Scribal errors of proper names in the *Beowulf* manuscript

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ABSTRACT

Scribal errors involving proper names appear throughout the manuscript of *Beowulf*. The scribes misrecognized names, converted them into common nouns of similar appearance, and spaced them into units that reflect incomprehension. This study assesses the implications of these errors for the engagement and awareness of the scribes, then considers their bearing on the dating and editing of *Beowulf*. The proper name errors reveal that the scribes were unfamiliar with the heroic-legendary traditions constituting *Beowulf*. The collective presence of these errors supports the probability that the extant manuscript of *Beowulf* is a copy of a centuries-old poem, not of a recent composition.

Palaeographical evidence in the unique extant manuscript copy of *Beowulf* has been examined, with highly divergent results, for clues to the dating and transmission of the poem.[1] Kevin Kiernan, focusing on erasures, corrections and a folio (179r) that he considers to be a palimpsest, argued not only for the intelligence and involvement of the scribes, but for quasi-authorial status to be attributed to scribe B.[2] He consequently dated both the production of the manuscript and the composition of the poem to the reign of King Cnut (1016–35). Studies addressing Kiernan's claims have consistently concluded that they are untenable.[3] Michael Lapidge, on the other hand, has taken scribal errors deriving from literal confusion to have a significant bearing on the poem's date and transmission history.[4] Lapidge observed that many of these errors conform

[1] For overviews of scholarship on the *Beowulf* manuscript, see A. Orchard, 'Manuscript and Text', *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 12–56; and S. Newton, 'The *Beowulf* Manuscript', *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 1–17.

[2] K. S. Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, rev. ed. (Ann Arbor, MI, 1996).

[3] These studies are reviewed in J. Gerritsen, '*Beowulf* Revisited', *ES* 79 (1998), 82–6; see also D. N. Dumville, 'The *Beowulf* Manuscript and How Not to Date it', *Medieval English Student's Newsletter 39* (1998), 21–7; and A. C. Amos, 'An Eleventh-Century *Beowulf*?', *Review* (Charlottesville, VA) 4 (1982), 335–45.

[4] M. Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 29 (2000), 5–41. Lapidge's work builds on the

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to a pattern (a/u, r/n, p/þ, c/t, and d/ð) and that approximately 65 per cent of the text's literal confusions can be accounted for by the hypothesis that *Beowulf* was originally written prior to 750 in Anglo-Saxon set minuscule script. E. G. Stanley challenged this argument by observing that a similar pattern of error can be detected in the glosses to the eleventh-century Arundel Psalter.[5] George Clark noted, however, that 'Stanley errs in assuming that the gloss to the Arundel Psalter dates to the same era as the psalter text itself.'[6] If the psalter gloss is a copy of much earlier glosses, as it appears to be, then it possesses a transmission history similar to the one Lapidge posited for *Beowulf* and lends considerable support to his case.[7] Lapidge's argument thus remains one of the more compelling attempts to bring palaeographical evidence to bear on the controversy surrounding the dating of *Beowulf*.[8]

This study assesses another group of scribal errors that may shed some light on the poem's date and transmission history. Scribal errors of proper names occur frequently in the manuscript of *Beowulf*, yet no comprehensive study has assembled them or analysed their implications. One of the few scholars who has discussed the importance of these errors is Kenneth Sisam, who viewed them as crucial evidence for the occasional unreliability of Old English poetical manuscripts. Proper name errors reveal the need for editors to emend because 'there can be little doubt about the true reading when a name is miswritten'.[9] Sisam discussed four such errors from *Beowulf*:

> In *Beowulf*, recent editors agree that the first scribe writes *gara* (*cyn*) 461 clearly and boldly for *Wedera* (*cyn*), without sense or alliteration, with no likeness in script or sound, or anything in the surrounding verses to mislead him; and the aberration is passed over

observations of J. Gerritsen and P. Clemoes. See Gerritsen, '"Have with you to Lexington!": The *Beowulf* Manuscript and *Beowulf*', *In Other Words: Transcultural Studies in Philology, Translation, and Lexicology presented to Hans Heinrich Meier on the Occasion of his Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. J.L. Mackenzie and R. Todd (Dordrecht, 1989), pp.15–34, at 24; and Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 32–4.

[5] E.G. Stanley, 'Paleographical and Textual Deep Waters: <a> for <u> and <u> for <a>, <d> for <ð> and <ð> for <d> in Old English', *ANQ* 15 (2002), 64–72.

[6] G. Clark, 'The Date of *Beowulf* and the Arundel Psalter Gloss', *MP* 106.4 (2009), 677–85, at 684.

[7] *Ibid*. pp. 683–5.

[8] Objections to Lapidge's argument are also raised in R. Frank, 'A Scandal in Toronto: *The Dating of 'Beowulf'* a Quarter Century On', *Speculum* 82 (2007), 843–64, at 857. G. Clark addresses Frank's objections in 'Scandals in Toronto: Kaluza's Law and Transliteration Errors,' to appear in *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, ed. L. Neidorf.

[9] K. Sisam, 'The Authority of Old English Poetical Manuscripts', *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 29–44, at 37. Notice of errors involving proper names is also registered in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Finn and Hengest: the Fragment and the Episode*, ed. A. J. Bliss (London, 2006), p. 32; and T. A. Shippey, 'Afterword,' *Beowulf and Lejre*, ed. J. D. Niles (Tempe, AZ, 2007), pp. 469–80, at pp. 474–6.

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in their commentaries. For *Cain* 1261 (misread as *cam*) he writes *camp* 'battle' . . .At a critical point in the Finn episode (1127 ff.), he leaves us the meaningless 'Hengest . . .wunode mid finnel unhlitme'. Rather different is 1960 f.: 'þonon geomor woc hæleðum to helpe', where, misled by a possible spelling or pronunciation of the initial diphthong, he has taken the proper name *Eomær* for the common adjective *geomor* 'sad'.[10]

Kiernan, wishing to elevate the textual authority of the *Beowulf* manuscript, responded to Sisam by arguing that these are not errors at all. He claimed that *finnel* is not a meaningful corruption because 'strange combinations and divisions of words are characteristic of Old English MSS' and he defended [*wi*]*gara*, *camp*, and *geomor* as readings worth retaining.[11] Yet in the case of *finnel*, the issue is not one of spacing, but of a confused scribe combining words into nonsense. Kiernan's defense of the other readings is unconvincing because, as R.D. Fulk has shown of Kiernan's overall editorial policy, it is based not on a larger network of metrical, linguistic, and contextual probabilities, but rather on his own (unproven and improbable) hypothesis that the composition of the poem is contemporary with the manuscript.[12] Kiernan's preferred readings leave us with lines deficient in metre ([*wi*]*gara*), alliteration (*geomor*), and sense (*camp*). They are all duly rejected by the editors of *Klaeber IV*. The presence of numerous scribal errors of proper names in the *Beowulf* manuscript is, contrary to Kiernan's argument, no illusion created by editors overly fond of conjecture, but a very real phenomenon, the extent and implications of which have not yet been fully explored. In what follows, I discuss the various forms of scribal errors, anomalies, and corrections pertaining to proper names that appear in the manuscript of *Beowulf*. I interpret their implications for the engagement and awareness of the scribes, then consider their bearing on the dating and editing of *Beowulf*.

A single scribal error, viewed in isolation, tells us little and may be insignificant. When a pattern of error emerges, however, insights of some consequence may be gleaned. It is my contention that the collective presence of scribal errors of proper names in the *Beowulf* manuscript indicates that the scribes were largely unaware of the heroic-legendary traditions constituting *Beowulf*; that these traditions were no longer in widespread circulation by the time the manuscript was copied out (*c.* 1001–10)[13] and perhaps well before then. The scribes' unfamiliarity with the poem's content increases the probability that the extant

[10] *Ibid*. p. 37.

[11] Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. 180–8, at 181.

[12] R. D. Fulk, 'On Argumentation in Old English Philology, with Particular Reference to the Editing and Dating of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 32 (2003), 1–26, at 9–16.

[13] D. N. Dumville, 'Beowulf Come Lately: Some Notes on the Palaeography of the Nowell Codex', *ASNSL* 225 (1988), 49–63.

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manuscript is a copy of a centuries-old poem, not a recent composition. There are three distinct groups of phenomena that indicate scribal difficulty with proper names, which I discuss in the following order. First, there are errors in which the scribes show serious confusion about a name, or they misrecognize the presence of the name altogether. Second, there are errors of a minor sort, which reveal less about the knowledge of the scribes, but bespeak rather a general state of difficulty with names. Third, there are a number of alterations and corrections that the scribes made to names. These self-corrections suggest that the scribes were worried about their problems with names. They also reveal that 'the *Beowulf* MS was subjected to intelligent scrutiny',[14] which encourages us to conclude that the remaining errors reflect a genuine gap in the scribes' knowledge.[15]

CONFUSION AND MISRECOGNITION

From the first group of errors, those indicative of confusion or misrecognition, two important examples occur at the beginning of the poem, when the name *beowulf* is twice written for *Beow*, the son of Scyld (18, 53). Some scholars have attempted to defend the manuscript reading,[16] but there are unambiguous signs of corruption here. The West Saxon genealogies list Beow as the son of Scyld in every one of their various iterations.[17] The half-line *Beowulf Scyldinga* (53) is metrically defective, a clear deviation from the poet's statistically demonstrable practices.[18] Emending it to *Beow Scyldinga*, however, results in a satisfactory verse. This combination of internal and external evidence renders it exceedingly probable that *Beow* is the authorial form and *beowulf* is a scribal corruption.[19] The motivation for the error is understandable: 'It is . . . plain to see how a scribe, copying a poem which he knew to be about Beowulf, might, on encountering the name *Bēow* (written *beow*) a few lines into the text, assume that

[14] Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 191.

[15] For a complete list of all scribal errors, anomalies, and corrections pertaining to proper names in the manuscript of *Beowulf*, see the appendix. In compiling this list, I have relied principally on the clear and uncontroversial textual notes in *Beowulf and Judith*, ed. E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 4 (New York, 1953). All citations of *Beowulf* are from *Klaeber's Beowulf*, *Fourth Edition*, ed. R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork, and J. D. Niles (Toronto, 2008).

[16] See, e.g., J. W. Earl, *Thinking About Beowulf* (Stanford, 1994), pp. 22–5.

[17] See *Klaeber IV*, 291–2.

[18] See R. D. Fulk, 'An Eddic Analogue to the Scyld Scefing Story,' *RES* 40 (1989), 313–22, at 314, n. 4: ' *Bēowulf Scyldinga* must be categorized as type 1D*1 in A. J. Bliss's system of scansion, a type Bliss finds only in the on-verse in *Beowulf*, and with double alliteration. . .My own recent research in OE metrics supports Bliss's conclusion: in the sample of nearly 14,000 verses studied I found no sure example of an expanded type D in the off-verse.'.

[19] The editors of *Klaeber IV* note: 'that the MS form *Beowulf* of ll. 18, 53 is a scribal substitution for *Beow* or *Beaw* is now rarely disputed'. *Introduction*, p. l.

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this was an error and alter it.'[20] Whatever the precise motive for alteration was, it is clear that two name errors have crept into the transmitted text.

A few general considerations about these errors, applicable to subsequent examples, must now be registered. It should be borne in mind that we often cannot distinguish an error committed by the final scribes from an error committed by earlier scribes. Scribe A may have been the first to corrupt *Beow* into *beowulf*; yet it is equally possible that scribe A merely reproduced the form *beowulf* from an erroneous exemplar. Fortunately, the distinction is of little consequence, since the implication of the presence of these errors remains the same: the scribes of BL, Cotton Vitellius A. xv show themselves to be unfamiliar with the mythological and genealogical traditions informing the poem here. If scribe A did not commit the Beow errors, then he (and scribe B) nevertheless permitted an obvious error to stand uncorrected twice in the transmitted text. If the scribes knew that Beow was the son of Scyld, or that Beowulf the Geat was not a Scylding, then these two errors would neither have been committed nor preserved. For clarity of exposition, I will discuss errors as though the final scribes committed them, but we should remember that the final scribes might only be guilty of preserving errors.

There are several errors in which the scribes, encountering proper names in their exemplar, did not recognize that these were names and converted them into common nouns and adjectives. This process appears to have been responsible for the corruption of the name *Eomer* (1960) into the adjective *geomor*, 'sad'. The scribe evidently did not know of a character named Eomer, so he altered the strange form in his exemplar to the word it most closely resembled. This would suggest that the scribe was unfamiliar with the Offa tradition drawn on by the Mercian genealogist[21] and the *Beowulf* poet – a suggestion borne out by the neighbouring corruptions of Hemming and Wærmund, discussed below. The manuscript readings *heaða bearna* (2037) and *heaðo bearna* (2067) for what should be the genitive plural proper name *Heaðobeardna* appear to have been generated by the same process that produced *geomor*. Not recognizing a name here, the scribe converted this ethnonym into a common noun by turning the 'battle-beards' into the 'battle-children'.[22] Other instances of

[20] R. D. Fulk, 'The Etymology and Significance of Beowulf's Name', *Anglo-Saxon* 1 (2007), 109–36, at 123.

[21] See D. N. Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection of Royal Genealogies and Regnal Lists', *ASE* 5 (1976), 23–50, at 33.

[22] See *Klaeber IV*, p. cxliv, n. 1: 'The handbooks of grammar do not admit such a phonological loss, and indeed, for example, there are nearly 25 instances of acc. sg. masc. (-)*heardne* in OE, but no **hearne*. It is therefore necessary to assume confusion with the noun *bearn* . . . rather than a phonological change, and to emend.' Interestingly, the scribe of *Widsið* initially made the same mistake when writing this name, but he noticed the omission and added the *d*

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proper names written as common nouns include the writing of Cain as *camp* (1261) and the writing of Hreþric as *hreþrinc* (1836). The former is probably not a direct conversion of Cain to *camp*, but of an already mistaken Cam to *camp*.[23] The writing of Hreþric as *hreþrinc* turns this proper name into a heroic epithet ('glory-warrior'): while *-ric* was a common element in personal names, *-rinc* was never productive in the Old English onomasticon. Hreþric is named at only one other point in the text (1189), an occurrence that the scribe, at this point in his stint, had likely forgotten. The MS form *hearede* for *Heardrede* (2202) may be another case of proper name written as common noun. The omission of the 'dr' is likely the consequence of haplology, but the resulting form resembles either a noun phrase along the lines of 'high counsel' or an unusual preterite verb. The context in which the error appears [*syððan Hygelac læg / ond hearede hildemeceas* (2201–02)] may have induced the scribe to expect a second preterite verb.

Other errors that suggest confusion or misrecognition on the part of the scribes are those that combine oddities of spacing with other problems. It is true, as Kiernan noted, that 'strange combinations and divisions of words are characteristic of Old English MSS'. Robert D. Stevick has demonstrated, however, that there is a surprising degree of regularity and metrical logic to the spacing of the *Beowulf* manuscript, especially with regard to proper names.[24] On the whole, proper names, when spaced, tend to be spaced into two sense-bearing units, such as when Hroðgar is spaced into *hroð* and *gar*.[25] Accordingly, when names are spaced into divisions that are senseless and devoid of metrical information, this may be taken as a sign of scribal incomprehension. Difficulty is evinced, for example, in the scribe's rendering of *in Freswæle* (1070) as *infr es wæle*. That this spacing is the result of confusion is confirmed by the fact that the scribe originally wrote *infes* (?) and then corrected it to *infr es*. Irregular spacing and error combine as well in the rendering of *Heaþoræmas* (519) as *hea þo ræmes*.[26] In the manuscript, the context of this oddity is as follows: *þa hine on morgen tid/ on hea þo ræmes holm up ætbær*. The scribe apparently misrecognized the presence of a name, read the constituents of the name individually and then

in a superscript to correct his error. See *The Exeter Book*, ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie, ASPR 3 (New York, 1936), 151, l. 49.

[23] P. Pulsiano, however, defends *Cam* as an authorial reading on the grounds of a conflated Cam/Cain tradition. '"*Cames Cynne*": Confusion or Craft?', *Proceedings of the Patristic, Medieval, and Renaissance Conference* (1982), 33–8.

[24] R. D. Stevick, *Suprasegmentals, Meter, and the Manuscript of Beowulf* (The Hague, 1968), pp. 26–40.

[25] See M. E. Hartman, 'Stressed and Spaced Out: Manuscript Evidence for Beowulfian Prosody', *Anglo-Saxon* 1 (2007), 201–20, esp. 213–14.

[26] The editors of *Klaeber IV* have retained the manuscript reading; other editors, such as Dobbie, have emended to *Heaþoræmas*.

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converted the accusative plural *ræmas* into a genitive singular *ræmes* under the mistaken impression that it modified *holm*. A more anomalous spacing error is the writing of *mid Finne h*[*e*] (1129) as *mid finnel*. The resulting form suggests that the scribe did not recognize a proper name here and that this led him to combine two neighbouring words (finne he) into one senseless unit.

Erratic spacing is clearly indicative of confusion in scribe B's rendering of the phrase *Merewioingas milts* (2921), 'the Merovingian's mercy', as *mere wio ingasmilts* (corrected from *ingannilts*). This is an interesting moment in the text, because it reveals what probably took place most of the time when the scribes transmitted names correctly: greeted with an unfamiliar form, the scribe simply writes what is in the exemplar as faithfully as he can. Tom Shippey observed that the form *Merewioing* is etymologically correct and a possible indication that knowledge of the Merovingians was orally transmitted to the *Beowulf* poet in the eighth century.[27] The form's intact preservation demonstrates that the scribes were capable of faithful copying when confused: 'One should note with approval the care with which scribe B of *Beowulf* transcribed a set of letters which clearly meant nothing to him, *mere wio ingasmilts*'.[28] Confusion is also evident in the aberrant spacing of *Ongenðeoes* (1968) into *on gen þeo es*. Elsewhere, this name is never subject to such curious spacing. This is the first appearance of Ongenðeo in the text, however. Not recognizing his name as a name, the scribe divided a confusing block of letters into a few recognizable morphemes, and thereby accurately registered what was in his exemplar. For a scribe suspicious of 'errors' in his exemplar, *eomer* could easily be fixed by 'correcting' it to *geomor*; whereas the prospect of turning *Ongenðeoes* into a more familiar word must have struck the scribe as futile. Finally, senseless spacing and orthographical irregularity indicate confusion in the two appearances of *Hemminges*, the first of which is rendered as *hem ninges* (1944) and the second as *hem inges* (1961).

The remaining errors that indicate confusion or misrecognition are heterogeneous. The MS form *elan* for *Onelan* (62), occurring after an evident gap in the text, suggests scribal incomprehension. Either the scribe skipped over text and resumed copying in the middle of a name, or the omission reflects damage in the exemplar, in which case the scribe was incapable of completing Onela's

[27] T. A. Shippey, 'The Merov(ich)ingian Again: *damnatio memoriae* and the *usus scholarum*', *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, ed. K. O'Brien O'Keeffe and A. Orchard, 2 vols. (Toronto, 2005) I, 389–406, at pp. 397–400. In 'The Name "Merovingian" and the Dating of *Beowulf*', *ASE* 36 (2007), 93–101, W. Goffart critiques aspects of Shippey's argument, but he does not address the significant claims concerning the etymologically correct form of the name in *Beowulf*.

[28] Shippey, 'The Merov(ich)ingian Again', p. 402. cf. J. Gerritsen: '. . .one can only marvel who or what [scribe B] thought *mere wio ingasmilts* was'; 'Have with you to Lexington!', p. 23.

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name from his own knowledge. Whatever the cause of the gap may be, the scribe seems not to have been aware that he supplied an incomplete form of a proper name here. A misunderstanding of great interest may be evident in the fact that the dative plural of *Eotan* (Jutes) is written twice as *Eotenum* (902, 1145), though the correct form is *Eotum*. The editors of *Klaeber IV* account for the unusual form as follows: '*Ēotenum* may have been formed by analogy to the genitive plural *Ēotena*, a rare development found in some other (but not proper) weak nouns, for instance *oxnum*. . .But perhaps a somewhat likelier explanation is that a scribe unfamiliar with the proper noun confused it with the word for 'giants".[29] The errors discussed throughout this paper lend support to the second explanation: the scribes mistook the Jutes for giants. Numerous errors confirm that the scribes were ignorant of the ethnic groups inhabiting the world of *Beowulf*, who were interchangeable to them. This is illustrated nicely in the final error of this section, the writing of *scildingas* for what should be *Scilfingas* (3005). Long absent from action of the poem, the Scyldings make an surprising return in the manuscript, when the scribe erroneously places the Danes in a geopolitical situation obviously belonging to the Swedes.

MINOR ERRORS

Some errors pertaining to proper names do not necessarily suggest scribal confusion or misrecognition, because they may have been induced by mere inattentiveness or by the more commonly diagnosed mechanical causes of scribal error.[30] These errors nevertheless deserve brief notice in the context of the present study. Several minor errors involve the presence of an incorrect inflectional ending, such as can be seen in MS *sige munde* for *Sigemundes* (875), *weoh stanes* for *Weohstan* (2613), *hige lace* for *Higelac* (1830) and again for *Higelaces* (2958), and *ohtere* for *Ohteres* (2612). These errors do not appear to reflect misrecognition of a proper name,[31] but instead stem from scribal misapprehension of the poem's syntax. For example, the scribe apparently modified authorial *Sigemundes* to *sige munde* because he construed this name as the complement of the preposition *fram*, not expecting an anticipatory genitive here. The erroneous MS form *fres cyning* for *Frescyninge* (2503) is more interesting, because by construing this word in nominative apposition to *he*, the scribe

[29] *Klaeber IV*, p. 171.

[30] For a discussion of mechanical errors, see S. O. Andrew, 'Scribal Error and Its Sources', *Postscript on Beowulf* (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 133–52.

[31] Sigemund and Weohstan occur infrequently enough that confusion regarding the name is a possible factor in these errors, but not an especially probable one. It may be worth noting that earlier in the same passage Weohstan is spelled *Weoxstanes* (2602) and it is usually spelled *Wihstanes* (2752, 2907, 3076, 3110, 3120). The spelling *Weohstanes* occurs elsewhere only once (2862). Sigemund is present only in the passage above and in 884.

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must have understood Dæghrefn to be the king of Frisia. Dæghrefn is otherwise unknown in legendary tradition, but the metrical deficiency of *fres cyning*, a half-line that would consist of only three syllables, confirms that he serves the Frisian king and is not the king himself.

The writing of *gara* (*cyn*) for *Wedera* (*cyn*) (461) is rather anomalous. This error, which results in a confusion of the Danes and the Geats, is perhaps best explicated as a case of scribal substitution of the sort discussed by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, in which a scribe replaces a word in the exemplar with a semantically suitable – though in this case, alliteratively and politically unsuitable – equivalent.[32] There is little reason to imagine that many such substitutions have crept into the transmitted text of *Beowulf*, though the errors *handgripe* for *mundgripe* (965) and *hildplegan* for *lindplegan* (1073) must be the consequences of scribal substitution (more accurately, trivialization).[33] We can recognize these as scribal alterations because although they make sense, they result in deficient alliteration, rendering their non-authorial status obvious. If *gara cyn* is not a conscious substitution, but the product of an orthographical or dialectal abnormality in the poem's transmission history, it may be related to the erroneous MS reading *garmundes* for the probably authorial *Wærmundes* (1962). Editors do not emend this name, yet the father of Offa in nearly every analogous source, including the Anglian genealogies, bears the name Wærmund, not Garmund.[34] Considering the scribes' propensity for erring in the writing of proper names, it would be reasonable for future editors to regard *garmundes* as a corruption worth emending to *Wærmundes*.

Some minor errors with probable mechanical inducements may have been overdetermined. The manuscript's (*dryhten*) *wereda* for (*dryhten*) *Wedera* (2186) appears to be the product of the mechanical transposition of *r* and *d*. This transposition nevertheless converts the 'lord of the Geats' into a less descript 'lord of hosts', thereby participating in the scribes' tendency to convert proper names into common nouns. Ethnic names are again corrupted in the MS forms *scyldenda* for *Scyldinga* (148) and *swona* for *Sweona* (2946). The archaic genitive plural *Deniga* (465)[35] is erroneously rendered as *de ninga*. The name Unferð is consistently written as Hunferð (499, 530, 1165, 1488). That the

[32] K. O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song: Transitional Literacy in Old English Verse*, *CSASE* 4 (Cambridge, 1990).

[33] See D. Moffat, 'Anglo-Saxon Scribes and Old English Verse', *Speculum* 67.4 (1992), 805–27, at 812.

[34] Editors refrain from emending presumably because there is no defect of meter or alliteration in the line *nefa Garmundes, niða cræftig*. Emending to *Wærmundes* produces no difficulties, however. That *Wærmund* is the name of Offa's father in most analogues is noted in *Klaeber IV*, p. 222, n. 4.

[35] This older genitive plural form of the i-stem noun *Dene* is recorded only in *Beowulf*. Elsewhere in poetry and prose, the later, analogical *Dena* is the only form used. See R. D. Fulk,

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Beowulf poet intended this character to be named Unferð is probable, since his name participates in vocalic alliteration in three of its four appearances.[36] The error is explained by the editors of *Klaeber IV* as follows: 'The first constituent of the name apparently was altered in the course of recopying because *Ūn-* was not a normal OE name element, at least in the later period.'[37] We can therefore conclude that either the scribes did not know the Unferð known to the *Beowulf* poet or they did not care if orthographical regularity spoiled alliteration.

CORRECTIONS AND ALTERATIONS

The scribes of *Beowulf* made many corrections and alterations to the text they copied out. Kiernan estimates that between erasures and corrections 'we have about 180 positive examples of intelligent scrutiny on the part of the scribes', indicating that the scribes' 'proofreading seems to have been quite thorough'.[38] Some of their editorial scrutiny was applied to proper names, a fact of some importance for the present study. Its importance is twofold, in suggesting: that the scribes were worried about their handling of proper names;[39] and that the proper name errors remaining in the manuscript survived the scrutiny of the scribes and therefore reflect genuine gaps in their knowledge. Most of the corrections and alterations made to proper names can be divided into two groups: cases in which a proper name was misrecognized or miswritten, and then altered to its correct form; and cases in which the modification is purely orthographical. The latter, to be clear, are those cases in which the initially written form would have been phonologically acceptable, but was considered orthographically deviant by the scribe.

Corrections that were applied to errors stemming from an initial misrecognition of a proper name begin with the correction of *healfdes* to *Healfdenes* (189) early in the poem. Its earliness is important, since it shows, like the confusion surrounding the first appearance of Ongenþeo, that the scribe initially did not recognize the name, even if he would later copy it correctly, having learned on the job. Misrecognition might also be detected in *Heaðoscilfingas* (63), where *heaðo* is written on an erasure. *Caines* (107) was originally written as *cames* before

'Archaisms and Neologisms in the Language of *Beowulf*', *Studies in the History of the English Language III*, ed. C. M. Cain and G. Russom (New York, 2007), pp. 267–87, at p. 271.

[36] See R. D. Fulk, 'Unferth and His Name', *MP* 85 (1987), 113–27.

[37] *Klaeber IV*, p. 150.

[38] Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, p. 195. There is an excellent discussion of scribal correction in A. Orchard, 'Reading *Beowulf* Now and Then', *SELIM: Journal of the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature* 12 (2003–4), 49–81, with a table of these corrections on 68–74.

[39] For this line of reasoning, see H. Duggan, 'Scribal Self-Correction and Editorial Theory', *NM* 91 (1990), 215–27.

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the *m* became *in* through erasure.[40] For the archaic toponym *Scedenigge* (1686), the scribe originally wrote *scedeninge*, perhaps thinking that he was copying *scyldinga* or an analogous ethnic name with *–ing*. *Scyldunga* (2159) was originally written as a *scyinunga* before the *in* was switched to *ld*. There are also two simple cases in which an initial literal confusion was spotted and then fixed: this occurs in *Beowulf* (1024), where *b* is altered from *f*, and in *Hroþgar* (1236), where its *h* is altered from *b*. Corrections of a purely orthographical nature, meanwhile, were evidently motivated by the desire to update archaic orthographical forms and produce forms more in line with standard late West Saxon norms: this accounts for the insertion of *g* into *ecþeow* (263) following the *c*, the addition of a concluding þ to *wealhþeo* (612) and *ongenðio* (2961), the substitution of *a* for *æ* in *Hetware* (2916), and the alteration of *-ung* to *-ing* in *Sigescyldingum* (2004).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DATING OF *BEOWULF*[41]

Johan Gerritsen, discussing the implications of the high degree of scribal error in general in the *Beowulf* manuscript, writes: 'either the errors we find were largely in the copy-text, which, then as now, argues for a long transmission history, or they were not, which argues for a text with which both scribes were so out of touch that it must have been quite an old one. In fact both prongs of the fork may well be true.'[42] Gerritsen's assessment of error in general becomes more pointed when applied to the scribal errors of proper names in particular. Whether the scribes introduced these errors into the text or merely transmitted the erroneous forms from their exemplar without correcting them, one conclusion is clear: the scribes were out of touch with the heroic-legendary traditions essential to the composition and comprehension of the text they were copying out. The scribal errors of proper names do not provide a firm indication of when *Beowulf* was composed, but their collective presence supports the probability that the extant manuscript is a copy of a very old poem, not of a recent composition.

One might question the rationale of this claim by asking whether it is reasonable to view the scribes of the *Beowulf* manuscript as representative of tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxons in their ignorance of heroic legend. External evidence adduced below will demonstrate that such ignorance was

[40] This is an unusual case: in writing *cames*, the scribe probably wrote the form in his exemplar. In correcting it to *Caines*, the scribe used his own knowledge of Cain to remove what he thought to be a corruption. Yet it is possible that the scribe is here 'correcting' an authorial reading. For an argument that the *Beowulf* poet credited the apocryphal tradition conflating Cam and Cain, see P. Pulsiano, 'Cames Cynne'.

[41] The arguments adumbrated in this section are offered at greater length in L. Neidorf, 'Scribal Errors and Cultural Change', to appear in *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, ed. Neidorf.

[42] J. Gerritsen, 'Have with you to Lexington', p. 22.

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not confined to these two scribes. The internal evidence provided by their labours, meanwhile, does not suggest that these scribes were foreign or unrepresentative. It is clear that they were both native speakers of Old English: their familiarity with the language is evident in the errors wherein proper names were converted to common Old English words. The errors induced by misapprehension of syntax (such as *fram sige munde*) likewise reveal that the scribes must have understood Old English, even though they did not always understand the language and content of *Beowulf*.[43] Additionally, it is worth noting that the proper name errors are distributed rather evenly between the stints of the two scribes. That two individuals could reach adulthood in Anglo-Saxon England without hearing of many of the characters and peoples found in *Beowulf* plainly suggests that the heroic-legendary traditions constituting *Beowulf* had ceased to be productive and widely known before the later tenth century. And the scribes are not simply ordinary individuals; they are two literate individuals who either volunteered or were ordered to produce a copy of a long heroic-legendary poem. If anything, we should expect them to be more knowledgeable about these matters than the average Anglo-Saxon. It therefore appears reasonable to conclude that the scribal errors of proper names, on their own, render a date of composition after 950 improbable. Yet we might broaden their dating implications by venturing an answer to the question that these proper name errors raise: when would these names have been known in Anglo-Saxon England, and when might this knowledge have faded?

H.M. Chadwick offered a powerful answer to this question in 1912, when he observed that many heroic-legendary names were used by historical Anglo-Saxons during the seventh and eighth centuries, but were no longer used during the ninth or tenth centuries.[44] Chadwick argued that this evidence supports the early dating of the heroic-legendary poems, but his argument went largely ignored in the dating of *Beowulf* controversy until it was revived by Patrick Wormald and brought explicitly to bear on that question.[45] Wormald, with posthumous aid from Stephen Baxter, availed himself of new technology and tabulated the distribution of heroic-legendary names throughout the Anglo-Saxon historical record. Wormald found that the expanded evidence strengthens Chadwick's argument: many heroic-legendary names occur exclusively or predominantly in sources reflecting the naming practices of the seventh and eighth centuries.[46] For

[43] See Orchard, *Critical Companion*, p. 49, for a discussion of other errors induced by misapprehension of syntax.

[44] H. M. Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge, 1912), pp. 41–4 and 64–6.

[45] P. Wormald, '*Beowulf*: the Redating Reassessed', *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. S. Baxter, (Malden, 2006), pp. 71–81 and 98–100.

[46] *Ibid.* p. 79. The arguments of Chadwick and Wormald are elaborated and taken in new

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example, in the original core of the *Liber Vitae Dunelmensis*, containing names from *c.* 640 to *c.* 840, there are men commemorated named Ætla (i.e., Attila), Beowulf, Deor, Froda, Hama, Heremod, Hroðulf, Hygelac, Ingeld, Offa, Theodric, Wada, Sigemund, Widia, Wærmund, Widsið, Wiglaf, and Wyrmhere.[47] Considering the fact that many of these names contain elements foreign to or unproductive in the Anglo-Saxon onomasticon, their use must reflect awareness of heroic-legendary traditions. The relative absence of these names in the later Anglo-Saxon period, on the other hand, suggests a gradual decay in both the general awareness of heroic legend and the social prestige associated with it.

Other evidence for the circulation of heroic legend (or lack thereof) confirms the picture that the onomastic evidence presents. The *Liber Monstrorum*, composed between 650 and 750, contains the only other reference from Anglo-Saxon England to King Hygelac of the Geats.[48] The Franks Casket, dating to Northumbria *c.* 700, offers evidence for the early circulation and post-conversion integration of heroic legend.[49] Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci* (*c.* 730) links the Mercian royal family to Icel – son of Eomer, grandson of Offa – and notes that young Guthlac listened to songs of his ancestors.[50] The Anglian genealogies, compiled by a Northumbrian cleric *c.* 765-79, contain references to various figures in *Beowulf*, including Hroðmund, Hengest, Offa, Eomer, Finn, and Folcwald.[51] *Widsið* shares a remarkable amount of material in common with *Beowulf*: they are the only texts that mention Breca of the Brondings and give the name Heorot to the Danish royal hall,[52] and they share reference to Hroðgar, Hroðulf, Ingeld, Offa, Hama, Finn, Hnæf, Eormenric, and Ongentheow, as well as the Frisians, the Hetwære, the Headobeardan, the Heoðoræmas, the Wulfings, the Swedes, the Geats, and the Danes. Orthographical, lexical, and onomastic evidence suggest that *Widsið* was composed during the seventh

directions in T. A. Shippey, 'Names in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England', to appear in *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, ed. Neidorf.

[47] For a complete list of heroic-legendary names in the *NLV*, including many not recorded by Wormald, see the appendix of L. Neidorf, 'Beowulf before *Beowulf*: Anglo-Saxon Anthroponymy and Heroic Legend', forthcoming in *RES*. On the prosopographical dating of the names in the *NLV*, see E. Briggs, 'Nothing But Names: the Original Core of the Durham *Liber Vitae*', *The Durham Liber Vitae and its Context*, ed. D. Rollason, A. J. Piper, M. Harvey, and L. Rollason (Woodbridge, 2004), pp. 63–85, at pp. 65–8.

[48] See M. Lapidge, '*Beowulf*, Aldhelm, the *Liber Monstrorum*, and Wessex', *SM*, 3rd ser., 23 (1982), 151–92, at 163–7.

[49] See R. Abels, 'What Has Weland to Do with Christ? The Franks Casket and the Acculturation of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 84.3 (2009), 549–81. See p. 551, n. 7, for scholarship on the casket's date and provenance.

[50] *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 75, 81, 83.

[51] Dumville, 'The Anglian Collection', p. 49.

[52] See *Klaeber IV*, p. clxxvi.

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or eighth century.[53] The relative antiquity of the shorter heroic-legendary poems – *Waldere*, *Deor*, and *Finnsburh* – is naturally more difficult to gauge, considering their brevity, but there are indications that *Waldere* is an early composition.[54] Alcuin's famous reference to Ingeld in the letter to Bishop Unwana (*c.* 797) reveals that heroic legend was still current at the end of the eighth century.[55] At the same time, this letter hints at developments that might have caused heroic legend to become unpalatable or unfashionable.[56]

In the ninth and tenth centuries, there is evidence only for the cessation of the heroic-legendary traditions constituting *Beowulf*. The latest datable reference to a figure from heroic legend in a work that is definitely not derivative of an earlier work is the replacement of Fabricius with Weland in the Alfredian *Boethius*.[57] It is significant that Weland alone is present here: this anticipates the impoverished state of heroic-legendary knowledge in Middle English literature, where Weland is one of the few Germanic figures remembered.[58] Memory of Weland persisted independent of heroic-legendary narratives,

[53] See L. Neidorf, 'The Dating of *Widsið* and the Study of Germanic Antiquity', *Neophilologus* 97 (2013), 165–83. See also R. D. Fulk and C. M. Cain, *A History of Old English Literature* (Malden, 2003), p. 219; D. Cronan, 'Poetic Words, Conservatism, and the Dating of Old English Poetry', *ASE* 33 (2004), 23–50, at 35–39; and *Widsith*, ed. K. Malone, Anglistica 13 (Copenhagen, 1962), 114.

[54] The manuscript of *Waldere* contains some signs of archaic composition. For a discussion of errors and anomalies in this manuscript, see J. B. Himes, ed., *The Old English Epic of Waldere* (Newcastle, 2009), pp. 27–35. It should be added to Himes' observations that *Waldere* exhibits an overwhelming preference for *ð* over *þ*: the text contains 81 *ð* and 10 *þ*, and the latter occur primarily in the stereotyped spelling of words like *þæt* and *þonne*. The implication of this discrepancy is that *Waldere* was probably first set into writing before *þ* was regularly used in Old English manuscripts. As for *Deor* and *Finnsburh*, there is no internal evidence that demands either an early or a late dating. If my arguments concerning the circulation of heroic legend are accepted, then an earlier date for these two poems would appear probable.

[55] For the text and context of the letter, as well as the identification of Bishop Unwana, see D. A. Bullough, 'What has Ingeld to do with Lindisfarne?', *ASE* 22 (1993), 93–125.

[56] In 'Scribal Errors and Cultural Change', I suggest that the arrival of pagan Viking invaders might have inspired anxiety about the pagan-ness of certain English customs and traditions, which had hitherto been acceptable. The problem with Ingeld, as Alcuin makes clear, is not that he is a Scandinavian, but that he is a pagan. An analogue to Alcuin's condemnation of stories of Ingeld, then, would be his rebuke to King Ethelred and the Northumbrian court for wearing the same hairstyles as the Viking invaders; see *Two Alcuin Letter Books*, ed. C. Chase, Toronto Med. Latin Texts 5 (Toronto, 1975), 55. Prior to the Viking invasions, these hairstyles, like heroic legend, may have been considered ancient and traditional rather than pagan and distasteful.

[57] See *The Old English Boethius*, ed. and trans. M. Godden and S. Irvine (Oxford, 2009), vol. I, p. 283.

[58] For Middle English references to Weland, see R. M. Wilson, *The Lost Literature of Medieval England* (London, 1952), pp. 14–16. See also the discussion of Weland's continuous reception history in M. S. Cecire, '*Ban Welondes*: Wayland Smith in Popular Culture', *Anglo-Saxon Culture and the Modern Imagination*, ed. D. Clark and N. Perkins (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 201–18.

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moreover, due to the smith's folkloric association with metallic objects and ancient barrows.[59] The only other late references to heroic legend are found in the various iterations of the West Saxon genealogy, which includes Scyld, Scef, Beow, and Heremod. Kenneth Sisam observed that the discrepancies and errors in the different iterations of the genealogy reflect a lengthy textual transmission, not a living tradition.[60] The archaic forms *Beowi* and *Sceldwa* reveal that these figures were not in contemporary circulation, but were added to the genealogy directly from a written, Anglian source, perhaps well before Alfred's reign.[61] The notion that the figures in the West Saxon genealogy were not widely known is corroborated by confused statements in Asser's and Æthelweard's recapitulations. In the *Vita Alfredi* (*c.* 893), Asser inserts a comment conflating the mythological figure Geat with Geta, a character from a comedy of Terence.[62] Similar confusion is shown in Æthelweard's *Chronicon* (*c.* 980), a translation of an earlier version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, when the story of Scyld is erroneously transferred to Scef.[63] Significantly more documentation is preserved from the ninth and tenth centuries, yet none of it gives us reason to believe that heroic-legendary traditions remained in circulation. No knowledge of heroic legend is revealed in later heroic poetry such as *The Battle of Brunanburh* (*c.* 937) and *The Battle of Maldon* (*c.* 991).[64] Tenth-century homilists

[59] See H. R. Ellis Davidson, 'Weland the Smith', *Folklore* 69.3 (1958), 145–59. R. M. Wilson's observation concerning the Middle English allusions to Weland holds true for the Alfredian allusion: Wilson writes: 'the Middle English allusions show little knowledge of the actual story of Weland. In all probability it had already been forgotten by the time of the Conquest, his name and a vague memory of his skill as a smith being all that had survived.' See *Lost Literature*, p. 14.

[60] K. Sisam, 'Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies', *PBA* 39 (1953), 287–348, at 314–22. Sisam concludes on p. 346: 'The variant forms of Æthelwulf's pedigree could not have arisen or survived if consistent legends about the heroes or gods in its remoter parts had been well known in the ninth century. Sometimes the stereotyped spellings of names tell against a living tradition. And there are instances of surprising carelessness.'

[61] On the archaism of *Beowi* and *Sceldwa*, see Fulk, 'The Etymology and Significance', p. 128. Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf*, pp. 139–42, hypothesizes that these names may have been taken from an East Anglian source in the early ninth century, when the West Saxons allied with the East Anglians against the Mercians.

[62] M. Lapidge and S. D. Keynes, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (Harmondsworth, 1983), p. 67. Asser is a Welshman, and so might be expected to be unfamiliar with English legend. Yet one must imagine that if Alfred were actively cultivating an identity based on his genealogy, some awareness of the nature of his ancestors would have reached his biographer, and it would have been obvious that he did not descend from a character in Terence's plays. The apparent irrelevance of this genealogy in Alfredian circles may be reflected in the fact that Alfred and his descendants never refer to themselves as Scyldings, even though their genealogy implies descends from Scyld.

[63] *The Chronicon of Æthelweard*, ed. A. Campbell (New York, 1962), p. 33.

[64] C. R. Davis writes: 'The later tenth-century poems *Brunanburh* and *Maldon* can still employ the ancient forms of alliterative measure, as well as many of the formulae, motifs, type-scenes and

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do not bemoan the recitation of tales of Ingeld or Hygelac. The gradual loss of legend is punctuated by the scribal errors of proper names in the *Beowulf* manuscript. By the first decade of the eleventh century, two Anglo-Saxons invested in literary culture had little knowledge of material that was vital to the *Beowulf* poet and his original audience.

CONCLUSION: THE TRANSMISSION AND EDITING OF *BEOWULF*

The evidence for the circulation and cessation of heroic legend in Anglo-Saxon England suggests that *Beowulf* was more likely composed during the seventh or eighth century than during the ninth or tenth.[65] A number of recent studies have reached similar conclusions using different evidence, with the result that a date of composition between 675 and 750 appears at present to possess the strongest claims to probability.[66] This raises an important question: what might have happened to the text of *Beowulf* during the transmission process, as it moved from an eighth-century archetype to the extant eleventh-century manuscript? We can safely assume that the text was subject to a great deal of cosmetic work: uninflected infinitives after *tō* were inflected; a prosthetic *h* was added to Unferð's name; archaic orthography was updated; Anglian forms were altered to accord with late West Saxon forms; verses were accidentally omitted; fitt numberings were added; punctuation was altered.[67] Hundreds

themes from traditional heroic verse, but the old heroes themselves are gone; their legends have been forgotten or are no longer deemed relevant, even by allusion, to the poet's present purpose.' *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England* (New York, 1996), p. 163.

[65] This conclusion may elicit the objection that the *Beowulf* poet could have been a secluded antiquarian dealing with material that was largely unknown at the time of composition. Admittedly, this is possible. Yet neither internal nor external evidence encourages us to imagine such a bizarre scenario for the poem's composition. A more natural conclusion to draw from the poet's numerous unexplained allusions is that he was working at a time when heroic-legendary traditions were flourishing, not at a time when they were forgotten.

[66] Important recent studies include: R. D. Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, Middle Ages Ser. (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 347–92; Fulk, 'Old English Meter and Oral Tradition: Three Issues Bearing on Poetic Chronology', *JEGP* 106 (2007), 304–24; Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*'; Cronan, 'Poetic Words'; Shippey, 'The Merov(ich)ingian Again'; Clark, 'The Arundel Psalter Gloss'; Newton, *The Origins of Beowulf*; Clemoes, *Interactions of Thought and Language*, pp. 1–67; Wormald, 'The Redating Reassessed'; F. M. Biggs, 'The Politics of Succession in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 80 (2005), 709–41; R. H. Bremmer, Jr, 'The Frisians in *Beowulf*; *Beowulf* in Frisia: the Vicissitudes of Time', *Medieval English Literary and Cultural Studies. SELIM XV*, ed. J. C. C. Silvestre and M. N. V. González (Murcia, 2004), 3–31; G. Russom, 'Dating Criteria for Old English Poems', *Studies in the History of the English Language*, ed. D. Minkova and R. Stockwell (Berlin, 2002), pp. 245–66. The majority of the essays to appear in *The Dating of Beowulf: a Reassessment*, ed. Neidorf, concur with recent scholarship that an early date is more probable than a late one.

[67] See *Klaeber IV*, pp. cxxix–cliv; Fulk, 'Textual Criticism', *A Beowulf Handbook*, ed. R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (Lincoln, 1997), pp. 35–53, at pp. 40–2; Fulk 'The Origin of the Numbered Sections in *Beowulf* and in Other Old English Poems', *ASE* 35 (2006), 91–109; Gerritsen,

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of errors crept into the transmitted text of *Beowulf*, deriving variously from literal confusion, from mechanical causes such as dittography and haplography, and from misrecognition of proper names. Because some of the Old English poems surviving in multiple copies contain a suite of variant readings, it has been suggested that we should expect nearly one-fifth of the lines in *Beowulf* to have been substantially altered during the poem's textual transmission.[68] Such large-scale alteration, however, appears improbable. Strong evidence suggestive of limited scribal interference is available in the frequency and distribution of the poem's metrically conservative features, which have been preserved despite the potential vagaries of the transmission process.[69] The fact that linguistic archaisms appear throughout the poem – in verses requiring non-parasiting or non-contraction for scansion, or verses adhering to (and never violating) Kaluza's Law – indicates that later scribes did not substantially recompose *Beowulf* during its transmission.[70]

The scribal errors of proper names have some bearing on this issue. Although they tell us nothing about intervening copyists, these errors shed considerable light on the final stage of textual transmission and on the behaviour of two late Anglo-Saxon scribes. It is true that some of the variant readings in poems surviving in multiple copies suggest that scribes occasionally felt licensed to replace words in their exemplars with equivalents that were 'semantically, metrically, and syntactically appropriate'.[71] Yet it is doubtful that all scribes felt so licensed or that scribes altered works with approximately equal regularity. The multiple copies of *Cædmon's Hymn* and *Bede's Death Song* show that scribes could deferentially copy a text without altering a word.[72] On the other hand, the two copies of *Soul and Body* suggest that scribes could take considerable liberties while copying. The scribes of the *Beowulf* manuscript, however, copied in a largely mechanical manner. The name errors and the literal confusions result too often in nonsensical readings for us to imagine that the scribes fully comprehended *Beowulf* and made lexical substitutions when the spirit moved

'Have with you to Lexington'; pp. 19–20; D. Donoghue, 'A Point Well Taken: Manuscript Punctuation and Old English Poems', *Inside Old English*, ed. J. Walmsley (Malden, 2006), pp. 38–58.

[68] See R. M. Liuzza, 'On the Dating of *Beowulf*', *Beowulf: Basic Readings*, ed. P. S. Baker (New York, 1995), pp. 281–302, at pp. 292–3.

[69] See Fulk, *A History of Old English Meter*, pp. 347–51, and 'Archaisms and Neologisms'.

[70] See Fulk, 'On Argumentation', pp. 23–4.

[71] O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Visible Song*, p. 21. P. R. Orton argued, however, that few of these variant readings represent intelligent substitution. He concluded that most of these variant readings are better understood as mechanical errors, misunderstandings, or trivializations than as sensitive scribal substitutions. See *The Transmission of Old English Poetry* (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 189–208.

[72] This point is made cogently in Kiernan, *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, pp. 173–8.

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them.[73] If they consciously altered *Beow* to *beowulf* or *Eomer* to *geomor*, they likely did so in the belief that they were harmlessly correcting the errors of earlier copyists and restoring authorial readings. These scribes may be guilty of hypercorrection, but they can be exonerated of the charge of literary ambitions.

Neil Ker records a notation in a tenth-century manuscript that seems accurately to reflect how Anglo-Saxon scribes viewed their work: *A scæl gelæred smiþ, swa he gelicost mæg, be bisne wyrcan butan he bet cunne*.[74] Bearing this maxim in mind, consider the experiential difference between copying out a poem like *Soul and Body* and copying out *Beowulf*. *Soul and Body* traffics in didactic and homiletic material with which scribes probably felt comfortable and upon which they probably felt they could improve. Naturally, the versions of this poem in the Vercelli Book and the Exeter Book differ greatly from one another, as those scribes (or, more likely, intervening copyists) must have felt licensed to diverge from the copy text.[75] *Beowulf*, on the other hand, is a poem about heroes and peoples who flourished during the fifth and sixth centuries, reflecting traditions that were unknown during the later Anglo-Saxon period. The scribes who produced the Nowell Codex were not familiar with this material. They recognized that they did not possess the expertise necessary to improve upon the poem and therefore worked closely from their exemplar. Their effort reveals that they copied with difficulty and with reverence, striving to reproduce material in their exemplar even when it made no sense to them. Manuscript readings such as *on gen þeo es* and *mere wio ingasmilts* are revealing: although the scribes found the letters constituting these names unintelligible, they transcribed what they saw and effectively preserved authorial readings.

Foregrounding the scribal errors of proper names in the *Beowulf* manuscript reminds us that greater restraint may be needed when theorizing the textuality – especially the textual instability or *mouvance* – of *Beowulf* and perhaps other Old English poems. The poems that survive in multiple copies exemplify varieties of scribal performance; they do not allow for any safe assumptions about scribal practice in general.[76] Some scribes were sensitive and competent, while others were uninformed and reckless; some deviated liberally from their exem-

[73] See Orchard, *Critical Companion*, pp. 42–4; Lapidge, 'The Archetype of *Beowulf*', observes repeatedly that the literal confusions result in readings devoid of sense.

[74] 'Always must a learned artificer work as closely from his exemplar as he is able, unless he knows how to work better' (my translation). N. R. Ker, 'A supplement to *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon*', *ASE* 5 (1976), 121–31, at 127; for discussion of this maxim, see F. C. Robinson, "Bede's' Envoi to the Old English *History*: an Experiment in Editing' *SP* 78 (1981), 4–19, at 6.

[75] The transmission of *Soul and Body* and its implications are discussed in D. Moffat, 'Anglo-Saxon Scribes and Old English Verse'.

[76] Cf. D. Moffat, 'Anglo-Saxon Scribes', pp. 810–14. The potential complexities of transmission, rarely considered when generalizations about scribal practice are given, are illustrated

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plars, some made minor alterations, and some reproduced texts, to the best of their ability, exactly as they found them. Generalizations about the 'radical instability' of Old English texts and about their transmission as a 'collaboration between the original composers and the transmitters of verse' are misleading, particularly with regard to *Beowulf*.[77] Furthermore, it cannot be presumed that 'since the manuscript texts, like oral productions, could be remade and recontextualized with any new production, the text as we have it represents the interests of its last maker'.[78] Considering the scribes' ignorance of heroic legend and their difficulty with the text, it is improbable that the extant copy of *Beowulf* reflects their interests or can be considered a unique scribal version in any meaningful sense. The transmitted text of *Beowulf* can only be said to reflect the interests of its latest scribes to the extent that it contains errors produced or preserved due to their unfamiliarity the poem's content.

To conclude, I will return the scribal errors of proper names to the use for which Sisam intended them: these errors provide unambiguous evidence for the need to emend the transmitted text of *Beowulf* liberally. The extant manuscript was written out probably two or three centuries after the poem's composition, and the scribes who produced it found its content remote. Conscientious as they were, these scribes could not avoid making new errors, and they lacked the knowledge necessary to fix errors committed by previous scribes. The condition of the transmitted text of *Beowulf* forces us to question the merit of editing it conservatively or retaining suspect manuscript readings. Textual conservatism has been supported by the notion that Anglo-Saxon scribes possessed insights into Old English language and literature unavailable to modern editors. E. G. Stanley articulates this position:

> we in our subject have to remember with constant humility that though perhaps, not certainly, most scribes may not have been the equals in Old English of the best Old English poets, every one of them, sleepy and careless as he may have been at times, knew his living Old English better than the best modern editor of Old English verse.[79]

The scribal errors of proper names demonstrate the inadequacy of this rationale. Far from being a safeguard against corruption, the scribes' fluency in Old English induced many of the proper name errors. A modern editor is in a much better position to understand *Beowulf* than its eleventh-century scribes. This

well in P. G. Remley, '*Daniel*, the *Three Youths* Fragment and the Transmission of Old English Verse', *ASE* 31 (2002), 81–140.

[77] I take these quotes from Liuzza, 'On the Dating of *Beowulf*', p. 294, but the ideas are widespread.

[78] C. B. Pasternack, *The Textuality of Old English Poetry*, CSASE 13 (Cambridge, 1995), 200.

[79] E. G. Stanley, 'Unideal Principles of Editing Old English Verse', *PBA* 70 (1985), 231–73, at 257.

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editor is equipped with dictionaries, concordances, indices of proper names, legendary analogues in several Germanic languages, and two centuries of *Beowulf* textual criticism. The eleventh-century scribes had no recourse to such aids during their confrontation with a poem that was already ancient in their day. Textual conservatism has dominated Old English studies, yet Kenneth Sisam and Michael Lapidge have offered strong defences of the liberal position, encouraging freer use of emendation and limited faith in scribes.[80] R. D. Fulk and Andy Orchard both recently went against the grain by recommending a more liberal approach to the editing of *Beowulf*.[81] I add my voice to the chorus in support of this position and hope that awareness of the scribal errors of proper names convinces others of its validity.[82]

APPENDIX

SCRIBAL ERRORS, ANOMALIES, AND CORRECTIONS OF PROPER NAMES IN THE *BEOWULF* MANUSCRIPT[83]

Confusion & Misrecognition:

18 Beow] beowulf
53 Beow] beowulf
62 Onelan] elan
519 Heaþoræmas] hea þo ræmes
902 Eotum] eotenum
1070 Freswæle] fr es wæle *with the* r *altered from some other letter*, *one letter erased after* r, *and* es *written on an erasure*
1129 Finne he] finnel
1145 Eotum] eotenum
1261 Cain] camp

[80] Sisam, 'Old English Poetical Manuscripts'; Lapidge, 'Textual Criticism and the Literature of Anglo-Saxon England', *Bull. of the John Rylands Univ. Lib.* 73 (1991), 17–45; 'The Edition, Emendation, and Reconstruction of Anglo-Saxon Texts', *The Politics of Editing Medieval Texts*, ed. R. Frank (New York, 1993), pp. 131–57; and 'On the Emendation of Old English Texts', *The Editing of Old English*, ed. D. G. Scragg and P. E. Szarmach (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 53–67.

[81] Fulk, 'Textual Criticism'; Orchard, *Critical Companion*, pp. 49–56. See also Fulk, 'Inductive Methods in the Textual Criticism of Old English Verse', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 23 (1996), 1–24.

[82] I thank Daniel Donoghue, R. D. Fulk, Joseph Harris, Francis Leneghan, and Rafael J. Pascual for reading this paper in draft and offering helpful suggestions.

[83] This appendix is based on the textual notes in Dobbie's edition, which are largely reproduced here verbatim, with certain departures and additions based on the preceding discussion. Some readings have been updated to agree with those found in *Klaeber IV*.

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1836 Hreþric] hreþrinc
1944 Hemminges] hem ninges
1960 Eomer] geomor
1961 Hemminges] hem inges
1968 Ongenðeoes] on gen þeo es
2037 Heaðabeardna] heaða bearna
2067 Heaðobeardna] heaðo bearna
2202 Heardrede] hearede
2921 Merewioingas milts] mere wio ingasmilts *with* sm *altered from* nn
3005 Scilfingas] scildingas

Minor Errors:

148 Scyldinga] scyldenda
461 Wedera] gara
465 Deniga] de ninga
499 Unferð] HVN ferð
530 Unferð] hun fer[.]
591 Grendel] gre del
875 Sigemundes] sige munde
1165 Unferþ] hun ferþ (*with a letter erased after* þ?)
1488 Unferð] hunferð
1830 Higelac] hige lace
1962 Wærmundes] garmundes
2186 Wedera] wereda
2503 Frescyninge] fres cyning
2612 Ohteres] ohtere
2613 Weohstan] weoh stanes
2946 Sweona] swona
2958 Higelaces] hige lace
2965 Wonreding] won reðing

Corrections & Alterations:

63 Heaðoscilfingas] *with* heaðo *written on an erasure*?
107 Caines] *with* in *altered from* m *by erasure*
189 Healfdenes] *originally* healfdes, *but* s *altered to* n *and* es *added by the same hand*
263 Ecgþeow] *with the* g *inserted by the same hand*
612 Wealhþeow] *with the final* w *added above the line by Scribe B*
1024 Beowulf] *with the* b *altered from* f
1236 Hroþgar] *with the* h *altered from* b? (*Zupitza*)
1686 Scedenigge] *with the first* g *altered from* n
2004 Sigescyldingum] *the second* i *of the word is altered from* u
2159 Scyldunga] *with* ld *altered from* in
2916 Hetware] *corrected from* het wære (Orchard, 'Reading *Beowulf*', p. 74)
2961 Ongenðiow] *with the* w *added by a different hand*

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