INTRODUCTION: LIQUID BEOWULF

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The illusion of historical truth and perspective, that has made Beowulf seem such an attractive quarry, is largely a product of art. The author has used an instinctive historical sense... of which Beowulf is a supreme expression; but he has used it with a poetical and not a historical object. The lovers of poetry can safely study the art, but the lovers of history must beware lest the glamour of Poiesis overcome them.—J. R. R. Tolkien

What is truly historical—rather than merely mimetic—about a work is inseparable from what within it exceeds its history.—Gerhard Richter

Modernity is the time when time has a history.—Zygmunt Bauman

In 1904, W. P. Ker remarked, “The fault of Beowulf is that there is nothing much in the story.” This comment did not appear fair to J. R. R. Tolkien in 1936 when he wrote that it seemed “improbable” that the poet “would write more than three thousand lines (wrought to a high finish) on matter that is really not worth serious attention.” But recalling what Tolkien also referred to as Ker’s “potent” criticism allows for some reflection on how it is so many have found so much to say and write about the poem, and whether, similar to Achilles’ anger, Oedipus’s hubris, and Hamlet’s angst, this Old English poem might not also be inexhaustibly productive of discussion. The beginning of this century looks promising: from Kevin Kiernan’s CD-ROM Electronic “Beowulf,” Seamus Heaney’s
award-winning translation, and Elliot Goldenthal and Julie Taymor’s opera, *Grendel*, based on John Gardner’s 1971 novel of the same name, the poem continues to assert itself in richly varied cultural productions. For all the talk of the supposed marginalization of Old English studies within the American and British academies, *Beowulf* continues to fascinate students, scholars, and artists alike. Possessing an uncertain provenance covering hundreds of years and written anonymously by one or more authors (or copyists?) in a language both familiar and yet also forbidding, ravaged by fire and by misguided attempts to arrest its deterioration, and, thanks to neglect and mishandling over the years, bereft of thousands of its original letters, the poem could be said to stand as a test case of what literary criticism is capable of saying and doing, and further, of whether or not we need criticism at all, or even poetry, and to what end. How, and why, does *Beowulf* continue to cast its spell on us? Or framing the question somewhat differently, why should *Beowulf* continue to matter at all?

In his review of Heaney’s translation, literary theorist Terry Eagleton judges Heaney’s refashioning of the Old English poem “magnificent” as well as a “marvelously sturdy, intricate reinvention,” but he also argues that *Beowulf*, a poem “both subtle and savage,” ultimately retains its pride of place in English studies mainly due to its function, from the Victorian period forward, as the cultural tool of a troubling nationalist romance with an archetypal and mythological past. Indeed, intellectual histories of Old English studies such as Allen Frantzen’s *Desire for Origins* have shown this to be partly the case, and it is difficult to deny, as Nicholas Howe reminds us, that “the texts and contexts of Anglo-Saxon England are essential, even originary, to a racist, anti-Semitic, and fascist politics in the United States.”

The occasion for Howe’s comment was receiving in the mail a book catalog that included Icelandic sagas, *Beowulf*, Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, and scholarly works such as Dorothy Whitelock’s *The Beginnings of English Society*, alongside Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* and books denying the Holocaust. Although most Old English scholars would be appalled at such an alignment of texts, somewhere out there beyond the academy, Old English poetry and scholarship, unmediated by the sharp knife of criticism, have become part of the spiritual heritage and profane history of fascism. Frantzen and Howe would never dispense with *Beowulf* as an object too tainted for study, but they have certainly challenged us to consider the ways in which Old English scholarship might be related to larger theoretical debates within the university and to the politics of the world in which we live. Moreover, they have asked that we consider how Old English stud-
ies might be refashioned as a type of cultural studies that would focus, as Frantzen writes, “on the political nature of the structural, structuring effects of the relationship between scholars and their subjects,” and also, as John Niles writes, on how a poem like Beowulf can be seen to have “a relation to the discourses of power of a society whose institutions were very different from our own.” Long before Eagleton’s review of Heaney’s translation, Old English scholars like Frantzen, Howe, and Niles have argued for situating Old English studies within contemporary theoretical paradigms that would help us to investigate how, in Niles’s words, literary works such as Beowulf “shape the present-day culture that calls them to mind as past artifacts.” In other words, Old English studies have not required Eagleton’s notice of the socio-historical dimensions of its canon and disciplinary practices in order to acknowledge and investigate those dimensions.

But Eagleton takes his resistance to Beowulf one provocative step further when he argues that even as a piece of poetic literature, Beowulf may no longer be relevant to us because “we no longer believe in heroism, or that the world itself is story-shaped, and we ask of literature a phenomenological inwardness which is of fairly recent historical vintage,” and the epic poem, “as Marx once observed, requires historical conditions which the steam-engine and telegraph put paid to.” Eagleton’s sentiments here resonate with those of the historian Dominick LaCapra, who argues that, in the post-Holocaust period in which we live,

traditional religions, Hegelianism (seen in stereotypical ways), and any form of thinking that seems to redeem the past and make it wholly meaningful through present uses no longer seems plausible. . . . It’s what Lyotard calls the incredulity or disbelief about grand narratives: we no longer seem to take seriously these grand narratives that make sense of everything in the past—narratives that at certain points seem to appeal to people very much.

LaCapra’s statement that grand narratives “at certain points seem to appeal to people very much” creates some slippage in Eagleton’s notion that Beowulf can no longer appeal to modern audiences, and indeed, we might well ask, who is this “we” Eagleton argues no longer believes that the world is story-shaped? Is it the public at large, including our students, who daily consume grand narratives in the form of video games, comic books, television programs, movies, self-help gurus, religion, patriotism, and bourgeois family values, or is it a certain faction of the elite humanities intelligentsia
who have devoted so much of their careers to dismantling and demystifying traditional narrative ontologies that they are effectively impervious to the lure of traditional stories and can only desire instead the chaotic (and beautiful) interiority of a James Joyce, and after all of this “phenomenological inwardness,” where to next? Eagleton may believe that we no longer believe that the world is story-shaped, but understanding the self, human experience, and history, and even being able to turn inward, as it were, is not possible without narrative constructs, and grand narrative constructs at that. As the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre argues,

Just as history is not a sequence of actions, but the concept of an action is that of a moment in an actual or possible history abstracted for some purpose from that history, so the characters in a history are not a collection of persons, but the concept of a person is that of a character abstracted from a history.17

Further, MacIntyre writes, “Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth.”18 In the field of historiography, Peter Munz reminds us that, “In order to do justice to time, it must be described in a narrative form. Any other form of description fails to take account of the fact that the past bears the mark of the arrow of time,” and narrative “is the only literary device available which will reflect the past’s time structure.”19 As is well known, the debates among contemporary historians over the “literariness” (and therefore, of the possible “fictionality” or “falseness”) of the historical enterprise have been fierce and contentious;20 nevertheless, as Munz also reminds us, in history, there can never be anything but stories:

The problem [of recording history as it was] does not simply consist in the fact that the past is not readily remembered or frequently insufficiently recorded. . . If this were the case, one would presume that people at any stage of the past knew what was happening to them and that the reason why we do not know is that records or traditions were lost. But the point is that even the people who were alive at any stage of the past had either little knowledge or perception of what was happening; or that such perceptions as they had were widely influenced by their personal interests and abstractions and therefore were in no sense “correct” perceptions. They themselves had no knowledge of res gestae but, at best were making up stories about it
and constructing *historiae rerum gestarum*. Which goes to prove the truth of an old saying... that "stories only happen to people who have an ability to tell them."\(^{21}\)

Within medieval studies, Caroline Walker Bynum’s work, especially with corporality, identity, and metamorphosis, has shown us how the stories of the past, when read properly, reveal profound ways of thinking about processes of self, identity, and history—processes, moreover, that fascinated medieval audiences as much as they continue to fascinate modern ones. In her analysis of werewolf stories in the classical, medieval, and modern traditions, Bynum concludes that we read the stories of the past, “not in order to understand the tradition (an academic enterprise) but in order to understand—through the tradition and its artful refiligings—ourselves.”\(^{22}\) It may be that literature, especially in its most fabulist forms, gets at something deep in the historical psyche that conventional history, or even theory, cannot get to, and therefore, stories, especially of a certain mythic variety—whether in the form of epic poetry, Arthurian romance, J. K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels, *Superman* comic books, or the animated films of Hayao Miyazaki, such as *Spirited Away* and *Howl’s Moving Castle*—will continue to play a critical role in how a culture perceives itself and articulates its deepest desires, fears, and questions of *knowing*.

MacIntyre argues, “I can only answer the question ‘What am I to do?’ if I can answer the prior question ‘Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?’”\(^{23}\) And Emmanuel Levinas once wrote that the whole of his ethical philosophy sometimes seemed to him to be “only a meditation of Shakespeare.”\(^{24}\) Ultimately, “to narrate” means “to know,” (from the Latin *gnarus* and *gnaritus*, “knowing” and “knowledge”), and as Mark Turner has written in *The Literary Mind*, “Story is a basic principle of mind.” We interpret “every level of our experience by means of parable,” which is the “root of the human mind—of thinking, knowing, acting, creating, and plausibly even of speaking.”\(^{25}\) In the fields of neurobiology, artificial intelligence, psychology, and cognitive science, there has been amazing consensus on the importance of narrative-like data sequences in the brain, and research in these fields has generally overturned the notion that individuals possess a “single, definitive ‘stream of consciousness,’ because there is no central Headquarters, no Cartesian Theater where ‘it all comes together’ for the perusal of a Central Measurer.” Nevertheless, there are “multiple channels in which specialist circuits... in parallel pandemoniums” create “fragmentary drafts of ‘narrative,’” or what Daniel Dennett calls “Multiple Drafts.”\(^{26}\)
So the question is not really whether or not conventional narratives (fabulist or otherwise), even in postmodernity, contribute in very important ways to various meaning-making processes—they may, in fact, constitute mind itself—but rather, which particular narratives might best answer to our present condition? In this regard, it is precisely Eagleton’s gesture toward the conditions of modern life—social, historical, psychic, and otherwise—that raises what we feel is the important question of whether or not Beowulf, as both an antique cultural object and ancient poem, might have anything to tell us about the conditions of our modernity, or even, our postmodernity. We contend that Beowulf has a great deal to tell us about these conditions, and further, that the poem is not, as some might claim, a coherent and comforting grand narrative that makes sense of everything in the past—nor, strictly speaking, is it even an epic. Rather, Beowulf comprises a series of not always synchronic and digressive narratives within narratives that reconfigure historical time in multiple dimensions, and the poem practically brims over with “parallel pandemoniums” of language and situation.27 As Gillian Overing notes in her essay “Swords and Signs: Dynamic Semeiosis,” reprinted in this volume, the poem is “a continuum, an echo chamber, where we experience a continual crisscrossing of temporal-spatial values and relations,” and

The narrative progression of the poem foils logical or linear attempts to sum up, to stand back and conclude that this, after all, meant that. The poem is essentially nonlinear, describing arcs and circles where persons, events, histories, and stories continually intersect. . . . Beowulf is a text that invites a challenge to assumptions about the possibility and desirability of a structural overview. The quicksilver nature of its structure, where individual elements persist, dissolve, and expand in a continuum of resonance and association, questions the notion of textual boundaries as a form of resolution and suggests instead the infinitude of the text.28

As James Earl has shown, many passages in the poem are also characterized by ambivalence and “deep, uninterpretable silences,” and the figure of Beowulf himself is like the enigmatic and radically ambiguous blank mask of Greek tragedy, all of which “invites a meditation on the unconscious themes of our own individual and cultural origins.”29

Beowulf does not make sense of the past so much as it calls the supposed coherence of the past (and of conventional narrative) into question. It also calls into question and unsettles how we (and likely the Anglo-Saxons as
well) have traditionally defined and understood the relationships between past and present, language and meaning, heroism and monstrosity, justice and violence, nation and gens, freedom and necessity, “same” and “Other,” and history and memory—relationships, moreover, that form the very center of many current theoretical debates. As one of the poem’s more recent translators Roy Liuzza writes, “[T]his unruly poem, like the manuscript in which it survives, does not stay within the framework of our generic expectations. Moreover, the poem itself is a monumental exercise of the historical imagination, poetically re-creating a past which is itself multilayered and temporally complex,”\textsuperscript{30} statements that call to mind LaCapra’s caution that history can never be construed as a “pure, positive presence that is not beset with its own disruptions, lacunae, conflicts, irreparable losses, belated recognitions, and challenges to identity.”\textsuperscript{31} Even to its original, let’s say tenth- or eleventh-century audiences,\textsuperscript{32} Beowulf was also already past, a work of artistic looking back that, by its very nature, speaks to the desire to have the past, however fallen and over, to speak to the present moment and be relevant to it. There is hardly a moment in the poem itself when the characters and the narrator are not voicing their anxious concern that the past be remembered in a way that is fruitful for the present and future—Hrothgar’s admonishment to Beowulf to learn from the story of Heremod, a former Danish chieftain who was apparently pathologically violent (\textit{blodræw}, “blood-ravenous,” line 1719a)\textsuperscript{33} and greedy, as well as a “harm” to his people (lines 1709b–23b), is one example among many. At the same time, in its almost manic and looping digressions regarding past, present, and future feuds, the poem points to the inescapable historical fact that even though Grendel and his dam, the dragon, and human aggressors such as Heremod are dead, their children are ceaselessly at play on the killing fields of history. Even Beowulf himself, when he returns to Geatland after journeying to Daneland to clean up, as it were, Hrothgar’s hall and help him put his kingdom back in order, acknowledges to Hygelac that “seldom anywhere after the death of a prince does the deadly spear rest for even a brief while”\textsuperscript{34} (“Oft seldan hwær / æfter leodhryre lýtle hwîle / bongar buged,” lines 2029b–31a). There is always a tension in the poem, then, between the hope, articulated in narrative (in all the stories within the story), that a certain kind of remembering will secure a better future, and the more historical reality that with each shift in the structures of power, the specters of inhumanity always return from their brief periods of exile to wreak havoc and death. In this sense, the poem speaks to a very modern (and disquieting) set of questions regarding history’s relation to time, language, and social communities struggling with traumatic and cataclysmic events.
Just as Beowulf is decidedly not the comforting grand narrative that, perhaps, critics such as Eagleton believe it to be, following Liuzzi’s statement above, it is also not entirely the literary animal we would expect from the aesthetic traditions of its own time—traditions of which we can never have what might be called a whole history, given the fact that the existing corpus of Old English poetry is scattered, incomplete, fragmentary, and full of maddening cruces. But among what does survive—the elegies, maxims, riddles, charms, religious verse, and battle poems—there is nothing even close to Beowulf. One of the hallmark dictums of modernism was summed up in Ezra Pound’s famous statement “Make it new,” and it is not difficult to make the argument, as Joseph Harris does, that Beowulf “presents a unique poet’s unique reception of the oral genres of the Germanic early Middle Ages; like the Canterbury Tales it was retrospective and comprehensive, summa-rizing a literary period in a literary form so new and so masterful that it apparently inspired no imitators.”35 That Beowulf is “new,” “multilayered and temporally complex,” subversive of generic expectations, and humming with discursive and historical ambiguities as well as with various cultural anxieties is beautifully illustrated by many of the contributors to this volume, but before we can begin to fully engage the question of Beowulf’s relation and relevance to our contemporary world, we must also ask, what are the supposed conditions of modernity (or, postmodernity) to which Eagleton and other scholars of more contemporary periods believe Beowulf cannot be related, and how might these conditions matter in our readings of the poem?

The term “postmodern” has become endemic in descriptions of the contemporary academic landscape, its objects of study, and its critical methodologies, as well as of the social and political conditions outside the university proper. Because of this, we cannot see our way around the term, although we wonder if, somewhere up ahead in the future, it will be decided that our “postmodern turn” was primarily a strategy to stake out a place of ground within which to critique a modernity to which we felt we could no longer belong, partly because its technologies and vocabularies of progress and liberation led inexorably and fatally to genocide and the gulag, and also valorized a bureaucracy capable of enacting these horrors. It might be best to say that “postmodernism” is a critical term (and a state of worldly affairs) still seeking a fully-developed definition and even a history, and that it is beneficial to leave open the question of what distinguishes the postmodern from the modern. But we would also say here that we agree with the social theorist Zygmunt Bauman, who argues, “The society which enters the
twenty-first century is no less ‘modern’ than the society which entered the twentieth; the most one can say is that it is modern in a different way.”

Following the thought of his fellow social theorists, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, Bauman believes that we are in a “second,” “late,” or “accelerated” modernity. For Bauman, this is a “fluid” period of modernity in which, thanks to new “liquid” and “light” technologies and hypertrophied time-space arrangements, such as wireless communications, “smart” missiles, and maquileros factory zones, the “heavy” arch-metaphors of an earlier phase—empire, Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, and the Fordist factory—have given way to a period in which “the prime technique of power is now escape, slippage, elision, and avoidance, the effective rejection of any territorial confinement with its cumbersome corollaries of order-building, order-maintenance and the responsibility for the consequences of it all as well as of the necessity to bear costs.” Also being melted are the bonds that, historically, have connected individuals to each other in relation to the state, and therefore, whereas in the past modernity first emerged as the era of territorial conquest and “feverish nation- and nation-state-building,” by contrast, in modernity’s more liquid phase, the contemporary global elite can rule without burdening itself with the chores of administration, management, welfare concerns, or, for that matter, “bringing light,” “reforming the ways,” morally uplifting, “civilizing” and cultural crusades. Active engagement in the life of subordinate populations is no longer needed (on the contrary, it is actively avoided as unnecessarily costly and ineffective)—and so the “bigger” is not just not “better” any more, but devoid of rational sense. It is now the smaller, the lighter, the more portable that signifies improvement and “progress.” Traveling light, rather than holding tightly to things . . . is now the asset of power.

It will be countered by some that certain political powers still engage in cumbersome order-building (witness the present situation in Iraq) and that contemporary life is rife with the gigantic and the heavy, from mega-shopping malls to multinational corporations to super-jumbo Airbus jets to personal armored vehicles to the “bling” and Bentleys of celebrities, but it could also be argued that some of these are points of backlash and resistance to the disembodiments and dislocations of modern life, as well as attempts at securing monumental fortifications against, and even at capitalizing upon, the friability of a too-fluid and fractured world. In political life, under the lengthening shadows of the supposed eclipse of the nation-state, we have
also witnessed the backlash, often with deadly results, of the fortress-like ‘isms’ of the past: tribalism, territorialism, nationalism, parochialism, and fundamentalism, although it might be argued, as Bauman does, that these ‘isms’ are always ‘brittle’ and “endemically precarious,” since they are subject to a world in which the globalization of the economy, the “privatization of self-formation,” and the fragmentation of political sovereignties makes it increasingly difficult for any kind of collective identity-building to secure anything but temporary strongholds. At the same time, precisely because all “grand certitudes” have dissipated, they have also “split in the process into a multitude of little certainties, clung to all the more ferociously for their puniness.” With liquid modernity’s cutting loose of the heavy structures of the past, then, there are also the pockets (and sometimes huge waves) of tenacious resistance, as well as, one would assume, a lot of personal and cultural and political anxieties over the tenuousness of everything.

According to Giddens, late modernity carries with it a certain “existential anxiety.” Whereas, in premodern cultures, “time and space merged with the domains of the gods and spirits as well as with the ‘privileging of space’”, in time and space have since separated and social relations are now “lifted out” of local contexts and have to be articulated “across wide spans of time-space, up to and including global systems.” Further, late modernity “breaks down the protective framework of the small community and of tradition, replacing these with much larger, impersonal organizations.” Thanks to satellite communications; accelerated processes of the production, consumption, and “dumping” of material goods; the “disembodied labor of the software era”; and the globalization of everything, “space and time, once blended in human life-labors, have fallen apart and drifted away from each other in human thought and practice.” Also contributing to the anxieties of living in the late modern age, as Kenneth Gergen has written, are “[t]he dramatic expansion of the range of information to which we are exposed, the range of persons with whom we have significant interchange, and the range of opinions available within multiple media sites [that] make us privy to multiple realities,” such that “the comfort of parochial univocality is disturbed” and “we do not know where to limit ourselves” in a world in which “protean being” is privileged over the “palpable self.”

We can see the protean nature of things in *Beowulf* studies, partly, through the example of The Electronic “Beowulf”, a CD-ROM facsimile “image-based” edition of the Nowell codex of the Vitellius A.vx manuscript, a joint venture of Kevin Kiernan and his assistants at the University of Kentucky and Andrew Prescott and his assistants at the British Library in London.
Using powerful medical imaging technology and fiber-optic lighting, The Electronic “Beowulf” includes a comprehensive collection of images of the entire Nowell codex (which includes, in addition to Beowulf, the fragmentary Life of St. Christopher, The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle, Wonders of the East, and Judith, all in Old English), as well as linked images of readings previously hidden by the paper frames used to rebind the manuscript in 1845, digital facsimiles of the complete transcripts of Beowulf made by Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin in the late eighteenth century, as well as of his 1815 edition of the poem, and also of John Josias Conybeare’s and Frederick Madden’s early nineteenth-century collations between Thorkelin’s edition and the original manuscript (made in 1817 and 1824, respectively), “image maps” that offer the reader-user the capability to zoom in on particular letters, a glossarial index (with hyperlinks to the University of Toronto’s Dictionary of Old English project), search facilities that provide access to new comparative research tools, and finally, a new edition and transcription of Beowulf itself. Obviously, The Electronic “Beowulf” provides a means for reintegrating the membra dissecata of the manuscript and, as Prescott has written, “A user will not only have at his fingertips all the key evidence for the history of this text but will also be able to juxtapose them in ways which would be impossible even if all the volumes were assembled in one room.”

That same user might also beware, however, since collapsing all of the membra dissecata of the Beowulf manuscript into two CD-ROMs that can only be viewed on monitor screens (albeit with some split-screen capabilities) means that the physical space of textual scholarship on the poem has also been collapsed to an extent that will likely bring about a certain amount of cognitive dissonance when reading the various texts, whether side by side, enlarged, or in multiple windows with scrolling annotations.

In the heavier modernity, where time and place were, indeed, more tied to each other, a scholar had to possess the means and ability to travel to libraries in England and Denmark to view all of the material now available on two slim pieces of digitized plastic, and she would have had to transcribe the transcriptions, so to speak, with lead pencil, and then carry those transcriptions with her from library to library and back home again, where she would have had to physically arrange all of the material on her desk in such a manner, with various printed editions of the poem and dictionaries and concordances also at hand, that she could begin to read everything, again, in order to arrive at something obscured in the original manuscript, or in the interstices between the manuscript and its multiple facsimiles and editions. Conversely, the present reader-user of Beowulf sits in a cyber
café in front of her laptop, on which she has loaded the light and portable electronic edition of the poem, clicking from verso to recto, from mapped covered readings to magnified and digitally enhanced letters, jumping in an instant from folio 130 to folio 172, or from line readings in the manuscript to line readings in the transcripts to word entries in the Dictionary of Old English, and all this without having to navigate the heavy interfaces of airports and buildings and stern curators, manuscripts and pages and pencils. Ultimately, the earlier scholarly experience—simultaneously visual and tactile, and even olfactory—of physically handling the original, three-dimensional manuscript gives way, with the electronic edition, to a kind of floating encounter with a simulacrum that is not so much an actual “palpable” edition as an ephemeral, “protean” representation of one. We might consider what of “the human” (if we still believe in such a thing) also “gives way” when we work with digitized texts. With the advent of new types of wireless technology and miniaturization, one can imagine the Beowulf scholar of the future sitting on a bench in the piazza of a crowded city and wearing PC-powered eyeglasses and a jacket in which transmitters, chips, speakers, microphones, and wireless technology have been woven into the fabric. To each passerby, she is just a woman sitting on a bench, when in fact she is downloading, viewing, and annotating folios of the Beowulf manuscript with voice-activated software and wearable hardware. She will be both inside the book and yet also outside, in the world, and if she likes, she can also feed the pigeons.

One can only guess at the phenomenological vertigo possibly attendant upon such a situation. In this scenario, Beowulf is as liquid and supple as the scholar’s identity, and both text and human body touch the other’s skin. Moreover, the manuscript has been freed from the confines of the library and has the ability to move, in pixellated waves or in the form of zeroes and ones, from server to server, or satellite to satellite—Grendel will come stalking, not only through moor and fen, but also through time and cold space—and the text of the poem will be far more susceptible to being written upon and tampered with (and, frankly, to being “deleted”) than the original manuscript that is somewhat protected in its glass case at the new British Library at St. Pancras, because, as Roger Chartier writes, “In the universe of remote communications made possible by computerized texts and electronic diffusion, texts are no longer prisoner of their original, physical existence.” We might ponder all the ways in which a “liquid Beowulf” also helps to usher in some of those existential anxieties that Giddens and other social theorists believe are a hallmark of the late modern experience, where
individuals feel increasingly unmoored from place, and as a result, also from other individuals who were once supposedly collective with them.

Bauman would argue that this disintegration of social bonds is not just the outcome or side-effect of late modernity’s various dislocations and globalizing forces, but is also their very condition, for “it is the falling apart, the friability, the brittleness, the transience, the until-further-noticeness of human bonds and networks”48 which allows particular asocial forces to flow unchecked. Bauman argues further that, in the realm of personal relationships, “The advent of virtual proximity [via various electronic networks] renders human connections simultaneously more frequent and more shallow, more intense and more brief.”49 The end result is a “separation between communication and relationship.”50 We might investigate how Bauman’s picture of modern society differs (or does not differ) from the society depicted in Beowulf, described by John Hill as a “non-centralized, notably martial, face-to-face, aristocratic world,” where “kinship structures are largely bilateral; where there is customary settlement of grievances through revenge and feud; where gift giving matters; where myths and legends are ancestral and incorporating; [and] where the sense of time is genealogical and not deeply historical, mechanistic, and alienating.”51 The Anglo-Saxon hall is, according to Hill, “more than a place or center; rather it becomes a fundamental mode of organization, cutting across kinship lines and creating a hall kinship—a kinship-band (sibbegedriht)—that . . . encompasses both private and public activities, both secular and sacred ones.”52 To assume, however, that the Anglo-Saxons only understood social relations within local or face-to-face contexts, might be not to understand fully how much of their culture was also “global,” in relation to the ways in which they imagined, remembered, and also traversed their northern European history and geography, as Nicholas Howe explains in his essay, “Beowulf and the Ancestral Homeland,” included in this volume.53 We would argue, moreover, that in Beowulf’s physical movements across broad expanses of land and water, as well as in his narrations of his own and others’ histories (past, present, and future—his speech to Hygelac, lines 2000–2151, is a chief example), the social relations of the poem are constantly being lifted out, as it were, of local contexts and are articulated and rearticulated across wide tracts of time and space. Nevertheless, Hill’s ethnographic approaches to Beowulf, as is well known, highlights what might be called the social unities of a highly localized—and, to Hill, anthropologically coherent—world in such a way as to redeem it from readings of the poem (such as Clare Lees’s) that see in that same world a “deliberately ambivalent” attitude toward “a particularly
conflicted set of male relationships.\textsuperscript{54} Regardless of whether we judge the cultural world represented in \textit{Beowulf} to be socially coherent—where, for example, its violence is part and parcel of what Hill terms its rational system of “jural feud”\textsuperscript{55}—or fraught with ambivalence and tension over issues of violence and aggression, it may be that its face-to-face relationships were not necessarily more solid than our supposedly more friable and “liquid” arrangements, nor more natural, for as Bauman writes,

No variety of human togetherness is fully structured, no internal differentiation is all-embracing, comprehensive and free from ambivalence, no hierarchy is total and frozen. The logic of categories [such as Victor Turner’s \textit{communitas} and \textit{societas}] ill fits the endemic variegation and messiness of human interactions. Each attempt at complete structuration leaves numerous “loose strings” and contentious meanings; each produces its blank spots, underdefined areas, ambiguities, and “no man’s” territories lacking their official ordnance surveys and maps.\textsuperscript{56}

Much of the recent scholarship on \textit{Beowulf}, as represented by many of the essays in this book, is quite intent on revealing the deep ambivalences, ambiguities, and “loose strings” of the social relations in what Hill calls the poem’s “cultural world” and Earl calls “the world of the poem.” Earl actually argues that the poem is not really a world at all but an “infinitely magnifiable imaginary map” whose “semiosis is unlimited,” partly because our mental associations “run along numberless roots under the vast fields of memory,” and therefore, we might approach the poem “as if it were a dream—even as if we had dreamed it ourselves.”\textsuperscript{57}

Michael Winterbottom’s film \textit{Code 46} (2004) provides another interesting avenue for thinking about \textit{Beowulf}'s relation to our modernity, and it also illuminates those vast fields of memory and dream to which Earl refers, partly because the story is based on the classical Oedipus myth whose branching tendrils run deep within the modern psyche. The film also provides a picture of the future that is really the present in disguise, and therefore gives another means (albeit through fiction and not social theory) for answering the question posed by Earl, “What kind of present are we in, anyway?”\textsuperscript{58}—a question we need to confront if we want to make the case for \textit{Beowulf}'s relevance to our present moment. A romance set in a near dystopic future but shot in the contemporary locales of the modern cities of Shanghai and Seattle, and also in the deserts of Dubai and shanty towns of Jaipur, \textit{Code 46} utilizes present-day landscapes unaltered by special effects to instill the same kind of romance, and any love and development of the workers’ conditions comes from the bottom up, not from above. By combining elements of the film, one recognizes its visitation to the world of the poem, but in the present, the filmmakers cannyly subtly play with and intersperse the present with the past in a way that globalizes it and yet makes it highly localizable and relatable.

Because our assumptions in \textit{Beowulf} are so antithetical to those of modern life, it is no wonder that our every thought is not only a return to the past, but a perpetually present not only to the past but to the present. If the past is not dead, yet, much more than a corpse, it is alive and living and continues to guide all epochs down the path of meanings, if these are to be seen as the wellspring and \textit{Beowulf} as its fountainhead, these local and global meanings.

Winterbottom’s film provides us with a development of social thought, and to the extent that the two films are similar, perhaps it is to the extent that it provides a meaningful and relevant interpretation of the meaning of social thought, and to the extent that the social thought is meaningful and relevant, it is meaningful and relevant to our current moment in the world.
to inscribe a dichotomy between the “inside” of the technologically sleek and antiseptic cities and the “outside” (“afuera” in the film) of the squalid developing-world villages and desert. The cities are home to transnational workers who speak a kind of Esperanto and whose movements are controlled by “papelles”—papers that function like visas and travel insurance combined and are issued by a corporation called The Sphinx. More than one reviewer has pointed out the film’s prophetic qualities, not because of its vision of the supposed future, but because all of the ways it pictures forth the present we already inhabit, while also making that present seem uncanny—both strange and familiar at once. According to once critic, by setting the film “in the sterile fluorescence of ultramodern airports and hotels and in impoverished outlying regions,” Winterbottom “delineates a time of global mobility, extreme inequality, and radical loneliness, distilling the fugitive moods of contemporary life into an ambience of muted, abstracted longing.”

Because Code 46 retells the story of Oedipus, albeit with some modifications involving human cloning (the main character, William, unwittingly sleeps with a younger clone of his dead mother, Maria), the film simultaneously updates the past and also reads the future against the grain of the structures of belief that persist in time. More specifically, Winterbottom’s film plays out certain classical and mythological themes regarding fate, desire, and taboo within the context of a future in which biology has replaced divine prophecy (while also retaining the inescapable mandate of a certain determinism), yet basic human passions and sexual sins remain the same. No one in the film ever really moves forward into the future but is stuck perpetually in a modernity, or “middle present,” similar to our own time. And yet, much like Beowulf, the film also articulates old concepts that are both alive and dead at once, and we could “do worse than [to] define historical epochs by the kinds of ‘inner demons’ that haunt and torment them.” And if these inner demons have a long history—as both Winterbottom’s film and Beowulf more than amply demonstrate—what better way to investigate these long histories than through our most ancient literatures?

Winterbottom’s film and Bauman’s and other social theorists’ conceptions of the present as modernity’s second, late, or liquid phase cannot, by themselves, answer the question of whether Beowulf is relevant to our present moment, nor do we even have to agree with these conceptions of the times in which we live, but they can at least help us to begin to sketch out a provisional plane of an ideation, or set of pictures, or narrative, of the present upon which we can play out various notions about where we think we
are, and more fully pose the question, what is Oedipus to Winterbottom or Beowulf to us? The critical anxiety surrounding this question may, at times, be palpable, for as Howe writes, “the desire to historicize our literary and cultural practice suggests our uncertainty that there is a workable connection between past and present,” which results in the “haunting anxiety that the past, even if it can be reimagined or recovered, will be mute when we press it to speak to our moment.”62 As Edward Said reminds us, however, it may not be that we have to press Beowulf to speak to our present moment, for “texts have ways of existing that even in their most rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and society—in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly,” and the “closeness of the world’s body to the text’s body forces readers to take both into consideration.”63

But it is also we, the critics, who “embody in writing those processes and actual conditions in the present by means of which art and writing bear significance,” and we therefore have a special responsibility to describe the processes by which a text expresses both “historical contingency” and the “sensuous particularity” of each moment in which it is read.64 And Old English scholars, we would argue, have already begun to do this. For example, in his essay included in this volume, “Writing the Unreadable Beowulf,” Allen Frantzen describes how, at various times in its reception history, Beowulf has answered to the particular desires of its different editors, translators, and critics, and Frantzen thereby historicizes “the function of the poem as a version of English history,” while he also delineates the ways in which the language of the poem itself comments on the intertextual processes of reading and writing in such a manner as to reveal to us some of the poem’s “inner” and “dialogized” history,65 an inner history which, in Seth Lerer’s view, may have something to do with “the poem’s own conception of the [emerging] role of literature in culture and in the nature of poetic response.”66 And in his essay “Beowulf and the Origins of Civilization,” Earl engages in a daring thought experiment where he imagines what the poem might have meant to one of its possible earliest readers—Byrhtnoth, the hero of The Battle of Maldon—while he also explores, through his personal dreams, his own unconscious reactions to a poem that he believes plucks “the deepest chords of ambivalence within us.”67 Earl’s statement in the same essay that, “The system of relations—of us to Beowulf, of Beowulf to the Anglo-Saxons, and of the Anglo-Saxons to us—constitutes the meaning of Beowulf”68 opens up an important critical space within which we can begin to trace the ways in which the poem invokes, not an actual Germanic or Scandinavian or northern world, but an imagined world that likely need-
ed to be *dreamed* in a specific place and at a specific time. In a particular present—tenth- or eleventh-century England, let’s say—Beowulf’s story, and all of the other stories attached to his narrative were desired and set into textual motion. But for what reasons? And how might those reasons still matter to us? We would say that one provisional answer might be that it is precisely in its ambiguities, ambivalences, circularities, and appositive tensions that *Beowulf* clearly questions certain values and ideologies that we are still questioning and struggling with today, in relation to violence, heroism, honor, masculinity, tribalism, loyalty, demonization of the Other, and idealization of the past. In relation to these values and ideologies, the poem does not so much answer the questions as leave them open and conflicted in each present in which it is read.

Niles characterizes *Beowulf* as “a site of ideological conflict” that “represents a broad collective response to changes that affected a complex society during a period of major crisis and transformation”—more specifically, to his mind, “in the period of nation-building that followed ninth-century Viking invasions.” As a result, the poem is a “a socially embedded poetic act” that does not so much provide “a clear window on early Germanic social institutions” as it responds to the “lively tensions, agreements, and disagreements in the society from which it came.” Further, the poem is “a polyphonic work whose messages are contingent and sometimes contrary.” In his essay reprinted in this volume, “Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac’s Mound and Grendel’s Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building,” Alfred Siewers likewise views *Beowulf*, through an ecocritical and psychoanalytic perspective, as a poem that reflects a certain expression of an emerging cultural identity for Anglo-Saxon elites—a cultural identity, moreover, that is formed out of a “creative tension between Augustinian otherworldliness and secular nation-building.” Siewers detects in the poem’s treatment of Grendel and his mother and the dragon, and the topographies they inhabit, “stand-ins for residual ‘native’ Celtic populations in areas such as the fenlands” who might have stood in the way of an emerging, seventh- to eighth-century “Mercian hegemony” that wished to exorcise “pagan ancestral associations from earlier cultural landscapes” through an Anglo-Saxon identity myth, personified in Beowulf, of supra-landscape authority. It is not only in the events or the landscapes of the narratives, but also in the poem’s language, as Carol Braun Pasternack argues, that we can begin to detect, through deconstruction, the “cracks,” “fissures,” and “slippages” in the contradictions between an older “oral-heroic social formation” and an emerging “written-Christian formation” struggling against each other for
expression in the poem. Even earlier than Niles or Siewers or Pasternack and other scholars included in this volume who take similar poststructuralist approaches to the poem, Roberta Frank took note of the fact that literary works, like Beowulf, with a “sufficiently intense concern for history,” cannot help but comprise “a series of projections inevitably focused by the particular anxieties of the writer.” Further, “the vision of the Beowulf poet seems to derive from contemporary concerns, from a need to establish in the present an ideological basis for national unity.” Beowulf himself could be characterized as a novus homo (Frank’s phrase) in the middle of history who travels back and forth between the “inside” of a proto-Christian social milieu (Heorot) and the borderland “outside” of a condemned and lawless past (Grendel’s and the dragon’s country but also, importantly, Geatland and its martial outposts).

In Beowulf’s heroic exploits and ritualized death scenes we can see the cultural tensions that always inhere in the incommensurability between the ways in which the figures of the past, in Walter Benjamin’s words, are always striving by “a secret heliotropism . . . to turn toward the sun which is rising in the sky of history” and the ways in which those in the present (the author and the poem’s tenth- or eleventh-century readers, but also we, its modern audience) are resurrecting the dead only to bury them again with different rites and under a different sky. At the same time, the poem speaks to historical contingencies and moments of uncanny recognition between the “familiar” present and the always “Other” past. In the poem’s digressive asides regarding future episodes of violence, such as the wars between the Swedes and the Geats, or the enmity between Hrothgar and his in-laws, every heroic action Beowulf undertakes to vanquish monstrous enemies is undercut by the social reality that, in the end, war is always inevitable and ongoing, both in Beowulf’s time, the time of the Anglo-Saxons, and our own time, and this calls into question the nature of heroism itself—what, finally, is it good for? Moreover, in Beowulf’s encounters with the so-called monsters—Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon—which themselves have deep roots in Old Testament and other mythological traditions, we can begin to trace the inner demons that lie just beneath the more overtly political and ideological conflicts expressed in the poem, and also glimpse the contours of the exiled stranger-Others who reside in the margins not only of Beowulf’s world or of Anglo-Saxon history, but also of our own cultural psyche, where they expose what Jeffrey Cohen has described as “the extimité, the ‘extimacy’ or ‘intimate alterity’ of identity.” And regardless of what appears to be the poem’s definitive foreignness—partly because of its
language and structure, partly because of the tribal culture it represents—as Earl reminds us, “Beowulf” both reveals and disguises some surprisingly familiar structures of our cultured Germanic, Anglo-Saxon, English-speaking minds—our antifeminism, for example, our repression of affect, our materialism, and our denial of death.”

Because of the endless ways in which different presents and different pasts encounter each other through the text of Beowulf, and the multiple tensions and varieties of frisson that inevitably result from such encounters, the “medieval,” as enclosed (and represented) within the poem, becomes what Cohen has described as “a site of infinite possibility . . . an uncanny middle that can derail the somber trajectories of history and bring about pasts as yet undreamed.” The poem might even be said to speak to a kind of crisis of temporality that inheres in the often vexed relationship between history and memory and the artist who desires to bring to a standstill, through representation, the always fugitive and ghostly presences of the past. What Gerhard Richter writes about the work of the contemporary German artist Anselm Kiefer, whose monumental paintings and other multimedia works, much like Beowulf, plumb the depths of a dark mythological Germanic past as well as the terrors of a haunted and conflicted political present, could apply, we believe, with equal force to our readings of Beowulf—that they return us again and again to a series of open questions. What is history? What will its relation to presentation have been? What are the links between strategies of aesthetic figuration and the politics of memory and counter-memory? . . . Does the presentation of history necessarily imply a search for lost former presences, fugitive moments of temporality that were once simply themselves and transparently comprehensible? . . . What does it mean that the historical presents itself not as a former presence but rather in the space of intersecting traces that inscribe its genealogical shifts and movements, and that, by extension, the historical was always already—even at the time of its retroactively projected former presence, the fiction of its anteriority—a network of traces and relays?

Tolkien was right that “the main foes in Beowulf are inhuman,” but he may have missed the mark in arguing that the poem “stands amid but above the petty wars of princes, and surpasses the dates and limits of historical periods,” for it may be that it is precisely “the historical”—however we might define that, through Leopold von Ranke or Michel Foucault—that
the poetry attempts to surpass, but never can surpass, and the dragon, ultimately, is not the figure of a particular myth, or mythical force, but history itself in mythological drag. The answer to whether or not Beowulf speaks to our modernity may lie precisely in the ways in which the poem, much like Kiefer’s art, “offers us a series of conceptual and figurational dilemmas without which the historical can hardly be thought.” And the poem’s continuing attraction, for modern critics as well as the more general public, will likely have something to do with how the poem poses a certain psychoanalytic problem of memory—in Charles Shepherdson’s words, “what does it mean to say that in dredging up the past, repeating it, going back across the river to see where the ancestors lie buried, one is concerned, not so much with what really happened—with what Leopold von Ranke called ‘the past as it really was in itself”—but rather with intervening, rewriting the past, producing a shift in the symbolic structure of the narrative that has brought us to the point where we are now.87

There has been an explosion in recent years in various humanities disciplines in “history and memory” studies, especially with regard to the problem of trauma in relation to major historical events, such as the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide. These studies are especially intent on interrogating “the historical” in relation to real-world events (or, actual lived experience) and to the aesthetic figurations of those events and experiences, as well as all the ways in which the two can rarely be untangled.88 The problem of memory’s relationship to history is especially acute at the end of the twentieth century, when we consider, as Jacques Le Goff writes, the critical importance of collective memory:

Overflowing history as both a form of knowledge and a public river, flowing uphill as the moving reservoir of history, full of archives and documents/monuments, and downhill as the sonorous (and living) echo of historical work, collective memory is one of the great stakes of developed and developing societies, of dominated and dominating classes, all of them struggling for power or for life, for survival and advancement.89

In Old English studies, Niles draws attention to the force of collective memory when he writes that, if a full history of Anglo-Saxon England could ever be written, “it would read as the story of a series of appropriations [material, linguistic, or intellectual] of greater or lesser magnitude,” and further, “Anglo-Saxon England is nothing other than what it has been perceived to be by historically grounded human beings, from the time of the Anglo-Saxons
to the present moment.\(^{90}\) The historical present, Niles argues, is formed on the ground of a past that is not out there somewhere, but is rather in here, as a part of our cultural consciousness, which cultural consciousness, moreover, is a kind of bricolage that has been formed out of the scavengings and pillagings of the artifacts and remnants of the past—linguistic, geographic, architectural, literary, etc. In the end,

it no longer matters what “really happened” in history. What’s done is done. The victors of former struggles are now wrapped by the same earth that covers their victims. What does matter greatly is what people believe happened in history, what they say happened, for such beliefs and claims can have a passionate relation to rivalries of which the outcome is still in doubt.\(^{91}\)

In her essay, “In Transit: Theorizing Cultural Appropriation in Medieval Europe,” reprinted in this volume, Claire Sponsler writes that the verb appropriate, “to make one’s own,” points to “a system of objects within which valued artifacts circulate and are given meanings and underscores the way in which appropriation is an act of possessing—of ideas, objects, texts, beliefs.”\(^{92}\) In Sponsler’s view, medieval studies has tended “to approach their task as one of salvage,” and this “has privileged the ‘artifact’ as the focal point of study rather than the ‘process’ of cultural creation and transmission.”\(^{93}\) As a result, we do not always recognize that meaning moves continually between different locations in the world, just as cultural objects do—nothing is ever static and everything is “flowing” all the time. Beowulf itself opens with the statement we gefrunon, “we have heard,” and therefore the poem begins with an appropriation of a story from somewhere out there that the poet is obviously going to refashion for his own concerns, while also putting on the pretense of only “telling” (i.e., “recording”) something not only already heard, but more elliptically, already known. We would argue that Beowulf is an ideal text—both as an artifact and as an act of aesthetic figuration—for interrogating the process of cultural creation and transmission, as well as the flow of meaning through places and over time, and many of the essays included in this volume do exactly that. A literary text like Beowulf that speaks of and points toward a traumatic and violent history—part real, part wholly unreal—so far removed from us in time that we could easily feel emotionally disconnected from it, and for which there are no recognizable memory sites (other than the manuscript itself, there is no real Heorot or Geatland we can visit, although we often strive mightily to create memory sites for ourselves, as we have with Sutton Hoo), and whose composition history is
fraught with so many unresolvable aporia (thereby continually unsettling our ability to historically situate its provenance with absolute precision), would seem to provide an ideal site through which to explore the always compromised relationships between memory, history, and art.

Since its first English edition in 1833, \textit{Beowulf} has operated in critical circles less as a purely poetic text from which we want to discover something about meaning—whether local or past or more global and transhistorical—and more as an historical \textit{lieu de mémoire}, or “memory site,” that can aid us in the construction (or deconstruction) of a collective and commemorative English or Germanic- or Nordic-inflated past.\footnote{This dismayed Tolkien, of course, who believed that some of the earlier dismissal of the poem, such as W. P. Ker’s, mainly had to do with the “disappointment at the discovery” that the poem “was itself and not something that the scholar would have liked better—for example, a heathen heroic lay, a history of Sweden, a manual of German antiquities, or a Nordic \textit{Summa Theologica}.\footnote{Although Tolkien’s commentary certainly opened the way for some brilliant aesthetic criticism—Edward B. Irving’s \textit{A Reading of “Beowulf”} (New Haven, 1968) and \textit{Rereading “Beowulf”} (Philadelphia, 1989) being two gorgeous examples—a concern for the supposed real history hidden behind the poem’s story, or its production and reception, or our relation to it over time, has remained predominant in \textit{Beowulf} studies, perhaps because, as Howe writes, “As they interpret the remains of a past culture, all works on Old English language and literature are historical in method and intent.”\footnote{Howe also reminds us that even Tolkien was somewhat of a historicist—not in wanting to use the poem as a “quarry” for specific cultural facts (a scholarly approach Tolkien condemned), but in recognizing the poem “as a sustained meditation on the past’s richly subtle senses of its own past.”\footnote{And the ultimate conclusion of this sustained meditation, for both the characters within the poem and the scholars outside of it, may be that the past, for all of its vibrant materiality at one time—can only ever be invented, partly as a hedge against the chaos of time, partly as a hedge against death and nothingness. When we consider the image of the women of Beowulf’s tribe, in line 3019, bereft of their possessions, “oft nalles eane elland tredan” (“treading a foreign path, not once but often”), or even the refugees of our present world living along the borders between Chechnya and Georgia, Sudan and Chad, or outside the walls of Fallujah in Iraq, we may believe initially that what we are seeing are the losers of history—those who are utterly bereft of all we have built up and retained through knowledge, place, and possessions—but what we are really seeing is the truth of what has, perhaps, always been our own historical condition: an ever-present vulnerability.}}.}

Vulnerability, a constant condition, a constant temptation, a constant oppression, a constant struggle, a constant battle, a constant necessity of survival. Through the poet's eyes, we can see how the characters face these challenges and overcome them, learning from their experiences and passing on their wisdom to future generations. The story of Beowulf is not just about the victory over the monster Grendel, but also about the triumph of good over evil, and the importance of memory, tradition, and storytelling in shaping our collective identity. As we read through Beowulf, we are reminded of the fragility of human existence and the need to cherish our memories and stories, lest we lose our connection to the past and the lessons it has to teach us.
condition: our rootlessness and fugitive wanderings, as well as our naked vulnerability to what Tolkien called our “inevitable overthrow in Time.”

Vulnerability to an overthrow in time is also Beowulf’s historical condition, a condition he strives mightily to displace in three significant places: when, upon returning from Daneland, he constructs his own narrative of his exploits there and also predicts the future destruction of Hrothgar’s court in a speech to Hygelac (lines 1999–2151); when, before fighting the dragon, he explains to his retainers the sorrow of Hrethel over his family’s fratricide and son’s execution, and also points to the bloody and unredeemed history of Ravenswood (lines 2425–2509), a story that sheds some light on the supposed origins of the long-standing feud between the Swedes and the Geats and that Wiglaf’s herald will continue narrating after Beowulf’s death (lines 2923b–98); and last, when he relates very specific instructions, while dying, regarding how he wants the dragon’s treasure to be used (as insurance against enemies) and how he wants to be buried—which is to say, how he wants to be remembered (lines 2794–2816). Strikingly, these three episodes, when taken together, show Beowulf placing himself all over the chronological map (past, present, and future) in order to not only tell his own story, but to also fix that story within a history that has already been sealed within a beginning and a middle, with himself as the sufficient end. Yet the very ending Beowulf wants to write for himself—warrior-vanquisher, peacemaker, and never-forgotten king—is undermined by Wiglaf’s decision to bury the treasure with him, and also by the fact that the very mission that he designed to initially fashion himself as a forward-looking hero (traveling to Daneland to take on Hrothgar’s monsters, who are also Hrothgar’s personal demons) cannot, and by Beowulf’s own admission, will not hold, due to the always percolating enmity of Hrothgar’s court. According to Janet Thomann, Beowulf’s speech before dying, as well as Wiglaf’s herald’s speech to the retainers afterward (lines 2900–3027), are both personal and cultural memories and attempts at representing history during moments of profound crisis and anxiety over the temporariness of material bodies, but we must also remember that,

No history is ever more than a symbolic construction, more than language relating only to other language, nor may history be ethical before it recognizes itself to be only language and hence acknowledges its limits. Only in language does the vulnerable body appear, not the real, indestructible enjoying body or the imaginary, fortified ego of the young warrior, but the subject without certainty, absolute control, or secure foundation.
In Beowulf's speech before fighting the dragon, especially in his expression of his nostalgic desire that he wishes he could know how, other than with a sword, he “wið ōam aglæcean elles meahte / gylype wiðgripian, swaic gio wið Grendle dyde” (“against that terror might otherwise grapple, according to boast, such as I did with Grendel,” lines 2520–21), Susan Kim likewise sees an attempt at writing and fixing in time a personal memory that, at the same time, carries the burden of a larger history:

Beowulf's desire here is explicitly the nostalgic longing for a past moment of origin, which is full, is fixed, and can be held on to in the way that Grendel could be and which is thus experienced only within the nostalgic narrative of loss. . . . Beowulf thus positions himself in a present moment defined by the loss of a past moment; he knows, by the very gesture of its evocation as already an old story, that this is an impossible origin, a self-conscious narrative rather than a lived experience.103

Because Beowulf's fight with the dragon and its outcome is linked at a very intimate level with the ensuing Swedish incursions against the now leaderless Geats that Wiglaf's herald will predict in gory detail to Beowulf's "folk" after Beowulf has died (lines 2999–3027), as Kim points out, “Beowulf carries the burden of history within the poem,”104 and this is a history, moreover, that is continually being foreclosed in language, and in language's fictionality. Indeed, because the poet himself tells us in the first one hundred lines of the poem, before Beowulf is even introduced as a character, that "ne wes hit lenge þa gen" (“it was not long yet”) before the great hall at Heorot is consumed by hostile fires due to the violence of ecghete, “sword-hate” (lines 83–84), Heorot is therefore destroyed before Beowulf even enters its horn-gabled doors in order to secure it against Grendel's attacks. Because of the multiple tenses implied in “it was not long yet”—it has already happened and is also about to happen—before Beowulf can undo Grendel and his kin, Beowulf's warrior work has already been undone. Moreover, when he crosses the sea to Daneland he hurries, as it were, toward an absence that trembles with the last traces of its once more vibrant materiality. Beowulf's command, when dying, for his retainers to build a memorial in his honor, both as reminder to his people as well as a marker for seafarers (lines 2802–08)—which seafarers can only come to Beowulf from a future that is now forever out of his grasp—indicates that Beowulf understands the absences and ambiguities of history all too well, and fears his own disappearance there. For all of the poet's labors to complete Beowulf's story with funerary
encomiums, with every reading of the poem, Beowulf is awakened, then put back to a rest that is never really a rest, which is why one of his last statements to Wiglaf, “ne mæg ic her leng wesan” (“I can be here no longer,” line 2801), becomes a pregnant irony. At the same time, as the poem also shows us, in the end, Beowulf is only smoke, as well as, in Kim’s words, “the remains” that “fill the language” of his tribe’s lamentations.\textsuperscript{104}

Bodies (both dead and alive), history, and language, and all of the fiercely tangled relations between them—what do the dead want from us, what might we want from each other at any given moment, and how might we sufficiently record our past and present histories in order to lend some kind of meaning and ethical content to what some of us fear, deep down, is a kind of unscripted chaos? How, further, can the past inform our future in a way that is ethically and socially constructive? These are the questions that resonate throughout Beowulf and also modern life. However insufficient some of Ker’s commentary on Beowulf might seem to us today, some of his remarks on Beowulf in his 1904 book The Dark Ages strike us as smartly sensitive to the issue of what might be called Beowulf’s historicity, and to the ways in which the poem speaks, not of history itself, but of the anxiety of being undone by history, of being erased in its ever-shifting currents and concerns, of being outright torn apart and killed by it and then consigned to oblivion, to a place where no one remembers anything at all. Following the thought of Richter on Kiefer’s art, Beowulf “presents itself in the strange figure of a singularity that meets in unforeseeable ways with the generality of its historical and philosophical structure,”\textsuperscript{105} and long before many other scholars were willing to concede the matter (and some will still not relinquish it), Ker recognized that the history contained in early epic poetry is always already transformed by a unique artistic sensibility (what Ker called the epic, or heroic, imagination) which, having admitted that the actual history of war and warriors is itself too politically complex for poetry, “turns by preference to adventures where the hero is isolated or left with a small company, where he is surprised and assailed in a house by night, as at Finnesburh, or where he meets his enemies in a journey and has to put his back to a rock. Ultimately, the poet’s “subject matter is not purely material; it has been idealized more or less before he takes it in hand.”\textsuperscript{106} Further, “the actual world, so infinitely more complex than the world of heroic poetry, was nevertheless occupied in the Dark Ages with the heroic ideal.”\textsuperscript{107} So, even before history is turned into poetry, it already is poetry, and the artwork, whether Beowulf or The Battle of Maldon, is a singular expression of a narrative imagination “concerned
with the Sisyphean task of working through history and its imbrications in the mythical: to attempt to come to terms with their ghostliness, but also to employ them as the vexed prime material out of which a thought may flow into artistic form.”¹⁰⁸ In this sense, the “historical”—whatever that may mean—is not recoverable in the poem, and even when we labor to locate analogues for historical figures and events (and for historical concerns) within the poem, as Michel de Certeau would remind us, “the historical figure is only a dummy,” and “the past is a fiction of the present.”¹⁰⁹ But what is historical about “heroic poetry” is the way in which it reveals, following Ker, what might be called a cultural occupation with that moment when the idealized hero has to put his back to a rock. In all times and places, whether under threat of violence and extinction—by Vikings or the Khmer Rouge—or under the obligation to either rush into the breach or out of the foxhole, such heroes are dreamed, and also killed off. Perhaps the poem relates to our present moment, finally, not because it either is or is not a comforting grand narrative, is or is not a story about things that might have really happened, is or is not a type of window, however opaque, upon a past related to us through genealogy and a “desire for origins,” but because it expresses some of the wish fulfillment, and also the anxieties, of a human memory troubled by history—in the same way that we continue to be troubled by history and our relation to its silences and blank spots, its dark fissures and violent effacements, its holocausts and other zones of devastation.

At the opening of the House of Literature in Stuttgart in 2001, the late writer W. G. Sebald, who grew up in the aftermath of Germany’s destruction during World War II, gave a speech in which he ruminated how, as an author of fiction, he had devoted his life to “adhering to an exact historical perspective, in patiently engraving and linking together apparently disparate things in the manner of a still-life.”¹¹⁰ He recalled that, as he was riding the S-Bahn train into Stuttgart in 2001 on a winter night, he could not help himself from thinking, when he reached Feuersee Station, “that the fires are still blazing above us, and that since the terrors of the last war years, even though we have rebuilt our surroundings so wonderfully well, we have been living in a kind of underground zone.”¹¹¹ Likewise, he found himself imagining how the “network of lights glittering in the darkness” of Daimler Corporation’s new administrative complex

was like a constellation of stars spreading all over the world, so that these Stuttgart stars are visible not only in the cities of Europe and on the boulevards of Beverly Hills and Buenos Aires but wherever columns of trucks
with their cargoes of refugees move along the dusty roads, obviously never stopping, in the zones of devastation that are always spreading somewhere—in Sudan, Kosovo, Eritrea, or Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{112}

What, Sebald finally asked, in such underground zones and (paraphrasing the poetry of Hölderlin) in “the dark of an all too sober realm where wild confusion prevails in the treacherous light,” is literature good for? Sebald’s answer was that “[t]here are many forms of writing; only in literature, however, can there be an attempt at restitution over and above the mere recital of facts, and over and above scholarship.”\textsuperscript{113}

We would like to argue that, similar to the poetry of \textit{Beowulf} or a work like Sebald’s novel of post-Holocaust experience \textit{Austerlitz}, scholarship can also be a “restitution,” as well as an artistic (even poetic) intervention into history that engraves and links things together in the manner of a still-life in order to “grasp the ways in which [history’s] images flash up only in the fleeting moment that illuminates...a field of endless relations that cannot be reduced to any realist or literalist concern.”\textsuperscript{114} And this is why we chose for the cover of our book the Peter Turnley photograph from the first Gulf War of a dead Kuwaiti soldier’s hand resting flat in the sand of the desert—a hand, moreover, that has been partially carbonized by unimaginable heat, and on the third finger of which a gold wedding ring is clearly visible. Why this photograph? According to Bruce Gilchrist, who found the photograph first and brought it to our attention,

It speaks in the synecdochic language of the associative violence of war, the traumatic effect of violence and the frank horror it creates in us as witnesses; it is only a wrist and hand, partially ruined by fire, as is the \textit{Beowulf} manuscript, as is \textit{Beowulf’s} pyre, as is the Finnsburg pyre on which the heads and helmets of Hildeburh’s beloved husband and son burn and collapse together in a harrowing metonymic embrace. And yet, that same wrist and hand also bear an intact material object that will outlive its bearer: the gold ring. Similar to the necklaces, the heirloom swords, the rune-carved sword hilt made by giants, and the gold cup (the theft of which awakens the sleeping dragon whose fury will be \textit{Beowulf’s} ultimate undoing), this ring sets up the possibility of story, of inscription, and of the renewal of violence in the urgency for revenge.\textsuperscript{115}

Like the photograph, the poem of \textit{Beowulf} “is a cultural response that, as testimony, overcomes the historical gap, its lostness and pastness, with
a power to reconfigure our understanding of the present world and our present selves.” And it overcomes that gap, of course, through language, in the same way the photograph crosses over the space that separates the middle Eastern desert from our Western shores through the metonymy of the visual. We do not see the work of criticism as belatedly secondary to the poem, or to the photograph, or to any work of art (literary or otherwise), for as Said writes, “rather than being defined by the silent past, commanded by it to speak in the present, criticism, no less than any text, is the present in the course of its articulation, its struggles for definition.” Ultimately, the job of the critic is similar to the job of the poet, who, in the words of Wallace Stevens, is always confronted, not with things as they are, but with things seeming, and both scholar and poet are “the artificer[s] of subjects still half night.”

We are indebted to the generosity of Roy Liuzza, John Hill, Bruce Gilchrist, and Janet Thornham, all of whom read through earlier drafts of this essay and offered invaluable suggestions for correction and revision; any remaining errors are entirely our own.

NOTES


6 See The Electronic “Beowulf,” ed. Kevin S. Kiernan with Andrew Prescott et al., version 2.0 (London, 2003), and Seamus Heaney, “Beowulf”: A New Verse Translation (New York, 2000). It should be noted here that 2000 also marks the year of Roy M. Liuzza’s verse translation of Beowulf for Broadview Press, a translation, moreover, that Frank Kermode has written “can be matched with the famous one [the Nobel laureate Heaney’s]” (“The Modern Beowulf,” in Frank Kermode, Pleasing Myself: from “Beowulf” to Philip Roth [London, 2001], p. 11. In addition, 2005 saw the publication of the anthology of Gareth Hinds’s Beowulf comics The Collected “Beowulf” (published by thecomic.com), and Eric A. Kimmel and Leonard Everett Fisher’s illustrated children’s book The Hero
“Beowulf” (published by Farar, Straus and Giroux). In the area of performance, 2005 also marked the release of the Icelandic director Sturla Gunnarsson’s film Beowulf and Grendel, the performance of Beowulf as a “twenty-first century ritualistic rock opera” by the Irish Repertory Company, and the announcement of Robert Zemeckis’s plans to make a Beowulf movie using “digital capture technology,” as he did in the film based on Chris Van Allsburg’s children’s book The Polar Express. And finally, Goldenthal’s and Taymor’s opera Grendel premiered in New York City at the Lincoln Center in July of 2006.


Eagleton, “Hasped and hooped and hirpling,” p. 16.

Dominick LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma (Baltimore, 2001), pp. 154–55. See also Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, 1984). One could argue that by using the Holocaust as a temporal border whereby he can mark off the period “before” (when “grand narratives” made sense) from “after” (when they no longer do), LaCapra privileges a historical event that is itself knowable only as a “grand narrative,” or, as the Shoah Project suggests, as a collage of “stories,” in much the same way that Beowulf presents its own version of heroic history as a collage of interlocking narratives. Of course, in contrast to the stories related in Beowulf, the Holocaust is very much a real and deeply traumatic and

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cataclysmic event that, because its main actors performed actions that, prior to that point, were unthinkable and unprecedented, blew apart many of the most cherished beliefs of those caught up in its maelstrom, but in coming to grips with that event, those who experienced it firsthand have had a profound need of what might be called conventional narrative devices in order to make sense of what happened to them. LaCapra himself is very much concerned in much of his work with what might be called the ethico-psychology of “remembering” traumatic events and of the narratives—testimonial, artistic, and otherwise—of that remembering. See, for example, his *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1994) and *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1998).

18 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 201.
20 For a brief overview of the recent debates in historical studies over “objectivity” and “narrativity,” and all the critical and ethical problems attendant thereupon, see the essays included in Brian Fay, Philip Pomper, and Richard T. Vann, eds., *History and Theory: Contemporary Readings* (London, 1998).
22 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York, 2001), p. 188.
23 MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, p. 201.
27 In an encyclopedia entry for *Beowulf* in *British Writers*, Supplement IV (ed. Jay Parini, [New York, 2001]), Paul Bibire describes the organizing principle of *Beowulf* as “non-linear parallelism and variation” (p. 37). And in his essay “Beowulf and Perception,” Michael Lapidge also makes an argument for the “non-linearity of Beowulfian discourse,” and the idea that the *Beowulf* author was deliberately experimenting with narrative strategies for which “there is no
satisfactory model in antecedent Western literature” (Proceedings of the British Academy 111 [2002]: 62, 76). Further, Lapidge sees parallels between Beowulf and the “multiple internal focalization” and preoccupation with epistemology of the modern novel.


31 LaCapra, History and Memory after Auschwitz, p. 24.

32 The dating of Beowulf, as a work of either oral or textual art, or some kind of hybrid between the two, has a long and contentious history that we do not wish to address here. For the purposes of this introduction, we assume a readership (or audience) consistent with the most probable date of the manuscript itself, which everyone agrees is ca. 1000 CE. For those interested in the dating controversy, see Colin Chase, ed., The Dating of “Beowulf” (Toronto, 1981); Roy Michael Liuzza, “On the Dating of Beowulf,” in “Beowulf”: Basic Readings, ed. Peter S. Baker (New York, 1995), pp. 281–302; and Kiernan, “Beowulf” and the “Beowulf” Manuscript, pp. 13–63. Regarding the probable monastic context of Beowulf’s écriture, see Patrick Wormald, “Bede, Beowulf and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy,” in Bede and Anglo-Saxon England, ed. Robert T. Farrell (Oxford, 1978), pp. 32-95.

33 All citations of Beowulf are taken from Fr. Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd ed. with supplements (Lexington, Mass., 1950); all translations are by the authors, unless otherwise noted.

34 This translation is from Liuzza, “Beowulf”: A New Verse Translation, p. 115.


36 Bauman, Liquid Modernity, p. 28.

The Consequences of Modernity (Stanford, 1991) and Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age (Stanford, 1991).

38 Bauman, Liquid Modernity, pp. 12–13. We should point out here that Bauman is well aware that much of his description of late modernity applies mainly to the elite elements of society, and that many individuals and groups, due to their location and/or poverty, are effectively “left out.” On this point, see Zygmunt Bauman, Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts (Cambridge, Eng., 2004).


40 Bauman, Postmodern Ethics, p. 239.

41 Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity, pp. 27, 20.

42 Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity, p. 33.

43 Giddens, Modernity and Self-Identity, p. 33.


45 For more information on The Electronic “Beowulf,” see Kevin Kiernan’s Web site devoted to the project, available at http://www.uky.edu/~kiernan/BL/kportico.html. Included on this Web site is the original 1993 project prospectus, an overview of the project’s early history, a detailed description and complete “help” guide to the 2003 edition (version 2.0), as well as articles written by Kiernan, Prescott, and others about the genesis and execution of the project.


50 Bauman, Liquid Love, p. 62.


54 Clare A. Lees, “Men and Beowulf,” in Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages, ed. Clare A. Lees (Minneapolis, 1994), p. 142. This essay is reprinted in this volume.

55 In his essay reprinted in this volume, Hill argues that what we might want to believe are “dismaying” episodes of violence in the poem, such as the digressive
asides recounting blood-soaked feuds between in-laws, are, rather, “socially acute meditations on the prospects for settlement, for accomplished and extended community, between groups who bring histories of past strife to their efforts at composing a feud,” and they are also positive “meditations on the dynamic of group reformation” (“The Ethnopsychology of In-Law Feud and the Remaking of Group Identity in Beowulf: The Cases of Hengest and Ingeld,” *Philological Quarterly* 78 [1999]: 97). This stands in stark contrast to Lees’s idea that *Beowulf* “dwells on death and lingers on the tearing of vertebrae, the severed arm, the burnt body,” and that the masculinist heroic ethos represented in the poem not only desires blood, but demands it (“Men and Beowulf,” p. 143).

56 Bauman, *Liquid Love*, p. 73. Hill himself would agree, and writes that, “To describe a social world of face-to-face relationships does not commit one to a frozen system. In fact, no social world can stay the same for ever or even for some very long time; as agents interact they of course usually do not seek change, given that their understanding of the rules, the arrangements, the relationships provide them with ways to advance themselves, manipulate the system, and compete. . . . Yet changes enter in; even a studied attempt to keep everything the same changes the social scheme of things” (e-mail communication from John Hill to Eileen Joy, 27 Feb. 2006).

57 Earl, *Thinking About "Beowulf"*, p. 11.

58 James W. Earl, “Reading "Beowulf" With Original Eyes,” in this volume.


60 The title of the film, *Code 46*, is a reference to the fictional international law within the film that states, “Any human being who shares the same nuclear gene set as another human being is deemed to be genetically identical. The relations of one are the relations of all. Due to IVF, DI embryo splitting and cloning techniques it is necessary to prevent any accidental or deliberate genetically incestuous reproduction.”


62 Howe, “Historicist Approaches,” p. 82.


65 Frantzen, *Desire for Origins*, pp. 175, 181.

is concerned with an emerging “literacy,” and he argues that, “implicit in the poem’s involvement with language is a marked and persistent hostility toward the epistemological foundation underpinning the practice of literacy” (“Anticipating Alienation: Beowulf and the Intrusion of Literacy,” PMLA [1993]: 321).

Earl, Thinking About “Beowulf,” p. 188.


On the subject of the poem holding in balance, through its appositional structure, two opposed worldviews—paganism and Christianity—see Fred C. Robinson, “Beowulf” and the Appositive Style (Knoxville, 1983).

Niles, “Locating Beowulf in Literary History,” pp. 81, 95. The date of Beowulf’s composition, as mentioned previously, has long been a contentious issue among scholars, but Niles believes the most plausible time period is the century preceding the date of the manuscript, which can be dated on paleographical grounds to ca. 1000 CE, where the poem can be seen as relevant to “the period of nation-building following the ninth-century Viking invasions,” as well as a “response to the two great sources of tension in English culture during the late sixth through early tenth centuries: the integration of Germanic culture and Christian faith into a single system of thought and ethics, and the integration of all the peoples living south of Hadrian’s Wall and east of Offa’s Dyke into one English nation ruled by the West Saxon line” (“Locating Beowulf in Literary History,” pp. 95, 106).


Carol Braun Pasternack, “Post-Structuralist Theories: The Subject and the Text,” in O’Keeffe, Reading Old English Texts, p. 185.


On the biblical, mythological, and other “roots” of the Grendelkin and the dragon in the poem, see Martin Puhvel, “Beowulf” and the Celtic Tradition (Waterloo,


83 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, Medieval Identity Machines (Minneapolis, 2003), pp. xxiii–xxiv.


88 For an overview of some of the most important work in this vein, see Cathy Caruth, ed., Trauma: Explorations in Memory (Baltimore, 1995); Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History (New York, 1992); Patrick Hutton, History as an Art of Memory (Hanover, N.H., 1993); Saul Friedlander, Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe (Bloomington, 1993); Dominick LaCapra, History and Memory After Auschwitz and Writing History, Writing Trauma; Jacques Le Goff, Histoire et mémoire, (Paris, 1988); Pierre Nora, ed., Les lieux de mémoire, 3 vols. (Paris, 1984–92); Eric Santner, Stranded Objects: Mourning, Melancholia, and Film in Postwar Germany (Ithaca, N.Y., 1990); Jay Winter, Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History (Cambridge, Eng., 1995); and Edith Wyschogrod, An Ethics of Remembering: History, Heterology, and the Nameless Others (Chicago, 1998). In medieval studies, some significant works in “history and memory” studies are Mary Carruthers, The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture (Cambridge, Eng., 1990);


Niles, “Appropriations: A Concept of Culture,” 220. We would point out here, however, that we do quibble a bit with Niles’s notion that “it no longer matters what ‘really happened’ in history.” We think it matters a great deal, especially to the historian who might believe, along with Walter Benjamin that “[t]here is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a special claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply” (“Theses on a Philosophy of History,” p. 254). Niles’s statement is a fairly safe one to make when discussing a past for which no forms of “living memory” or living witnesses exist, whereas if one were to apply the phrase “what’s done is done” to something like the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide, or even to World War I, we might be appalled at its insensitivity, while still recognizing the general truth of the statement. Inevitably, this raises the question of the ethics of remembering, which is especially acute with respect to very recent traumatic events, such as the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks or the incidents of torture in the prison at Abu Ghraib in Iraq. With respect to events such as these, when perpetrators and victims alike are, so to speak, still “at large,” the question of “what really happened” matters very much, indeed. With respect to *Beowulf*, we would say that the text, however we might want to rearticulate it in relation to present concerns, and regardless of its “fictionality,” is also always and irrevocably an historical artifact—“a gift of the past to a present affected with futurity” that is inscribed with “the vouloir dire of a people that has been silenced, of the dead others” (Wyschogrod, *An Ethics of Remembering*, p. 248). In this sense, the question of an “ethics of remembering” should also be examined in relation to how we read and understand *Beowulf*.


We are borrowing the term *lieu de mémoire,* or "memory site," from the work of the French historian Pierre Nora. According to Lawrence Kritzman, Nora coined the term to denote the "memory places" of French national identity as they have been constructed since the Middle Ages, and memory must be here understood, not in its literal sense, but in its "sacred context" as the variety of forms through which cultural communities imagine themselves in diverse representational modes" ("Foreword," in Pierre Nora et al., *Realms of Memory: The Construction of the French Past,* Vol. 1: Conflicts and Divisions, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer [New York, 1996], p. ix). Memory places in French culture cover a broad variety of "sites," including the prehistoric caves at Lascaux, Joan of Arc, the Eiffel Tower, Versailles, the films of Truffaut and Godard, Gitane cigarettes, just to name a few, all of which, in Kritzman's words, are ultimately "the result of an imaginary process that codifies and represents the historical consciousness of 'quintessential France'" ("Foreword," p. x).

Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,* p. 54.

Howe, "Historicist Approaches," p. 79.


Much recent work in history has begun to question the standard historical narrative of a late antiquity/early medieval Europe as having been shaped by a long period of Germanic expansion and migration, often referred to as the Migration Era. According to Walter Goffart, recent studies of migration by demographers, archaeologists, economic historians, geographers, and social scientists have shown that migration has been a "ubiquitous" and "continuous phenomenon" embedded in the social and economic framework of human organizations" ("Does the Distant Past Impinge on the Invasion Age Germans?" in *On Barbarian Identity,* ed. Andrew Gillett [Turnhout, 2002], p. 29, n. 32]). Migration is not the unique exception but rather the rule of thumb of human history. See also Migration, *Migration History, History: Old Paradigms and New Perspectives,* ed. Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, International and Comparative Social History, vol. 4 (Bern, 1997).


Kim, "As I Once Did with Grendel," p. 20.

Kim, "As I Once Did with Grendel," p. 27.


Ker, *The Dark Ages,* pp. 85, 84.
115 Bruce D. Gilchrist, “‘What am I supposed to do with this gobstopper?’ Metonymy and Trauma in *Beowulf*” unpublished essay.
116 Gilchrist, “‘What am I supposed to do with this gobstopper?’”