

CRITICAL EDITION OF THREE PASSAGES FROM BEOWULF

The following pages are some of the references to harps in Beowulf. I have used a facsimile copy of Beowulf to make my edition of the text, and my intent is to try to let the manuscript's original rhythms and ideas shine through as clearly as possible.

When I looked closely at the Beowulf poet's use of the word "hearpe" several concepts came through very strongly in these passages. The harp is almost synonymous with the joys of life and convivial fellowship in the meadhall. It is a sign of light, warmth, fellowship, goodwill and community. The absence of the harp is a sign of darkness, grief, solitude, remorse, and desolateness. In my edition of these three passages I have tried to create a text that remains true to these ideals.

Notice that I do not always follow the original manuscript's punctuation. However, my edition is far more faithful than any printed edition ever is. Traditionally editors have taken a great deal of liberty with the original punctuation.

I have made a conscious effort to retain the marks of punctuation that are in the original manuscript text. Understanding the necessity of adding additional punctuation to aid readers in their translation, I have nevertheless tried to be conservative with my additions as well. I have added commas or semi-colons where it is clear that the two phrases being separated are, in some way, complete thoughts. I have tried to give preference to the original text's word spacing, whenever doing so does not create translation problems. When a word or word spacing is unclear or problematic, I have tried to make changes that regularize the word to a form that is used within the manuscript in another passage. In one instance I have made an editorial change solely on the basis of the meaning of the passage in the context of the surrounding text.

Throughout my edition, I have tried to see what ideas and images were originally grouped together in the manuscript, and then make my decisions about the text accordingly. In order to see what new meanings might be possible if the manuscript text were followed closely, I have in some cases exaggerated the importance of punctuation, word spacing, and word choices.

I have carefully weighed the impact of any emendation on the lines meter and alliteration. Whenever it was possible to preserve these without compromising clarity, I have done so.

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Lines 1064-1066

1064 þær wæs sang and sweg samod æt-gædere
1065 fore healfdenes hilde-wisan,
1066 gomen wudu greted, gid oft wrecen.

There was singing and music all together
in the presence of the Halfdane's commander,
the joy wood touched, a song often delivered.

1064 In the manuscript "æt" and "gædere" are two distinct words. Combining them does not effect the alliteration and creates a more standard word, hence I have chosen to hyphenate them after the example of Wrenn & Bolton. (Klaeber combines them into a compound.)

1065 For the same reasons listed above, I have chosen to hyphenate "hilde wisan."

1066 I have retained the period after "wrecen," as it is in the manuscript. Although the last line is somewhat odd, having, as it does, two past participles, the awkwardness is not mitigated by combining it with the sentence below it. Klaeber and Wrenn & Bolton both replace the period with a comma. This removes the playing of the harp and the delivery of song from the general statement about singing in front of Hroðgar, and makes it instead one of a series of images, which includes Hroðgar's scop. Rather than combining the progression of images, I have kept the terminal punctuation. I have, however, added a comma to separate the two sentence halves, since they are two related (but distinct) thoughts.

Lines 2105-2110

2105 þær wæs gidd ond gleo; gomela scilding,
 2106 fela [ge]fricgende, feorran rehte;
 2107 hwilum hilde-deor, hearpan wynne,
 2108 gome[n] wudu grette; hwilum gyd awræc.
 2109 Soð ond sarlic hwilum syllic spell.
 2110 Reht æfter rihte rum heort cyning.

*There was song and mirth; the aged Scylding,
 very wise, told of far distant days;
 At times the battle-brave one touched the joy wood,
 the harp's joy; at other times he sang a song.
 True and sad, sometimes he told his wondrous history.
 The noble stout-hearted king recited what was right.*

2105: I am following the example of both Klaeber and Wrenn & Bolton by adding a semicolon to indicate a break in thought between "gleo" and "gomela."

2106: This line has crumbled away almost entirely and/or is covered. The facsimile edition I am working from is from 1959, with the Julius Zupitza transliteration of the text on facing pages. In this edition the missing words are supplied from the copy, which Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin had made in 1787. Thorkelin's copy preserves nearly 2000 letters, which have subsequently crumbled from the scorched edges of the manuscript. Zupitza's transliteration is also based on his attempts to record the letters, which were covered up when the British Museum rebound the manuscript in 1845. (He held the manuscript up to a light bulb to try to see the covered letters.) In 1982-83, Kevin Kiernan used fiber-optic light to recover an additional 300 letters. Ultra violet light has also been used to read text that had been erased by the scribe or later editor. Kiernan's work as well as color scans of Beowulf and Thorkelin's manuscripts are available on the CD, The Electronic Beowulf, from British Library Publishing [<http://www.uky.edu/~kiernan/eBeowulf/guide.htm>].

Zupitza transcribes the first two words as, "fela fricgende." Wrenn & Bolton retain the space between the two words, while Klaeber combines the two into a compound, "felafricgende." On the manuscript there does appear to be a space, but Klaeber's change seems to be an effort to shift the meaning by adding a prefix. "Fricgen" means to ask or inquire; "gefricgen" means to learn by inquiry. Since "much asking" makes no sense in the context of the sentence, and the shift to "much learning" (or as it is often translated, "very wise") is much more applicable, some editorial intervention seems necessary. Hence, I have added a "ge" prefix. This lessens the alliteration in the line, but does not disturb the meter. Klaeber's solution also lessens the alliteration, but creates a new compound word, which does not appear anywhere else in the poem. While not a perfect solution, the addition of the "ge" prefix makes the word more regular and makes a logical translation possible. (Since the last 5 letters of "fricgende" are covered by tape, Kiernan's transliteration should be checked before a final conclusion is drawn.)

The interjection of "hwilum" in 2107 begins a new thought, so I have added a semicolon at the end of 2106 to show the division between the two.

2107: I have chosen to hyphenate "hilde-deor," following the example of Wrenn & Bolton. Although the words are separate in the manuscript the emendation makes it clearer that the two words function as an adjective. Klaeber combines them into a compound word, which is also an acceptable solution, but is slightly more intrusive.

The appositive statement "hearpan wynne" is set off with commas here to make it easier to identify.

2108: The manuscript is missing the "mel" of the first word, however Zupitza's transliteration reads, "gomel wudu." While a translation of "aged wood," makes perfectly good sense in reference to a harp, the word would need to be "gomelan." Klaeber and Wrenn & Bolton both change the word to "gomen." This seems the least invasive and most logical, since the kenning "gomen wudu" also appears in line 1065.

Klaeber combines the two words into "gomenwudu," while Wrenn & Bolton choose to hyphenate them. This seems overly invasive since both instances of the kenning have a space between the words.

I have added a semicolon before hwilum for the same reason as line 2106. I have retained the period at the end of the line rather than including "Soð ond sarlic" to the sentence in this line.

2109: Since both the subject and verb from the previous sentence are applicable to this sentence, I have retained the period after "spell," with the understanding that this line forms a complete thought. Although I have translated "awræc" as "sang" in line 2108, it also carries the meaning of "recited" or "told."

2110: This sentence appears above as it does in the manuscript. (The "ri" in "rihte" is now missing, but is supplied in the Zupitza transliteration.) Klaeber chooses to combine this sentence with the second half of the one above it, as does Wrenn & Bolton. Grammatically there is no reason the two lines must be combined, so I have retained 2109 and 2110 as separate sentences.

I have left the two adjectives, "rum" and "heort" as individual words since they are distinctly two words in the manuscript and there is no clarity to be gained by combining them. Klaeber creates a compound out of them, while Wrenn & Bolton hyphenate.

Lines 2455-2459

2455 Gesyhð sorhcearig on his suna bure,
 2456 winsele westne, wind[ige] gereste.
 2457 Reote berofene, ridend swef[e]ð,
 2458 hæleð in hoðman, nis þær hearpan sweg,
 2459 gomen in geardum swylce ðær iu wæron.

*Sorrowful, he sees in his son's chamber,
 a desolate winehall, a windy resting place.
 Bereft of his rote, the rider sleeps,
 a man in darkness (in his grave), where there is no sound of the harp,
 no joys in the world as there were of old.*

2456: Klaeber has changed the spacing between "wind gereste" to "windge reste," (both of which translate as "windy resting place"). However, if the scribe meant to write "windge" it is the only instance of it being spelled that way in Beowulf. The other two uses of the word are spelled with the more usual "windige." Wrenn & Bolton render the words as "wind-gereste," which makes it clear that the two are meant to be translated together, but still leaves the incongruity of two nouns sitting together. In the manuscript the words are clearly separate, so I have chosen to retain the space between the words and the spelling of "gereste." If a scribal error was made it seems more reasonable to assume that the adjectival ending "ige" has been accidentally omitted. (Klaeber's editorial change is essentially trying to make up for this as well.) By insert the more common ending "ige" to "wind," I have emphasized that an editorial emendation is being made, regularized the word to a form that is found elsewhere in the manuscript, and does not disturb the meter of the line.

2457: I have retained the period after gereste. If "reote" is a plucked instrument, then there is a shift from the empty hall metaphor to a description of how silent and dark graves are. (Marijane Osborne "notes that the word 'reote' in line 2457, usually translated as 'joy,' is more properly translated as 'rote,' which she terms 'another kind of harp'" (Boenig 316-317). Both Klaeber and Wrenn & Bolton choose punctuation that connects "reote berofene" with the preceding sentence. This creates the mistaken reading that it is the "windy resting place" that is bereft of the "rote" or "joy," rather than the grave.

I have changed "swefað" to "swefeð," because it better fits the extended metaphor that begins with line 2444. "Ridend" and "hæleð" could either be singular or plural. In the manuscript the ending on "swefað" is clearly "að" indicating that both nouns should be considered plural. I hypothesize, however, that a scribal error may have substituted "að" for "eð." If both nouns are read as singular, a more poetic and logical translation is possible: "the rider sleeps, a man in darkness." This gives the passage continuity with the beginning of the metaphor, which speaks of how sad it is for an old man to see his son *ride* young on the gallows. Translating "ridend" as "rider" directly continues the metaphor, since the rider and the man in darkness are then read as the son who was executed.

2459: Although I have made no change to this line, I would like to make a translation note that bears on the extended metaphor. This line can be read as a return to the metaphor of

the son's room as a dwelling with the statement that there is no joy in the court. However, "In gearðum" can also be interpreted as "in the world," which would make it a continuation of the commentary about the joyless, silent grave.

COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS WITH COMMENTARY

Lines 1063-1065

Noise and music mingled together
 before the leader of Healfdene's forces,
 the harp was touched, tales often told, 1065
when Hrothgar's scop was set to recite
among the mead-tables his hall-entertainment...
 (Luizza 86)

There was song and music together before Healfdene's battleleader, the wooden harp
 touched, tale oft told, *when Hrothgar's scop should speak hall-pastime among the*
meadbenches...
 (Donaldson 19)

They sang then and played to please the hero,
 words and music for their warrior prince,
 harp tunes and tales of adventure: 1065
there were high time on the hall benches
and the king's poet performed his part...
 (Heaney 71)

Commentary:

In both Klaeber and Wrenn & Bolton this passage is combined with the lines that follow it into one long sentence. (The manuscript punctuation breaks the text with a period after "wrecen.") Since the punctuation in their source material encourages it, all three translations create a long sentence. Luizza and Donaldson accomplish this by retaining Klaeber's series of commas and the order of the half lines. Heaney, however, inserts a semi-colon where the manuscript has a period, thus breaking the half line more closely to the original than his source text of Wrenn & Bolton. Perhaps he looked at a facsimile of the manuscript, or it is equally possible that being a poet himself, he could "hear" the end of the statement and the need for a fuller stop than a mere comma.

Donald's word choices are very close to Klaeber's glossary definitions. This is logical since he is translating directly from Klaeber, (as does Luizza). For example he translates "hildewisan" with Klaeber's term "battle leader." His translation is overall more faithful to his source text than the other two. He correctly translates "gyd" as singular, "tale," where Luizza and Heaney choose to make it more idiomatic by pluralizing it.

Luizza's word choices differ from Donaldson's more significantly in this passage than they normally do. He has "the leader of Healfdene's forces" rather than Donaldson's Healfdene's battle leader. He also renders "sang" as "noise," rather than Donaldson's "song." Luizza also attempts to give a more emphatic sense to "samod ætgedere" by translating it as "mingled together."

Heaney's translation, by comparison, is quite loose, showing his deliberate preference for active voice and natural word order over "correctness" (Heaney xxviii-xxix). He inserts "they" as the subject and "sang" and "played" as active verbs. His looser word

choices appear to be chosen partly for their alliteration, "warrior" instead of "battle leader," because it alliterated with "words." Donaldson and Luizza's translations retain a better sense of the transitional nature of this passage. The previous sentences have a short homily on the good and ill that life in this world offers. Lines 1063-5 bring the reader's attention back to the meadhall. They describe a scene without introducing an active character. Then after the period (in the manuscript) Hrothgar's scop is introduced as the active agent who will tell the saga of Finn. By shifting these lines into active voice, Heaney subtly shifts their purpose. In his translation they become the opening lines of a new narrative portion of the text, which emphasizes those people sitting on the mead benches singing and playing. It de-emphasizes the entrance of the scop into the passage.

Lines 2105-2110

There was song and joy; the aged Scylding, 2105
 widely learned, told of far-off times;
 at times the brave warrior touched the song-wood,
 delight of the harp, at times made lays
 both true and sad, at times strange stories
 he recounted rightly. That great-hearted king, 2110
graybearded old warrior wrapped in his years,
at times began to speak of his youth again...
 Luizza (117)

There was song and mirth. The old Scylding, who has learned many things, spoke of times far-off. At times a brave one in battle touched the glad wood, the harp's joy; at times he told tales, true and sad; at times he related strange stories according to right custom; at times, again, the great hearted king, *bound with age, the old warrior, would begin to speak of his youth...*
 (Donaldson 37)

There was singing and excitement: an old reciter, 2105
 a carrier of stories, recalled the early days.
 At times some hero made the timbered harp
 tremble with sweetness, or related true
 and tragic happenings; at times the King
 gave the proper turn to some fantastic tale... 2110
 (Heaney 143)

Commentary:

Both Luizza and Donaldson choose to shift 2110-B, "rum-heort cyning" to be the subject of the following clause, despite Klaeber's semi-colon between the two. Having moved the words Luizza feels it necessary to add "that great hearted king" to make clear that the "aged Scylding" and "king" are the same person. Donaldson creates a series of statements set off with semi-colons that all begin with "at times." This also preserves the interpretation that the "aged Scylding" is the "king," particularly with the addition of the word "again," which is not in his source text. It is interesting that both choose to shift "rum heort cyning" since it is not indicated in Klaeber's punctuation and the manuscript punctuation is even a clearer break, as it places a period after the phrase.

Wrenn & Bolton also place a semi-colon after "cyning," and Heaney retains "cyning" as the subject of "rehte æfter rihte" rather than shifting it the way Luizza and Donaldson have done. However, where Donaldson and Luizza seem to be aware of the traditional interpretation, which has Hrothgar "touching the joy wood," Heaney has the king instead correct the performers. In Heaney's translation, "Scylding," hildedeor," and "cyning" are a list of different people. This is certainly a possible reading of the passage, but is not traditional.

I must assume that there is an older, well-known translation, which originally grouped "cyning" with the lines that follow it, rather than retaining it where it is in the

manuscript. This seems the only possible explanation for both Luizza and Donaldson making the same choice, despite using a source text, which punctuates against that reading.

As we saw in the previous passage, Donaldson's word choices are closer to Klaeber's glossary and to roots of the words themselves. He has "glad wood" to Luizza's "song-wood" or Heaney's "timbered harp." Heaney's word choices, though, are even looser in this passage than in the previous. "The aged Scylding" becomes "an old reciter" and "harp's joy" becomes "tremble with sweetness."

Lines 2455-2459

He looks sorrowfully on his son's dwelling, 2455
 the deserted wine-hall, the windswept home,
 bereft of joy—the riders sleep,
 heroes in their graves; there is no harp-music,
 no laughter in the court, as there had been long before.
 Luizza (128)

Sorrowful he sees in his son's dwelling the empty wine-hall, the windy resting place without joy—the riders sleep, the warriors in the grave. There is no sound of the harp, no joy in the dwelling, as there was of old.
 (Donaldson 43)

He gazes sorrowfully at his son's dwelling, 2455
 the banquet hall bereft of all delight,
 the windswept hearthstone; the horsemen are sleeping,
 the warriors under ground; what was is no more.
 No tunes from the harp, no cheer raised in the yard.
 (Heaney 167)

Commentary:

Luizza and Donaldson have very similar translations in this passage. They both retain the punctuation and phrase order from their source text, Klaeber. In sharp contrast, Heaney has reordered 2456-B and 2457-A. This allows him to directly link "bereft of all delight" with the "banquet hall." His choice, I think, shows the unease that all three translators and their source texts, Klaeber and Wrenn & Bolton have with 2457-A, "reote berofene." Both Klaeber and Wrenn & Bolton provide a dash after the phrase to indicate a break between it and the next half line. However, this is an editorial emendation. The original manuscript groups 2457-A with the phrases above it and ends with a period after "berofene."

Heaney also chooses to reorder 2458-B, and 2459-A and B. Once again there is no basis for this in his source text, (or in the manuscript either, in this instance). He is merely reordering to create more poetic lines. In his translation line 2458 has three alliterating words; "warriors", "what" and "was." Line 2459 ends each half line with a slant rhyme; "harp" and "yard."

Heaney's translation of "(nis) gomen in geardum" as "what was is no more," while very different than Donaldson and Luizza's, is still a valid translation. "In geardum" can mean "in the world," which Heaney's translation seems to be rendering in more idiomatic (or more poetic) terms.

Donaldson's translations of "bure," "winge reste," "winsele," "hoðman," and "geardum" are all from Klaeber's glossary. His translation also maintains very similar word order to the original text. (A feat made more possible by the fact that it is a prose translation.) Luizza's word order is also very close in this passage. He even changes "sorghcearig" to an adverb to accommodate a word order in which "looks" can precede the word "sorrowfully." The words he has chosen are more dignified-- more heroic sounding, without necessarily being inaccurate. "Home" instead of "resting place," "court" instead of "dwelling." Interestingly, although as I have already observed, Heaney's word order is not

precise, his word choices in this instance may bring out more of the correct flavor for the passage. Since the man who is daydreaming these images in sorrow is a "ceorle," it may actually be more appropriate to use the more homely terms "yard" for "dwelling" and "hearthstone" for "resting place."

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