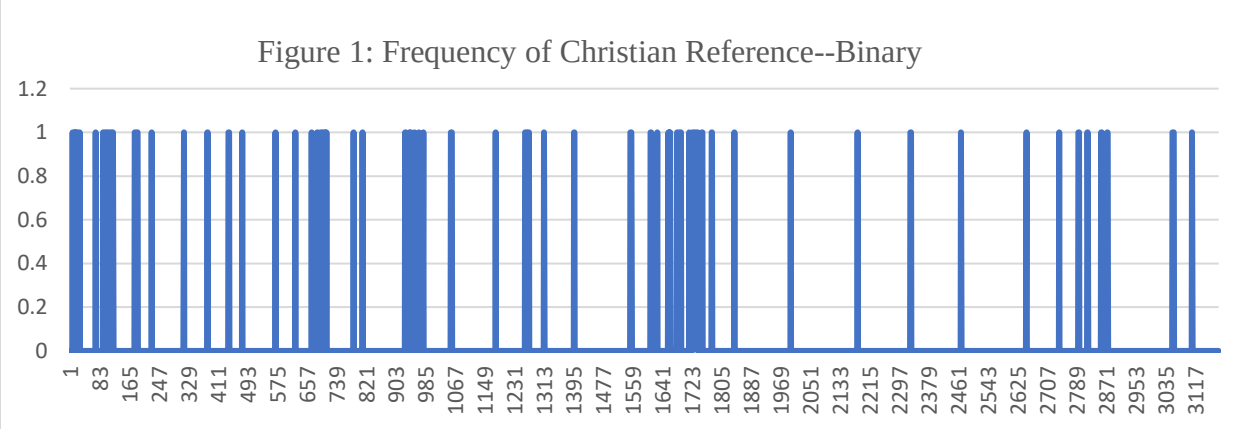
Another example of quantification complication appears in lines 2794-2796. Here, Beowulf speaks after having defeated the dragon, saying: "Ic ðara frætwa Frean ealles ðanc, / wuldurcyninge wordum secge, / ecum Dryhtne" 'I offer thanks / with these words to the eternal Lord / King of Glory' (Liuzza 223). But this translation leaves out something for the purposes of this analysis, because in line 2794 the second half of the line is "Frean eallas ðanc," in line 2795 the first half of the line is "wuldurcyninge," and 2796 the first half of the line is "ecum Dryhtne," so that a closer word-for-word translation (ignoring grammar) might read, 'the Ruler of all I thank, Glory-King, words speech, eternal Lord' (my trans.). Reading the Old English original, however, highlights the problem: words apparently referring to the Christian God appear in each of three lines in succession. Should this be counted as one appearance of the Christian episteme, or as three? Following the rule I set out for the examination, the integrity of the inquiry requires that it be counted as one appearance per line for three lines, thus a count of three. That is how I have counted it for this analysis, but here again, there is the possibility of the results being disproportionately skewed.

Then, lastly, are the indeterminate pronouncements. For example, in lines 2819 to 2820, the text reads "him of h[r]æðre gewat / sawol secean soðfæstra dom" 'from his breast flew his soul to seek the judgment of the righteous' (Liuzza 223). While this passage is one of the points

of greatest contention in its interpretation, most scholars give it interpretation that is not very different from Liuzza's, above. The commentary in *Klaeber's Beowulf* weigh in favor of this being at least not strictly pagan, if not purely Christian. In this case, I have counted these two lines as evidence of Christian presence in the poem, although this is only one of a few possible instances where it can be argued either way—and in fact is, as analyzed later in the section on the rifts within the poem, of which this line is a premier example.

### 3.A.1. The Quantification of Christianity Within the Poem

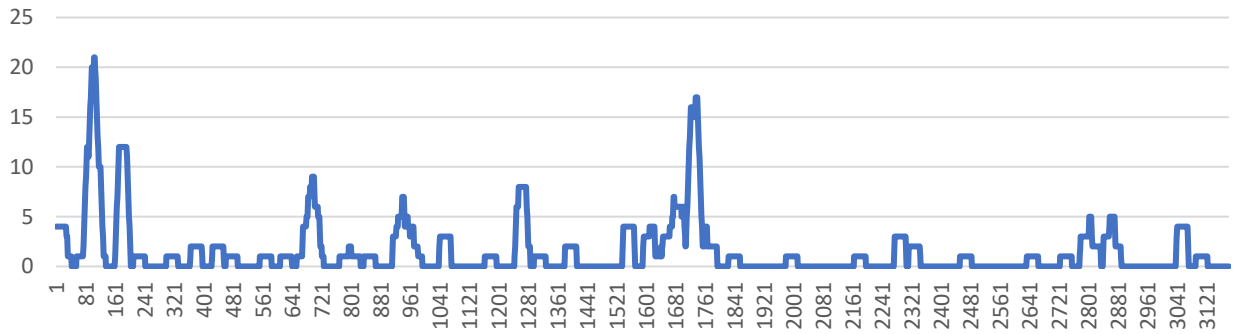
Counting each line as a yes/no (either there is or there is not a Christian reference) yields another problem. Any graphic representation of this analysis will yield an unhelpful result. The graphic representation will be only a very long x-axis with data points of either one or zero. This yields a chart of binary results:




The density of those data points does reveal some information about the frequency of the appearance of Christianity within the manuscript. But the representation doesn't yield as much information as it does when the representation of information is averaged. That is, instead of reporting each individual line as a separate data point, the information is gathered into a representation of frequency of occurrence of Christian references across a number of lines. As the number of lines for representation increases, the representation of the data changes.

For the first example, I created a chart that shows the number of lines with a Christian reference per thirty-two lines of the poem. I chose the number thirty-two since there are 3,182 lines in the poem, thirty-two lines is one percent of the poem. Thus, the representation below is the frequency of occurrence of Christian references per every one percent of the poem.

Figure 2: Frequency of Christian Reference Across 32 Lines--High Threshold

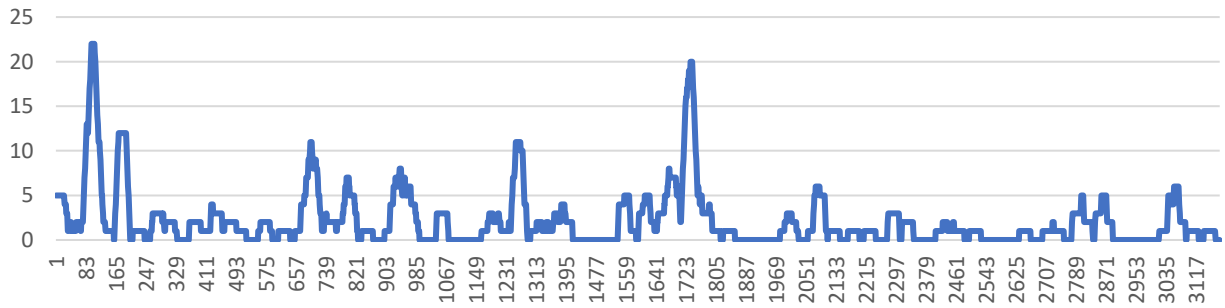



Further, it should be noted that this is calculated on a continuous basis. For example, while the first line of the poem has no Christian references, its value for Christian references per 32 lines is 4, since there are four lines referencing Christianity within thirty-two lines of line one.

There is no way of quantifying the occurrence without falling into one pitfall or another. However, the analysis, taken as a broad view of the poem as a whole, still shows a surprising result. There is a disparity between the frequency of Christian reference in the first scribe's section and the frequency in the second scribe's section. While it isn't conclusive evidence, the graph above, when coupled with the understanding that there were two scribes and the knowledge that scribes of the era in which the manuscript was penned frequently emended texts, presents a strong inference: the manuscript we read today had Christianity added to it at the time the two scribes penned it, from an earlier version which had significantly less Christian reference—or even no meaningful Christian presence at all.

However, the argument could be that the results are skewed by the conditions that were set out at the beginning, that only the necessarily and incontrovertibly Christian references were counted. The argument would be that if all the possible Christian references were counted, the result would not be the same. In order to investigate this possibility, a second analysis was done. In this analysis, all the variations of soul, lord, sin, evil, heaven, fiend, ghost, and hell were counted. The first analysis is referred to in this thesis as the "high threshold" analysis, that is, that the threshold for considering a word or phrase as being indicative or exemplary of the presence of the Christian episteme is high. The table that includes all the possible evidences of the Christian episteme, and therefore the threshold for registering a positive presence of such episteme is low, is referred to as the "low threshold." The results are shown in the table below:

Figure 3: Frequency of Christian Reference Across 32 Lines--Low Threshold




We can see that the result does not significantly change. Regardless of the threshold at which the presence of Christian episteme is counted (high, at which only the incontrovertibly Christian is counted, or low, where every possible Christian reference is counted) the result is the same: first, that the first three-fifths of the poem has significantly higher Christian references than the final two fifths, and second, that the division point for the distinction aligns exactly with the point where one scribe stops and another scribe begins. Which leads, in turn, to the other strong supposition: that the text was being re-written by the scribes who were transcribing it at the time the extant poem was made.

**Observations on the Appearance of Christianity: The Peaks**

Reviewing the results in graphic form reveals two elements of the appearance of Christianity within the poem: there are a few peaks of high concentration of Christian element, and there are numerous points of low occurrence in isolated, but comparatively more frequent, occurrence.

Referring to the high threshold table above, we can see that in scribe one's section there are seven peaks where the frequency of Christian reference exceeds 5 references per thirty-two lines. The first peak of Christian reference comes in lines 91 -114, which was analyzed above. The first half of this section relates a "swutol sang scopes" 'clear song of the scop' (Liuzza 61). The narrator then paraphrases the song, and that paraphrase is a relation of the Christian creation myth. In the second half of the section, Grendel makes his first appearance and his existence is related to Christian ethos through the Cain/Abel story. Thus, this first section is entirely the narrator speaking.

The second peak comes where the narrator details the plight of the people of Heorot, how they turned to pagan idols and "Metod hie ne cuþon," 'did not know the Maker' (180; Liuzza 65). Again, this is the narrator's words spoken directly to the audience. The third peak comes in lines 685 – 711, which is the end of Beowulf's speech immediately before laying down to wait for Grendel, and the narrator's ensuing description of the arrival of Grendel at Heorot. The fourth peak is in lines 929 – 979, which is Hrothgar's speech after Grendel is defeated and Beowulf's responding speech. The fifth peak is lines 1261-1274, which is the narrator's description of Grendel, a recapitulation of his relation to Cain in the context of the introduction of Grendel's mother into the narrative.

Peak six occupies lines 1658 -1693, and it begins in the speech of Beowulf to Hrothgar after defeating Grendel's mother and continues into the narrator's description of the handle of the giant's sword, wherein is depicted the Biblical flood. Peak seven, occupying lines 1716 - 1752 is the closely related, in space and narrative time, response speech of Hrothgar, wherein Hrothgar relates the story of Heremod.

Each of the seven peaks of Christian reference occurs at a point where either the narrator is speaking directly to the audience, or the character of Beowulf or Hrothgar is making a speech. Three of the seven sections are directly related to Grendel and that creature's relation to Cain, and two of the seven are relations of the creation myth. Notice that all seven are descriptions or reactions. All seven are interjected into the story, and none of the seven relate to a factor that motivated a character to take an action, but rather, all take the form either of description or advice.

In the second scribe's section, there are only two points where the peaks reach a frequency of five references per 32 lines. The first of these two comes from the close proximity of lines 2794-2796, where Beowulf gives his dying speech, and lines 2819-2820, which is the narrator's relation of the moment of Beowulf's death and the soul leaving his body. Note that in the first portion of this, Beowulf's thanks to God occurs over the course of three lines, thus increasing one speech event—thanking God—to a disproportionately high frequency. The second point at which the frequency exceeds five occurs in lines 2857-2875, where once again two separate events occur in close relation, thus pushing the frequency count disproportionately high. The first of these two events is 2857-2859, where the narrator talks about the power of God over the life of a man. The second reference is in lines 2874-2875, where a similar idea, the power of God to direct the course of a man's life and actions, has the word "God" in the first line

and “Waldend” ‘Ruler’ in the second. From this we can see how the references, once again, only occur in a speech from a character or the narrator addressing the audience directly. We can also see how the frequency peaks in the second half only rise greater than five because of the skewing of the results by the occurrence of a single Christian reference that, by virtue of the organization of the narrative, occurs over more than one line.

**Observations on the Appearance of Christianity: The Repetitions**

Occurring across the narrative in the shadow of the many peaks of Christian-reference frequency are the isolated but multiple points. Of these many points, a great many are characters interjecting thanks to God, or crediting God with success, guidance, or care. Each is an interjected comment that bears, at best, only tangential reference to the *logos* of the narrative.

It is also interesting to note a few disparities in word choice between the first scribe’s section and the second. In the first scribe’s section, the phrase *Gode þancode* is used four times, and is always used when thanks is given to God with only one exception, where the text has “þæs sig Metod þanc” ‘thanks be to the Creator’ (1778; Liuzza 161). By contrast, the phrase *Gode þancode* is never used in the second scribe’s section. In that second section there are only two instances of thanking God: one use of the phrase “Gode ic þanc secge” ‘I say thanks to God’ (1997; Liuzza 173) and one use of “Frean ealles ðanc” (2794) where *Frean* is Ruler, Lord or God (my trans.).

There are many other words that show such disparities. The term *Alwalda*, “Almighty” is used three times by the first scribe and never by the second. The word *Drihtne*, “Lord” or “God,” or one its variations, is used twelve times throughout the first part of the poem, only two times in the second part—though, also notably, the word(s) *mandryhtnes*/*mondryhten*, “man-lord” or “lord of men,” are both used in the second section, one time each, to refer not to God,

but to Beowulf. The word *Metod*, "Maker/Creator," is used eleven times in the first part of the poem, only one time in the second part. Contrast these word choices with the usage of the word *Waldend*, "Ruler," and its variations, which word appears only three times in the first part of the poem, but four times in the second part; and keep in mind that the number of references to the Christian God are significantly fewer in the second part than in the first, making the use of *Waldend* not roughly equal, but rather, disproportionately higher on average in the second part than in the first. These differences in word choice, while once again not conclusive, tend to suggest that the two scribes who penned the manuscript were actively changing the text, introducing the Christian element into the text as they wrote.

### 3.A.2. Narrative Disparity between First and Second Part

Further supporting this idea that the two scribes made emendations—or even wholesale re-writings—of the text is further attested by a notable disparity in the narrative itself. This disparity appears in lines 2085 through 2092, where the poem in second scribe's section describes events of the Grendel fight. In this second section, among the differing details are that Grendel had a "glof" 'glove' (2085; my trans.), and that the man killed is named: Hondscio (2076). There has been much scholarly conjecture on what that glove might be: some scholars translated *glof* as pouch or bag, following its use in the poem; others argue that the *glof* is a glove, and its use emphasizes the great stature of a troll and its monstrousness. Regardless, the problem is that the events that are recounted in the second scribe's section are different than the events of the first scribe's earlier narrative. This disparity is notable, but mundane so long as one author is assumed: it is not more than a difference of giving different details at different times. But once the idea of a single author is questioned, and once the idea of two scribes changing the text is allowed, this disparity becomes further evidence of that re-writing.

### 3.B. Epistemic Violence in *Beowulf*

Initially, there appears to be a hurdle that must be cleared in applying Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to *Beowulf*: Spivak is primarily concerned with two things that are entirely foreign to *Beowulf*. First, her thesis treats the speaking position—the possibility of a speaking position, the possibility of Subjecthood—of contemporary Indian woman specifically, third-world women in the larger sense, and subaltern persons in the broadest sense. The second problem is that the core of her analysis emphasizes Marxist theory and its indictment of capitalism and consumerism, analyses that are rooted in the events that occur post-17th century. The problem is well exemplified in the following passage:

> Clearly, if you are poor, black, and female you get it in three ways . . . Confronted by the ferocious standardizing benevolence of most US and Western European human-scientific radicalism (recognition by assimilation), the progressive though heterogenous withdrawal of consumerism in the comprador periphery, and the exclusion of the margins of even the center periphery articulation (the 'true and differential subaltern'), the analogue of class-consciousness rather than race-consciousness in this area seems historically, disciplinarily, and practically forbidden . . . (Spivak 90)

Yet her examination, despite its Marxist, classist, and capitalist terms and its third-world, gendered object (or, perhaps, Object), still exemplifies the type of examination that must be done of the authorship of *Beowulf*. This is because while her examination is Marxist, it is also post-structuralist and post-colonialist, and it is these two codes of examination that will be brought to bear on the *Beowulf* text. This thesis will show how the "ferocious standardizing benevolence" of Western thought as it worked in Indian colonization is the same force at work in the Christianization of northern European in the second half of the first millennium. And so, staying

true to the root from which Spivak's deconstruction springs, this thesis will employ the same instruments in its analysis of *Beowulf* that she used in her analysis.

### 3.B.1. Foucault, Epistemic Violence, and *Beowulf*

Before considering Spivak, it is beneficial to approach *Beowulf* through the analysis of Foucault. By reference to Foucault, the Christianization of the North Sea can be recognized as happening through a pattern of epistemic violences. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault laid out his method in as organized a fashion as he believed was possible and appropriate, but it is in his other books that he gives examples of how the archaeology works in practice. In *Discipline and Punish* (*Discipline*), Foucault undertakes such an archaeological practice, focused upon the history of punishment, especially the change in western Europe's attitudes, or *discourse* and *episteme,* toward punishment that occurred in the early 18th-century. His aim is not to document the series of events and persons who moved, one following the next, through an evolution of a field of knowledge, but through his archaeology, to show how the changes wrought were themselves part of the effects of changes happening in related and unrelated disciplines. Further, Foucault shows how all of punishment is not the singular event of crime-judgment-punishment, but was a multi-layered process, a discourse, in which all levels of society participate, perpetuate, and underwrite.

The importance of the erasure of the pre-Christian episteme by the evangelical Christians has a ready analogue to crime in the 18th century. For Foucault, "the crime and the punishment were related and bound up in the form of atrocity" (*Discipline* 57), which atrocity "was also the violence of the challenge flung at the sovereign; it was that which would move him to make a reply whose function was to go further than this atrocity, to master it, to overcome it by an excess that annulled it" (*Discipline* 56). We can see how this same discursive practice, this same

epistemic violence, was at work during the Christianization of the North Sea. For the texts, the oral traditions, the cultural objects of the pre-Christian culture were themselves atrocities, epistemic crimes against the Christian episteme, which had to be more than simply renounced or forgotten, but had to be absorbed, re-written, re-coded; the atrocity upon the body of the episteme had to be effected in greater value than that epistemic violation of which the pre-Christian episteme was guilty. Foucault notes of the atrocity of a punishment in comparison to its crime that "[t]he atrocity that haunted the public execution played, therefore, a double role: it was the principle of the communication between the crime and the punishment, it was also the exacerbation of the punishment in relation to the crime" (*Discipline* 56). So, too, was the action of the clergy, the kings, the counts, nobles and the other individual inhabitors of power: they must execute actions that at once communicated the epistemic violation, and by the extremity of its effacement, exacerbated the violation.

But the point Foucault is making lies at a deeper level. For Foucault goes on to state that "[t]he fact that the crime and the punishment were related and bound up in the form of atrocity was not the result of some obscurely accepted law of retaliation. It was the effect, in the rites of punishment, of a certain mechanism of power" (*Discipline* 57). Foucault goes on to list several separate manifestations and relations of this power to the atrocity of punishment in relation to the crime, but making the point all the while that punishment, and punishment's activity upon the body of the accused or condemned, is itself a manifestation not of a theory or a belief, but an expression of power, the power of the sovereign, and how that power of a sovereign was the extension of the power of a particular construction of society and its episteme. And here, too, we see a similar action in the creation of the *Beowulf* manuscript: it is the creation of object in the form of the colonizer (written) taking the face of the colonized (in Old English) in the words of

the colonized (a pre-Christian story) over which the colonizer exerts power: by fixing the tale in written form, the colonizer exerts a final control over the pre-Christian episteme.

The change that Foucault is examining which occurs in the 18th and 19th and into the 20th centuries, is occurring at a completely different level than that cast by the historians of Foucault's "history of ideas." It is not a change from a less to a more humane way of exacting justice; it is a change at the level of episteme. Where once what was considered normal and correct, what was once the only obvious and rational conclusion, changed to another equally obvious and rational conclusion, but which conclusion is fundamentally different. Where once the only acceptable, the only right thing to do with a condemned was torture and death. This, for the prior episteme, was the only rational course of action. But the episteme changed, so that the only rational, acceptable, right thing to do was incarcerate and reform. But Foucault asserts that the change occurred not because the people who had the ability to choose became more enlightened or more humane, but because the very structure of power within society, what that power wanted, how that power wanted its own aims and goals achieved, had changed. Where once the atrocity of the crime was effaced, and the guilt of the punished absolved by the atrocity of the punishment, "the exacerbation of the punishment in relation to the crime" (*Discipline* 56), the succeeding episteme exhibited itself quite differently: "The punitive practice of the nineteenth century was to strive to put as much distance as possible between the 'serene' search for truth and the violence that cannot be entirely effaced from punishment" (*Discipline* 56).

This whole-cloth change in episteme happened from within, so to speak, western Europe in the 17th to 18th centuries in Foucault's analysis. For Spivak, and for the analysis of how the epistemic change occurred in Europe in the first millennia AD as reflected in *Beowulf*, the epistemic change does not occur from within, but by an invasion from outside the native

episteme which changes that native episteme by force. It is important to also note that hand-in-glove with the invading force's episteme is the motive force of power. It is this invasion of episteme, operating with the force of power, that is *epistemic violence.* For Spivak, the power was colonialism, consumerism, and property, backed with physical injury and death by military force. For *Beowulf*, and for the Northern European, the invasion was Christianity and the power was the fate of the immortal soul and the afterlife, backed with injury and death through disease, famine, plague, and the random violence native to the dark ages and coded by Christianity as 'evil.'

### 3.B.2. Spivak's Epistemic Violence

> The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogenous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other . . . It is well known that Foucault locates epistemic violence, a complete overhaul of the episteme, in the redefinition of society at the end of the European eighteenth century. (Spivak 76)

The clear meaning of this phrase is her location of the notion of epistemic violence as she developed it from and located in within the work of Michel Foucault. However, there is another statement embedded within her work, and implicit to the statement above: the epistemic violence conjunctive with colonialism may be the same epistemic violence that Foucault examines in the overhauls of the early eighteenth century. That is, not two epistemic violences of two epistemes upon two other epistemes—one of science over pre-science in England and France, the other of imperialism and colonialism over pre-colonial people—but one epistemic violence, of one episteme, codification/ science/ knowledge/power, exerted over the whole of that which was unknown to the western Subject, that is, to the mind, crime, medicine, taxonomy, wealth,

possessions, and geography the portions of the world *terra incognita*. It should be not be lost that the re-discovery of *Beowulf* itself dates from this same period, so that the text, its recovery and its regard in the view of the new Subject, is part of that epistemic violence this new Subject exerts upon the world. The current of this regard was nationalism; it was a search for lost origins. The lost origin could be regarded as a racial original that the early 19th century European wanted to thrust in the face of the Mediterranean Greco-Roman paradigm that had ruled scholarship and ecclesiastical thought alike. But even this search for a lost origin of a European, national, or racial original was itself part of the greater epistemic violence of the attempt to locate essences, to scientificize knowledge. So we add to the list of territories unknown that the episteme of codification/science/knowledge/power was to conquer as the unknown of identity itself.

And yet the apparent dissimilarity of the modern capitalist enterprise—or even the Eighteenth Century European Imperialist enterprise—to the activities of the institutions of the dark ages, dissolves under closer scrutiny. It is important here to note the framework of Spivak's indictment of the colonial epistemic violence:

> However reductionistic an economic analysis might seem, the French intellectuals forget at their peril that this entire overdetermined enterprise was in the interest of a dynamic economic situation requiring that interests, motives (desires) and power (of knowledge) be ruthlessly dislocated. (Spivak 75)

It is into this same breach that two scribes, at around the turn of the 11th century, construct *Beowulf* from a previous text. The dynamic situation is not economics/power, but religion/power. However, while the cloth may be different, the cut is the same. With the same overwhelming power and authority that the economic and scientific drives rewrote episteme

beginning the late 17th century, so the drive toward the salvation of the eternal soul rewrote both motive/desire and power/knowledge. The Christian evangelical enterprise was no less ambitious than the European Imperialism of the latter second millennium. Christianity worked the routes—literally—of the Roman Empire that had paved Europe and North Africa. More importantly, the Christian evangelical agenda was even more directly identity-oriented than later European Imperialism or its capitalist, consumerist heir. Where Imperialism wanted more colonies and more property and wealth flowing to the center (the colonizer), and where capitalism wants to monetize both space (property) and time (labor), and create and exert control over wealth, neither wants to re-write a native culture; the re-writing of native culture is at best secondary to its agenda. Contrast imperialism and capitalism with dark age Christianity: it was the direct itinerary of Christianity to spread its own episteme. Where Imperialism and Capitalism want to control property and production, and only incidentally, or as an afterthought, wish to change the beliefs of the colonized, Christianity has as its sole and primary object the epistemic violence of evangelism. Spivak herself states this similarity, though recruiting the identity to another end: "the gravity of imperialism was that it was ideologically cathected as 'social mission'" (97). What better phrase than "social mission" could be created to describe the object of the Christian evangelist to the infidel?

And just as "[i]t is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed Subject of the Other of Europe" (75), so to the same extent it has been impossible for scholars to imagine the Power and Desire of the native, pre-interpolation, pre-Christian episteme of the text. And to the same extent that the West must vacate space in order to *absent itself*—not to *allow,* for that implies permission, which re-establishes the Subject/Object silencing—from a place where the subaltern may then construct

its own speech, so the first step in understanding the *Beowulf* is to absent all other episteme from the poem and its interpretation, and let the pre-Christian speak, in the only voice it has or will ever have, that is, in the words that are still preserved.

**The Violence Need Not Be Intentional to be Epistemic Violence**

It may be asked where the evidence is that such an intentional re-writing occurred. The easiest answer, and the one so often correctly replied by all investigators of *Beowulf*, is that the paucity of reference material—even absence of information about who, when, and where the work came from—limits the availability of such evidence, probably forever. This is no less true today than it has ever been. But there is another answer. Because for everything about the epistemic violence of the text that is said here to be true it does not need to have been a single author intentionally changing a text. The mere fact that we can establish that something existed before the text's Christianization—and this is evident, even incontrovertible, from the text itself—then an epistemic violence occurred. Whether a single event of a single author at a single moment, or an accretion of oral changes to an oral tradition over the course of centuries, does not change the fact that an invading episteme—the Christian—changed/overwrote the episteme of a native culture—the pre-Christian.

This is another important element in what Spivak is saying, related to authorship, and the imagined author of *Beowulf*. In any conjecture about the nature of the author, it is easiest to see the application of Spivak to the text if the author is a monk or other clergy; but this is not necessary. For actually, any person of the era who had the ability to read and write—and most importantly, to write in a particular hand, a particular writing style, this writing style (or styles) being one of the few pieces of concrete, indisputable evidence we have about the manuscript—means that the person was of a particular class. And as importantly, and perhaps more to the

point, the person was also not a member of a different particular class. Every person who could read, write, and write with a particular script was a member of a class that was educated by the clergy, and thus indoctrinated by the clergy. Regardless of the biography of the penners, they were members of the speaking subject class that was divorced from the class that constituted the pre-Christian constructors of the tale. They were a representative, and so the question becomes the slipping between representative in the sense of speaking for (political / social power) and re-presentative as being the carrier, the transmitter of a re-presentation. It is the distinction between someone speaking in place of (and thus not being the actual subject, but being its own subject, using its voice and projecting its voice into the empty space vacated by the not-present represented) (so is the not-present represented therefore not present because they are absent, because they are pushed out by the representative, or because they did not ever exist in the first place? This distinction is one Spivak would argue, and would argue all three). For *Beowulf*, the penner took a new subject position, whether intentionally (I want to /I am instructed to re-write this text to reflect the glory of the one true God) or less intentionally (this piece is misunderstood, and I will re-present it so that how it already reflects the power of the one true God will be revealed), and re-presented the text in a new formulation.

Irving also notes a related important reality about the scribes of the manuscript. He notes that in the scholarship of the 19th and early twentieth centuries, scholars ". . . believed that, before its scribes copied such inflammably pagan material, the church had to add some 'Christian coloring' (to use a now famous phrase) to mask and justify the process" ("Elements" 181). It is important to remember here that the epistemic outlook of the 19th-century scholars that Irving is commenting upon was that the essentially pagan text would not have been overwritten by the 11th-century scribes unless somebody was forced to do it. That is, within the

view of the scholars of the 19th and early 20th centuries, no author or transcriptionist would have intentionally overwritten the native pre-Christian text; there had to be some reason that justified, or at least explained, the marring of the text. It is not within the realm of epistemic possibility that the Christian scholars were operating with any other thought in mind. However, this assumption excludes that possibility which post-colonialist scholars, including Said and Spivak, have pointed out as occurring in the colonializations of other cultures. The text was not overwritten by a scholar who was bent on preserving a pre-Christian text, and who grudgingly accommodated some Christian interpolations in order to pass muster with the higher-ups. The episteme of these early scholars did not allow for the possibility that the modern, post-colonialist scholar would recognize, even demand: for the Christian transcribers who first wrote the text down, the process of interpolating the Christian into the pagan was one of explanation and understanding, just as much as the codification of Indian law was also an interpolation of the English system of laws into the native Indian, within the context of Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

Further, and equally important, it remains a fact that any attempt to understand the work holistically as a unified epistemic expression, is doomed to failure, because the text itself is not such an expression. The only way to understand the text is to attempt, based on the best evidence available, the meaning of the text in its pre-Christian values, and understand the overwritten Christian codification or explanation as a separate entity.

As Gayatri Spivak analyzed in the context of the English colonization of India, and the resultant codification of Indian law, the intent of the colonizer is not necessarily to overthrow, subvert, or re-write in the first sense. The intent of the colonizer can be to understand, to formalize, even to help or aid the colonized. While there may be compelling evidence of the

former, the important point is that the former is not necessary for the result to be the same. It is only necessary that the colonizer is making the attempt to translate, to record, or even to, at its most basic, simply understand the elements of the colonized; it is then that change of the episteme to the understanding or representation of the colonized occurs.

**Spivak, Epistemic Violence, *Sati*, and the *Differend***

In order to exemplify both how epistemic violence occurs, and how this clearing of space can operate, Spivak traces the path of her investigation with an analogy to Freud and Freud feminist scholarship, then proceeds to a longer examination of the English Imperialist abolishment of a pre-colonial Indian practice of widow sacrifice:

> The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. . . . The rite was not practiced universally and was not caste- or class-fixed. The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'. White women . . . have not produced an alternative understanding. Against this is the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: 'The women actually wanted to die.' The two sentences go a long way to legitimize each other. One never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness." (93)

Spivak goes on to claim that the "protection of women by men" is the kind of "singular event that breaks the letter of the law" that can "mark the moment when not only a civil but good society is born out of domestic confusion" (93). Spivak goes on to reiterate her intent: "what interests me is that the protection of woman (today the 'third-world woman') becomes a signifier for the establishment of a good society" (93). She points out the distinction in Foucault's historical narrative of the change from tradition to science:

> [Foucault's] theoretical description of the 'episteme' is pertinent here: 'The episteme is the "apparatus" which makes possible the separation not of the true from the false, but of what may not be characterized as scientific.' (PK, p.197) – ritual as opposed to crime, the one fixed by superstition, the other legal science. (94)

The distinction that Spivak and Foucault are making is the distinction between epistemes. It is the same distinction between epistemes that is the driving force in the re-writing of *Beowulf*. In Spivak's investigation, it is the pre-colonization laws, and in her examination specifically the ritual of *sati*, that is being re-written by the colonizing civilization of the English, their civilization being emblemized by both their rule of law and their science. In *Beowulf*, there is an identical movement: the colonizing episteme Christianity, having the same force of 'correctness' or 'goodness,' the Christian beliefs being the colonizer's episteme of good society, is invading the native pre-Christian understanding(s).

Spivak also references, in her analysis of *sati* (the ritual of widow's self-immolation upon the funeral pyre of the dead husband), the *differend* of Jean-Francois Lyotard, "the inaccessibility of, or untranslatability from, one mode of discourse in a dispute to another" (96). All that is misperceived about *sati* from the subaltern subject is a *differend* when represented, not only in the discourse of the colonizer Europeans, but also in the non-subaltern expression of the speaking colonized. The problem is not just one of the imperialistically egotistic colonizer's refusal to understand, nor is it one of mere ignorance, the mistranslation or not understanding of the words. Moreover, it is not the problem of the colonizer erasing, whether in indifference or in haste, of native episteme in the colonizing's episteme's rush to order. The idea of the *differend* is that the concepts themselves are so foreign from one episteme to the other that there is no coding by which one can be translated into the other.

How much, then, of *Beowulf's* original episteme was subject to such an effect? If the analyst subscribes to the belief that the text is the product of slow 'evolution', the effect of the colonizer over the colonized remains the same. How much of that pre-Christian episteme was overwritten as a way for the colonizing Christian to explain the 'correct' understanding, re-writing the pre-Christian in order to explain the 'right' way to understand the narrative? How much of the re-writing was intentional destruction of the native 'bad' narrative? And how much was *differend*, the fact that the native episteme was untranslatable at the epistemic level? Moreover, how complicit is the contemporary reader going to remain in the face of such epistemic violence?

There is more—by way of example—to learn from Spivak in her exegesis of epistemic violence. Spivak also notes that "in the spirit of codification of the law, the British in India collaborated and consulted with learned Brahmans to judge whether suttee (sati) was legal by their homogenized version of Hindu law" (97). Spivak has the evidence to show that the colonizer was consulting with local authority—but the consultation was a consultation not of whether a practice should be allowed or condemned, but rather, a consultation by the colonizer with the objects of native authority among the colonized as to whether the colonizer's law was being violated or not. Because it is not the violation of Hindu law that was here being analyzed or consulted upon, but rather it was the British "homogenization" of that law that was in question. And in her conclusion on that issue, Spivak notes that "When the law was finally written, the history of the long period of collaboration was effaced, and the language celebrated the noble Hindu who was against the bad Hindu, the latter given to savage atrocities" (97). The importance of this in the first sense seems clear, as an extension of the example Spivak had

earlier laid about the effect of the colonizer upon the episteme of the colonized, the act of the colonizer to show the pre-colonized episteme as bad and the colonizing episteme as good.

Spivak goes on to elaborate the possible epistemic translations of *sati*:

> Perhaps *sati* should have been read with martyrdom, with the defunct husband standing in for the transcendental One; or with war, with the husband standing in for sovereign or state, for whose sake an intoxicating ideology of self-sacrifice can be mobilized. In actuality, it was categorized with murder, infanticide, and the lethal exposure of the very old. (98)

Spivak gives here a concise explication of the possibilities and the pitfalls of epistemic translation. More importantly, it highlights the fact that such translations occur. It is not simply a case of the viewer observing the viewed and understanding its actions. Every viewing, and every viewer, makes his or her observation from an epistemic position by which the viewed is understood. But in the case of epistemic translation and the problem of the *differend*, the viewer's description will necessarily efface the *episteme* and the subjecthood of the viewed. It is against this embedded activity that the modern commentator must be on guard.

**Spivak's Prescription for the Subaltern's Speech**

Spivak, in order for her subaltern to speak again, especially in the face of the Western Intellectual, advises:

> What must the elite do to watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern? . . . In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonialist intellectual *systematically* 'unlearns' female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique postcolonial

discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized. (91)

The important difference between this analysis of *Beowulf* and Spivak's analysis, and her attempt to de-objectify the subaltern, is that for Spivak there is still a subaltern that is available to speak. For Spivak, the problem is finding the location for that speech to occur. In the examination of *Beowulf* as subaltern, there is no subaltern that still exists which can speak for itself. The text is the only thing that can speak. Our search is not so much for a lost origin as it is a search for the voice of the subaltern, to the extent it still exists, beneath the colonizer's invasion of the text through epistemic violence.

But we cannot let ourselves be confused by this passage, either. The lost origin that Spivak—and Foucault, in his turn—speaks of is the illusion of some originally constructed subject in the Derridean sense of a center, not the origin of the subject position of the subaltern. Spivak's lost origin refers to the Western Subject's essentialist construction of the Other, an "invocation of the authenticity of the Other" (Spivak, 90). That is to say, the search for lost origins is not the self-aware search for the space in which the subaltern can assume her subjecthood. The search for lost origins is a construction of the Other by the Subject, construction of Other as Other, a construction by the Subject of a counter-space, a defining of the Other by difference.

Implicit in this unlearning and making room for the subaltern to speak is the Western Intellectual, or anyone approaching the subaltern through the method of western European theory, "marking their positionality as investigating subjects" (92). Spivak's prescription, in order to create the space for the subaltern, is for the observer/reader to clearly define the

positionality the reader has taken, the Subject position that the reader holds, in order to recognize the reader's own space, and thus become adept at clearing out separate spaces.

### 3.C. The Pre-Christian Episteme of *Beowulf*

Taking our cue from the foregoing, in order to read *Beowulf* with the anticipation that the text will make some kind of sense, the reader must begin with the acknowledgment that the Christian episteme was an invader into a pre-Christian episteme, and that the text cannot be understood until that invasion, and its epistemic violence, is recognized. The next step is to quarantine that invading episteme, and in the same moment, quarantine ourselves as readers and as observing Subjects. Taking this position, then, the reader's expectation is to clear space from which the text's own subaltern voice can speak. Assuming the quarantine to be trustworthy, and to the extent that such can be accomplished, the pre-Christian episteme can be revealed. After such revelation, the many rifts and points of discontinuity can be addressed.

Removing the Christian, and all the assumptions about meaning that are inherited from the Christian episteme, from the work, the reader is able to look at the pre-Christian. The rifts that occurred which are the focus of the controversies about the text over the past two hundred years all fall within the gaps or fissures between the Christian and the pre-Christian episteme. Primary among these fissures are, first, an understanding of Beowulf's motivations, especially related to gold and the Christian notion of avarice; second, the meaning of lines 2817-2820, especially the phrase "sawol sacean soðfæstra dom," 'his soul sought the judgment of the righteous' (Liuzza 223); and third, lines 168-169, wherein lies the controversy about Grendel and the "gifstol" 'gift-seat' (my trans.). Each of these significant rifts in the understanding and interpretation of the text center on the resolution of the controversy about the essential nature of the poem as Christian or pre-Christian.

**The Motivation and Character of Beowulf**

No point of contention deriving from the controversy about the Christian versus pre-Christian nature of the poem has spurred more comment than that of the motivation of Beowulf. Scott Gwara asserted that "questions about Beowulf's motivations (vainglorious or charitable?) and temperament (ruthless or benign?) have had no unconditional resolution" (1). Edward Irving emphasized as one of the those "hot spots of past discussion, these hooks on which so much has depended" ("Elements" 189). The controversy revolves principally around the determination about whether Beowulf is essentially greedy or guilty of avarice in violation of Christian code, or whether some other interpretation yields a better understanding of his motivations.

Among the most important battlegrounds of this controversy are lines 2327-2332 of the poem, wherein Beowulf learns of and reacts to the dragon:

> Þa wæs Biowulfe broga gecyðed
> snude to soðe, þæt his sylfes h[a]m,
> bolda selest brynewylmum mealt.
> gifstol Geata. Þæt ðam godan wæs
> hreow on hreðre, hygesorga mæst;
> wende se wisa, þæt he wealdende
> ofer ealde riht ecean dryhtne
> bitre gebulge; breost innan weoll
> þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs. (2324-2332)
> To Beowulf the news was quickly brought
> of that horror—that his own home,
> best of buildings, had burned in waves of fire,

the gift-throne of the Geats. To the good man that was

painful in spirit, greatest of sorrows;

the wise one believed he had bitterly offended

the Ruler of all, the eternal Lord,

against the old law; his breast within groaned

with dark thoughts—that was not his custom. (Liuzza 195)

This passage is the only place in the poem where the character interacts with the Christian episteme. In all other places, as noted above, the Christian episteme appears as narrative commentary or interjection or part of the speech of a character. Here, though, it appears that Beowulf is affected because of his attitude toward the Christian God. The controversy exists because the words themselves must be translated, and how the words should be translated is the issue.

Controversy about the motivations of Beowulf, and the understanding and translation of words and lines appears in several other places. The most telling, perhaps, is the last word of the poem, "lofgeornost" 'eager for esteem' (3182; my trans.), which is used in describing Beowulf. It appears in context as: "Manna mildust on mon[ðw]ærust, leodum liðost ond lofgeornost" 'the mildest of men and the most gentle, the kindest to his folk and most eager for fame' (3182-83; Liuzza 245). Scott Gwara points out how this word "is the target of apologists who debate whether the social milieu of *Beowulf* is 'essentially' Christian, secular, or mixed" (1). And it is from his footnote that the other half of the argument finds its voice: "*lofgeorn* in prose translates Latin *prodigus* '(overly) generous' and shows that the word could have a positive sense in *Beowulf*" (1, fn 2).

For many commentators, Beowulf seems eager for treasure, and is apparently guilty of the sin of avarice when, in lines 2743-51, lying down after his battle with the dragon, dying from his wounds and the poison from the dragon's bite, Beowulf states:

> . . . Nu ðu lungre geong
> hord sceawian under harne stan,
> Wiglaf leofa, nu se wyrm ligeð,
> Swefeð sare wund, since bereafod.
> Bio nu on ofoste, þæt ic ærwelan,
> goldæht ongite, gearo sceawige
> swegle searogimmas, þæt ic ðy seft mæge
> æfter maððumwelan min alætan
> lif ond leodscipe, þone ic longe heold. (2743-51)
>
> . . . Now go quickly,
> to look at the hoard under the hoary stone,
> dear Wiglaf, now that the worm lies dead,
> sleeps with his wounds, stripped of his treasure.
> Hurry, so that I might witness that ancient wealth,
> those golden goods, might eagerly gaze on
> the bright precious gems, and I might more gently,
> for that great wealth, give up my
> life and lordship, which I have held so long. (Liuzza 219)

This is but one of many examples of this kind of sentiment either being expressed by Beowulf or being expressed by the narrator about Beowulf. Yet this apparent avarice is not condemned by

the narrator nor by any other character. The closest that the text ever comes to a condemnation of Beowulf's actions are in the speech of Wiglaf in lines 3077-3081:

"Oft sceall eorl monig anes willan
Wræc adreog[an], swa us geworden is.
Ne meahton we gelæran leofne þeoden,
rices hyrde ræd ænigne,
þæt he ne grette goldweard þone . . . " (3077-81)

"Often many earls must suffer misery
through the will of one man, as we have now seen.
We could not persuade our dear prince,
shepherd of a kingdom, with any counsel,
that he should not greet that gold-guardian . . . " (Liuzza 239)

The contrast continues less than one hundred lines later, when Wiglaf is directing the troop, in wholly positive terms, to go quickly into the dragon's lair to witness and recover the balance of the treasure, and then ten lines later expresses his interest in securing Beowulf "þær he longe sceal / on ðæs waldendes wære geþolian" 'to where he must long rest in the keeping of the Ruler' (3108-09; Liuzza 241).

Throughout the poem lie multiple passages that describe Beowulf's desire for gold and treasure in approving terms, terms that can only be understood in a Christian context as showing him guilty of avarice. But these passages are dissonant to those passages that show Beowulf exhorting the Christian God, acknowledging His favor, and thanking His benevolence. How can a unified poem have such dissonance? Is there a way to jibe the two apparently disparate elements? Can the poem be understood as a whole?

The controversy gains momentum as it is put in the context of the poem as a whole within a social framework: if this poem is the work of a single author, how does this reaction toward God fit within a pre-Christian framework? If the work is viewed as primarily Christian, how do the many pre-Christian elements fit into a unified work by a primarily Christian author? Lastly, if the work is to be viewed as a hybrid of the Christian and pre-Christian, in what way is this discontinuity synthesized in this supposedly hybridized, transitional culture, of which culture the poet, and the poem, are a result?

### 3.C.1 The Value of Treasure in *Beowulf*

The key entry point into allowing the pre-Christian episteme in the text of the Beowulf is understanding the value of gold and treasure in the pre-Christian cultural world, and how gold and treasure works as a signifier unique to that culture. Many critics have taken up the issue of gold and treasure, and a review of every commentator's view would be a book unto itself. Many commentators have struck very close to home, but each has fallen short of an accurate explication of how treasure works in the poem, and in the pre-Christian episteme of which the poem is an example. And each has fallen short because of epistemic barriers to understanding: the treasure of *Beowulf* is a *differend* of the pre-Christian episteme.

Most commonly, commentators understand gold/treasure in a modern context. Commentators take gold and treasure and understand their value in the context of a modern episteme of what gold and treasure mean. The episteme that most commentators use is one that sees gold and treasure through the lens of commercialism—or, perhaps more generously and more accurately, most commentators view gold and treasure through the lens of the epistemic value of gold contemporary to the time of each commentator's writing.

But gold does not have this value in the culture contemporary to *Beowulf*, regardless of whether we view this contemporary period as the sixth century or the eleventh century. And to understand the poem, it is critical to understand how gold and treasure works—what gold and treasure means to the poem. Treasure—and gold is just one of various kinds of treasure that exist in the poem—is a physical manifestation of the esteem in which the owner of the gold is held.

The best expression of how treasure works is in Michael Cherniss's *Ingeld and Christ*. In this book, Cherniss explores the appearance of pre-Christian culture within Old English poetry, focusing on a few of the representative poems that exist in Old English. Among the poems he studies and uses as example of his points is *Beowulf*. Cherniss, examining *Beowulf* alongside several other poems, arrives at a number of general conclusions about the pre-Christian world from which Old English poetry springs, especially the values that are held by that world. Cherniss focuses his organization of the way in which these values differ from modern values into four categories: loyalty, vengeance, treasure, and exile. The four values are intertwined, such that loyalty—from lord to warrior as much as warrior to lord—is a foundation of pre-Christian society as represented in the poems, and that foundation of loyalty is expressed through the vengeance that lord or warrior must take. The bonds of society are expressed through this loyalty, and so the centrality of loyalty is further reflected in the ultimate punishment being exile, the cutting off of a warrior—or even a lord—from participation in the social group.

But it is the place of treasure that gives the finest and most precise expression of the difference in epistemic value between our modern age—or even the early nineteenth century, when the poem was first glossed by commentators—and the value of the age(s) from which the

poem comes. And it is this understanding of the place of treasure, and the episteme that this place expresses, that is central to understanding the poem itself.

Cherniss agrees with this assessment of the importance of understanding the role of treasure within Old English heroic poetry, as he begins his section on the discussion of treasure with: "The modern reader may easily overlook or misunderstand the role played by treasure in the system of values which informs Old English poetry" (79). Cherniss quickly points out the important distinction to be made: "one is likely to assume that 'treasure' . . . is synonymous with 'money' . . . it is difficult for a reader to recognize that the heroic world has a quite different conception of the function of treasure," and that a "hero's treasure hoard represents more than just his financial solvency" (79).

Cherniss agrees that treasure "plays a central role in the conceptual world" (79). It is important to note that Cherniss is publishing his comments in 1972. In that year, post-structuralism and deconstruction are only nascent. Foucault published *Archaeology of Knowledge* in that same year, Spivak had not yet translated Derrida's *Of Grammatology,* and her expression of epistemic violence and her publication of "Can the Subaltern Speak?" was still a decade and half away. Clearly, when Cherniss is using the words "conceptual world," he is envisioning the same concept as Foucault's episteme, just not in the terms later established by others.

Cherniss spends some time summarizing the misunderstanding of treasure that other commentators have. He mentions Francis B. Gummere's assessment of the role of treasure, quoting Gummere as saying the pre-Christian had "a franker and more childish love of gold" and summarizing Gummere as attempting "to excuse Germanic acquisitiveness while assuming that it corresponds, more or less, to modern avarice" (Cherniss, 80). He reviews the assessments of

treasure made by R.W.Chambers in his *Widsith*, and the assessment of Dorothy Whitelock in her *Beginnings of English Society*. He also focuses on three commentators who make specifically Christian interpretations of *Beowulf*. According to Cherniss

> H.L. Rogers, would have us believe that . . . treasure . . . represent[s] the forces of evil . . . Kemp Malone says that the dragon's hoard in *Beowulf* symbolizes "the vanity of worldly goods" . . . [and] E.G. Stanley . . . accus[es] Beowulf of avarice because he wants to see the hoard before he dies. (80)

It is exactly these misinterpretations of the meaning of gold and the place of Christian episteme within the poem, and thus the understanding of the poem itself, that Cherniss dispels, and which are the core of the controversy about the meaning and understanding of the poem.

Cherniss goes on to identify one earlier commentator on *Beowulf* who first gave a good expression of the role of treasure in the poem. Ernst Leisi, the German commentator, in his "Gold and Manneswert im *Beowulf*," is the earliest commentator to mention the dynamic of treasure and esteem in the poem. Cherniss, of him, states, "Leisi recognizes that treasure in *Beowulf* is . . . not equivalent to money" (81), and goes on to quote from Leisi:

> Es sind also Dinge, die gewissermassen mit Prestige geladen sind und dieses auch ihrem Besitzer verleihen . . . Die Worterbucher geben deshalb fur *woerðian* auch die Bedeutungen "beschenken" "schmucken" an, was aber insofern unprazis ist, als dadurch gerade der wichtigiste Inhalt des Begriffes, namlich de Erhohung des personlichen Wertes verwischt wird, Darin lieget jedoch offenbar der Sinn des Reichtums. Er dient nicht in erster Linie dazu, dem Besitzer einen asthetischen Genuss zu vershaffen: Beowulf kann unmoglich alle die geschenkten Ringe tragen, und man hort auch nie von reich geschmuckten Mannern. Der Reiche furht auch kein komfortableres Leben als der

> Arme; er kann seinen Reichtum auch nicht beliebig konvertieren, de es noch keinen Kauf gibt, und endlich verbindet sich mit dem Empfang von Schatzen sogar die Verpflichtung zum Weiterschenken. (Leisi 262)
>
> So these are things that are loaded with prestige and give it [prestige] to their owner. . . For this reason, the dictionary also indicates for *woerðian* the meanings "to gift," "to decorate," but this is imprecise insofar as the most important content of the concept, namely the increase in personal value, is blurred, but obviously the meaning of wealth lies therein. It is not primarily intended to give the owner an aesthetic pleasure: Beowulf cannot possibly carry all the rings he has given, and one never hears of richly decorated men. The rich man does not live a more comfortable life than the poor; he also cannot convert his wealth arbitrarily, for there is nothing to purchase, and finally, with the reception of treasures, even the obligation to give away. (my trans.)

So the views of Leisi and Cherniss align in the idea that treasure is not the commercial or economic surrogate that it is today. For Cherniss:

> the objects and materials which we have designated as 'treasure' . . . give moral value to their possessors; . . . they are . . . material manifestations or representations of the proven or inherent worthiness of whoever possesses them. We may define the function of treasure as that of a tangible, material symbol of the intangible, abstract qualities of virtue in a warrior. (81)

Cherniss argues that treasure is the representative of virtue or honor that a warrior has within the pre-Christian culture. Cherniss later uses the term "individual merit" (82), and this term comes closest among the terms he uses, I believe, to capturing an accurate translation of the idea from the pre-Christian episteme to the modern.

In this thesis I choose to use the term ‘esteem’ to designate the correct understanding of the role of treasure in the pre-Christian episteme of *Beowulf*. Words like ‘virtue’ or ‘honor’ might seem at first glance to be surrogates of equal value, but on closer examination seem to bring too many additional meanings, meanings which are exterior to the idea that needs to be transcribed from the pre-Christian to the modern. Esteem, in our modern episteme, is the value to which a group gives an individual, but also, in the sense of self-esteem, it is the value or worth that a person gives themselves. So the word esteem, like the word merit, has the best positive sense in translation of the concept from the pre-Christian to the modern, with the fewest senses exterior to the concept as it appears in *Beowulf*.

Cherniss identifies his first example from one of perhaps the most innocuous of passages in *Beowulf*, where Beowulf, leaving Denmark, arrives at his vessel, and gives a gift to the Danish shore-guard:

> He þæm batweard bunden golde
> swurd gesealde, þæt he syðþan wæs
> on meodubence maþm[e] þy weorþr[a],
> yrfelafe. (1900-03)
> To the ship’s guardian he gave a sword,
> bound with gold, so that on the mead-benches
> he was afterwards more honored by that heirloom,
> that old treasure. (Liuzza 167)

Cherniss goes on to point out how the treasure/esteem exchange works again when Beowulf returns to the Geats and his exploits at Heorot are recounted. At this point, Hygelac gives Beowulf further treasures. As Cherniss correctly notes:

> The interdependence of treasure and individual merit can again be observed . . . Hygelac acknowledges this newly-discovered worthiness in his kinsman by giving him more of the visible symbols of that worthiness, more 'medals of honor'. Beowulf and Hygelac exchange gifts as an expression of mutual respect. (82)

While Cherniss does far better analyze the role of treasure in Old English poetry, following in the path of Leisi eighty years earlier, than most other commentators, especially those who insist on perpetuating a Christian interpretation, Cherniss does not trace the value of treasure and esteem through all its exhibitions within the poem. While treasure is the outward mark of esteem, the dynamic of treasure/esteem in the pre-Christian episteme as exhibited in *Beowulf* must be traced one step further. Leisi, in the passage above, comes closer, in the final part of the passage, when he notes that there is "und endlich verbindet sich mit dem Empfang von Schatzen sogar die Verpflichtung zum Weiterschenken" 'and finally, with the reception of treasures, even the obligation to give away' (262; my trans.). The part missing from Cherniss's explanation, and only hinted at in Leisi, is what might be characterized as the other side of the treasure/esteem system. There is the esteem of being given the treasure, the esteem of being of the quality to which such a treasure may be bestowed. But there is also the quality of esteem in giving treasure away.

Cherniss, in reviewing lines 1900-1903, wherein the shore-guard is given the sword by Beowulf, correctly notes how this receipt of treasure positively affects the shore-guard's esteem in the pre-Christian tradition. But it is also Beowulf's esteem that increases by the act of giving.

In lines 2144-2199, upon which Cherniss commented above, Hygelac does not give Beowulf these treasures as payment for a deed done for Hygelac or for the Geats. Hygelac gives the treasures because Beowulf has risen in esteem. But the esteem-treasure dynamic, and the

lord-warrior dynamic, is one step more complicated than this. For Hygelac to not give the treasures that mark Beowulf's new esteem would bring a reduction of esteem upon Hygelac, because it is the role of the lord in the treasure/esteem system to give gifts. Hygelac doesn't just give the treasure only as a measure of respect for Beowulf, because Beowulf has merited it, or solely because Beowulf has risen in esteem. Hygelac must give the treasure so that he may mark and acknowledge the higher esteem in which Beowulf now sits, and by this marking, correctly establish Hygealc's own esteem within the treasure/esteem system. This is the point that Cherniss misses, and to which Leisi alludes but does not fully establish.

The status of the lord or ruler as giver of treasure is reflected in the numerous references to just such a status throughout the poem. In twenty-four separate instances a ruler is referred to not as a *cyning*, "king," or a *dryhtne*, "lord," but as "beaga brytten" 'dispenser of rings' (35; my trans.), a *sincgyfan, "*treasure-giver," or *hringa thengel*, "prince of rings," and other such names. There are several dozen other references to ring-, gold-, or treasure-giving by a ruler throughout the poem, and always with approval. This status is also reflected in the many negative comments made by those rulers who do not give out treasure. One example is in line 1749-1750. Here, Hrothgar is addressing Beowulf after the slaying of Grendel's mother. In the passage, Hrothgar admonishes Beowulf to continue to be good and not turn bad as a result of his success. And the bad that Hrothgar extols against is that the bad person "nallas on gylp seleð / fæ[tt]e beagas" 'he gives out no golden rings' (1749-50; Liuzza 159).

And it is not just the lord or ruler who has such a designation. In multiple places, the throne-room of the ruler—whether it is Heorot, the throne room of Hygelac, or Beowulf's throne room which is destroyed by the dragon—is referred to as the *gifsele*, the "gift-hall," the *beahsele*, the "ring-hall," or the *goldsele*, the "gold-hall." These second glosses are frequently mis-read as

referring only to the adornments of the hall, but understanding the poem in the pre-Christian context, and in the light of the other evidence about treasure and its function within the pre-Christian episteme, it is clear that these references are to the fact that these halls are not treasure adorned places, but the places where treasures are given. And as an extension of that, they are the seats of rulership because they are the places where esteem is received by those persons who are worthy to receive it, and given by those rulers of merit. The thrones of rulers are similarly coded. A throne of a ruler is in only two places ever mentioned: first in line 168, and again in line 2327. In both places, the throne is called the *gifstol*¸ literally the "gift-seat."

It is this important point which makes such a great distinction in understanding the poem: treasure has no value in and of itself; nor is it the valorous deeds of defeating foes and taking their treasure, as Cherniss expresses it, that lead to the value of treasure. It is the giving of treasure from a ruler to a person that is the central element of the treasure/esteem system. Understanding this is key to the understanding of treasure and esteem in pre-Christian *Beowulf,* and to understanding the poem. The Christian scribes who intentionally wrote over the poem during transcription in the 11th century did not obliterate this element of the pre-Christian episteme, and, actually, do not appear to have touched it at all. The modern commentators who, since at least the early 20th century, if not dating all the way back to the early 19th, attempt to interpret the poem as whole, giving it a gloss that includes or enforces a Christian or modern episteme, perpetuate the epistemic violence of a colonization of an original that, far from needing to be wondered about, in fact still largely exists.

The centrality of the idea that treasure must be given exists throughout the poem and takes on many different, but related, appearances. One appearance of this idea comes from the analysis of the words *beaga bryttan*, which first appears on line 35. The word *beag*, defined as

"a ring (as ornament or as money), coil, bracelet, collar, crown, diadem, garland" and *brytta*¸ "distributor, dispenser, giver, originator, author, governor, prince, lord" are placed together into one term. The interdependence of the word *brytta* between the meanings "giver" and the meaning "prince/lord," and the interdependence of the word *beag* "ring" and its related word *beag-gifa* "ring-giver, lord, king, generous chief" is embedded in the words themselves. So we see that this example shows how, for the pre-Christian culture, the very idea of being a king, lord, or ruler and the idea of giving out rings are embedded one within the other. Another example is in line 80, as Hrothgar builds Heorot and "He beot ne aleh" 'He remembered his boast' (80; Liuzza 59), and "beagas dælde" (80). *Beagas* is the familiar ring, and *dælde* comes from dæl "portion, part, division, share," or dælan "to deal out, divide, part, separate, share, distribute," so that Hrothgar remembers his words and gives out treasures when Heorot is complete; more, it is that Hrothgar remembers his duty as a lord and distributes treasure/esteem from the newly created gift-seat. Deeply embedded here is the central element of giving and esteem: the boast Hrothgar remembers is that he will build the greatest of halls, but this greatness is not measured by size or adornment, but by what is given from within the hall.

So, with the new understanding, a new interpretation of the poem must arise. When Beowulf first arrives at Heorot to conquer Grendel, Hrothgar states: "Ne bið þe wilna gad / gif þu þæt ellenweorc alder gedigest" 'You will have all that you desire, if you emerge from this brave undertaking alive' (660-61; Liuzza 95). These lines have always been understood to be an expression that is nearest to a payment, and if not a payment, a reward. But with the new understanding of the role of treasure, these lines must be understood in a new frame: if Beowulf succeeds he will have the highest esteem, he will be held at the highest merit, an esteem that merits the highest of treasure gifts.

In lines 1387-1389, Beowulf expresses that "wyrce se þe mote / domes ær deaþe; þæt bið drihtguman / unlifgendum æfter selest" 'let him who can bring about fame before death—that is best for the unliving man after he is gone' (Liuzza 139). Such an expression must be understood, within the Christian episteme, as an expression of the sin of pride. But within the pre-Christian episteme, it synchronizes well with the other expressions of the treasure/esteem system. "Domes," which can be translated many ways, here should not be fame, but rather, from within this new reading, should now be translated as "esteem."

It is also interesting to see how the treasure esteem system arises in unexpected places, with unexpected and surprising nuances. This kind of nuance appears in lines 1527-1528. Here, the blade of Beowulf does not aid him in his fight with Grendel's mother. The lines read "ða wæs forma sið / deorum madme, þæt his dom alæg" 'It was the first time that the fame of that precious treasure had failed' (Liuzza 147). These words, in their original Old English, give something of a challenge to translate into modern English, but this difficulty arises from the translation of the episteme of the pre-Christian into the modern. Looking at these lines, and Liuzza's translation, the meaning of the poem at this point takes on a surprising depth: for the inhabitants of the pre-Christian episteme, the weapon, as has already been shown, brings esteem to the person who receives it from a ruler, and that esteem is measured by the fame of the weapon, but here we see a kind of reversal, for the power of the weapon itself is linked to its own fame.

**Lines 2817-2820: "soðfæstra dom"**

One of the points of greatest contention over the history of scholarship in *Beowulf* is the interpretation of the lines 2817-2820. Irving ended his analysis in "Elements" with reference to this passage, calling it one of a few of the "hot spots of past discussion, these hooks on which so

much has depended" ("Elements" 189). The passage describes the final moment of Beowulf's death, in which the narrator comments on Beowulf's disposition toward his death and his entering the funeral flames upon his death. The passage reads as follows:

> Þæt wæs þam gomelan gingæste word
> breostgehygdum, ær he bæl cure,
> hate heaðowylmas; him of h[r]æðre gewat
> sawol secean soðfæstra dom. (2817-20)

Because of the importance of these lines as controversial over the course of scholarship on *Beowulf*, and because of the possibilities which must be disentangled, I will include a few different translations. Edward Irving translates the passage as "For the old man, that was the last work from his inner thoughts, before he chose the pyre, the hot hostile flames; from his breast his soul went to seek the judgment of the righteous" ("Elements" 191). R.M. Liuzza translates the passage as:

> That was the last word of the old warrior.
> his final thought before he chose the fire,
> the hot surging flames—from his breast flew
> his soul to seek the judgment of the righteous. (223)

Howell D. Chickering translates the passage as:

> That was the last word of the old man
> from the thoughts of his heart before he chose
> the high battle-flames; out from his breast
> his soul went to seek the doom of the just. (219)

And one last, from Burton Raffel, a quite different relation of some of the words:

The old man's mouth was silent, spoke

No more, had said as much as it could;

He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul

Left his flesh, flew to glory. (114)

The problem is located in the interpretation of the final words of that section, "soðfæstra dom." Liuzza includes the footnote to this translation of these two words that assists in explication of the problem:

> Literally, "the *ðom* (fame) of the truth-fast," an ambiguous pronouncement. It is not clear whether this means that Beowulf's soul will receive the sort of judgment that a righteous soul ought to receive (and so go to Heaven), or that it will be judged by those "fast in truth" (and so go to Hell as an unbaptized pagan). (*Beowulf*, trans. Liuzza, FN3, 223-225)

Irving summarizes the controversy thus:

> The last two words occur elsewhere in clear religious contexts and normally refer to the favorable judgment made on the virtuous at the time of their death, usually implying their admission to heaven (see Greenfield 1985). Here, Beowulf's body is said to "choose" the flames of the pagan pyre; his soul, however, escapes this fate and travels to find "the judgment of the righteous." But if he is not Christian, how can his soul enter heaven? This question can only be answered either by exerting very considerable pressure on the phrase "soðfeastra dom" or by putting up with the inconsistency of what is implied. ("Elements" 191)

Irving continues with further analysis of the problem, concluding that the only possible result may be paradox.

But this apparent paradox only exists if the reader is assuming that the poem is written by a single author. The entire paradox, and the very rift itself, is bridged, if not closed entirely, once the assumption is made that there is not a single author that is writing this work, but rather, that the Christian reference is made by an interjection of a Christian episteme into a previously pre-Christian original. In fact, a reading of the text, once the Christian is removed, reveals that there is no controversy at all. Though a Christian interjection by the scribe is possible, it is not a necessary conclusion. It is also possible that there is no interjection by the scribe at all, but that the entire controversy comes entirely from the modern reader's interjection of the Christian epistemic values of soul, death and afterlife. These values may have been the same or similar values that the scribe adopted wholesale at the time of the transcription of the text, so that no interjection or erasure was necessary. That is to say, it is possible that just as the modern reader reads these words with a Christian understanding of their meaning (which understanding only begins to break down upon closer analysis), the scribe who was transcribing the text found the words unobjectionable because of the same potential for reading them within the Christian episteme. What is more, it is entirely possible that the scribe saw the words as entirely Christian, and therefore saw within them the presence of the Christian episteme already in place within the 'heathen' text, thus providing that much more proof for the scribe that his work was not 'changing' the text, but rather, 'revealing' the Christian truth that had always been there.

In the end, it does not matter whether the words are, on the one hand, an emendation by the scribe, or some other, of a pre-Christian passage into a more Christian passage, or on the other hand, present in the pre-Christian text the same as in the text we now have post-epistemic violence. Regardless, the controversy is eliminated and the text is easily read within the pre-Christian episteme, keeping in mind the many references throughout *Beowulf* of the pre-

Christian ideas of *wyrd*, of fate, of destiny, and that the pre-Christian episteme was not without its own notion of an afterlife.

**The Exclusion of Grendel and the *Gifstol***

Among the most important rifts in the translation and understanding of the text are lines 168-169, wherein the narrator describes Grendel's relationship to the *gifstol*. There is probably no stronger argument in favor of this pre-Christian understanding of the poem that in the solution to the debate surrounding Grendel's invasion of Heorot and his relation to the throne. The passage in full reads: "no he þone gifstol gretan moste, / maþðum for Metode, ne his myne wise" (168-169). Again, the several translations begin to express the breadth of the potential problem. Liuzza translates this as "he saw no need to salute the throne, / he scorned the treasures; he did not know their love" (65); Chickering has this passage as "he could not come near the gift-throne, the treasure, / Because of God—he knew not his Love" (59); and Raffel reads the lines as "He never / dared to touch king Hrothgar's glorious / Throne, protected by God—God / whose love Grendel could not know" (9).

The many problems in coming to a satisfactory understanding, and translation, of the lines is well-summarized in George Jack's footnote to his *Beowulf: A Student Edition*:

> The lines are problematic in interpretation and have drawn extensive commentary; . . . a number of issues are involved: (a) whether *he* denotes Grendel or Hrothgar, (b) whether *gifstol* refers to Hrothgar's throne within Heorot or to the throne of God, (c) whether *gretan* means 'approach' or 'attack', (d) whether *moste* means 'was permitted' or 'had to', (e) what is signified by *for Metode*, and (f) the meaning *ne his myne wisse.* (Jack, 38, FN to 168-69)

Jack summarizes significant portions of the possible resolutions to the debate, significantly that *he* in line 168 is most likely Grendel, and the *gifstol* is Hrothgar's throne, not God's, and that *gretan* glosses better as 'approach' or even 'pay respect to.' The one aspect that resists any resolution is the use of *Metode*. Though there is evidence that the word *metode* can be understood to mean 'ruler' or 'king' in the earthly sense, when used as *Metode*, and especially, when the word *Metode* appears within the poem *Beowulf*, it is always understood to mean the Christian God.

Jack, after considering the several arguments, proposes the reading that "he [Grendel] was not permitted to approach the throne, that precious thing, because of the Creator, and did not experience his [the Creator's] love" (Jack, 38, FN to 168-69). But his analysis, as he agrees, is "not the only possibility" (Jack, 38, FN to 168-69), and reviewing only the seven contributors that Jack mentions in the footnote, along with the two commentators who wrote works that did nothing other than summarize the debate surrounding the translation and understanding of these lines, it is clear that here there exists a fissure that remains open, a debate unresolved. What, then, is the solution, and the best reading of the poem?

Preliminary to answering that question, it should be noted that, unlike significant portions of the manuscript where letters have faded, are difficult to read, appear to imply words that don't exist or that make no grammatical sense, or where portions of a word or the manuscript are missing altogether, none of these problems appear in this passage. As remarked by Robert Estrich: "There is no problem of transcription or [manuscript] reading here. The [manuscript] is quite clear and the words easy to make out" (384).

Turning back to the question then: if the reader considers the poem as an organic whole by a single author, no solution to the problem can be conclusively suggested. But if the reader

views the poem as an example of epistemic violence, and preserves a persistent suspicion that all references to the Christian episteme within the poem were interjected after original construction—even interjected, as I argue here, by the scribes contemporaneous to their inscription of the manuscript that we have today—then the resolution of the problematic construction in 168-169 becomes apparent, even facile. The word *metode* existed in the previous version, and referred to an earthly king, not the eternal Christian Divinity. The scribe, following his agenda of 'translating' the poem from the pre-Christian to the Christian, capitalized *Metode* as part of that agenda. The original meaning worked within the treasure/esteem discursive formation of the interaction between lord and retainer, and the scribe capitalized on the re-reading, the epistemic violence of re-interpreting the meaning of the other words, to take on the meaning within the Christian episteme. Where once Grendel was an outcast, exiled from the treasure/esteem discursive relationship, and could not approach the throne in the figurative sense that he could not give nor gain esteem within the lord-retainer relationship, the scribe re-wrote (re-understood) to mean that Grendel was forbidden from God's presence because he was kin of Cain. The problem is resolved.

Note here that the problem is not resolved in only one dynamic, but the problem is doubly resolved, resolving both dynamics at once. Now, the reader understands the poem within the pre-Christian discursive formation, but this reading does not have to exclude the reading that the scribe wishes to put into the text, the reading where *Metode* is the capitalized divinity, not Hrothgar. Now, both readings are possible, and an understanding both of the poem in its pre-Christian iteration and also of the moment of its change from pre-Christian to Christian can be appreciated. Instead of debate about which possible meaning is most likely, now there exist two

separate meanings, coming from different epistemic values, different discursive formations, each pointing toward different sources and different conclusions.

### 3.C.2. The Pre-Christian Episteme of *Beowulf*: Conclusion

These three areas of controversy—the character of Beowulf, *soðfæstra dom*, and Grendel's exclusion from the *gifstol*—are prominent among the areas that have drawn the most debate over the course of *Beowulf* scholarship centering on the influence of Christian versus pre-Christian episteme. But these three are not alone. Among many specific instances that can be re-cast are Unferth's motivation in his antagonism toward Beowulf in lines 503-505, the description of ring-giving in the context of fealty in lines 1050 and following, and perhaps most importantly, the understanding of the role of the dragon, the last survivor, the curse upon the dragon's hoard, and Beowulf's disposition toward the dragon and his hoard, beginning at the dragon's first appearance in the line 2211, through to the end of the poem. Each of these instances has drawn speculation in the scholarship about how they should be understood; viewing each through the lens of Christian epistemic violence resolves controversies and creates clarity in the poem's meaning.

But even these three additional points of examination do not capture the entirety of this reading's implications. It is no exaggeration to say that the entire poem can be re-cast, reading both the appearance of Christianity as epistemic violence, and reading the treasure/esteem social system into the narrator's statements, the motivations of the characters, and the meaning of words and actions. A completely new understanding of the context of the poem allows a window into the world-view of the pre-Christian culture from whence the poem comes, and also serves as a touchstone for examination of other epistemic violences in other circumstances throughout history and in our modern day.

# CHAPTER IV

# CONCLUSION

One might argue that this reading of the poem, as a pre-Christian work interjected with Christianity, while bridging several gaps that have long plagued scholarly understanding of the text, leaves a text in the end that must be viewed as a marred product. It appears important to realize that this sensation is itself an inheritance of a particular episteme. The idea comes from a predisposition that we inherit from the romantic tradition, the tradition of the noble poet who, in Coleridgian, Shellyian or Byronic form, receives poesy from some pure font of aesthetic and philosophic wisdom. This kind of tradition about the writer, and of authorship, is an inheritance that can be traced in the western European literary tradition at least as far back as the Renaissance, and within the English literary tradition, at least to the Elizabethan age of Shakespeare. It is an epistemic tradition that values a work of art as a creation of something original from the recesses of a single mind, and devalues anything else.

This impression is not true, of course, and realizing the impression comes from such an epistemic predisposition goes a long way to dispelling this sense of the poem. The poem, it must remain, still has its value as it exists, regardless of whether it was one author or many. Its value remains as an exemplar of a culture in transition; it still retains its value as the cornerstone of one or more literary traditions. The reading this thesis proposes does not denounce those values, but rather, goes much further: this reading allows all of the possible values to co-exist simultaneously. The poem is no longer Christian or pre-Christian; it is now both. It is not from

the 6th or the 10th or 11th centuries, but from them all. It is not from Kent or Northumbria or Scandinavia or Denmark, but from the whole North Sea. This reading does not reduce the poem from a *La Pieta* to a *La Pieta* with the hand broken off—or, worse, to a *La Pieta* covered with Christian graffiti. Rather, in a style that Foucault would approve of when he states that "[f]or archaeological analysis, contradictions are neither appearances to be overcome, nor secret principles to be uncovered. They are objects to be described for themselves" (*Archaeology* 151), this understanding of *Beowulf* preserves all three *La Pietas* in the same moment.

It is not the goal of this thesis to suggest—much less demand—that the Christian elements be excluded from a reading, as if those elements were alien invaders that must be repelled at all costs. The Christian elements are a part of the work as it is received today. Nor, alternatively, does this thesis merely defer to those authors who have advocated for the necessity of a Christian reading. The point of this thesis is that many of the apparent controversies of the understanding of the text as a literary work are caused by the interjection of Christianity into an epistemic system to which it is foreign, and that a consistent reading of motivations and contexts is possible—even easy—when the foreign Christian episteme is recognized as one episteme interjected into another. Further, study of how the Christian episteme was interpolated is worthwhile in itself, not only as a study of how epistemic violence is trespassed, but also of how the culture in transition at the time of the penning of the manuscript reflects various heritages contemporary to that time. Further, it is the aim of this thesis to continue to validate that not only are pre-Christian readings of *Beowulf* possible, but that they are necessary. They are necessary not only to what we might call a literary understanding of *Beowulf*, not only to understanding what we might call the social-history, the culture of the *Beowulf* periods, but also

necessary to a modern understanding of how epistemic violence occurs, its sites and locations, its *modus operandi*, in a very current assessment of our own modern methodologies.

Looking at the work thus, it can be honestly stated that the author of *Beowulf* is epistemic violence. If an author is an origin; if an author is the cause of a text in the sense that the author is the manifest will that brings the text into existence, both as a physical act of either speech or writing and as an act of creation; and if an author is the source of a writing in the sense that it is from the amalgam of an author's consciousness, an author's knowledge and experience, then *Beowulf* is by all accounts a product of the author epistemic violence. To this extent, we look to the totality of the *Beowulf* manuscript for its meaning as to what this author, this authorship by epistemic violence, might mean. But to the extent that we currently prize as an object of interpretive value the clearing of space for the subjecthood of the subaltern, then to that extent the pre-Christian must be allowed to speak. Understanding of the poem requires both speeches at the same time.

Irving ends his analysis with a compelling statement about the importance of the pre-Christian episteme within the poem. Irving begins with the assertion that "what a poet talks about and gives full attention to well over ninety-five percent of the time is what he or she is interested in and what the poem is chiefly about, and thus it is what readers and critics should give their attention to" ("Elements" 189). From this assertion, he concludes therefore that "*Beowulf* is, in overwhelming mass, an admiring account of heroic action" (189).

Irving is on exactly the right track, but I believe he does not take it quite far enough. He is right that what the overwhelming bulk of the poem speaks about is what the poem is about; but what is more, this overwhelming bulk emphasizes the incongruity, and in this case, the alien-ness, of the other 5%. It is more than an aesthetic assertion that Irving is making: it is, for the

sake of the estimation of *Beowulf*, an analytical assertion as well. There are, according to Irving's analysis, 142 Christian references in the Danish section and 36 such references in the Geatish part, for a total of 178 references. Notice that he is counting individual words, and if several words, read in context, were counted each as only a single reference, the number would then become much smaller. The poem consists of 3,182 lines—and by Irving's calculation exhibits only, at best, 178 references to Christianity. The percentage, then is not 5% Christian, but rather, .056%.

Perhaps I am guilty of exaggeration in this percentage; however, if I am guilty, then I am guilty in order to make a point, and the point I make is not reduced if this percentage is adjusted. The text of *Beowulf* indisputably comes from an original pre-Christian source, and what is more, it was a pre-Christian text up to the moment when one, then a second, scholar—probably monastic—undertook to absorb the tale into the Christian episteme.

More importantly to the novice reader trying to make sense of the greater whole of the poem, and to the scholar concerned with the pedagogic approach to orient such a reader, is that the poem is best understood in this light. The various rifts in our understanding of the poem, whether that rift is in making sense of where the poem came from, why it was written in the first place, what value it had as a whole and what values are reflected in its various parts, the value of Christian versus pre-Christian within the poem—all the rifts are most accessibly bridged when the poem is viewed as an intentional overwriting by a zealous and devoted clergy.

**Further Research**

It is important to note that the analysis done here is not an archaeological analysis within the concept as proposed and developed by Michel Foucault. Such an analysis is possible, however, and might prove very productive as applied to the history of the critical analysis of

*Beowulf*. Such an analysis would be the history of the scholarship surrounding *Beowulf* from the early 19th century through to the present day, mapping the spaces in which the various oppositions and contradictions examined by the scholarship played out or exhibited themselves. But that is not the goal of this thesis.

On a similar Foucauldian archaeological track, work might be done in mapping out the various elements of social power that were at work during the most likely penning of the *Beowulf* manuscript. Even with the lack of knowledge of and the uncertainty about the exact date and location of the creation of the manuscript, much work still might be done in using those few most likely places of creation, locating the various influences and exercises of power in those locations, especially looking for similarities and conjunctions among the elements, to map how various social powers exercised that power in the creation of the manuscript. And though extensive work has been done in this regard in the suggestion of and advocacy for various dates and locations, looking at each study through the lens of epistemic violence affords new opportunities in viewing both the poem and the world surrounding its penning.

In another vein, this new view of *Beowulf* opens up several possible extensions of the conclusions. Among the most interesting of the areas of research is how this understanding of the treasure/esteem system within the poem applies to the depiction of women within the poem. An irresistible entry point of this investigation is in the description of Wealtheow, Hrothgar's queen, in line 623, where is she "beaghroden" 'ring-adorned,' and again a few lines later in line 640, where she is "goldhroden" 'gold-adorned.' In the view of the new understanding of the value of treasure in the pre-Christian episteme, a description that was once understood by a modern reader to be synonymous with decoration or beauty must now be recognized as an expression of the fact that she is held in high esteem—and, taking the treasure/esteem system to

its logical endpoint, it is an esteem that she has earned in a social sense. Further, this treasure/esteem was given to her by a ruler—presumably Hrothgar—or she has received from warriors loyal to her, perhaps a loyalty synonymous and concomitant with that loyalty to Hrothgar himself. Another point arises, though: the queen is also deemed worthy of the possession of such treasures. In multiple places throughout the poem it is clear that women's place in the society are second to men's, and women are used in ways that we consider misogynistic today. Most notably are the references to women being married to sons of rulers in order to broker peace between peoples. However, it appears equally clear that women can have a place in the treasure/esteem system. These points seem ripe for further investigation.

In a similar way, the place and value of the monsters themselves now have the opportunity for a new understanding. If we assume that Grendel's role was entirely re-written to make him one of the kin of Cain—and Grendel's mother re-written similarly—then it opens up the question of what, if any, value Grendel might have had before the Christian re-writing occurred. Looking at the metanarratives, the roles of the characters and various characters' speeches that occur surrounding each of the monster's appearances, it is possible to deduce symbolic or cultural values for each of the monsters within the poem. A separate work could be undertaken in this investigation alone.

Just as with the date and location of the penning of the poem, much work has been done on the metanarratives of the poem, with conjecture on their presence. This new view of the poem opens up the opportunity to review the presence of the metanarratives within both Christian and pre-Christian epistemic originations. In a similar way, one current of scholarly activity, more dormant in recent years, that was often applied to the poem was *liedertheorie*—the idea that the poem was created by or existed in multiple versions, recounted by *scops* in the oral

tradition. With this new view of the poem as epistemic violence, investigation is possible into this orientation to the poem's creation.

Another avenue of scholarly investigation that had currency in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, but has had less in the past century, is the idea of the *specula principum*, "mirror for princes" (my trans.). The *specula principum* was a type of literary work, common from the middle dark age into well past the renaissance, where the narrative and its characters functioned as an instructive manual for the education of kings and lords. These narratives were written both to serve as guides for the ruling class as much as they were homages to notable figures in that ruling class, to curry favor with houses and lineages in power. The opportunity exists, with this view of *Beowulf* as epistemic violence, to review the poem's possible place as such a *specula principum*, intentionally selected for re-writing by the church.

When considering how deeply embedded the Christian versus pre-Christian debate is in the understanding of the poem, it is perhaps not surprising to suggest that the reading this thesis suggests opens up opportunity to review so much that has already been stated in regard to the poem. But we recall Edward Irving's statement in his "Christian and Pagan Elements," the comment with we which this thesis began: "every general essay on *Beowulf* has been obliged to deal with the problem" (180).

It is true, in the end, that there is a great deal of scholarship upon the poem that is not at all affected by the reading suggested in this thesis. But every general reading of the poem—every reading of the poem that would be made by a first-blush reader, coming to the poem for the first time, and every reading of the poem that talks about the most fundamental of questions—what does this poem mean?—are affected by this reading.

Which brings us to the last implication of the reading. Pedagogically speaking, *Beowulf*, in this reading, takes on a new life in the classroom. It is now no longer only a reminiscence of an era more than a millennium gone by or a placeholder for a phantasmal *lost origin*, to reference Foucault again, for a northern European, or proto-English, identity or literary tradition. *Beowulf* may still be both of these things, but with this reading, it is now also a current poem, capable of being viewed and regarded in the very contemporary concern for cultural and identity politics into the third millennium A.D.

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# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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