

Benevolent Authoritarianism in Klaeber's *Beowulf*: An Editorial Translation of Kingship

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Much of our understanding of Anglo-Saxon culture, even our notion of such institutions as Anglo-Saxon kingship, comes not from written histories but from translations and interpretations of the culture's literary works. There are comparatively few historical documents to tell us about the period, and even extensive study and analysis of the extant wills, charters, diplomas, laws, and chronicles often lead to sparse results:¹ information about what happens between humans, what values determine actions, and what objects and events are significant seems more readily available through literature. As a result, in addition to the literary scholars and general readers who over the years have absorbed from Anglo-Saxon literature what it expresses as art, archaeologists and historians have for generations turned to editions and translations of such works as *Beowulf* to make sense of their

¹ An example is Simon Keynes's meticulously researched *Diplomas of King Æthelred "the Unready" (978–1016): A Study in Their Use as Historical Evidence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). Keynes attempts to reassess "the alleged incompetence of the king and the ineptitude of his military advisers" by studying the more than one hundred royal diplomas preserved from Æthelred's reign (xvi). His premise is that the literary sources from the period (most notably the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and Wulfstan's *Sermo ad Anglos*) have given us very negative impressions of Æthelred's reign that might be changed if we examined the diplomas collectively, for Keynes believes that they may reveal "political developments within the kingdom which are barely hinted at in the literary sources" (xvii). At the end of his long study, however, the only step he is able to take away from the literary sources is that "the reign of Æthelred was not a period of *such* steady deterioration or uniform degeneracy as the literary sources, written during the closing years, would seem to imply" (230; my italics).

finds or documents and to form their notions of history.² Indirectly, then, these editions and translations have shaped our perceptions not only of Anglo-Saxon art and culture but of history itself. *Beowulf*, still the most read of all Anglo-Saxon literature, is foremost among the texts we use to decode the culture; consequently, it is crucial that we critically assess the editorial process that has produced the text as we now conceive it.

Among the editions of *Beowulf*, Frederick Klaeber's remains the most important. A monumental project begun in 1893, published in 1922, and revised and supplemented up to 1950, it continues to be the central source used by graduate students for the study of the poem and by scholars and teachers as the basis of their translations.³ As a student under Julius Zupitza, creator of the famous and still valuable Zupitza facsimile of the *Beowulf* manuscript, Klaeber—a master of Greek, Latin, and French in addition to all historical stages of the Germanic-Scandinavian languages, including Old, Middle, and Modern English—was eminently qualified to create an edition of the poem and was recruited to do so by the University of Minnesota in 1893,

² In this century historians of the Anglo-Saxon period from Sir Frank Merrie Stenton and Dorothy Whitelock to James Campbell have used *Beowulf* in particular as a documenting source. See Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Whitelock, *The Beginnings of English Society*, rev. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966); and Campbell, ed., *The Anglo-Saxons* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1982). See also Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology: Sutton Hoo and Other Discoveries* (London: Gollancz, 1974); David M. Wilson, ed., *The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Methuen, 1976); and Charles Green, *Sutton Hoo: The Excavation of a Royal Ship-Burial*, 2d ed. (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1988).

³ Fred C. Robinson argues persuasively that while Klaeber's *Beowulf* has "served the century well . . . Klaeber should *not* be *Beowulf* in the twenty-first century as well" ("*Beowulf* in the Twentieth Century," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 94 [1997]: 62). Robinson notes, however, that "it is Klaeber, by and large, that scholars continue to teach in their classrooms (especially in the United States) and to cite in their publications," and he demonstrates the difficulty of escaping the "Klaeber consensus": "New textual studies usually begin by citing Klaeber's reading, and when later scholars quote passages from *Beowulf*, they usually quote from Klaeber's text with his original readings intact despite all the subsequent challenges that may have been made to them" (47 and n).

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shortly after completing his doctoral work in Berlin. During the nearly thirty years that Klaeber spent on the edition, his eminence as a scholar steadily grew: by the time his great work appeared in 1922, he was considered the leading *Beowulf* scholar in the world; indeed, few would challenge that judgment today.

Since Klaeber made his last supplements to his edition in 1950, however, the world has looked with a more skeptical eye at any endeavor considered “pure” scholarship, and as a result even Klaeber has come under scrutiny, particularly in the literary and cultural analysis developed in his introduction.⁴ But his philology has been a different issue: though scholars as wide-ranging as Fred C. Robinson and Raymond P. Tripp Jr. have challenged and even demolished some of Klaeber’s glosses, they do not examine what they consider his “flawed” glosses in ideological terms.⁵ Because the entire philological aspect of Klaeber’s work has until recently been viewed as nonideological, his work has not undergone the same examination as cultural work in other disciplines; history, for example, has been regarded as likely to carry ideological biases, while philology has not. Klaeber is generally assumed to have objectively collected and synthesized all of the philological evidence available to him and to have rendered it into an equally objective translation of the poem and its culture. I would like to argue, however, that ideology is deeply important to Klaeber’s editorial treatment and translation of kingship in *Beowulf*; in particular, the ideology of authority underlying his scholarship produces readings of Anglo-Saxon kingship that are significantly different from what other historical (and even philological) evidence suggests. Our view of the past may have been importantly shaped by Klaeber’s drawing from his own culture to reconstruct the Anglo-Saxon one.

⁴ See, e.g., Eric Gerald Stanley, *In the Foreground: “Beowulf”* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1994). While Stanley relies on Klaeber’s edition and glosses for his text and for the meanings from which he draws his interpretations (e.g., 231), he notes that Klaeber’s introductory notes show that he sometimes found what he expected to find in the poem rather than what was there (e.g., 54–5, 156–7).

⁵ Robinson has collected some of his most notable gloss studies in *Beowulf* in *The Editing of Old English* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994). Tripp has challenged the “Klaeber consensus” in numerous venues; perhaps the best examples of the ways in which he disputes earlier glosses using semiotic theory, paleography, and linguistics are found in his *More about the Fight with the Dragon: “Beowulf,” 2208b–3182: Commentary, Edition, and Translation* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1983).

Though Klaeber's treatment of kingship in *Beowulf* has not been given careful scholarly attention, Anglo-Saxon kingship in more general terms has been in recent decades. Historians, linguists, literary critics, and other scholars of the period have noted with growing frequency the discrepancy between Anglo-Saxon law codes, which often picture a strong monarchy exercising God-given authority, and the reality of Anglo-Saxon customs and life.⁶ Richard P. Abels argues that

the early Anglo-Saxon law codes did not simply reflect tribal custom or practice of the period; they were ideological and political documents intended to demonstrate a king's regality. Lawgiving had a symbolic meaning for these barbarian rulers that transcended the practical use to which those codes could be put. Ine's decrees no more reveal the true state of late seventh century West Saxon society than King Alfred's pedigree preserves his actual descent from Woden. Rather, both were meant to project a royal ideal of kingship. (16)

Abels bases his conclusions on a synthesis of early sources that demonstrate that when king and lord came into conflict, "the claims of lordship outweighed the loyalty owed to a king" (16). Likewise, H. Munro Chadwick shows that the term *cyning* originally designated not royal authority but simply royal lineage; the *office* of king is designated in Anglo-Saxon documents and literature by the titles *hlaford* and *dryhten*, "lord."⁷

Religious propagandists and preachers as well as chroniclers and lawgivers from Bede to Wulfstan use the terms of lordship—reciprocal loyalty—rather than those of subjection to "God's anointed" in order

⁶ See, e.g., Richard P. Abels, *Lordship and Military Obligation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 16–25, 30–1, 85–95, 171–5; Eric John, "The Age of Edgar," in Campbell, *Anglo-Saxons*, 168–70; John, "The Return of the Vikings," in Campbell, *Anglo-Saxons*, 192–213; John, "Orbis Britanniae" and Other Studies (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1966), 139–42; D. H. Green, *The Carolingian Lord: Semantic Studies on Four Old High German Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 173–91, 276–9, 294–312; J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Early Germanic Kingship in England and on the Continent: The Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term, 1970* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 144–5; Patrick Wormald, "The Ninth Century," in Campbell, *Anglo-Saxons*, 132–59; Wormald, "The Age of Bede and Æthelbald," in Campbell, *Anglo-Saxons*, 70–100; and Dorothy Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1951), esp. 13–9.

⁷ Chadwick, *The Heroic Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 362–5.

to bind their readers, listeners, and followers to religious and civil law.⁸ The Colyton Oath of the tenth century shows that the tendency to associate kingship with personal lordship was strong even after Alfred's reign, for in it King Edmund commands his subjects to swear loyalty to him not because it is proper or necessary for a man to be loyal to his king but "just as a man ought to be faithful to his lord" (cited in Abels, 18). Indeed, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* gives continual evidence from the ninth century to the time of Cnut that the chroniclers understood kingship to be reciprocal.⁹ Though the battles to choose who would be king lie at the heart of Bede and the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Patrick Wormald points out that the battling for position is no proof that kingship had actually taken on an authority greater than lordship: high kingship in England was "a political myth for which rival kingdoms competed vigorously" ("Age of Bede and Æthelbald," 99).

Some of the strongest literary evidence that the institution of kingship in Anglo-Saxon England did not mirror, or rest on the same ideology as, the Carolingian one—in which the ruler was regarded as God's anointed, standing outside and above his society—is found in *Beowulf*, where "in no passage is a king presented as anything other than a lord" (Abels, 210 n. 23).¹⁰ The nation [*Geata leode*] seems to be equated with the king's retainers [*geneatas*] (e.g., ll. 1228–1315, 3170–9), and Hrothgar speaks of the Geatish people electing or choos-

⁸ See, e.g., Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.1 (the stories of Cadwallon and Oswald), 3.7 (the story of Cenwealh), 3.22 (the story of Oswin), 4.13 (the story of Bishop Wilfrid), 4.20 (the story of Imma), in Dorothy Whitelock, ed., *English Historical Documents*, vol. 1 (London: Methuen; New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 677, 678, 682–3, 692, 718–9. In "Sermo lupi ad Anglos" [Sermon of the wolf to the English], Wulfstan specifically describes the Viking terror as God's reciprocal response to the people's sins (Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 928–34). See also the laws of Ine and of Alfred, Edmund's code concerning blood feud, and the laws of Cnut (Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 398–407, 407–16, 427–9, 454–67).

⁹ See, e.g., Dorothy Whitelock, David C. Douglas, and Susie I. Tucker, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, rev. trans., 2d imp. corr. and rev. Dorothy Whitelock (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1961), 1.46a755, 60a1037.

¹⁰ Walter Ullmann gives a detailed explanation of Carolingian kingship in "Ecclesiology and Carolingian Rulership," in *The Carolingian Renaissance and the Idea of Kingship* (London: Methuen, 1969), 43–70. It differed from the older notion of Germanic kingship essentially because it combined two Pauline principles ("All power comes from God" and "What I am, I am by the grace of God") into a government principle.

ing Beowulf as their king (ll. 1850–3). There are also repeated examples of the equating of the word *dryhten* [lord] with *cýning* [king], as in lines 862–3, where *winedrihten* is immediately varied by *god cýning*, or in the *drihten Wedera* of line 2186, described five lines later as *headorof cýning*. Other words taken from the warrior culture, which in other Germanic languages or even in other Old English works assume Christian meanings, retain in *Beowulf* their reciprocal meanings. In *The Carolingian Lord*, a study of the transformation of the so-called *comitatus* words into the language of Christianity in medieval Germanic cultures, D. H. Green notes that while *est* (Gothic *anssts*, Old High German *anst*) is used by Wulfila in Gothic to mean “divine grace” (239–46), it can have a reciprocal meaning in *Beowulf*:

Whereas in v. 1194 it occurs in the context of the gift bestowed on Beowulf by Queen Wealh þeow as a reward for his services in freeing Heorot from the menace of Grendel, in v. 2149 it is used in the converse sense, for it describes Beowulf’s gift to his lord, Hygelac. The fact that *estum*, when employed like this, is meant to refer on both occasions to the same treasure only serves to underline the fact that its function is here reciprocal, denoting both the bounty of the superior and also the devotion of the dependant. (247)

Green points also to a passage in which *estum miclum* describes the willingness with which Beowulf and his followers serve the Danish king in the matter of Grendel. Green believes that it is significant that the passage follows Hrothgar’s promise to reward him for such service (247):

	Ne bið þe [n]ænigre gad
worolde wilna,	þe ic geweald hæbbe.
Ful oft ic for læssan	lean teohhode,
hordweorþunge	hnahran rince,
sæmran æt sæcce.	þu þe self hafast
dædum gefremed,	þæt þin [dom] lyfað
awa to aldre.	Alwalda þec
gode forgylde,	swa he nu gyt dyde!
Beowulf mapelode,	bearn Ec[g]þeowes;
“We þæt ellenweorc	estum miclum,
feohtan fremedon,	frecne geneðdon
eafod uncupes.” ¹¹	

¹¹ Frederick Klaeber, *“Beowulf” and “The Fight at Finnsburg,”* 3d ed. (Boston: Heath, 1950), ll. 949–60. All subsequent citations, unless otherwise noted, are from this text.

[Nor will there be any lack of the good things of the world of which I have control. Very often I have given rewards for less, honoring lesser men, inferior at battle. You yourself have performed deeds that will cause your fame to live forever. Let the almighty reward you with good things, as he just now did! Beowulf spoke, the son of Ecgtheow: "We performed that deed of valor, that fight, *estum miclum*, daringly ventured against unknown strength."]

Though Green does not argue that this act of reciprocity is part of a formal reciprocal nexus, *estum* is clearly not used in these instances in the vertical and unilateral way that Wulfila uses it in Gothic (240–55).¹²

Nor is the *Beowulf* poet simply trying to reflect a mode of relationship that was operative before Christianity: at least three different times the (Christian) poet himself stresses the king's moral duty to enrich his retainers (ll. 70–81, 1718–9, 1749–50).¹³ The poet also portrays levels of reciprocity at court: Hrothgar's court officials Wulfgar and Æschere, in return for the service they give the king, are given precedence and privilege at court (ll. 348–50, 360–7, 1323–9, 1417–20).¹⁴

¹² For a full discussion of "why Wulfila's Gothic version of the Bible shows no trace of any word corresponding to OHG [*comitatus* words] applied to Christ and why the four words [that Green examines] belonging to the sphere of the *comitatus* undergo semantic changes which set them apart from the usage of the other Germanic dialects," see also Green, 278–301, 320–1.

¹³ In ll. 70–81 the poet says that Hrothgar has especially built Heorot as a place to give back to his retainers the gifts he and they have earned; in ll. 1718–9 the poet and Hrothgar condemn Heremod for not giving to his people generously; and in ll. 1749–50 Hrothgar envisions a king's worst offense as his forgetting to give gifts. William A. Chaney demonstrates that the poet, despite his Christianity, would have perceived not only a king's role but even God's and Christ's roles in terms of secular lordship: in the poem *Christ*, "Christ is portrayed as 'the mighty Lord, the Prince of splendor, [who] summoned His thegns, the well-loved band, to Bethany,' and his apostle Andrew has thegns who, as in the Anglo-Saxon secular world, will not desert their leader lest they be despised for their action" (*The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970], 48).

¹⁴ As John M. Hill notes, "Our word 'loan' derives from *lean*, meaning 'reward' or 'gift.' Insofar as a king's or lord's gifts require services in return, they are loans. Thus, materially, obligatory prestation [*sic*] shapes the central institution of the heroic world—the *comitatus*. This is so completely the case that early in the poem, and outside of his own warband, Hrothgar thinks in terms of gifts and service. After Wulfgar announces Beowulf's arrival, Hrothgar says he will 'offer,' 'tender,' or 'give' treasures (*madmas beodan*) to that good one for his *modþræce* (385), for Beowulf's courage" ("Revenge and Superego Mastery in *Beowulf*," *Assays* 5 [1989]: 7).

None of the kings the poet focuses on—Hrothgar, Hygelac, or Beowulf—is treated as God’s anointed, nor does any of them appear to consider himself only in a unilateral relationship with his people. There is no suggestion in the poem that the king serves through God, granting gifts as an act of grace, and no sense of inferiority among the receivers of his bounty.¹⁵

Given the reciprocal idea of kingship that pervades not only the poem but contemporary cultural documents, it becomes significant that Klaeber glosses nine different adjectives or nouns (*arstafum, glæd, glædman, est, mildust, bliðe, lissa, liðe, monðwærust*) in thirteen instances surrounding kings and other powerful men in such a way as to attribute to them the motive of kindness, or the one-sided power to convey grace or favor, hence giving them a Christian-monarchical, benevolent authority that is little evidenced in the text. The pagan Hrothgar is, moreover, made to credit his heathen god with kindness, as is the equally pagan coast guard (ll. 316–9, 381–4). In Klaeber’s reading, each of the kings becomes, in essence, a figure whose authority appears to be invested from outside rather than earned from inside his realm; the pagan god or gods, his glosses suggest, likewise act unilaterally, outside a system of reciprocal service and rewards.

It is crucial to examine Klaeber’s glosses here, although his most recent edition of the poem is nearly fifty years old, since it remains central to graduate and professional study in this area and, indirectly, to undergraduate study also: the most widely used translation of *Beowulf*, E. Talbot Donaldson’s, relies almost entirely on Klaeber’s

¹⁵ See, e.g., ll. 20–5, 80–1, 378–82, 385–6, 946–56, 1020–9, 1043–9, 1480–92, 1855–67, 1929–31, 2101–4, 2144–50. David Allen argues, however, that this lack is not based on the absence of a vertical model of kingship in Anglo-Saxon society: “The Christian monarchic ideal of coercion . . . was available as a positive norm for the members of the first audience of *Beowulf*, whether they lived at the start or the finish of the eighth century.” Allen cites Bede’s “presentation of proper kingly action” as a reflection of “the presence of the Christian monarchic ideal” and the adoption by Offa II of Mercia of a “descending” system of government (“The Coercive Ideal of *Beowulf*,” in *Literary and Historical Perspectives of the Middle Ages*, vol. 1, ed. Patricia W. Cummins, Patrick W. Connor, and Charles W. Connell [Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 1982], 122). He argues that the absence of this model in *Beowulf* is a consequence of the poet’s “strategy of suggesting ecclesial kingship by highlighting the complications and dangers latent in a system reliant upon the proper exercise of choice” (125).

glosses, as do most critical studies of the work.¹⁶ As noted above, historians and archaeologists also use it as a central text to help them decode documents and artifacts from the period of its composition. From every perspective, then, Klaeber's interpretation of the vocabulary of *Beowulf* continues to influence significantly our notions of Anglo-Saxon kingship.

The first of Klaeber's "kind ruler" words, *arstafum*, occurs only four times in all of Old English literature, three times in *Beowulf*.¹⁷ The first time, it is used by the coast guard who greets and challenges Beowulf on his arrival in Denmark:

"Mæl is me to feran; Fæder alwalda
mid arstafum eowic gehealde
 siðe gesunde!"
 (ll. 316–8)

This passage is glossed by Klaeber as "It's time for me to go; may God with kindness/favor/grace keep you safe in your venture."¹⁸ The second time, Wulfgar, one of the chief thanes in the hall, has announced to Hrothgar that Beowulf is waiting outside, and Hrothgar recalls aloud

¹⁶ Donaldson, *Beowulf: A New Prose Translation* (New York: Norton, 1966); see also Ruth P. M. Lehmann, *Beowulf: An Imitative Translation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988). Both translations are noted throughout this essay. The sixth edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (1993) uses Donaldson's, giving it the most common way that undergraduates are introduced to the poem. Even the most avant-garde critical theorists—applying, for instance, feminist, psychoanalytic, and poststructuralist analyses to the poem—in general rely on Klaeber for their text. See, e.g., Gillian R. Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in "Beowulf"* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990); and John M. Hill, "Beowulf and the Danish Succession: Gift Giving as an Occasion for Complex Gesture," *Medievalia et humanistica* 11 (1982): 177–97.

¹⁷ The fourth occurrence is in riddle 26 in *The Exeter Book*, vol. 2, ed. and trans. W. S. Mackie (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 116–7, where its meaning is ambiguous. Mackie translates it as "favors," which fits the context, in which the speaker lists all the good things that will happen to those who make use of the riddle object. Two words from the culture of military and kin relationships, *getreowa* and *estum*, occur close to *arstafum*.

¹⁸ Since Klaeber glosses whole sentences only rarely, when I offer a line of poetry as it is "glossed" by him, I have put together his glosses of the words in the line as he defines them and as he grammatically designates them in his glossary.

having known him as a boy (ll. 372–3). He says that Beowulf has come to Heorot to seek a loyal friend (l. 376) and that Beowulf, so he has heard, has the strength of thirty men in his grip. Then he attributes Beowulf's arrival to God:

Hine halig God
for arstafum us onsende,
 to West-Denum, þæs ic wen hæbbe,
 wið Grendles gryre.
 (ll. 381–4)

Klaeber translates his words as “Holy God *for kindness/favor/mercy* has sent him to us, the West-Danes, as I hope (expect), against the terror of Grendel.” The third time that *arstafum* is used, Hrothgar is explaining the relationship and bond between Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow, and himself: many years before, Ecgtheow had murdered the Wylfing Heatholaf and so had forfeited his tribal rights, leaving his people (the Geats) unable, for fear of war, to harbor him. Hrothgar, then the wealthy young king of the Danes, had helped Ecgtheow by sending riches to the Wylfings to settle the feud, after which Ecgtheow had sworn him an oath of loyalty (ll. 460–70). As he introduces this story, Hrothgar says:

For [g]ewy[r]htum þu,¹⁹ wine min Beowulf
 ond *for arstafum* usic sohtest.
 (ll. 457–8)

These lines are glossed by Klaeber as “My friend Beowulf, to fight in our defense and *for kindness/favor/mercy* (or *for kindly help*) you have sought us.”

In his study of Old High German *êra* (Old English *ar*; the base of *arstafum*), Green argues that though there was most likely an original pagan religious meaning of *êra*, which expressed the human feeling of awe before superior powers, there was almost certainly also an original secular meaning connected with German kingship in general and with the lord-thane relationship in particular (173–4). He notes that the secular use “frequently [occurs] in the context of riches, power, authority or victory” (178) and describes a vertical relationship rather

¹⁹ Klaeber's 1950 emendation, following Gruntvig. MS: *fere fyhtum*.

than a horizontal one (179); indeed, he sees authority or high rank as central to the concept of *êra* (179). There is a direct parallel between the secular and the religious uses of *êra*: the first refers to a man's relationship with a man or men of greater power and the second to a man's relationship with God (182). But it is possible for a vertical relationship to be reciprocal as well, and one function of *êra* is to express such a relationship; that is, "*êra* can also be used to express the superior's attitude and behaviour towards his followers" (182). In fact, it is frequently used to designate the lord's obligation to assist and protect his followers; it is also used to express a reward or gift made by the leader (182–4). Even in *Heliand*, which contains a thoroughly Christianized version of the vocabulary of military relationships, *êron* denotes both gifts given to authorities and the rewards that they give in return; it is used this way in reference to relationships among people as well as to those between God and people (185).

Interestingly, Green uses *Beowulf* to demonstrate the reciprocity of *ar* in Old English, citing the passage in which Wiglaf is moved to act in Beowulf's behalf when he remembers the *are* that Beowulf has given him:

Gemunde ða ða are	þe he him ær forgeaf,
wicstede weligne	Wægmunðinga
folcrichta gehwylc,	swa his fæder ahte.
	(ll. 2606–8)

[He remembered then the *are* that he gave him earlier, the rich dwelling place of the Waegmundings, the same public rights that his father had.]

Though Green points out that in a secular as well as a religious context *ar* can mean "mercy" (akin to the "kindness" of Klaeber's gloss of *arstafum*), he notes that where it bears this meaning, in the passage describing the treaty between Finn and Hengest (ll. 1095–1100), it is used in the context of an agreement binding on both parties. There is a significant difference between this usage in *Beowulf* and in Old English texts such as *Genesis*, where *ar* is used, in its religious form, vertically and nonreciprocally as "God's mercy" (187n).²⁰

²⁰ Charles Abbot Conway argues persuasively that in Anglo-Saxon prose *ar* is

In the first two occurrences of *arstafum* in the poem, then, it seems to signify “awe-inspiring signs of power” (for the second half of the word, *stafum*, from *stafas*, means “letters,” as in runes or, by extension, “signs”), of which mercy could certainly be one. It is unlikely, however, that the *Beowulf* poet meant to attribute the later Christian meaning, “God’s (i.e. Christ’s) mercy” (as Donaldson, following Klaeber, translates it in both cases), or the Christian value, “kindness” (as Lehmann translates it), to these two passages, since the words come from the mouths of two pagan characters, the coast guard and Hrothgar.²¹ Klaeber, by suggesting the motive of kindness in a pagan god, departs from the possible experience of the characters in the poem; more significantly, perhaps, he moves beyond the characterization of this god by the poet, who even when speaking in his own voice and of his own religion steps no closer to Christianity than the Old Testament, where

frequently misglossed as “mercy,” when it more likely means “favor” or “benefit,” because it occurs or is grouped with *miltse*. Like Green, Conway argues that *miltse* itself has been repeatedly misglossed as “forgiveness” or “pardon” when it is much more likely to mean “prosperity”: “Thus the case that *ar* must mean ‘mercy’ because of its juxtaposition with *miltse* is not proven” (“Honour, Mercy, and the Wanderer’s Problem: Some Thoughts on ‘Ar,’” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 93 [1992]: 278–9). That Klaeber himself sees *miltse* only as a Christian term and modifies glosses that occur around it to reflect that reading is clear in his introduction: “In what light the author desired him [Beowulf] to be viewed is well expressed in those decisively significant final words of praise which almost sound as if spoken of some saintly person (*manna mildust ond mon[ðw]ærust*); even the epithet *lofgeornost*, of which so much has been made, does not necessarily point to warlike renown” (cxx).

²¹ See Fred C. Robinson, “Apposed Word Meanings and Religious Perspectives,” in *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 29–59. Michael Swanton, one of the few scholars to deal with the poet’s use of *arstafum* here, acknowledges that its root, *ar*, may have been a word “with an originally reciprocal function” and cites Hrothgar’s words in l. 458 (“for *arstafum* usic sohtest”) as evidence; he also notes “the hint of reciprocity also in its use in Beowulf’s attitude to the young King Heardred, 2378.” Puzzlingly, though, Swanton then says, “But *ar* has already been established in the poem as defining the divine grace of God in his gifts to the hero,” and cites ll. 316–8 and 381–3. There is, of course, nothing intrinsic in the use of *mid arstafum* and *for arstafum* in these lines to require that they be read to signal divine grace rather than reciprocity: only the a priori assumption that the presence of a god figure presumes a vertical, nonreciprocal relationship establishes such a gloss. Swanton seems to see the problem with this gloss also, for, having introduced his interpretation of *ar* or *arstafum* as “divine grace,” he adds, “It is used predominantly in the poem, however, to denote the attributes of a king in relationship to his followers” (*Crisis and Development in Germanic Society, 700–800: “Beowulf” and the Burden of Kingship* [Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1982], 64–5).

kindness is not yet a value and where God is a figure noted more for rough justice than for mercy (ll. 109, 181, 979, 1691–3).

In the third occurrence, *arstafum* is used by Hrothgar to describe Beowulf's motive for coming to the aid of the Danes; it appears in the context of a larger story in which Hrothgar tells of Beowulf's father's as yet unrepaired debt to him. The reciprocity of Beowulf's action is clear, for both the fulfilling and the acquiring of *ar* depend on his mission: if he is successful, he will achieve a reciprocation for the aid Hrothgar gave his father and also the acquisition of his own *ar*, which will allow him one day to inspire awe as the leader of a tribe. Hrothgar, when he hears of Beowulf's arrival, understands well how both of them can benefit from Beowulf's desire to demonstrate *arstafum*. Beowulf's challenge to Grendel is not simply an act of altruism: though Beowulf does not verbally acknowledge a tribal debt to Hrothgar, Hrothgar suggests that Beowulf's willingness to battle the monster is appropriate repayment of his father's debt and is also a likely source of the fame he will need to rise to greatness in his own tribe.

A second word that falls into Klaeber's "kind ruler" category of glosses is *glæd*, used twice to describe Hrothgar and once to describe Ingeld, who is later to be Hrothgar's son-in-law.²² In the first instance Wulfgar, who has met Beowulf and has entered Heorot to urge Hrothgar to receive him, addresses his king as "*glædman* Hrothgar" (l. 367), which Klaeber glosses as "kind/gracious Hrothgar" (Donaldson and Lehmann both translate it as "gracious"). The second instance (l. 863) follows a description of Hrothgar's warriors' reaction to Beowulf's victory over Grendel: in all the earth, they say, there is no better warrior, no man worthier of a kingdom:

	Dær wæs Beowulfes
mærðo mæned;	monig oft gecwæð,
þætte suð ne norð	be sæm tveonum
ofer eormengrund	oper nænig
under swegles begong	selra nære
rond hæbbendra,	rices wyrðra.
	(ll. 856–61)

²² On the meaning of the word when Wealhtheow is speaking, see Josephine Bloomfield, "Diminished by Kindness: Frederick Klaeber's Rewriting of Wealhtheow," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93 (1994): 183–203.

The poet is quick to point out, however, that their praise of Beowulf does not diminish their admiration for their own king or indicate in any way that they feel that Beowulf should replace Hrothgar:

Ne hie huru winedrihten wiht ne logon
glædne Hroðgar ac þæt wæs god cyning.
 (ll. 862–3)

(Klaeber glosses these lines as “Nor did they find any fault at all with their lord, *kind/gracious* Hrothgar.” Donaldson and Lehmann translate it as “gracious.”) Klaeber’s final glossing of *glæd* as “kind” (l. 2025) refers to Ingeld, the son of Froda (whom Hrothgar’s Danes have killed in battle), who has been betrothed to Hrothgar’s daughter Freawaru to bind the two tribes together. In this scene Beowulf imagines or prophesies a celebration in Heorot at which Freawaru moves among the tables, serving the men, and says of her,

Sio gehaten is
 geong goldhroden, *gladum* suna Frodan.
 (ll. 2024–5)

[She is betrothed, the young gold-bedecked one, to the *glæd* son of Froda.]

Again Klaeber glosses *glæd* as “kind/gracious.” Indeed, only in the one occurrence in *Beowulf* where *glæd* does not describe a powerful man (l. 58) does Klaeber translate it as “lordly, glorious,” the gloss that fits its etymological root meaning of “shining, bright, brilliant” as well as its gloss in all but one example provided by Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller.²³ (In this one case *glæd* describes the Scylding tribe.) Because no other major editor or translator up to 1950 either leads or follows Klaeber in the gloss of “kind” in line 2025 (most prefer “gracious” or “glad”; even Moriz Heyne, in his 1879 edition, chooses “marvelous, splendid, excellent”),²⁴ it seems particularly to represent Klaeber’s own expectations of the text.

²³ Bosworth and Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1898, rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1964; suppl. 1921, rpt. 1955), 479. Although Bosworth and Toller offer “kind” as one of four possible nuances under meaning 3, the one example they use with this meaning (from l. 1173 of *Beowulf*) is based on a questionable gloss in Benjamin Thorpe, *Codex Exoniensis: A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (1842; rpt. London: Pickering, 1975).

²⁴ See Grimur Jónsson Thorkelin, *De Danorum rebus gestis secul. III & IV. Poëme*

The context surrounding the *glæd*/"kind" words does not elucidate Klaeber's perspective, either; rather, it points away from his readings and even highlights their peculiarity. In the first instance (l. 367), Beowulf, whom Hrothgar knows to have the grip of thirty men in his hand (ll. 379–80), has arrived from over the seas to offer his services against Grendel; Wulfgar advises Hrothgar to see him immediately and to listen to his words (ll. 360–70). Wulfgar, it seems, wishes to appeal to those qualities in his king that enable him to make quick and appropriate decisions for the good of the tribe. Not only does "kind" fail to designate these qualities, but it assumes a power over Beowulf that Hrothgar simply does not have. Beowulf, it is true, does not have the rank in his homeland that Hrothgar has in Denmark, but he is not (yet) Hrothgar's thane and does not answer to his authority. Since at this point Beowulf and his men have not put down their weapons and are still helmeted and armored (ll. 395–8), neither does it seem possible that Wulfgar is pleading with Hrothgar not to have Beowulf and his men killed before hearing them out. Nothing about Beowulf's arrival or his proposed meeting with Hrothgar requires or even calls to mind the quality of kindness.

In the second instance of Klaeber's *glæd*/"kind" gloss (ll. 862–3), the poet describes Hrothgar's thanes' feelings toward him in light of Beowulf's achievement: the thanes would never abandon Hrothgar, whatever Beowulf may have done, because he is *glæd*, a *god cyning*. Though kindness or graciousness may be a valued quality in a monarch who has a vertical, nonreciprocal relationship with his subjects, even in the line preceding *glædne* here Hrothgar is referred to as the warriors' *winedrihten*, "lord-friend," a man to whom they are reciprocally bound and with whom their bonds are strengthened by his "lordly, glorious" behavior, that is, by his excellent and appropriate

danicum dialecto anglo-saxonica (Havniae, 1815), "happy, cheerful"; Thorpe, "glad"; A. J. Wyatt, *Beowulf* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894), "gracious"; Chauncey Brewster Tinker, *Beowulf: Translated out of the Old English*, 2d ed. (New York: Newson, 1910), "glad"; John R. Clark Hall, *"Beowulf" with the Finnsburg Fragment*, rev. C. L. Wrenn (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), "gracious"; Francis B. Gummere, ed. and trans., *The Oldest English Epic: "Beowulf," "Finnsburg," "Waldere," "Deor," "Widsith," and the German "Hildebrand"* (1909; rpt. New York: Macmillan, 1927), "glad"; Heyne-Schücking's *Beowulf*, rev. Else von Schaubert, 3 vols. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1963), "herrlich, trefflich."

gifts, favors, and rewards. If he were simply a kind man, they might be tempted to join the more daring and fame-hungry Beowulf.

Klaeber's final *glæd*/"kind" gloss comes in the least likely context of all. The characterization of Ingeld, Freawaru's betrothed, as *glædum*, occurs during a discussion of blood feud and of the measures, often finally useless, that tribes take to prevent it. It is difficult to find any contextual basis for Klaeber's identification of Ingeld as "kind" in this passage: he is a defeated king's son whose marriage is a political match designed to prevent war. For this purpose a "kind" man is not required, but a "lordly, glorious" one or a "splendid, excellent, bright, brilliant" one, an exemplar of warriorship. Even "gracious," the other gloss Klaeber offers, does not fit, for Ingeld is almost certainly not choosing graciously to marry Freawaru; he is marrying her because, as the political and familial head of his tribe, he is the most appropriate, most "lordly" choice.

Klaeber also characterizes Hygelac as "kind" twice in words spoken by Beowulf. The first word that Klaeber renders as "kind" is *bliðe*, which in its one other occurrence in the poem (l. 617) he glosses conventionally as "joyful" or "blithe":

Dær wæs hæleþa hleahtor, hlyn swynsode,
word wæron wynsume. Eode Wealhþeow forð,
cwen Hroðgares cynna gemyndig,
grette goldhroden guman on healle
ond þa freolic wif ful gesealde
ærest East-Dena eþelwearde,
bæd hine bliðne æt þære beorþege,
leodum leofne.
(ll. 611–8)

[There was the laughter of heroes, a pleasing sound, words were pleasant. Wealhtheow went forth, the queen of Hrothgar; mindful of custom, the gold-bedecked one greeted the men in the hall, and the noble woman offered the cup, first to the East-Dane, guardian of the homeland, told him, the beloved of the people, to be *bliðe* at beer drinking.]²⁵

²⁵The reading "joyful" (or "joyous, glad, happy") is the only appropriate one for *bliðe*'s occurrences in *The Exeter Book* and in *The Paris Psalter* (which alone accounts for half its occurrences in Old English). Bosworth and Toller find a number of instances in which it could be glossed as "quiet, calm" (111) or "gentle" (suppl., 98), but none in which it means "kind."

But in line 436, in a scene in which Beowulf asks Hrothgar to allow him to battle Grendel alone, Klaeber glosses it as “kind”:

Ic þe nu ða,
 brego Beorht-Dena, biddan wille,
 eodor Scyldinga, anre bene,
 þæt ðu me ne forwyrne, wigendra hleo,
 freowine folca, nu ic þus feorran com,
 þæt ic mote ana [ond] minra eorla gedryht,
 þes hearda heap, Heorot fælsian.
 Hæbbe ic eac geahsod, þæt se æglæca
 for his wonhydum wæpna ne recceð;
 ic þæt þonne forhicge, swa me Higelac sie,
 min mondrihten modes *bliðe*,
 þæt ic sweord bere oþðe sidne scyld,
 geolorand to guþe ac ic mid grape sceal
 fon wið feonde ond ymb feorh sacan,
 lað wið laþum.
 (ll. 426–40)

[Now then, protector of the Bright Danes, chief of the Scyldings, I will ask of you one favor, that you do not refuse me, defender of warriors, friendly lord of the people, now that I have come this far, that I might alone, with my chosen followers, this brave troop, purge Heorot. I have also heard that the monster, in his recklessness, uses no weapons; therefore, so that Hygelac, my lord, might be *bliðe* in his heart on account of me [or toward me], I scorn to bear a sword or a broad shield, a golden shield, to battle; rather I shall battle against the fiend with my hands.]

The second word that Klaeber glosses as “kindness” in connection with Hygelac (Donaldson: “kindnesses”; Lehmann: “kindest Hygelac”) is *liss*, which in all of its other occurrences in Old English means “favor” or “joy.”²⁶ The line in which the word falls (l. 2150) occurs as Beowulf presents his Danish treasures to Hygelac and tells him their story:

Swa se ðeodkyning þeawum lyfde;
 nealles ic ðam leanum forloren hæfde,
 mægnes mede, ac he me (maðma)s geaf,
 sunu Healfdenes on (min)ne sylfes dom;

²⁶ Indeed, Klaeber himself offers the alternatives “favor” and “joy,” which are the choices of Thorpe, Wyatt, Tinker, Hall, Gummere, and Heyne as well as of Bosworth and Toller, who list “kindness” as one of its meanings but cite no examples where such a gloss would be appropriate (643).

ða ic ðe, beorcnyning, bringan wylle,
 estum geywan. Gen is eall æt ðe
lissa gelong; ic lyt hafo
 heafodmaga nefne, Hygelac, ðec.
 (ll. 2144–51)

[So the king of the people lived, abiding by custom; not at all did I lose the rewards, the prizes of my strength, but rather he, the son of Half-dane, gave me treasures of my own choice, which to you, heroic king, I want to bring, to offer *estum* [as a gift? as a reciprocation for your favors? Klaeber: “with good will”]. All *liss* continues to be dependent on you; I have few close relatives besides you, Hygelac.]

In the first instance, according to Klaeber’s gloss, Beowulf asks Hrothgar to let him battle Grendel alone so that Hygelac will feel kind toward him; in the second, as he hands him treasure that he has won by defeating Grendel, Beowulf tells Hygelac that he is dependent on his kindness. Once again it seems unlikely that the context is guiding Klaeber, for both instances take place not only in the sphere of warrior and kin relationships but in the lord-thane nexus that Hygelac and Beowulf represent; both instances offer clear references to the mutual, reciprocal relationship between lord and follower. The second passage in which Klaeber characterizes Hygelac as kind is, Green argues, deeply representative of the reciprocity of Beowulf’s culture, especially in the way *estum* (l. 2149) is employed. Though Green does not refer to Klaeber’s edition here (for the text of the poem he uses the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*), he asserts that it is not remotely possible for *est* to denote a Christian kind of obedient service in *Beowulf* (249). The poet speaks of the reciprocal benevolence of Hygelac and Beowulf:

Swa sceal mæg dôn,
 nealles inwitnet oðrum bregdon
 dyrnum cræfte, deað ren(ian)
 hondgesteallan. Hygelace wæs
 niða heardum nefa swyðe hold,
 ond gehwæðer oðrum hropra gemyndig.
 (ll. 21 66–71)

[So should a kinsman do, and never weave a net of malice for another, or contrive death for his close companions by secret craft. To Hygelac, the strong in battle, his nephew was very loyal, and each was attentive to the well-being of the other.]

These lines make it even less likely that *liss* is appropriately translated here as “kindness.”

Finally, in two passages Klaeber glosses as “kind” or “kindness” a number of words that define Beowulf’s own actions and motives. In the first (ll. 2377–9), the poet describes Beowulf’s counsel to Heardred after Hygelac’s death, and in the second, at the end of the poem, the poet tells how Beowulf’s people spoke of him at his funeral. The two words in question in the first passage, *estum* and *are*, are strongly rooted in the vocabulary of the Germanic warrior culture (Green, 163–91), and of the three words in question in the second passage, the first, *mid-dust*, epitomizes Germanic lordly generosity (Green, 163–73); the second, *monðwærust*, has a root word meaning “united”; and the third, *liðost*, though not related to the warrior culture or to battle or tribal loyalty, is used nowhere else in Old English or other Germanic literature to represent “kind” (Bosworth and Toller, 644; suppl., 619).

In the first passage Beowulf prepares to battle the dragon. As he arms himself, the poet recounts the battles Beowulf survived after having returned home from his slaying of Grendel and his mother (ll. 2354–66). The poet reveals that after Hygelac had been slain in one of these encounters, his widow, Hygd, offered Beowulf the throne, but Beowulf refused it, proposing instead to give his counsel to young Heardred, Hygelac’s son:

pær him Hygd gebead	hord ond rice
beagas and bregostol;	bearne ne truwode
pæt he wiðælfylcum	eþelstolas
healdan cuðe,	ða wæs Hygelac dead.
No ðy ær feasceafte	findan meahton
æt ðam æðelinge	ænige ðinga,
pæt he Heardrede	hlaford wære,
oððe þone cynedom	ciosan wolde;
hwæðre he hine on folce	freondlarum heold,
<i>estum mid are,</i>	oð ðæt he yldra wearð
Weder-Geatum weold.	
(ll. 2369–79)	

[Then Hygd offered him treasures and the kingdom, rings and the lord’s seat; she could not depend on her son to be able to defend the ancestral thrones against foreign armies, now that Hygelac was dead. But that destitute people could not in any way prevail upon the noble-

man to be Heardred's lord, or to be willing to take on the kingly rule. However, he supported him among the people with kinsmanlike²⁷ advice, *estum* [Klaeber: "with good will, kindly"] with *are* [Klaeber: "honor, kindness, benefit, help"], until he became older, ruled the Weder Geats.]

This passage is filled with the vocabulary of tribal and kin obligations and with references to reciprocity. In the first line Hygd offers Beowulf treasures in exchange for his taking over Hygelac's kingdom; in the second line the poet uses the word *truwode*, which represents the central, binding ethical concept uniting kin as well as lords and retainers,²⁸ to explain why Hygd feels that she cannot rely on her son's power; in the seventh line Beowulf refuses to reverse what he considers his appropriate role as Hygelac's follower to become *hlaford*, "lord," to Hygelac's son; and in the ninth line Beowulf offers Heardred a kinsman's counsel in a way that the poet describes, in the tenth line, as *estum* with *are*, both of which, as we have seen, possess reciprocal meaning in this poem. With the exception of one of the possible glosses he offers for *are* [honor], however, Klaeber suggests glosses that attribute unilateral, nonreciprocal motive and behavior to Beowulf. Neither the etymological roots and general usage of the words in question nor the contexts in which they appear in the poem justify Klaeber's glosses.

Finally, in the last two lines of the poem, the poet (relating the words of the people) describes Beowulf as *manna mildust ond mon(ðw)ærest* and *leodum liðost*, all three of which adjectives are glossed by Klaeber as "kind" (*liðe* and *monðwær* are also glossed by him as "gentle"; Donaldson translates the three as "mildest," "gentlest," and "kindest" and Lehmann as "most generous," "most gracious," and "kindest"):

²⁷ See Helen Damico's argument for *freond* as "kin" in "*Beowulf's*" *Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 162–4.

²⁸ *Triuwa* [Old English *truwe*] could be "employed to express a vertical relationship between a superior and an inferior, not merely objectively with reference to the actual social institution and its members, but also subjectively as [a term] to express the human qualities demanded or inculcated by such a relationship. . . . this vertical relationship rested firmly on the need for reciprocity, that the qualities of the subordinate were complemented by characteristics of the leader. . . . one and the same word could be used to express these two functions" (Green, 191).

Swa begnorodon Geata leode
 hlafordes (hry)re, heorðgeneatas;
 cwædon þæt he wære wyruldcyning[a]
 manna mildust ond mon(ðw)ærust,
 leodum liðost ond lofgeornost.
 (ll. 3178–82)

[So did the people of the Geats, hearth-companions, mourn the death of their lord; they said that of all the kings in the world he was the *mildust* man, and *mon(ðw)ærust*, to the people *liðost* and most eager for praise.]

Once again, both the context and the poet's vocabulary suggest reciprocity. Though the people in general [*leode*] mourn their lord [*hlaford*], the poet makes special mention of his *heorðgeneatas*, his kin or retainers; of the four adjectives that describe him in the last two lines, all but one, *liðost*, come from the vocabulary of Germanic politics and lordship. *Mildust*, from *miltsa*, "generosity"—"that virtue *par excellence* which the Germanic world regarded as indispensable in the ruler" (Green, 372)—almost certainly means "reciprocal generosity" everywhere else in the poem.²⁹ *Monðwærust*, though it occurs nowhere else in this form, has as its root *geþwære*, which occurs frequently in Old English and even in *Beowulf* (l. 1230) and in all cases means

²⁹ See Bloomfield, "Diminished by Kindness," esp. 189 n. 22. For a detailed etymological tracing of Old High German *miltis* [reciprocal generosity] to its modern form *mild* and its modern meaning in English and German see Green, 163–73. Swanton argues that the meaning of *milde* changes from reciprocal to vertical during the poem: "Originally, it seems to have had a reciprocal use, as when Queen Wealhtheow speaks of the company in Heorot [ll. 1228–9]. . . . But now [at the end of the poem] it has come to refer explicitly to that attribute of the ideal king that can only be considered in a non-reciprocal sense, the quality of mercy or indulgence" (63–4). Swanton maintains that "when Hrothgar is urged by his queen to speak to his people with *mildum wordum* (1172), it could be seen merely in the context of a generous king, bestowing treasures in his hall. But when Beowulf's own career is summarized in the final lines of the poem as *wyruldcyninga manna mildust* (3180–1), its import is clearly intended to be more momentous" (64). Though Old English polysemy is acknowledged by all scholars of the language, it seems unlikely that the word would have nearly opposite meanings in the same work and that the poet assumed that his audience would apply the first meaning to the Danes early in the poem and the second one to Beowulf late in the poem. Such a theory presupposes an audience familiar with the word's (posited) semantic history and therefore able to infer its earlier meaning in discussions of distant history and its later one in discussions of more recent history.

“united, agreeing, consonant, harmonious, accordant, concordant” (Bosworth and Toller, 457–8; suppl., 436). The verbs from which it comes, according to Bosworth and Toller, are *geþwærian*, “to cause to agree, to make accordant,” and *geþweran*, “to stir, beat, churn together, forge” (457–8; suppl., 436). In *Beowulf* the lines where it appears are as follows:

Her is æghwylc eorl	oþrum getrywe	
modes milde,	mandrihtne hol[d]	
þegnas syndon geþwære	þeod ealgearo,	
druncne dryhtguman	doð swa ic bidde.	
	(ll. 12	28–31)

[Here is each noble warrior pledged to the other, generous in spirit, loyal to his liege lord, a ready troop of warriors; the retainers, having drunk, do as I ask.]

This vocabulary could hardly be more deeply rooted in the lord-thane relationship: *eorl*, *getrywe*, *milde*, *mandrihtne*, *hold*, *þegnas*, *geþwære*, *þeod*, *druncne*, and *dryhtguman* all signify the reciprocity, the loyalty, and the specific relationships involved in the Germanic warrior band. *Geþwære* is an important word, for it represents the uniting of thanes loyal to one another and to their liege lord; because it carries the meaning “agreement,” it can only have a reciprocal significance. Though *Beowulf* himself is characterized here in the superlative degree (“the *most* able to unite his people, bring them into concord with one another”), which seems to suggest an unreciprocable condition or quality about him, still the value that he promotes is mutuality and reciprocity. He is, paradoxically, superior to all other kings in creating a social balance and a harmony that use reciprocity to flatten concerns about superiority and inferiority.³⁰

³⁰ George Clark has come to similar conclusions about *monðwærust*; he also reads *milde* in a *comitatus* rather than a Christian context (*Beowulf* [Boston: Twayne, 1990], esp. 136–42). He suggests for the last lines of the poem the reading “He was the most generous and loyal to his men, the most protective of his people, the most eager for fame” (137). Leo Carruthers, whose analysis of the final lines of the poem depends on the Wrenn translation, based in turn on Klaeber’s glosses—“They said that he was of the world’s kings the gentlest of men, and the most gracious, the kindest to his people, the keenest for fame”—trusts the translator but is still troubled by the lines: “Manliness and strength are surely fitting for both kings and heroes; mild-

The final adjective for Beowulf that Klaeber glosses as “kind” is *liðe* (*liðost* [most *liðe*] in the text), which, exceptionally in these two lines, has no associations with tribal or kin obligations. Neither, however, does it mean “kind” elsewhere in Old English literature, though it has several connotations that we might now associate with kindness: “mild,” “soft,” “pleasant,” “smooth,” “gentle,” “persuasive,” “serene,” “tender,” “flexible,” and “sensitive.” But because these signify external behaviors or qualities, whereas “kindness” reflects a not-materially-motivated, internal generosity, the use of “kind” as a gloss here may show us Klaeber’s rather than the poet’s attitude toward Beowulf. Is Beowulf the most “kind” ruler, or is he instead the most “persuasive” ruler, or the most “serene” (mature and quiet in judgment), or the most “sensitive” (to his people’s needs), or even the most “pleasant”? These lines might best be read, “He was of all kings in the world the most generous with gifts to his followers, the most able to unite them, the most sensitive to the needs of his people, and the most eager to perform deeds that would bring praise to him and them.”

Whatever these lines may mean, Klaeber saw them in his own way, and his way is how we have in general read them ever since his edition of *Beowulf* was published. Because the sources of these meanings lie neither in etymology nor in context in Old English, they seem likely to lie in Klaeber’s suppositions about ideal rulership and in his particular expectations of kings and rulers in the text.

Though little is known about Klaeber’s formative years or about the development of his own ideas concerning culture and society, close study of the period and the world in which he grew up has produced a great deal of evidence in the last two decades about the social and political forces surrounding him in his home as well as in his academic

ness and kindness, on the other hand, hardly seem desirable in either.” Carruthers argues that “their inclusion may suggest a Christian writer’s attempt to make Beowulf into an ideal Christian king,” though he does not entertain the possibility that the “Christian writer” might be Klaeber rather than the poet (“Kingship and Heroism in *Beowulf*,” in *Heroes and Heroines in Medieval English Literature: A Festschrift Presented to André Crépin on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Leo Carruthers [Cambridge: Brewer; Rochester, N.Y.: Boydell and Brewer, 1994], 29).

life.³¹ Much of it points specifically to a notion of rulership that permeated German bourgeois society during the nineteenth century. It has become clear, for instance, that the ideal of an authoritarian though benevolent state under a father-figure monarch was widespread in the German intellectual world at that time; the German university was itself, in fact, the source of idealist philosophy, which demanded and thrived in an enlightened authoritarian state. As the training ground for nearly all members of the bureaucracy, moreover, the university was a bulwark of state power.

One of the strongest voices for the paternal strength and security of the state was Heinrich von Treitschke, a lecturer in politics at the University of Berlin, from which Klaeber received his doctorate.³² From 1875 to 1896 Treitschke, the most influential speaker in all the empire, delivered his views to thousands of students and professors.³³ One of them, Friedrich Meinecke, became one of the foremost German historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. An exact contemporary of Klaeber, Meinecke had a notably similar upbringing. Both were born to staunchly Lutheran families and were raised in small Prussian towns a few miles apart,³⁴ and both were the sons of educated, middle-class fathers; both, after attending the *Gymnasium*, made their way through a number of universities, finally settling in Berlin to earn their doctorates. Treitschke's Prussian, Lutheran, and idealist perspectives strongly influenced Meinecke and his work; indeed, he did not abandon them even as an elderly man during the Second World War.³⁵ If anything, Meinecke's experience of

³¹ Our only direct testimony is the short Latin vita attached to Klaeber's doctoral dissertation and a brief vita compiled by Kemp Malone for Klaeber's festschrift. See Friedrich Klaeber, *Das Bild bei Chaucer. Teil 1. Abschnitt 1: Sammlung der Bilder aus der Tierwelt* (Berlin: Vogt, 1892), n.p.; and Kemp Malone and Martin B. Rudd, eds., *Studies in English Philology: A Miscellany in Honor of Frederick Klaeber* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1929), 486.

³² Klaeber finished his degree in Berlin in 1892, having earlier studied at Leipzig, Kiel, and Halle.

³³ Konrad H. Jarausch, *Students, Society, and Politics in Imperial Germany: The Rise of Academic Illiberalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 208–11.

³⁴ Klaeber was born and raised in Beetzendorf and Meinecke in Salzwedel. Both towns are in Lower Saxony, east of Hanover.

³⁵ "So hatte ich am Schluß der Schulzeit, ohne besondere Überlegung, von natürlichen Trieben meines Wesens geleitet, bereits eine gewisse Auswahl aus den

Nazi Germany, in which “the masses,” he believed, had brought Hitler to power, convinced him more firmly than ever of the correctness of the ideal that had prevailed during his and Klaeber’s childhood and college years: a Germany united under Prussian rule, with a benevolent monarch at the helm and only limited input from a parliament.³⁶

A more mainstream force in political thought than Treitschke, and one also based at Berlin, though some decades earlier, was the historian Leopold von Ranke. Ranke, one of Klaeber’s most famous predecessors at his *Gymnasium*, Schulpforta, was largely responsible for the critical use of documents in historical writing; he enjoined historians to shed their “present-mindedness” by placing themselves in the mindset of the cultures they explored. Neither Ranke himself nor the school of neo-Rankeans who emerged after 1870, however, seemed able to shed present-mindedness enough to question “the positive value of the nation and its need for political and military power and aggrandizement” (Iggers, 130). Though Ranke used primary documents in his histories, he relied almost completely on diplomatic ones, for he saw value and meaning only in activities that took place at the governing level. All of his histories emphasized the central role of the state, viewed as an ethical good in itself (Iggers, 88–9).³⁷

Nor was it only at Berlin that philosophy, politics, and the philosophy of history combined to form a perspective that justified and even

mehr oder minder idealen Werten der Zeitbewegung getroffen: Freidenkerisch mit dem Bedürfnis, die Welt ideal zu deuten, trotzig und stolz auf mein Gewissenrecht— denn inmitten alles vom Vater auf mich geübten Zwanges lebte, von ihm selbst vorgelebt, das echt protestantische Gefühl strenger Selbstverantwortung und Gewissensprüfung und ging auf mich über—romantisch-sentimental im Ästhetischen mit noch recht unsicherem Geschmack für Wert und Unwert meiner Lieblingsdichter— konservativ, monarchisch, preußisch-deutsch als einziger Möglichkeit für einen guten Deutschen, aber die ungeheure Bedeutung des sozialen Problems schon fühlend,” says Meinecke of his worldview before he began his doctorate (*Erlebtes: 1862–1919* [Stuttgart: Koehler, 1964], 55). In his memoirs he shows how his feelings were strengthened and deepened by doctoral work and examinations under Johann Gustav Droysen, Treitschke, and Wilhelm Dilthey and by later work under Heinrich von Sybel in the Staatsarchiv (81–2, 91–8).

³⁶ Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*, 2d ed. (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 176–7.

³⁷ See Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell, eds., *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

honored authoritarian, paternalist rule. Georg G. Iggers notes that after 1866 Max Weber, Ernst Troeltsch, Meinecke, Hermann Cohen, and Paul Natorp all subordinated the democratic ideals they had held to the power interests of the German state (128); that the historians Gustav von Schmoller and Karl Lamprecht, who saw themselves as more objective than Ranke, continued to see the central force in history as the *Machtstaat* (130); that Wilhelm Dilthey considered the organized power of the state, including coercion and even brutality, necessary to the maintenance of culture (139); and that Heinrich von Sybel and Johann Gustav Droysen saw the state not as the work of individual men but as “eine Schöpfung von oben” [a creation from above], to which, if necessary, civil liberties and ethical principles could be sacrificed (117).

Both Sybel and Droysen (Klaeber cites the latter, along with Dilthey, in his vita as among the *virī clarissimi* who were his teachers at Berlin), like Treitschke members of the Prussian school of history, were committed to the centrality of the Prussian state in their political and historical considerations; they saw Prussia as the political agent of German unification.³⁸ Though early on, especially from the 1840s to the 1860s, they took part in liberal activities and argued for reforms, both became more conservative after the failed revolution of 1848 and particularly after the defeat of Austria in 1866. Each came ever more firmly to believe in the state (and above all in Prussia) as a moral institution, in the monarch as a benevolent representative of that morality, and in freedom as an achievement possible and meaningful only through obedience to the monarch and the state (Iggers, 104–21).

In addition to seeing the German form of government after 1848 (and especially after 1871) as the ideal form, the *Bildungsbürgertum* also “rejected egalitarianism and parliamentarianism primarily upon cultural grounds. . . . They became addicted to a kind of ideological geography, in which technical progress, along with spiritual decay, appeared to increase to the west, while an apparently inseparable mixture of economic backwardness and cultural profundity was associated with the easterly portion of the map.”³⁹ Recent historians of nineteenth-

³⁸ Leonard Krieger, *Time's Reasons: Philosophies of History Old and New* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 88.

³⁹ Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 186–7.

and twentieth-century German history and historiography trace this association—of shallowness and commercialism with freedom and of cultural and spiritual profundity with authoritarianism—as far back as Napoleon's victory over and reorganization of Germany in the early nineteenth century (Ringer, 25–100; Jarausch, 110–60; Iggers, 8–25). Needing to cope with the humiliation of their conquest but reacting violently to what they saw as the abuses of democracy in the hands of the masses in the French Revolution, the German elite, these historians argue, retreated into an abstract idealism in which concrete, everyday, ugly realities were ignored in favor of a theoretical political ideal, and into a romantic glorification of state and folk over individual freedom. To satisfy the need for personal freedom, they returned to Luther's notion of "inner" freedom, which included acquiescence in the political and social order and the branding of opposition to authority as secular "sin."⁴⁰

Romanticism and idealism were, of course, the products of an educated class. Among the general post-Napoleonic reforms introduced after 1812, education was also reformed, at first with humanistic intentions; within a couple of decades, however, most of the humanistic goals had been forgotten (see Ringer 20–40, 85–100). Exclusion from university education for nearly everyone but the elite began early on, and by 1834 it was difficult for any but those with an *Abitur* from a *Gymnasium* (where mostly "nonpractical" courses were taught, including Greek and Latin) to enter a university, the only noneconomic path to a higher class status (Ringer, 26).⁴¹ Not until the 1880s did the numbers of *Kleinbürger* and lower-class students, educated outside the *Gymnasium*, increase in the universities. This situation gave rise to a cultural type later called the "apolitical German": the elite, well-educated member of the upper bourgeoisie who proudly announced, as a sign of his class, that he knew nothing of the practical world or of politics (Ringer, 26–9).

Given the privilege and rank that membership in the educated

⁴⁰ Robert M. Bigler, *The Politics of German Protestantism: The Rise of the Protestant Church Elite in Prussia, 1815–1848* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 420–30.

⁴¹ From 1812 to 1834 students who had not graduated from a *Gymnasium* might gain admission to a university by taking an entrance examination. After 1834, however, such examinations were no longer given.

elite brought German scholars and academicians, and given the ease with which an authoritarian, paternalist monarch fit into their generally idealist view of politics, it is hardly surprising that by 1890 most German professors and scholars approved and supported the notion (Ringer, 129). Although university professors and students were staunchly loyal to the empire and held a generally conservative stance even shortly after 1871, their loyalty had to become stronger once Friedrich Althoff became Prussian education minister in 1882.⁴² After Althoff's appointment, professors were expected to make their students respect the monarchy and state institutions; it became nearly impossible for a professor in sympathy with the lower classes to obtain a position: "An open-minded or critical attitude on these subjects was possibly even more of a barrier to a professorial career than had been the case before German unification" (McClelland, 294–5). The loss of one's job for political and religious views was no minor problem in the 1880s and 1890s, when, because of an abundance of graduating doctors of philosophy, the average period of (largely unpaid) habilitation was already six to eight years—a period Klæber bypassed by coming to America.

Though it cannot be demonstrated that Klæber had absorbed and assimilated the above assumptions about monarchy and ideal rulership, they exerted great ideological, social, and cultural power in the milieu in which he was reared and educated, especially in his native Prussia; many of them emanated from the University of Berlin, where he spent his last years before coming to America, and were demonstrably shared by his contemporary, fellow student, and "neighbor" Meinecke and by his professor Droysen. Klæber was never a professor at a German university, where he would have experienced the practical realities of being a scholar-*Staatsbeamter* under benevolent authoritarianism and where that system of governance might have become demystified for him; instead, he became part of the American system of mass democratic education, with all its flaws: the state university. During his nearly four decades in the United States, he seems to have functioned "around" the American system of life and education rather than "in" it:

⁴² Charles E. McClelland, *State, Society, and University in Germany, 1700–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 263, 294.

Those who know him are aware how sensitive he is, for all his seeming detachment, to the multifarious American world about him and its needs. At all events, he has never allowed the bewildering complexity of a state university to trouble him, still less to distract him from that work to which a generation ago he set his hand. He might doubt, indeed, the value of this or that new discipline that forced its way into the curriculum and even threatened to crowd out the ancient liberal arts; but he could never dogmatize about it. The only thing he could be sure of was that he found in his own studies that intense satisfaction which is the last reward of the scholar. (Malone and Rudd, vii)

Perhaps it was partly a longing for the protected life of a scholar that he had left behind, a life dependably fostered by the state, that drew Klaeber back to Germany on his retirement in 1931.

In an essay on Klaeber's life during the years of his retirement, Helen Damico quotes a letter dated 18 January 1946 from William Benton, former assistant secretary of state, to J. L. Morrill, then president of the University of Minnesota. Attempting to prove that Klaeber's "Germanness" posed no threat to the United States, Benton said: "If you knew [Klaeber] as I do you would realize that he isn't remotely interested in politics. He was, I believe, the world's leading authority on *Beowulf*, and my recollection of him is that he has scarcely ever read a daily newspaper!"⁴³ Indeed, it seems likely that Klaeber was not political in the way Benton means: though he returned to Germany just as Hitler began his rise to power, there is no evidence that he had any more interest in Hitler's politics than he had had in that of any American president who served while he worked at the University of Minnesota.⁴⁴ But his glosses hint at, if not a political stance, then certainly

⁴³ Damico, "Klaeber's Last Years: Letters from Bad Koesen," *Old English Newsletter* 22 (1989): 45.

⁴⁴ I remain exceedingly grateful to Damico, who had already begun work on a Klaeber biography when I began working on Klaeber's edition in the late 1980s and who generously shared with me the information that she had gathered, as well as publishing it in a number of venues. She made research trips to the archives of the German universities that Klaeber had attended, met with faculty who were familiar with his work at Berlin after his retirement, and developed a cordial relationship with his only living relative (a niece of his wife), who gave her access to personal papers. However, all extant information was from the postedition period, after Klaeber had returned to Germany. Damico could discover nothing that threw any light on his ideological leanings or views from his birth until his departure from Germany

an ideological one, unaffected by the political world around him as he prepared his edition of *Beowulf*. If his glosses can be used as evidence, Klaeber, like Kant, Hegel, Ranke, Meinecke, Dilthey, Sybel, Droysen, and probably most of his professors and colleagues from the *Gymnasium* through graduate school, apparently considered the ideal ruler to be an authoritarian, benevolent patriarch invested with power not by the people but “von oben.” Because Hrothgar, Hygelac, and Beowulf are poetic exemplars of excellent (though pagan) leaders, Klaeber seems to have been led unconsciously to portray them as kind, that is, as acting out of voluntary benevolence, often where that quality or motive is unlikely. Allen J. Frantzen argues that influences such as those surrounding Klaeber result in “typological preconceptions,” or

classification system[s] shaped by the social conditions of the scholar. Those conditions . . . are not neutral. . . . social conditions are social relations, specific and individual and historical. Typologies emerge from intellectual and social conditions. . . . as they create expectations for patterns of change and continuity, and assist scholars in establishing the relationships of pieces of evidence to one another, they [also] express the interests of larger social schema.⁴⁵

Klaeber seems to have brought to his work typological preconceptions about rulership so closely tied to the interests of the social schema of his own culture that he was unable to perceive rulership in other terms.⁴⁶

in the 1890s. If he belonged to a fraternity (which might suggest a particular ideological leaning), that fact is inaccessible to even the most respected and trusted historians (see Jarausch’s introduction [n. 33 above]) because of the protectiveness not only of still-living fraternity members but of the descendants of long-dead ones. Since the late 1960s many historical studies of the sources of the Nazi movement have pointed to the university as a site of both the breeding and the transmission of anti-Semitism (particularly during the period that is relevant here). As a result, such records are closed to historians and literary critics.

⁴⁵ Allen J. Frantzen, “Prologue: Documents and Monuments: Difference and Interdisciplinarity in the Study of Medieval Culture,” in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 417–8.

⁴⁶ These preconceptions were not limited to kingship. Klaeber finds two other areas of Anglo-Saxon life, kinship and women, surrounded by kindness and glosses thirteen words, in twenty-five instances involving kingship, kinship, and women, as

That the gloss changes in which rulers and pagan gods become kind occur more than a dozen times in the poem indicates that the actual qualities of the Beowulfian kings, rulers, and god figures presented Klaeber with a conceptual and ideological problem so great that, to express human norms and norms of rulership as he understood them, he had to override both his superior linguistic training and his well-developed ability to find meaning in context. Not even the extraordinary polysemy of Old English can account for the stark, situational division of meaning that Klaeber reads and writes into the poem in his glosses of “ruler” adjectives. The size of the sample gives us ample reason to reexamine our use of his edition of *Beowulf* (and of the translations based on it) as a source of information about Anglo-Saxon kingship; more significantly, it reminds us how important literary texts and their editors and translators are to us as we reconstruct the cultures from which those texts come. Whether we have come to understand Anglo-Saxon kingship directly from Klaeber's *Beowulf* or from historians and/or archaeologists who have used it, our view of Anglo-Saxon kingship has almost certainly been profoundly shaped by what Klaeber expected it to be.

“kind” or “kindness.” To some degree he re-creates the “larger social schema” of his own culture by producing a revised Beowulfian world in which authority is benevolently handed down from above, kinship ties are sentimental, and women are most concerned with their roles as mothers. Klaeber's generous treatment of fellow scholars in his articles and reviews and his gracious behavior toward others (of which Damico has found much evidence) demonstrate that he was himself a person whom we might classify as kind, which may have deepened the force of his typological preconceptions. There seems to be little linguistic stimulus either in his native language (where one word, *gütig*, represents “kind”) or in Modern English (where there is also only one word for this motive or behavior) for his expectation that kindness was lodged in more than a dozen words in Old English.