

Dating Wiglaf: emotional connections to the young hero in *Beowulf*

Mary Dockray-Miller

Wiglaf, the young warrior who helps Beowulf kill the dragon at the end of the poem, offers a new definition of heroic masculinity for a post-Beowulf (not post-*Beowulf*!) world. The premise of the *Dating Beowulf* collection allows an examination of Wiglaf's affective and emotional contributions to the poem as a whole. When the critical focus turns to Wiglaf, moving Beowulf and the other Geats into ancillary roles in Wiglaf's narrative, we see that his performance of heroism includes emotional association, understood as expressions of affection and caregiving, as well as more typical masculine skills of speech making and monster killing. Most unusually, Wiglaf's heroism assumes feminine-coded forms when he nurses and then mourns Beowulf in the aftermath of the dragon fight. By the end of the poem, Beowulf's heroism is quite literally burned out, and Wiglaf's innovative heroic masculinity is in tenuous ascendance.

Lexical and connotative analysis of the vocabulary and phrasing referring to Wiglaf in the final third of the poem reveals the ways in which the poet creates an emotional connection between Wiglaf and the poem's audience. As Wiglaf demonstrates loyalty to his lord, participates in battle, and then enacts a traditional and cross-cultural ritual of mourning, he completes his emotional growth and assumes the role of primary male and hero. Wiglaf's masculine appeal and social status are enhanced by his grief in such a way that his performance realigns the poem's definition of heroic masculinity away from military expertise and towards emotional association.

A review of the critical literature reveals that Wiglaf has received surprisingly little attention in *Beowulf*'s extensive secondary corpus. The current edition of *Klaeber's Beowulf* remarks only that 'a suitable counterpart to the aged king of the Geatas, the young retainer Wiglaf also cannot fail to remind one of the youthful Beowulf as portrayed in the Grendel episodes'.¹ When mentioned at all, Wiglaf

is usually discussed as a minor representative of a larger theme such as heroic loyalty or the transitoriness of life.²

Most criticism focused on Wiglaf tries to place him definitively within the kin structures of the poem.³ The poet refers to him seven times in variations of the phrase 'Weoxstanes sunu' or 'byre Wihstanes' (Weohstan's son) (2602, 2752, 2862, 2907, 3076, 3110, 3120) and once as 'leod Scylfinga' (prince of the Scylfings) (2603), terms that present Wiglaf as a Swede, a tribe feuding with the Geats. But Beowulf calls Wiglaf 'endelaf usses cynnes / Wægmund-inga' (the last of our Wægmunding kin) (2813–14a), placing them in the same extended family. Scholars have tried to reconcile these seemingly contradictory identifications: how can Wiglaf be both a Swedish prince and a kinsman to the Geatish King Beowulf? Potential answers include relationships as disparate as uncle/nephew (specifically mother's brother/sister's son), extended cousinship, or even honorary rather than biological kinship.⁴

These suggestions extrapolate a hypothetical relationship from the ambiguous references in the poem; ultimately, an exact definition of the specific biological relationship is less important to them than the question of whether Wiglaf can take Beowulf's place on the Geatish throne. To use Michael Drouot's terminology, Wiglaf has a good but not ironclad claim to that throne based on both 'blood and deeds'.⁵ Wiglaf has performed a heroic deed (helping Beowulf in his time of need to kill the dragon), and he is related to Beowulf by blood (although we are not sure exactly how). While earlier scholars seem to have assumed that Wiglaf would follow Beowulf as king of the Geats, more recent work has cast substantial doubt on that assumption, emphasizing Wiglaf's disappearance from the poem during the funeral preparations and the absence of a statement (from Beowulf, Wiglaf, or anyone else) declaring his succession.⁶

These sorts of arguments elucidate Wiglaf within the structure and narrative of the poem, but they tend not to analyse his character beyond the question of his fitness to rule. The recent affective turn in medieval studies in general, and in early medieval English studies in particular, facilitates a more multivalent analysis of Wiglaf's emergent heroism, one that includes the interrogation of emotion in interpersonal relationship as well as the more usual military and political endeavours.⁷ The 2015 publication of *Anglo-Saxon Emotions* decisively marked a turn towards the study of emotion in Old English texts and culture; three of the essays in that volume focus specifically on *Beowulf*, but none mentions Wiglaf.⁸ Wiglaf's heroism, however,

stems at least in part from his emotional growth, his loyalty and grief, at the poem's close.

After Beowulf, Wiglaf is the main character at the end of the poem; he is referenced in line 2599 and then formally introduced in line 2602. From his entrance, Wiglaf is consistently defined as 'geong' (young); he is the 'geongan cempan' (young champion) (2626a), the 'geongum garwigan' (the young spear-warrior) (2674a and 2811a), 'se maga geonga' (the young kinsman) (2675a), and 'ðam geongan' (the young man) (2860a). Wiglaf is not 'young' in the sense of awkward or ignorant; 'geong' is praiseworthy in these instances, modifying favourable nouns. While the poet tells us that 'Ða wæs forma sið' (it was the first time) (2625b) that Wiglaf had gone into battle with Beowulf, he also states that Wiglaf's father had waited to pass on heirlooms 'oð ðæt his byre mihte / eorlscipe efnan swa his ærfæder' (until his child could perform earl's-deeds like his forefather) (2621b–22). His father's gift implies that Wiglaf has some but not extensive experience in battle before he follows Beowulf into the dragon's lair. Wiglaf's youth, then, is positively connoted throughout the episode. Rather than inexperience, his youth implies strength and enthusiasm – excellent traits for an emerging hero.

Throughout the episode, Wiglaf expresses and enacts deep loyalty to and affection for Beowulf as lord and king, another indication of his heroism. His speech to the cowardly retainers invokes the debt they owe Beowulf as their lord and ring-giver: Wiglaf says that Beowulf 'us ðas beagas geaf' (gave to us these rings) (2635b) and he 'usic garwigend gode tealde' (thought us good spear-warriors) (2641). Only Wiglaf, of course, turns and enters the battle; the rest run away. When he addresses Beowulf directly, Wiglaf calls him 'Leofa Biowulf' (beloved Beowulf) (2663a). Beowulf responds with the same terminology, addressing him as 'Wiglaf leofa' (beloved Wiglaf) (2745a) after the dragon is dead; the verbal echoes here reinforce the emotional nature of the bond between the warrior and the king.⁹ This verbal exchange is a notable and direct contrast to the poet's reference to the cowards as 'unleofe' (unloved) (2863b) after Beowulf's death. Wiglaf continues to use this terminology after Beowulf's death as he speaks to the Geats about the 'leofne þeoden' (beloved lord) (3079b) and 'leofne mannan' (beloved man) (3108a). Similarly, Wiglaf declares to Beowulf as he enters the battle that 'ic ðe fullæstu' (I will support you) (2668b). In this speech, delivered directly to Beowulf and presumably out of earshot of the departed cowards, Wiglaf does not mention rings or oaths

or reciprocity. He merely states his intention to support the 'leofa' one at a time of great need.

The poet's diction throughout the dragon fight and Beowulf's death thus stresses the depth of the emotional bond between Wiglaf and Beowulf. Wiglaf's actions and gestures similarly emphasize this bond, as Wiglaf acts as assistant, colleague, and finally nurse and mourner as the episode comes to a close. While Wiglaf has stated that he enters the battle to support Beowulf, his first action is to clamber 'under his mæges scyld' (under his kinsman's shield) (2675b) when Wiglaf's wooden one is incinerated by the dragon's fire waves. The diction here emphasizes their kinship again ('mæges'), even as Wiglaf is receiving more help than he is providing at this particular moment. Presumably, the two are then huddled under the shield together, since Beowulf had the special shield made 'eall irenne' (all of iron) (2338a) expressly for this battle, and the only relatively safe space in the literal firestorm is under or behind this iron shield. At this moment, the two kinsmen experience the intensity and physical intimacy of this decidedly martial and heroic space.

They both move away from this protection, however, in a coordinated attack that demonstrates their alliance and cooperation. Beowulf strikes at the dragon's head; the dragon bites Beowulf in the neck; Wiglaf strikes the dragon in the belly or at least in the lower part of its body; Wiglaf's hand is burned; Beowulf then 'forwrat' (carved) (2705a) the dragon through its body. Although these events take place over the course of twenty lines (2688–708), they combine to form a quick, precise sequence in a systematized and successful attack that seems more spontaneously organic than consciously planned. The poet's diction again emphasizes their bond with the word 'begen' (both): 'hi hyne þa begen abroten hæfdon' (they both then had destroyed it) (2707). Despite his youth, Wiglaf has performed well in his first battle for Beowulf: he has demonstrated clear, strategic thinking and he has endured and ignored pain 'þær he his mæges healp' (when he helped his kinsman) (2698b). Like the speeches and descriptions that precede and follow it, the actual sequence of action demonstrates Wiglaf and Beowulf's emotional and affective bond.

That bond is made even more clear by the poet's use of a hapax legomenon, 'sibæðelingas' (kin-princes) (2708a) to bind Wiglaf and Beowulf together lexically as well as thematically and militarily. *Sibæðelingas* is unique not just to *Beowulf* but to the entire Old English poetic corpus.¹⁰ John M. Hill calls *sibæðelingas* a 'constructed honorific' that 'embraces them both as they mutually achieve a

costly victory', even as (in Hill's analysis) their biological kinship remains relatively remote.¹¹ It is the only *sib*- (kin-) compound in the poetic corpus that includes connotations of aristocratic social class (contrast with *sib (be)gedriht* [kin-band], *sib (b)hufan* [kin-love], or the redundant compound *sibgemagas* [kin-relatives]). As such, *sibcæðelingas* unites Wiglaf and Beowulf, even somewhat eliding their differences in age and fame, by emphasizing instead their shared aristocratic nobility.

Other phrases similarly emphasize this bond between the young and old kinsmen. In a foreshadowing of the victory to come, the poet tells us that the dragon discovered that Wiglaf's spirit was strong 'syððan hie togædre gegan hæfdon' (after they had come together) (2630). The plural pronoun-phrase 'hie togædre' here refers to Beowulf and Wiglaf, working in tandem against their common enemy.¹² Wiglaf also binds himself to Beowulf through his use of the first-person plural pronoun *urum* when he reproaches the cowardly Geats, separating the cowards from himself and Beowulf when he says 'urum sceal sweord ond helm, / byrne ond beaduscrud, bam gemæne' (we must have sword and helmet with both mail-coat and battle-clothes) (2659b–60). The heroic and affective bond is thus also lexical.

During the dragon fight, the diction of the poem promotes Wiglaf away from youth and into full maturity, using terms and descriptors of success and accomplishment. The diction shows Wiglaf to have become a fully adult male *eorl* immediately after Beowulf has been bitten in the neck in the second part of the dragon fight: 'ða ic æt þearfe gefrægn þeodcyniges / andlongne eorl ellen cyðan' (then I heard at the need of the nation-king, the earl made known [his] courage throughout) (2694–5). Similarly, the anonymous Geatish messenger of the end of the poem refers to Wiglaf as an *eorl* as Wiglaf holds something of a vigil over Beowulf's body: 'Wiglaf siteð / ofer Biowulfe, byre Wihstanes, / eorl ofer oðrum unlifigendum' (Wiglaf, son of Weohstan, sits over Beowulf, [one] earl over the other un-living) (2906b–8). This diction shows that Wiglaf has fully matured as he has been tested in battle.

Another indication of Wiglaf's new, higher status is the poet's use of the celebratory adjective 'sigehreðig' (victory-glorious) (2756a) to refer to Wiglaf during the interlude after the fight but before Beowulf dies. Forms of *sigehreð* are used only four times in *Beowulf*; one reference is to God (94), two to Beowulf (490 and 1597), and the last to Wiglaf (2756). Wiglaf is *sigehreðig* as he passes into the dragon's den to collect treasure for Beowulf to view; as Beowulf is

dying, the diction of victory moves from the old king to the new hero, affirming Wiglaf's new power in the narrative.

At the same time, however, Wiglaf's ascendant heroism takes a decidedly non-masculine turn when he becomes the chief nurse and mourner for the dying Beowulf. While there is ample analysis available of the connections in early medieval British culture between mourning and feminine performance,¹³ 'nursing' as in 'caring for the sick and dying' seems to have received hardly any attention, probably because the act of nursing is not featured in the Old English corpus.¹⁴ Scholarship on early medieval medicine tends to focus on the medical texts rather than on the people engaged in medical practice, and the very little extant work discusses doctors (who diagnose illness and prescribe treatment) rather than nurses (who care for the sick more generally).¹⁵ Such work of general caring tends to be invisible in the historical record; however, Montserrat Cabré has described how 'women's significant contribution to healthcare can be mapped out by looking at the domestic space that is largely left outside the histories of medieval medicine'.¹⁶ Cabré's analysis of 'the medieval health-care system' shows the difficulties for historians in differentiating among various types of women's work in the household, so that care of family members (both healthy and sick), preparation of food, cleaning of clothing, objects, and interior space all merge into the 'domestic space' as general women's work rather than as distinctive tasks attached to an 'occupational label' (nurse, cook, laundress, etc.).¹⁷ Cabré's sources (including some fascinating home-remedy recipes) come from late medieval Iberia, but she suggests 'that perhaps the essence of [her] argument could be valuable for other Western European regions', especially since 'the household was the primary locus of the medieval provision of health care'.¹⁸ Cabré, like other medical historians, focuses more on diagnosis and treatment of illness than on general care of the sick; in other words, she examines more closely what modern culture would term 'a doctor's work' rather than 'a nurse's work'. To further her argument about women's medical work enfolded in and thus made invisible by their daily work of care in the household, I would like to suggest here that Old English seems to have had no word for 'nursing' (apart from the very specific act of wet-nursing an infant) because care of the sick and dying was embedded in daily household work, work presumed to be appropriate to the female role and enacted almost exclusively by women.¹⁹

Wiglaf's care of Beowulf in the aftermath of the dragon fight, then, could not be described as 'nursing' in the language of the

poem, but Wiglaf does indeed nurse the dying Beowulf in the sense that he tries to alleviate his lord's pain and suffering as much as he is able. After the dragon is definitely dead, Beowulf realizes that he too is dying; at that point, Wiglaf 'winedryhten his wætere gelafede' (washed his lord with water) (2722) and 'his helm onspeon' (unfastened his helmet) (2723b). Neither of these actions will stop Beowulf from dying, but they may make him more comfortable in the process; washing and (un)dressing, of course, are services that women have traditionally tended to perform for children or for incapacitated people (or for the dead, in fact). Any potential Christological association also feminizes Wiglaf, as it is *mulieres* (women) who proceed to the tomb to tend to the body of Christ (Luke 23.55–24.1).²⁰ Wiglaf actually washes and refreshes Beowulf with water twice more, performing these feminized activities as part of his heroism and service to his lord. After Wiglaf follows Beowulf's orders to explore the dragon's hoard and retrieve treasure for Beowulf to look at as he is dying, 'he hine eft ongon / wæteres weorpan' (he began to cast water on him again) (2790b–1a), continuing to keep Beowulf as comfortable as possible. Finally, the cowardly Geats return to the scene to see Wiglaf denying Beowulf's death by persisting in his use of water to comfort the dying (now dead) man: Wiglaf 'wehte hyne wætre' (would have roused him with water) (2854a).²¹ There may be some quasi-baptismal or last rites overtones to this repeated washing, especially since it is remarked upon three times in this relatively short sequence of 132 lines. But it also illustrates an unusual level of tender caregiving, and its reiteration shows that this nursing is an important part of Wiglaf's character; his loyalty to his lord includes not just the willingness to fight to the death but also to care for the body of the dying. Wiglaf thus adds a new and unusual dimension to the poem's intertwined definitions of masculinity and heroism.

This emotionally charged caregiving metaphorically wounds Wiglaf in a way that the dragon could not. Perhaps reinvigorated by Wiglaf's ministrations, Beowulf begins his directions to Wiglaf for the construction of his tomb, and his words break apart Wiglaf's 'breosthord', literally his breast-treasure, metaphorically his heart, his thoughts, his mind: 'he hine eft ongon / wæteres weorpan, oð þæt wordes ord / breosthord þurhbræc' (He began again to cast water upon him, until the spear-point of a word broke through [his] heart) (2790b–2a). Bosworth-Toller defines *ord* as 'the point (of a weapon)', not as the 'point' or main idea of a phrase.²² Beowulf's

following speech (2794–808) wounds Wiglaf emotionally, penetrating his emotions ('breosthord þurhbræc') in a way that the dragon could not penetrate his body. In this surprising image, the poet deepens our understanding of Beowulf and Wiglaf's bond as physically embedded in their heroic bodies.

That heroic focus on the body is embedded in the poetic diction of the scene as well. The poet tells us, just before the third reference to Wiglaf using water to soothe Beowulf, that 'He gewergad sæt, / feðecempa frean eaxlum neah' (he sat wearied, the foot-soldier, near the shoulders of his lord) (2852b–3); the description suggests that Beowulf's head may be in Wiglaf's lap in an emotionally charged, physically intimate posture.²³ The imagery here as well implies that Wiglaf and Beowulf are metaphorically two parts of one body, Wiglaf the feet ('feð') and Beowulf the shoulders ('eaxlum'); their assignments here roughly correspond to the spots where each stabbed the dragon's body a few lines before. Their military, biological, and emotional closeness is reinforced in the unifying bodily diction of the image, even though at this point in the narrative Beowulf is dead.

All of these close readings point to a role for Wiglaf as the ascendant young hero, ready to take over as the old hero dies and enters the realm of posthumous fame and glory. Wiglaf is young, loyal, brave, skilled, intuitive, and nurturing. Beowulf himself, however, seems not to see Wiglaf as a fully worthy successor. As noted above, scholars have engaged in extended discussion about the exact nature of Beowulf and Wiglaf's kinship; that discussion has included reference to Beowulf's bequest of his war-gear to Wiglaf, since Beowulf has no biological son. After the poet has resoundingly and uniquely defined them as 'sibæðelingas', and before Beowulf sends Wiglaf into the dragon's lair to collect treasure, Beowulf says that:

Nu ic suna minum syllan wolde
guðgewædu, þær me gifeðe swa
ænig yrfeweard æfter wurde
lice gelenge (2729–32a)

(Now I would give to my son [my] battle-gear, if there to me had been given any heir belonging to my body that remained after [my death])

However, Beowulf does not immediately give the items to Wiglaf. Wiglaf has to wait approximately eighty lines before Beowulf makes

the seemingly logical next step to follow his statement above, that since he has no biological son he will treat Wiglaf as a worthy proxy:

Dyde him of healse þring gyldenre
 þioden þristhydig, þegne gesealde,
 geongum garwigan, goldfahne helm,
 beah ond byrnan, het hyne brucan well:
 'Þu eart endelaf usses cynnes,
 Wægmundinga; ealle wyrd forsweop
 mine magas to methodscafte,
 eorlas on elne; ic him æfter sceal.' (2809–16)

(The glory-minded lord did give to the thane, the young spear-warrior, the golden ring from his neck, the gold-decorated helmet, ring, and mail-coat, ordered him to enjoy [them] well. 'You are the last of our Wægmunding kin. Fate has swept away all of my kin to the measured end, those earls in courage; I must go after them.')

Beowulf actually undercuts the bond between him and Wiglaf twice in this sequence. First, he hints that Wiglaf will inherit the war-gear since Beowulf has no biological son, but does not then immediately follow through on that suggestion. Instead, he makes Wiglaf gather treasure from the dragon's barrow (2752–91), then gives thanks to God (2792–800), and then provides tomb-building instructions (2800–8) before he fulfils the implied promise in the earlier lines and gives his war-gear to Wiglaf since he has no biological son.

Second, even as that transfer takes place, Beowulf seemingly contradicts himself and somewhat delegitimizes Wiglaf, at first affirming that Wiglaf is the last 'usses cynnes' (of our kin) but then lamenting that 'ealle ... mine magas' (all my kin) (2813b–15a) are dead. Hill differentiates between connotations of *cynnes* and *magas* in this sequence, reading *cynnes* as implicitly more distant than *magas*, which Hill translates as 'personal kinsmen'.²⁴ Even if the terms have different emotional valences, however, Beowulf still bemoans his lack of kin while he has a young, strong, loyal kinsman right next to him, diminishing the relationship that the narrative has just established. Wiglaf seems not be offended by this deathbed slight; he remains seated by Beowulf's corpse, sprinkling it with water in a futile gesture of hope.

While scholars have focused on Beowulf's (somewhat grudging) gift of his war-gear to Wiglaf, none has remarked that Wiglaf does not need the gift, either practically or metaphorically. Wiglaf has already participated in the iconic ritual of receiving arms from his (biological) father. Beowulf needs a son to receive his war-gear, but

Wiglaf does not need a father or more weapons and armour. Wiglaf has his father's 'bill ond byrnan' (sword and mail-coat) (2621a) as well as more generalized 'guðgewæda / æghwæs unrim' (countless of each [kind] of battle-articles) (2623b–4a). He holds his family's ancestral property (2607). He has an unclear but important biological relationship with the Swedish royal family, enough of one that Wiglaf is called 'leod Scylfinda' (a prince of the Swedes) (2603b) when he is introduced. Once Beowulf is dead, the Geats need Wiglaf more than he needs them. As noted above, critics have parsed the end of the poem in an attempt to determine whether Wiglaf succeeds Beowulf as king of the Geats, but they have proceeded on the assumption that Wiglaf would want that succession. Hill emphasizes the ways in which Wiglaf's loyalty to Beowulf is that of a retainer to a lord; Wiglaf's loyalty is to Beowulf the individual, not to the Geats as a nation or tribe. Once Beowulf is dead, that bond of loyalty disappears, since it is a bond of homosocial intimacy rather than one mediated by any larger entity of tribe or group or nascent nation. Throughout the poem, Wiglaf expresses no loyalty to the Geats, who after Beowulf's death will endure the terrors prophesied by an anonymous woman at Beowulf's pyre:

sæide geneahhe
 þæt hio hyre heregeongas hearde ondrede,
 wælfylla worn, werudes egesan,
 hynðo ond hæftýnd (3152–5)

(she said earnestly that she feared harsh army-attacks, a multitude of abundance of the slain, horror of the war-host, loss and captivity)²⁵

The Geats may see Wiglaf as a potential and attractive new king, but his disappearance at the very end of the poem indicates instead that Wiglaf, like many heroes before and after him, sets off into the unknown. The poet does not permit the audience a glimpse into his future; that future does not lie within the bounds of the poem's narrative and geography.²⁶

Part of Wiglaf's attractiveness for the audience is his status as one of the few dynamic characters in Old English poetry. In the course of the dragon fight and its aftermath, he has grown from a young to a mature man. While he does not necessarily become king of the Geats, he certainly assumes command, even if temporarily, once Beowulf is dead. After Beowulf's death, Wiglaf gives orders, with the poet twice using forms of the verb *hatan* (to command) to describe his actions. Wiglaf 'heht ða þæt heaðoweorc to hagan

biodan' (then ordered that the battle-work be proclaimed to [those in] the enclosure) (2892) after he castigates the cowards who deserted Beowulf. His order is promptly followed, as an anonymous Geat announces Beowulf's death and predicts future devastation following line 2900. Similarly, the Geats act as he orders them to build Beowulf's funeral pyre:

Het ða gebeodan byre Wihstanes,
 hæle hildedior hæleða monegum,
 boldagenda, þæt hie bælwudu
 feorran feredon (3110–13a)

(Then ordered the son of Weohstan, the war-brave man, to command
 the many heroes, the bold-actors, that they from afar bear the firewood)

The poet reinforces 'het' (ordered) with 'gebeodan' (to command), emphasizing the subordinate position of the Geatish 'hæleða' and 'boldagenda' in relation to Wiglaf. These two instances of reaction to Wiglaf's speech stand in marked opposition to the reaction to his first speech, which takes place before the dragon fight (2633–60). In that first speech, he reminds his companions of their debt to Beowulf; they ignore his exhortation, and then they run away. After the dragon fight, in contrast, the Geats do what he tells them.

The poet as well realizes that Wiglaf has changed through the course of the narrative. The text's final reference to Wiglaf is as 'se snotra sunu Wihstanes' (the wiser son of Weohstan) (3120).²⁷ The poet refers to Wiglaf as Weohstan's son both at his introduction (2602) and his exit (3120), but much affective growth and expansion have been layered on top of that patronymic identification in the intervening lines. While translators tend to ignore the comparative form 'snotra' at 3120 (translating it simply as 'wise' or 'sage'),²⁸ Wiglaf is indeed 'wiser' on his departure from the text than he was at his entrance.²⁹ He speaks with authority and wisdom. He has experienced battle against a monstrous creature. He has nursed his king, watched him die, and mourned that loss. All of these activities play into the meaning of his name: Wig-laf, battle-remnant.³⁰ Wiglaf's wisdom comes from the experience of battle and from its aftermath. In these processes, Wiglaf has performed an affective, masculine intimacy that constitutes a distinct alternative to Beowulf's static, heroic masculinity.

Because of his range of emotional experience and emotional growth, the poem's audience can identify with Wiglaf in a way we could not with Beowulf. Beowulf's experiences in the poem consist

almost entirely of heroic deeds and boasting speeches; his emotional range is narrow.³¹ Wiglaf's range of emotion and experience, in contrast, is much broader and also more nuanced; in fighting and speech making, he is somewhat like Beowulf, but he also nurses, mourns, and becomes wiser through all of these experiences. His experiences, even as narrated in the elevated diction of heroic poetry, are 'common' in the sense that all humans mourn the death of a 'leofa' (a loved one), and all humans change in response to that grief. His process of mourning and subsequent growth into leadership creates an appealing and sympathetic character, a new kind of hero to end the epic. Wiglaf excels in stereotypically masculine performance: he remains loyal to his king as they fight together to kill the dragon. He also excels in more stereotypically feminine performance: he nurses, he mourns, he prepares a funeral. In his association with death and its aftermath, Wiglaf performs a heroism that encourages empathy and imitation – or, in short, intimacy. Members of the poem's audience will probably never have a chance to kill a dragon, but all will mourn loved ones.

This affective connection endows Wiglaf with emotional attractiveness; ironically, his masculine appeal and social status are enhanced by his grief in such a way that Wiglaf's performance realigns the poem's definition of heroic masculinity away from military stoicism and towards emotional association. As such, the final hero is Wiglaf, the empathetic, emotional, dynamic, and multidimensional man. While the Geats do not have a new king at the end of the poem, the audience has a new, more intimate definition of heroism.

Notes

- 1 R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (eds), *Klaeber's Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), p. 252. All quotations from the poem are from this edition; all translations are my own and attempt to be literal rather than poetic. Throughout, I have used the online *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ed. Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, compiled by Sean Christ and Ondřej Tichý, Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 19 July 2010, <http://www.bosworthtoller.com>.
- 2 For example, see R. M. Lumiansky, 'Wiglaf', *College English*, 14.4 (1953), 202–6, at 205; Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder (eds), *A new critical history of Old English literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), p. 142; Kenneth Sisam, *The structure of Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 53; Dennis Cronan, 'Wiglaf's sword', *Studia neophilologica*, 65 (1993), 129–39, at 137; Edward Irving,

- Rereading Beowulf* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), p. 111.
- 3 A generally historicist turn in literary criticism went to an extreme in Richard North's claim that *Beowulf's* Wiglaf is a reference or homage to King Wiglaf of Mercia in *The origins of Beowulf: from Vergil to Wiglaf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); it should be noted that Michael Lapidge refers to North's thesis as 'the mother of all crackpot theories' in his review of *The origins of Beowulf*, *Reviews in History* 617, <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/617> (accessed 5 June 2019).
 - 4 For examples, see Rolf H. Bremmer, 'The importance of kinship: uncle and nephew in *Beowulf*', *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*, 15 (1980), 21–38; Norman E. Eliason, 'Beowulf, Wiglaf and the Waegmundings', *ASE*, 7 (1978), 95–105; Stephen O. Glosecki, 'Beowulf and the wills: traces of Totenism', *PQ*, 78 (1999), 15–47; John M. Hill, *The Anglo-Saxon warrior ethic: reconstructing lordship in early English literature* (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2000).
 - 5 Michael D. C. Drout, 'Blood and deeds: the inheritance systems in *Beowulf*', *Studies in philology*, 104.2 (2007), 199–226.
 - 6 For examples, see Irving, *Rereading Beowulf*, pp. 75–6; Hill, *Anglo-Saxon warrior ethic*, pp. 42–4; Frederick M. Biggs, 'Beowulf and some fictions of the Geatish succession', *ASE*, 32 (2003), 55–77; Frederick M. Biggs, 'The politics of succession in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum*, 80.3 (2005), 709–41.
 - 7 In addition to the Jorgensen collection, for work on emotion in medieval culture more generally, see Barbara H. Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's past: the social uses of an emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) and her *Emotional communities in the early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).
 - 8 Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (eds), *Anglo-Saxon emotions: reading the heart in Old English literature* (London: Routledge, 2015); the three essays that concentrate on *Beowulf* are Stephen Graham, 'So what did the Danes feel? Emotion and litotes in Old English poetry', pp. 75–90; Kristen Mills, 'Emotion and gesture in Hrothgar's farewell to *Beowulf*', pp. 163–76; and Erin Sebo, '*Ne sorga*: grief and revenge in *Beowulf*', pp. 177–92.
 - 9 These echo the other uses of *leofa* in the poem, which is used exclusively in intergenerational address. It occurs in direct address from Wealhtheow to *Beowulf* (1216), *Beowulf* to Hrothgar (1483), Hrothgar to *Beowulf* (1758 and 1854), and *Beowulf* to Hygelac (1987).
 - 10 J. B. Bessinger (ed.), *A concordance to the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978), p. 1055.
 - 11 Hill, *Anglo-Saxon warrior ethic*, pp. 32–4.
 - 12 It is possible but not likely that *hie* could refer to the three combatants (*Beowulf*, *Wiglaf*, and the dragon) as they 'come together' in battle.

However, the subject of the sentence, *se wyrm*, makes its discovery after the two previously separated humans ‘come together’ to oppose the dragon.

- 13 For analysis of the identification of mourning as a female activity in pre-Conquest England, see Helen Bennett, ‘The female mourner at Beowulf’s funeral: filling in the blanks / hearing the spaces’, *Exemplaria*, 4.1 (1992), 35–50; and Patricia Clare Ingham, ‘From kinship to kingship: mourning, gender, and Anglo-Saxon community’, in Jennifer C. Vaught and Lynne Dickson Bruckner (eds), *Grief and gender: 700–1700* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 17–31. On mourning as a male activity in *Beowulf*, see also Robin Norris’ essay in this volume, pp. 210–26.
- 14 Translations of *nutrix* into Old English cluster around words for fostering and feeding children: *cild-fostre*, *fostre*, etc. See *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary online*, www.bosworthtoller.com. I am indebted to Monica Green for her insights about medieval medical history in general and the dearth of information about medieval nursing practices in particular.
- 15 See, for example, the primary overview: M. L. Cameron, *Anglo-Saxon medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Chapter 3 is entitled ‘Physician and patient’. Cameron’s index does not include ‘nurse’ or ‘nursing’. Monica Green has addressed the issue more generally in ‘Integrative medicine: incorporating medicine and health into the canon of medieval European history’, *History compass*, 7.4 (2009), 1218–45, at 1221–2.
- 16 Montserrat Cabré, ‘Women or healers? Household practices and the categories of health care in late medieval Iberia’, *Bulletin of the history of medicine*, 82 (2008), 18–51, at 18.
- 17 Ibid., 23–6, quotation at 23.
- 18 Ibid., 24–5.
- 19 I am indebted to Craig Davis for his insight in this analysis of nursing as feminized work in pre-Conquest culture. Davis suggested (via personal email 2 February 2017) that some men must have cared for the sick in a monastic context; the *Regularis concordia* does indeed direct both monks (*seruitores*) and laymen (*famulorum*) to aid monks in the infirmary; Dom Thomas Symons (ed. and trans.), *Regularis concordia / the monastic agreement* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1953), ch. 12, p. 64.
- 20 In the Gospel of Mark, these women are specifically identified as Mary Magdalen and Mary, mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:1).
- 21 The editors of Klaeber’s *Beowulf* suggest following Alfred Bammesberger’s argument (‘Old English *wæteres weorpan* in *Beowulf*, 2791a’, *American notes and queries*, 19.1 (2006), 3–7) that *wæhte* here is a preterite subjunctive (258).
- 22 ‘Ord’, *An Anglo-Saxon dictionary online*.
- 23 This posture would then be an inversion of the imagined scene in *The Wanderer*, wherein the speaker lays his head and hands on his lord’s knees (41–4).

- 24 Hill, *Anglo-Saxon warrior ethic*, p. 35.
- 25 Much of this section is conjectural due to manuscript damage; see the description and discussion of this folio in *Klaeber's Beowulf*, p. xxviii as well as Bennett, 'Female mourner'.
- 26 Approximately 1,000 years after the *Beowulf* manuscript was made, Wiglaf's story was retold and then continued by Rebecca Barnhouse in *The coming of the dragon* (New York: Random House, 2010) and *Peaceweaver* (New York: Random House, 2012).
- 27 Although Wiglaf is *eahta sum* (3123), one of the eight in the group to go into the dragon's barrow, he is not specifically identified by name or patronymic at that point; he is not mentioned again, directly or indirectly, in the remaining fifty-nine lines of the poem.
- 28 For instance, R. D. Fulk uses 'sage' in Fulk (ed.), *The Beowulf manuscript*, *Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 291; Frederick Rebsamen, 'young', in Rebsamen (ed. and trans.), *Beowulf: an updated verse translation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 99; Michael Alexander, 'in his wisdom', in Alexander (ed. and trans.), *Beowulf* (New York: Penguin, 1973, repr. 1986), p. 150. Translators who use 'wise' include Howell D. Chickering (ed. and trans.), *Beowulf* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), p. 237; Seamus Heaney (trans.), *Beowulf* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), p. 209; Roy Liuzza (ed. and trans.), *Beowulf*, 2nd edn (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2013), p. 148; Burton Raffel (ed. and trans.), *Beowulf* (New York: New American Library 1963), p. 119; J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: a translation and commentary*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2014), p. 104.
- 29 I am indebted to Stephen J. Harris for grammatical expertise about the form of *snotra*.
- 30 I am indebted to the Manchester University Press reviewer for the suggestion to incorporate the implications of Wiglaf's name into this argument.
- 31 While Gillian Overing does not use the phrase 'emotional range', she does delineate the 'masculine economy' of *Beowulf*, in which she sees 'a continual need for resolution – the hero says, I will do *x* or I will die – and the notion that choice is heroic, inescapable, and reducible to simple binary oppositions'. Gillian R. Overing, *Language, sign, and gender in Beowulf* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. xxiii.