

The Medieval Period, Day Three

Adjusting Our In-Class Pace

Too Much Information, Too Fast?

- Our Course Community
- The appeal, the manuscript context, and the genre of *Beowulf*
- Significant differences between Old English and Middle English (changes in alphabet, vocabulary, and grammar)
- *Beowulf's* Poetic Form

Important Poetic Features

- Alliteration
- Stress-patterns (variety) and caesura
- Apposition (repetition)
- Specialized/stock Poetic Vocabulary (oral formulae)
 - Compound words
 - Kennings
- Negative modifiers

kennings

- Kend heiti (characterized terms)

Swegles leoht (heaven's light=sun)

- Kenningar (contrasting base word)

Rodores candel (heaven-candle=sun)

What happens? Treharne's Extract

- V. Beowulf and fellow Geats arrive at Heorot (Hall of Hrothgar, king of the Danes)
- VI. The Danes allow the Geats inside, Beowulf speaks
- VII. Hrothgar replies, the feast begins.
- VIII-VIII There is a verbal contest between Hunferth and Beowulf, the queen Wealhtheow welcomes the Geats
- X. Bedtime, Beowulf boasts.
- XI. Grendal arrives at night and eats a man; Grendal and Beowulf struggle
- XII. No one else can help since weapons are useless; Beowulf tears off Grendal's arm and triumphs; Grendal flees
- XIII. Morning. The men follow Grendal's tracks to the swamp, the king's thane recites great deeds as they travel back.
- XIII. Hrothgar speaks, Beowulf replies.
- XV. There is a feast, gifts are given to Beowulf
- XVI. Gifts are given to his companions and compensation for the dead man. Hrothgar's scop sings of the sons of Finn.
- XVII. The story of the song continues, Wealhtheow speaks.
- XVIII. Wealhtheow gives Beowulf gifts. Bedtime again.

Beyond Plot: Poetic Structure, Poetic features

Three struggles in a hero's life?

The intertwined histories of three peoples?

An account of loss, from funeral to funeral?

A contest between a pagan (heroic) code and the poet's
Christian perspective, shifting perspectives on battle,
gold, monsters, etc ?

A lesson in how to rule?

Group Translation Comparisons

Group 1: Compare Treharne, 340-359, with Heaney, 340-359

Group 2: Compare Treharne, 837-852, with Heaney, 836-851

Group 3: Compare Treharne, lines 980-996, with Heaney, lines 979-995 (note: there is a name mistake in Treharne's line 980)

Group 4: Compare Treharne, 1154-1172 with Heaney, 1153-1171

1. Read the passages aloud in your group.
2. Together, create a list of the most significant differences between the two translated passages (at least four differences). Be very specific about the features that contribute to these differences. [see list on board]
3. Explain why these differences seem most significant (in other words, how do the different translations affect the way the reader understands the passage/the poem).
3. Put the full names of your entire group on your list; hand in the list to me after presenting your work to the rest of the class. When presenting, make sure every member of the group has a chance to speak.

What Next?

Heroes and Other Monsters!

- J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics." 1936

"Why should we approach this, or indeed any other poem, mainly as an historical document?"

- R. Frank, "The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History." 1982

"Awareness of historical change, of the pastness of a past, a past that itself has depth, is not instinctive to man; there is nothing natural about a sense of history."