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Re-reading Beowulf from a Modernist Perspective: A Study of Richard Wilbur's Poetry

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Dedication

All praise to God, today we fold the day's tiredness and the errand summing up between the pleats of this humble work .

To the utmost knowledge lighthouse , to our greatest and most honored prophet Mohamed.

To the spring that never stops giving , to my mother who weaves my happiness with strings from her merciful heart.

To him who have never ceased blessing me and pushed me forward on the path of success and devotion to knowledge, to my dearest father.

To them whose love flows in my veins, and heart and whom I will always remember, to my brothers and sisters.

Acknowledgment

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Abstract

This research is concerned with the modernization of the great epic, Beowulf by Richard Wilbur, a central modern America poet (1921-2017), who re-wrote the old poem to be viewed from a twentieth century perspective. For this purpose, the paper is divided into two chapters.

In chapter one, a view about Anglo-Saxon poetry and its tradition is presented along with the original epic of Beowulf , Richard Wilbur's life and work and how he recycled old English poetry.

chapter two, begins with a brief account of Wilbur's use of tradition and shifts to discussing the modern version of Beowulf and the changes that Wilbur makes in order to modernize it.

Finally , the conclusion sums up the findings of the paper.

Chapter One

1.1 Old English Tradition Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Poetry

Anglo-Saxon poetry covers the period from the mid fifth century to the Norman Conquest of 1066; it was based on oral tradition. The Anglo Saxons were a dominant culture however there were a lot of changes in society which affected the literature. The Anglo-Saxon society continued to grow over the following centuries, absorbing other cultures and rebuffing other Germanic invaders. The history of these people is reflected in the rich literature of that era. The Anglo-Saxon period was filled with constant fighting. Most Anglo-Saxons were pagans who believed in many gods until the middle of the 5th century when they were Christianized. Christianity was the religion of the Britons, and at the start of the Anglo-Saxon invasion it was suppressed. But over the following years, these Germanic tribes converted to it, Christian ideals become popular in Anglo-Saxon literature.¹

Poems were meant to be read aloud so the poems were sung by scopers since there was no common written language, and they emphasized devices that would aid listeners' memory, such as the repetition of names and the use of an appositive style. The subject matter covered in the poems included songs and myths, and the poems combined both pagan and early Christian ideas. All old English poems were meant to give the listeners a moral lesson in life and righteousness.²

Epic poetry was one of most common genres of literature during the period. An epic is a long narrative poem that celebrates a hero's deeds. The plot of an epic is complicated by the supernatural events and beings usually involve a long, dangerous journey through foreign lands. The hero of an epic is known as the epic hero, usually a male of a noble birth and he is historical or legendary. Moreover, the hero's character features reflect the ideals of his society and his action –such as courageous and superhuman – reflect the values of his society. The actions of the hero

often determine the fate of a nation of people. Also the Anglo-Saxon poems treat universal themes like good versus evil, life versus death, etc.³

The Anglo-Saxon poetry has a lot of characteristics such as the loftiness of excretions, the use of metaphor, complicated, and construction.⁴ The Anglo-Saxon poetry was written in blank verse which means that there is no end rhyme occurring from line to line. The most famous characteristic was the use of caesura, which is a pause in the middle of a line of poetry like taking a breath. It was placed after the second foot in the line of poetry, and each line consisted of four feet and the breath allowed for a pause to happen in the middle of each line. In addition, alliteration was used in the old English poetry; alliteration is the repetition of a consonant sound within the line of poetry to add a musical effect to the poem. Moreover, they used kenning which is a descriptive phrase or a compound word substitutes for one word.⁵

2.2 *Beowulf*: Anglo-Saxon epic

The epic *Beowulf* is considered to be the shining star of Old English Literature, and it represents the core values of Anglo-Saxon culture. This great epic was composed during the early eighth century, first recorded in writing nearly three hundred years later, and printed in 1815. *Beowulf* has had a direct impact on the development of English poetry. In the mid-to-late twentieth century *Beowulf* began to influence writers and it had a marked impact on the work of many important novelists and poets such as W.H.Auden, Geoffrey Hill, Ted Hughes, and Seamus Heaney who translated the epic of *Beowulf*.⁶

This great epic tells the story of a Scandinavian hero called *Beowulf* the protagonist of this epic. *Beowulf* is a Geatish hero who came to save the kingdom of Denmark, which was ruled by king Hrothgar a descendent of the great king Sheafson. Hrothgar enjoyed prosperous and successful reign, and he built a great mead-hall, called Heorot. The Heorot was a place where the king and his warriors gathered to drink and receive gifts from their lord. One day the jubilant noise from Heorot angered Grendel, a demon descended from Cain who was ruthless and miserable since his existence was a part of the retribution exacted by God for Cain's murder of Able.⁷ Grendel hunted marches and moors, fens; one evening Grendel attracted at night the Danish warriors who were asleep and seized thirty of them then he carried them back to his lair. These attacks of Grendel continued for twelve winters, night after night. So *Beowulf*'s duty as a hero ought that he must save this kingdom and also because Hrothgar the king had once done a great favor for *Beowulf*'s father Eegtheow. Hrothgar gratefully accepted the offer of *Beowulf* to help him fight Grendel and held a feast in the hero's honor. When Grendel arrived *Beowulf* fought him unarmed to prove that he is stronger than the demon and to even the odds since Grendel was not armed, so *Beowulf* showed his true nobility, strength, and courage. As Grendel struggled to escape, *Beowulf* tore the monster's arm off. So Grendel was mortally wounded and slinked back

into the swamp and died. *Beowulf* won the battle and the Grendel's arm was hung high in the mead-hall as a trophy of victory.⁸

Hrothgar treasured a feast to celebrate Beowulf's victory and showered him with gifts. During the feast songs were sung in praise of *Beowulf*, and the celebration lasted late into the night. At that time another threat was approaching, Grendel's mother was on her way to seek revenge for her the death for her son. Grendel's mother was a swamp-hag who lived in a desolated lack, though Grendel's mother showed the human quality of revenge.⁹ Grendel's mother killed one of Hrothgar's trusted advisers, before sinking away. Hence, to revenge his death the company traveled to the murky swan, where *Beowulf* dived into the water and fought Grendel's mother in her under water lair. *Beowulf* managed to kill Grendel's mother with a sword he saw hanging on the wall from the age of giants, although the sword was too heavy for any man to carry into battle. Then he found Grendel's corpse and great treasures, but all that he took away was Grendel's head and the hilt of the sword with a wasted blade has a prize to Hrothgar. When *Beowulf* returned he spoke to king Hrothgar and told him that he carried the sword as a sign that his men could sleep peacefully in Heorot. Therefore the Danish countryside is purged of its treacherous monsters, and became peaceful.¹⁰

After this great battle the Danes were overjoyed, and Beowulf's fame had spread across the kingdom. Then *Beowulf* decided to return back to Geatland, and *Beowulf* departed after a sorrowful goodbye to Hrothgar, who has treated him like a son.¹¹ *Beowulf* returned to his land with a ship full of treasures and most importantly he returned with a great fame. *Beowulf* and his men were reunited with their king and queen, Hygelac and Hygd, and told them about his adventures in Denmark. *Beowulf* gave Hygelac his treasures, in return, Hygelac rewarded *Beowulf* and named him a prince and successor to his own throne.¹²

By the time, *Beowulf* ascended the throne after the death of Hygelac and his son. *Beowulf* ruled wisely for fifty winters, and then a reign of terror visited

the land of the Geats. At that time *Beowulf* was an old man, the dragon was awoken when a thief stole a golden cup from the dragon's lair. So the dragon came to seek revenge and he started to spew forth flames and destroyed many dwellings by fire, including Beowulf's home, the best of halls. *Beowulf* sensed that his death is approaching, he fought the dragon bravely.¹³ With the aid of Wiglaf, a young kinsman and retainer of *Beowulf* who helped him in the fight against the dragon while all other warriors run away. *Beowulf* succeeded in killing the beast, but *Beowulf* was injured heavily. The dragon bit *Beowulf* in the neck, and at the end his fiery venom killed him moments after their encounter.

Beowulf's last words was to Wiglaf

"I gave thanks that I was able to gain these precious things for my people before I died. I have paid for this treasure hoard with my aged life. You must now fulfill the needs of the people with it. I can no longer be here. After my body has been burned have the warriors build a memorial mound for me on a coastal promontory. Seafarers will call it Beowulf's Mound."

With these words *Beowulf* said his goodbyes, and the people fulfilled his wishes. His body was burnt and the Geatish people made a mound upon the cliff. It was high and broad and could be seen from afar by seafaring men. They built a wall around the fire's ashes, the famous Warrior's Beacon. And in the mound they put rings, jewels, and adornments that warriors had taken from the hoard. Thus the Geatish people mourned their fallen lord since he was a mighty king, the mildest and kindest of men, most kind to his people, and most desirous of praise.¹⁴

1.3 Richard Wilbur: Life

Richard Wilbur was born in New York City on March 1, 1921, his father was a portrait painter, and his mother came from a family of New York journalists. So he was influenced from both sides of his family. When he was young he enjoyed the art of drawing and creating cartoons, but he also had a passion for words. When he began writing poems his interests were combined, since he used in his vivid visual images in his poetry. Wilbur moved with his family to rural New Jersey when he was two years old. Growing up in this environment, Wilbur developed his awareness of and appreciation for nature, which is evident in many of his poems. He studied literature in the then-popular methods of Criticism at Amherst College in Massachusetts. New critics encouraged poets to write in traditional forms while expressing the discord of modern life. When he joined the U.S. Army to serve in Europe in World War two he began to write poems more frequently. Writing helped him out of the chaos he was experiencing.¹⁵

His work is marked by its wit, charm, and gentlemanly elegance. Wilbur's poetry has been characterized as bloodless lacking and head-on confrontation with the problems characteristic of modern life. Wilbur's poems concern the ways in which beauty transforms our lives and the need for imagination and inspiration to be grounded in everyday objects and experiences. In addition, unlike many poets of his era his voice is not "confessional" and does not address only how the word affects him as an individual. He is more of a classicist, seeing the world outside himself. Yet, in his close observation of nature, he echoes the Romantic poets, particularly William Wordsworth.¹⁶

Wilbur's first book was "*The Beautiful Changes and Other Poems*" published in 1947, contains several poems that he sent to his wife and few friends during the World War Two, these poems focused on his experience in combat. The first book contained his favorite themes which were the description of nature, as well as metaphysical meditations as a sense of ironic detachment. His second collection "*Ceremony and Other Poems*" was

published in 1950, considered the possibility of heroism in a chaotic world such as his poem “*Beowulf*” which we will discuss later in this research. “Things of This World” was his third volume of poetry and it was published in 1956; and he received the Edna St. Vincent Millay Memorial Award, the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize. In his third volume Wilbur demonstrates that spirituality and imagination are grounded in everyday objects. In 1969 he published his new poetry collection which was called “*Walking to Sleep*”: New Poems and Translation”, this volume was concerned with how to “walk” - or live – before sleep and death. In “*The Mind Reader*” which was published in 1976, Wilbur broached more personal topics. Another collection was published in 1988 and in 2000. Wilbur also wrote several volumes of poetry for children and the lyric for Leonard Bernstein musical version of *Voltaire’s Candide*, as well as an extensive body of prose and criticism.¹⁷

1.4 Richard Wilbur : Recycling of the Old English Poetry

Many modern poets started to imagine the performance of Anglo-Saxon poetry is loud , noisy, primitive , strong , and even violent , as if the orality of old English poetry required the loud voice , rather than a whisper . One of those poets who produces verse according to this imagined sound was Walter Scott who had studied Anglo-Saxon poetry as something originated in ' rude exclamations ' of the people . His poetry was characterized by violent , unexpected transitions and repetitive phrasing . One can see all these features in war-song in which he has the Saxon Ulrica chant during the siege of castle Torquilstone in *Ivanhoe* (first published in 1819):¹⁸

All must perish!
The sword cleaveth the helmet:
The strong armour is pierced by the lance:
Fire devoureth the dwelling of princes,
Engines break down the face of the battle.
All must perish!(Scott 1996:340-41)

Twenty years later , Longfellow translated a section of *Beowulf* (Longfellow 1838:104-06). He also imagined the implementation of Anglo-Saxon oral poets (' Gleemen' , from Anglo-Saxon *gliw* , which means mirth) as characterized by their volume : ¹⁹

And so loud these Saxon gleemen
Sang to slaves the songs of freemen,
That the storm was heard but faintly,
Knocking at the castle-gates

Ezra Pound –discoverer of Anglo –Saxon for the modern age- is the first poet who studied Anglo-Saxon poetry in formal way(at Hamilton college New York). He is more mindful than his nineteenth century ancestors of the rhythmic complexity of Anglo-Saxon poetry. In his translation of *The*

Seafarer, he intended more different rhythms rather than imagining the music of the verse as primitive: ²⁰

*May I for my own self song's truth reckon,
Journey's jargon , how I in harsh days
Hardship endured pft.
Bitter breast –cares have I abided
Known on my keel many a care's hold,
And dire sea-surge, and there I oft spent
Narrow nightwatch night the ship's head
While she tossed close to cliffs.(Pound 1984:64)*

Pound introduces a fashion for recycling and reusing Anglo-Saxon sounds patterns in original twentieth century verse compositions . However, there is another modern poet who saved Anglo-Saxon poetry, the 1987-1988 US laureate , Richard Wilbur in his poem "junk"(1961). He studied Old-English poetry at Harvard and Graduate school. He focused on the language and "catchy" rhythms of the alliterative line.²¹

"Junk" has a strong relationship with Anglo-Saxon , It opens with an epigraph belongs to the parts of Anglo-Saxon poem Waldere. It sets out with half-lines, so that the two and half lines quoted (lines 2-4a), occupy five lines of space on Wilbur page. This special design is repeated in the main body of text.²²

"Junk" written as imitation of old English poetry. The poetry of Anglo-Saxon poetry was not too much interested with regular patterns of rhymes. However, the poetry of later eras was more concerned with these patterns of rhymes. Anglo-Saxon verse was free and less rigid in the placing of accented syllables rather than sticking to a regular "iambic beats", in which the odd syllables are unaccented and the even syllables are accented. In addition , old English poetry highlighted a break between two halves(distichs) of a line. Finally, old English poetry relied on the repetition of the same sounds on

either sides of the break. The sounds that are repeated are consonants , however, in Wilbur's poem , vowels could also be stressed :

An axe angles
from my neighbor's
ashcan :
It is hell's handiwork,
the wood not
hickory....²³

However, these words would be printed as two lines , not four in the actual translation of an old poem :

An axe angles from my neighbor's
ashcan...²⁴

Wilbur lies down each second half of a statement to a second line in order to stress more strongly the Caesura between two halves of each statement . As Anglo-Saxons , Wilbur is less interested with following predictable rhythmical patterns than with making sure that each line has four beats and the syllables accented display alliteration . Wilbur's second statement shows how the beats are distributed (with boldface type to indicate accent or stress):²⁵

It is hell's handiwork , the wood not hickory.

The "dialogical " critics focus on Wilbur's poem. Those critics interested in the "dialogues between two texts. This sort of dialogue is known as "intertextuality". Wilbur invites us to pay more attention to the way in which his poem imitates the Anglo-Saxon poetry.²⁶

"Junk" draws its own rhythmic performance according to the model of Anglo-Saxon verse as Wilbur understands it to have sounded. Wilbur tries to present some sort of visual compromise between the nineteenth century system to set out the rhythmic periods of Anglo-Saxon poetry and the

twentieth century convention. Wilbur's poem intends to protect a fragile ecosystem of phonetic patterning in verse.²⁷

Richard Wilbur focuses on traditional methods of rhyme and meter. His literary strategy is very similar to a philosophical one . He tries hardly to order not only the sensibility of the present , but also the instincts of past . He uses many tools to weight the implications of relying too much or too little on the data of sense. ²⁸

Notes

- ¹ <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/describe-features-anglo-saxon-poetry-detail-272314> . Accessed in November 20, 2017.
- ² Ibid.
- ³ https://thayercentral.instructure.com/files/9731/download?download_frd=1&verifier=XQm9sQFgLQotFLlIM4ObMfif7qPa7mB05ubl327y . Accessed in November 22, 2017.
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- ⁵ <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/describe-features-anglo-saxon-poetry-detail-272314> . Accessed in November 20, 2017.
- ⁶ <https://www.enotes.com/topics/richard-wilbur/in-depth> . Accessed in November 21, 2017.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/beowulf.html> . accessed in November 21, 2017.
- ⁹ <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/beowulf/context/>. Accessed in November 21, 2017.
- ¹⁰ <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/beowulf.html> . Accessed in November 21, 2017.
- ¹¹ <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/beowulf/context/>. Accessed in November 21, 2017.
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- ¹³ <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/beowulf/context/> .Accessed in November 21, 2017.
- ¹⁴ <http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/beowulf.html>. Accessed in November 21, 2017.
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- ¹⁷ <https://www.enotes.com/topics/richard-wilbur/critical-essays/wilbur-richard> . Accessed in November 22, 2017.
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- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/do-you-have-junk-by-richard-wilbur-metrically-327061>
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ Ibid.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Jones , Chris . (2012), Recycling Anglo-Saxon poetry : Richard Wilbur's " junk" and a self study. Locating the Middle age.
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Chapter Two

Richard Wilbur: Recycling of Beowulf

After 1946, American poetry was divided into three groups: The traditional camp, the idiosyncratic, and the experimental. The traditional poets renew poetic forms, while idiosyncratic poets have supplied work for modern techniques, and the experimental went after the cultural bent.¹

Richard Wilbur is one of the traditional poets who mastered the traditional forms. His writings embrace rhyme and metrical patterns.²

Wilbur is not an English poet since he writes in traditional meter and form. His formalism propose nothing new except that it is an honest American embodiment of historically long-standing traditions.³

Richard Wilbur also wrote poetry in largely traditional meters ,and by that he pulled poetry back from the abyss of mindless modernization and technical disintegration that copied the other arts.⁴

The critics have contradictory views about Richard Wilbur's poetry since they disagree about his style. While other poets who emerged in the 1940s and 1950s flaunted tradition and tried to be original to impress the readers, in contrast to Wilbur always used the conventional from. Even the critics who found his work unproductive and believed that he sacrificed meaning at the expense of style admired his work for its craftsmanship.⁶

So in this chapter, we are going to discuss “*Beowulf*” from the twentieth’s century point of view. Richard Wilbur modernizes the old epic to fit the time he lived in. we will highlight the things that he maintained, omitted and the end that he had chosen to the hero of the epic.

Richard’s poem begins by describing the country that *Beowulf* has come to save, and this description is seen from the hero’s point of view. The natural

world is too perfect like a theatrical scenery on stage. He personifies the flowers and grass by giving a human characteristics such as “attentive”, or overly polite and “garrulous” or too talkative. The lake is so motionless to the extent that the reflection remains even after the bird has gone. So this country is given the sense of mystery through these images of the physical world that has an unreal qualities.⁷

The poem continues by shifting to describe the people of this country; his judgment is that they are strange just like their land although they were hospitable to *Beowulf*. In this poem, some details are recycled from the original epic such as the king’s knowing Beowulf’s father, thanking him for his help and the queen’s serving the hero mead- a wine made from honey- in a cup decorated with jowls. The poet describes the other people as being “vagueness” which may mean they cannot be clearly seen, like shadows because they live in fear of the nightly attacks by the monster Grendel. The strangeness of these people adds more mystery to the atmosphere of this country.⁸

Furthermore, the poet uses this term “childish country” to describe the child like nature of the at the same time, he is the child of a monster. The people are always afraid because of Grendel’s attacks to the castle each night. Their fear increases because Grendel eats his victims, thinking that he will “own them to the bone”. In order not to risk others’ life, *Beowulf* decides that he will fight the monster alone. Here, the poet may have more than one intention. In addition, Wilbur borrows much of the action from the original epic, such as the Danes leaving *Beowulf* alone in the echoed hall and went off to bed “so then the people wandered to their sleep/And left him standing in the echoed hall.” So *Beowulf* stands by himself like a lonely figure in the great hall waiting for the monster. In the original epic, the reason behind Grendel’s anger and attacks is the sound of happiness and celebration, so according to the original poem, people are the main reason behind Grendel’s attacks nevertheless they leave *Beowulf* alone in this fight. Then, the poet

shifts to the fight between *Beowulf* and Grendel “They heard the rafters rattle fit to fall,/The child departing with a broken groan”. It is so fierce that it shakes the beams supporting the roof. *Beowulf* is strong enough to defeat Grendel without using any weapons and manages to pull the monster’s arm completely off his body. After that, the “child”-Grendel- dead. *Beowulf* is found exhausted sleep by the Danes and his head is “sealed” that he didn’t wake up for a long time. In this poem, Wilbur doesn’t mention the other fight between *Beowulf* and Grendel’s mother since the poet is after the results not the causes.⁹

The poet completes his description of the country but now somehow it is deferent, since Beowulf’s feelings after the battle have changed. This change is reflected by Beowulf’s own feelings. Probably because he is exhausted from the battle that makes the country seems unfriendly, or maybe he thinks that his efforts are very magnificent that it cannot be appreciated by people. Moreover, he perhaps feels that they are only after their own interests, and when he saves them he feels that is not welcomed anymore and he should leave. Then, after his great battle people give *Beowulf* a lot of gifts. Even these gifts are for their own benefits since all of them are related to war such as an armor, horse, and weapons. This makes *Beowulf* feel as if people want him to fight other battles, to “do again what he has done.” *Beowulf* would prefer to rest but he cannot since expect him to do more great deeds. After taking his gifts, he sails home. Despite his victory, he feels miserable since he has no successor to leave his treasure to. *Beowulf* may cry because he will not be remembered after his death.¹⁰

At the end of the poem, *Beowulf* feels that he is isolated from this world. He feels that no one can understand him. Though he becomes a king of the Geats, he dies lonely. He has no family to remember him. When he died, he is buried alone at the edge of the sea. This place is not appropriate for a great man to be buried in. Therefore, Wilbur modernizes the old epic by giving *Beowulf* the sensibility of the mid-twentieth century person. *Beowulf* as a

modern hero feels alienated from his society, he feels that he doesn't belong to his community despite of his brave deeds. He can't share his feelings with anyone since he doesn't have any close family or friends. On the contrary, the epic hero is a member of his society, since there are warrior band and small kingdoms often at war.¹¹

In addition, the modern *Beowulf* is an outsider maybe because the world he lives in sees peace as a normal thing and was against abnormal things. Though he risks his life defending the people but this very act made a gap between him and those whom he saved. Wilbur shows these events from Beowulf's point of view. So the events in the poem maybe real or unreal, in other words, the reader cannot distinguish whether the description of these events is objective or subjective. That means that the reader cannot confirm whether the people really changed after the monster is killed, or *Beowulf* himself is changed. This loneliness that *Beowulf* as a modern hero felt dominates his life, even after his death he is still not understood by his mourners. Wilbur shows that *Beowulf* alienation may be caused by his assumption of his responsibilities he has as a hero. However, he does not doubt or question his duties even if it leads to his death. He protects the people by fighting his battles alone in order no one to be harmed. The people welcomed this idea by leaving him alone facing his fate. After they are saved they does not stop reminding him of his endless duties towards them. They give him many gifts which are related to war such as a horse, an armor, and weapons. His heroic deeds continuous even after his coronation as a king.¹²

In the original epic "*Beowulf*" most of the time the focus is on the monster and the mythological beasts that *Beowulf* fights, whereas Wilbur's poem "*Beowulf*" almost eliminates these enemies, since he wants to convey a message that there is more than the battles that the hero fights. The central point of the modern poem is Beowulf's lack of descendants and his feelings. Wilbur's point of view increased especially at the end of Beowulf's life when people mourned him, but there is no direct successor to his throne. So all his

efforts in fighting, defeating the monsters and collecting treasures went in vain.¹³

In fact, Grendel is the only monster which is mentioned in Wilbur's poem. And he doesn't refer to him directly by his name. he introduces Grendel in a very simple way such as " and a child/ Grown monster, so besieged them in the night/ That all their daytime were a dream of fight." While in the original *Beowulf*, many monsters are mentioned such as Grendel, his mother and the dragon.¹⁴

The events are narrated with details even the background of the monsters is mentioned such as Grendel is descended from Cain. Whereas Wilbur provides almost no background. His attention is not on the monsters themselves unlike the original epic.¹⁵

In Wilbur's poem, *Beowulf* is not called by his real name but rather he is referred to as a "hero". Moreover, in the original epic *Beowulf* is given the credit for saving the people and defeating Grendel, whereas in the modernized one, Wilbur does not give the credit directly to *Beowulf* so the reader must figure the name out by himself.¹⁶

Another difference that makes Wilbur's poem a modern one is that Wilbur does not mention all the monsters that *Beowulf* fought, just Grendel, instead he focuses only on Beowulf's battle against Grendel. However, in the original epic, the highlight was on the monsters that *Beowulf* fought including Grendel's mother and the dragon. Furthermore, the way that *Beowulf* dies is not indicated whether he dies in one of his battles or he dies because he got old. Wilbur kept Beowulf's death as a mystery.¹⁷

The end of the epic concentrates on the treasures that *Beowulf* has left behind, while in the modern version, the attention was drawn on the fact that *Beowulf* has no successors. So, the old epic is taken from materialistic point of view, whereas Wilbur's modernizes it by taking it from a humanistic point of view.¹⁸

In fact, what Wilbur tries to say is that it doesn't matter how a good king *Beowulf* is if he doesn't have an heir since his legacy cannot continue. In contrast Wilbur's poem, the original epic draws the attention on the battles the *Beowulf* fights and the treasures he collected. Wilbur's poem is taken from the twentieth century perspective since it is more realistic than the original.¹⁹

Notes

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- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Michael Antony , 2008, *The Masculine Century : A Heretical History of Our Time* , United States of America , p 249.
- ⁶ Ibid.
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- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., P 4
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid
- ¹³ <https://writersfirstrule.wordpress.com/2014/10/18/bare-bones-paper-monsters-in-beowulf-and-richard-wilburs-beowulf/>
- ¹⁴ James Routh, Jan. 1991, "Our Earliest English Masterpiece", No. 1, Vol. 19, The Johns Hopkins University Press, pp. 29-42.
- ¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ <https://writersfirstrule.wordpress.com/2014/10/18/bare-bones-paper-monsters-in-beowulf-and-richard-wilburs-beowulf/>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

The revival of the Anglo-Saxon alliterative tradition played a great role in revolutionizing the form and technique of modern poetry at the hands of poets like Ezra Pound and Richard Wilbur.

Moreover, it provided the modern poets with new perspectives on their present political and social milieu. By re-writing old English poetry, the modernists have become able to assess their age and launch verdicts on it in a new camouflaged form.

Wilbur tries to give the old epic a new spark and shows it in a modern perspective. He revived the old English traditional poetry and pull it back from the abyss of mindless modernization and technical disintegration.

Moreover, Wilbur concentrates in some of his poems on the traditional methods of rhyme and meter. He follows a literary strategy that is very similar to a philosophical one. And he makes a combination between the sensibility of the present and the instincts of the past.

Wilbur made a number of changes to give the old epic a new sense. He gives the hero the sensibility of the mid twentieth century. Wilbur neglects the fact that *Beowulf* collected a lot of treasures from all his battles against the monsters and focuses on the reality that he does not have a decedent to take the thrown after him, in contrast to the original epic that focuses on the other side of the story which is that *Beowulf* was a hero and he fights a lot of battles which in return he collected a lot of treasures and he dies a heroic death.