

Getting intimate

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‘What’s an old, 3000-line poem like you doing in a place like this?’

What would it mean to ‘date’ *Beowulf*? And what do we learn when we try? This playful pun on one of the more controversial terms in the scholarship on the poem allows a consideration of the range of intimacies generated by it as well as a conditioning of both the poem and its scholarship. Indeed, we, the editors, sincerely hope that you, the reader, considered the subtitle to this volume before picking it up. This collection of essays is in no way concerned with localizing the historical date of the composition of *Beowulf*, whether in manuscript or modern edited forms. In fact, the injunction not to address in any way the date of the poem’s composition was given as a strict thematic and formal requirement to the contributors before they composed their chapters. Rather, the first part of the title of this book, *Dating Beowulf*, takes up ‘dating’ – that form of social and sometimes erotic interaction – as a kind of wilful and desperate anachronism whose internal and historical heterogeneity is aimed at raising the spectre of ‘intimacy’ with *Beowulf*, and thereby with early medieval studies broadly conceived. That is, by ‘dating *Beowulf*’ we mean to propose *going out with, courting, hooking up with*, etc. as a way to provocatively phrase a set of new relationships with an Old English poem.

But what kind of dating site would *Beowulf* be on anyway? The cool convenience of an app, of swiping right, a pay-to-play match-making service, or OkCupid? It would be difficult to get a date with *Beowulf* – not that function of the text that we name its hero, but the poem itself. If we take the poem’s material state quite literally – the sole surviving copy in the charred manuscript held behind glass in the British Library now known as London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius MS A.xv – this is all the more true. Is that the name it puts on its Tinder account, the British Library shelf-mark

that preserves the sixteenth-century antiquarian and early owner Robert Cotton's system for organizing his books under the busts of Roman emperors (here, Vitellius)? Or maybe its nickname, 'the Nowell Codex', which Kemp Malone coined in reference to the manuscript's earliest known owner, the pioneering Old English lexicographer Laurence Nowell (1520–76), who inscribed his name and the date – 1563 – on the first folio? Or is *Beowulf* on Grindr? Is 'hwæt', that famous opening word of *Beowulf* and other Old English poems, a pick-up line, perhaps more a 'hey, girl' than a 'hark'?¹

Kenneth Sisam once confessed that '[i]n a place far from libraries, I have often read the text of *Beowulf* for pleasure'.² To which we ask: well, Ken – what place is that exactly? And what of us who read *Beowulf* or any other text in or maybe just near libraries, for pleasure? Read it the 'wrong' way, and this claim comes across as little more than awkward.³ Plus, if it's the standard scholarly edition of the text you are reading, the one we will be citing throughout this volume, with its pet name 'Klaeber 4' and all those notes,⁴ you have a *de facto* library right in your hands! So this fantasy of intimacy with *Beowulf*, of being alone with the poem 'in a place far from libraries', free to be a caring amateur, reading 'for pleasure' far away from an elaborate academic apparatus – well, ha. But perhaps you're interested in a liaison with a slightly different *Beowulf* altogether – one of the many translations and adaptations, perhaps even the notorious computer-generated film starring Angelina Jolie? And let's say you get a date. We know that *Beowulf* is funny, with a knack for puns, elaborate jokes about historic feuds, and a timeless sense of style. But is it exclusive? And anyway, that's a seriously long-distance relationship.⁵

This brief meditation on the central pun of our title may seem simply silly; however, each of these playful takes on our relationship to the poem raises questions about the full range of possible intimacies and erotics in the poem itself and between the poem and its readers. Our title is admittedly a little cheeky, but it is meant in part as the site of an alternative discourse about the poem which aims to open up the study of *Beowulf* and other Old English literature to a more diverse range of voices and approaches. We thus aim to open new trajectories in the discourse on *Beowulf*, which has not seen a radical reconsideration, or stock-taking, of its position and its larger set of functions within the field of literary studies more generally for at least a decade. Indeed, no monograph or collection of essays has intentionally engaged the study of *Beowulf*

with important developments in critical theory since Eileen A. Joy and Mary K. Ramsey's *The postmodern Beowulf: a critical casebook*, which collected scholarly contributions from the 1990s and the early 2000s and has proved a collection of continuing importance.⁶

Within Old English studies, *Dating Beowulf* responds directly to increasing calls for more feminist scholarship on early medieval texts; indeed, *The postmodern Beowulf* is the only previous volume of *Beowulf* criticism that has featured an equitable division of men and women authors. Of course, this volume also responds directly to related calls for robust alternatives to the recent revival of positivist scholarship on the date of the composition of the poem at the expense of literary and theoretical readings. Undeniably, 'dating' implies a system of understood social codes and obligations even as its incumbent emphasis on intimacy distances would-be daters from any fantasy of impersonal objectivity. In dating *Beowulf*, we thus reflect on the orientation of the field of early medieval studies as a whole towards the texts we study.

At the same time, we aim to open contemporary thought about affect to a pre-modern archive and vice versa. Indeed, we hope that affect theory and critical affect studies will benefit from this volume as a casebook of work that engages this field with an early medieval archive – not by simply extending backward the unaltered insights gleaned from the study of modernity, nor by constructing a purely linear pre-history, but by thickening and convoluting the problems and questions of the contemporary discussion. Although the closely related field of queer theory has long benefited from studies drawn from a very long history (and is very much in dialogue with our project here), affect theory and critical affect studies, as exemplified by major texts such as Lauren Berlant's *Cruel optimism* or Sianne Ngai's *Ugly feelings*, routinely consider texts from no earlier than the nineteenth century, and so remain hampered by a historically shallow archive. Scholars such as Stephanie Trigg and Thomas Prendergast have demonstrated the crucial functions of affect in modern and late medieval medievalisms, however,⁷ and early medieval literature would benefit from similar sustained attention. Building on the work of early medievalists who have laid the groundwork for studies of Old English texts to contribute to affect theory,⁸ *Dating Beowulf* addresses this critical lacuna, thereby seeking to fill a major gap both in medieval studies and in critical affect studies.

This introductory chapter thus seeks to get intimate with both *Beowulf* and with intimacy as a mode of critical engagement, forming a kind of dating profile that will serve as a conceptual framework

for the various modes of intimacy in and with the poem that emerge throughout the volume. We will consequently delineate the difficulties and pleasures of intimacy with *Beowulf* – the philological and the speculative, the playful and serious – and how these difficulties organize themselves in an array of interrelated critical practices. Indeed, this volume coheres as a project in presenting a new set of readings both critical and personal that aim to generate new avenues of discussion for a poem too-often mired in critical impasses.

By inviting, then, an array of critical responses to and contestations of the politics, histories, affects, and sometimes even impossibilities of intimacy in and with *Beowulf*, we contend that the most basic practices and philosophical assumptions of our discipline must attend to how and why certain modes of scholarship are thought to be more or less suited to courting an Old English poem. Undeniably, even the old ways of dating *Beowulf* – for instance, philologically, metrically, historically – were, whether overtly or silently, invested in articulating the ‘appropriate’ methods that one could and could *not* bring to bear on Old English texts. As Roy Michael Liuzza affirms,

I believe that the assumptions made in dating the poem, a branch of the study of Old English often regarded as ancillary, technical and perhaps a bit antique, tell us a great deal about our sometimes unspoken and unformulated critical attitudes towards Old English literary texts; each effort to date the poem contains an implicit *ars poetica*.

Indeed, ‘When we talk about the dating of *Beowulf* we are talking about nothing less than the philosophical foundations of our discipline.’⁹ So, dating *Beowulf* can be a scandalous undertaking, and getting intimate can prove tricky.

Looking for intimacy (in all the scholarly places)

What primarily constitutes intimacy? Acts (a kiss, a touch)? Knowledge (about someone)? Epistemological gestures (getting to know someone, a knowing look)? Or, apart from praxis or epistemology, a relational ontology (finding oneself caught up with, even ‘stuck with’ an intimate)? How would any of these possibilities condition a notion of intimacy that can speak to, and be informed by, early medieval literature? As Carissa M. Harris discerns, ‘We are not accustomed to seeing the Middle Ages as intimately familiar’, since, in contemporary media, “‘medieval’ functions as shorthand

for *backwards, other. We are not like that. We are not that bad.*¹⁰ And yet, as Harris deftly reveals, ‘We are more like that than we want to admit, and our impulse to demarcate present from past, to posit ourselves as “progressive,” as *not-that*, has profound implications because it elides the continuities of violence and inequality over time.’¹¹ It is essential to uncover our intimacy with the past, then.

Latin in origin, the word *intimacy* only entered the English language during the early modern period, referring first to personal familiarity and then quickly developing an erotic charge in certain contexts. Indeed, the term derives from the Latin *intimus* (most inner) and originally denoted personal interiority or ‘intimate thoughts’ as well as exceptional closeness between ‘intimates’.¹² In this sense, the intimate is always *personal* and often involves *persons*. Only later did the term develop a wider application to connections between abstract concepts. This is not to say, of course, that the intimate is a privileged realm of the human (indeed, scholars of the pre-modern have been at the forefront of studying queerly inhuman intimacies), but it does perhaps mark the ease with which our conceptualizations and readings of intimacy may relentlessly *personalize* – even when one or more of the intimate entities in question are decidedly not *persons*, or when what may be at stake in a given instance of intimacy turns less around the experience of individuals and more around questions of collectivity or the workings of normative power.

In Old English, notions of interpersonal intimacy are perhaps most apparent in the dual pronoun ‘wit’ (we two), but Old English also has a range of words that describe states that can involve intimacy, such as ‘ferræden’ (companionship or fellowship) and ‘freondscipe’ (friendship). Old English also has a robust vocabulary for objects of intimacy, from words for friends, lovers, and spouses, including but not limited to ‘freond’, ‘wine’, and ‘gefera’, to terms of endearment, such as ‘dyre’ (dear, precious one), ‘deorling’ (darling), ‘leof’ (beloved), and ‘lufsum’ (lovesome, lovable one).¹³ Moreover, aristocratic society in early medieval England involved countless performances of intimacy well known to the student of *Beowulf*, from ring giving to the exchange of maxims.

Intimacy has long eluded critics of the poem, however, whether in localized textual cruces or in broader theoretical questions about the text and its world. Perhaps more than any other figure in the poem, we resemble Grendel lurking ‘in þystrum’ (in darkness) (87b), able to hear the music but perpetually unable to secure an invitation to the party. The ‘radical reconfiguration of the interconnection of

time, space, and embodiment' that, according to Gillian R. Overing, *Beowulf* offers its readers may render the poem particularly recalcitrant to any conclusive familiarity – much less intimacy, for 'the beginning student of the poem ... encounters the same difficulty as the lifelong scholar'.¹⁴

Even scenes in *Beowulf* that appear to centre modes of intimacy can be difficult to pin down or to schematize precisely, as for example when Overing suggests that the role of women 'in enacting the ties of kinship' in *Beowulf* is 'a task of infinite regression, a never-ending process that accurately reflects Derrida's concept of *différance*'.¹⁵ For this reason, a seasoned critic such as James W. Earl can explicate experiences of deep intimacy with the poem, 'as if it were a dream ... as if we had dreamed it ourselves', and yet also insist that 'reading *Beowulf*, even after all these years is not like talking to an old friend'.¹⁶ And yet, even though the poem offers itself up to questions of old friends very naturally, intimacy is rarely articulated openly as a guiding critical framework.

Many times when intimacy is invoked in places where we would expect to see it – in queer theory, affect studies, and theories of sensation or phenomenology – it functions metaphorically as a descriptor of a certain kind of intense relationship between conceptual entities rather than those of lived lives. Scholars readily discuss the intimacy of two concepts, philosophical schools, or distant times, texts, and places, but rarely focus on intimacy of the kind that exists between people – even in descriptions meant to rigorously account for factual experience itself. The phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's famous analysis of the reversibility of flesh and world, flesh and idea, visible and invisible, '[t]he intertwining: the chiasm' – a trope of intimacy *par excellence* if there ever was one – speaks of the 'intimacy' of 'us' and the field of the visible 'as though there were between it and us an intimacy as close as between the sea and the strand'.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores 'the intuition that a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions',¹⁸ with a particular instance of such an intimacy, around shame and anal eroticism in Henry James's *The art of the novel*, giving way to the traces of an intimacy between historical persons.¹⁹

Although the critical moves of affect theory do not turn on intimacy as such, foundational texts frequently describe the emotional effects of intimacy and its absence, for, as Nancy Yousef puts it, 'insofar as intimacy, like sympathy, designates feeling for and with another, it also admits and discloses affective expectations and

disappointments – from aversion to self-abasing admiration, from gratitude to resentment, from frustration to fascination'.²⁰ Alternately, the terms 'intimacy' and 'intimate' often circulate, in a supporting role, around and within the analysis of specific affects and their social fields. In Sara Ahmed's groundbreaking *The promise of happiness*, for example, we hear about the 'intimacy of desire and anxiety' as taught by psychoanalysis.²¹ Accordingly, intimacy provides the scene for the perniciously normative way that 'happiness makes its own horizon', in that love, which is supposed to make us happy, 'becomes an intimacy with what the other likes (rather than simply liking what the other likes) and is given on condition that such likes do not take us outside a shared horizon'.²² Because happiness orients, as a promise, towards the future, Ahmed even figures intimacy as one crucial avenue for happiness itself: 'if happiness is what we desire, then happiness involves being intimate with what is not happy, or simply with what is not'.²³

Indeed, intimacy signals a set of questions that organize some of the most compelling recent interventions in critical theory. Delineating her queer medieval historiography, Carolyn Dinshaw cites the influential claims of L. O. Aranye Fradenburg Joy and Carla Freccero that 'what seems crucial to a queering of historiography is not the rejection of truth for pleasure – which would only repeat the myth of their opposition – but rather the recognition of their intimacy'.²⁴ Here, again, the concepts of high philosophy – truth and pleasure – are mediated by 'their' intimacy, inviting us, perhaps, to consider further the question of precisely what such intimacy might consist of, or how this intimacy might relate to the intimacy of historical bodies. Consequently, a 'hermeneutics of intimacy' contends that hermeneutics – and perhaps also critique – itself *is* intimate. Our practices of reading and interpretation are not activities of distancing ourselves from our texts but of drawing them nearer. Whereas Susan Sontag famously proclaimed that 'in place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art',²⁵ then, we contend that the two are – or at least can be – one and the same, that hermeneutics and intimacy, erotics and philology all belong together.²⁶

Of course, in each of these examples, an inquiry into intimacy itself is not, precisely, the point, and we do not cite them in any way as a catalogue of failures or offences. However, collectively, they do invite a fuller and more systematic assessment of intimacy as a critical term, both within each of these discourses, and as its own field for humanistic inquiry. Here, it is worth noting that all

reading is an act of intimacy, since, as Daniel Boyarin notes, there is a ‘pervasive association of reading in the West with the private social spaces and meanings of the erotic’, as, for instance, when we read in bed.²⁷

Sometimes humanists call us to lean on this intimacy. Edward Said argued that all intellectuals should be motivated by

amateurism, the desire to be moved not by profit or reward but by love for and unquenchable interest in the larger picture, in making connections across lines and barriers, in refusing to be tied down to a specialty, in caring for ideas and values despite the restrictions of a profession.²⁸

More recently, in a less Arnoldian manner, Carolyn Dinshaw has argued that ‘[d]efined by attachment in a detached world, amateurism in fact condenses a whole range of abjections from the normative modernist life course, including ethnicity and race, economic class, and sex and gender’.²⁹ Dinshaw’s interest in amateurism as ‘a bit queer’ foregrounds the overlap between the affects and intimacies of the amateur and those assigned by twentieth-century psychology to the sexual deviant: ‘immaturity, belatedness or underdevelopment, inadequate separation from objects of love, improper attachment, inappropriate loving’.³⁰ Which intimacies, we ask, does *Beowulf* or its world abject, and which intimacies or modes of intimacy within medieval studies are ‘inappropriate’ now, and why? What inappropriate loving may know something about *Beowulf*, its intimacies, its allures, or its dangers now better than any scholar, but remains unheard, dismissed as ‘immature’, ‘not yet fully developed’ (and here we think specifically of students of Old English, at all levels) – or, perhaps legitimately wronged by the field’s histories of racism, misogyny, or abuse, no longer interested in the hazardous modes of intimacy that code as ‘collegiality’?

Relationship status: it’s complicated

No intimacy or even a critique of intimacy can be considered only from the side of the individual. No mode or instance of intimacy can offer pure, autonomous affects; it will always remain imbricated within the logics of capital and history. In Ahmed’s analysis of ‘the happy family’, for example, heterosexual models of intimacy especially take on the charge of ‘happy objects’ that reproduce the form of the family on ‘the assumption that happiness follows relative proximity to a social ideal’.³¹ But if it is out of an analysis

of contemporary texts and cinema that Ahmed's now well-known figures of the 'feminist killjoy', the 'unhappy queer', and the 'melancholic migrant' emerge as recalcitrant positions of resistance to these horizons, then it is also worth underscoring that *Beowulf* has also been the site of notably interruptive, resistant, queer intimacies in modernity. Indeed, as Toni Morrison deftly summarizes, *Beowulf* can offer 'a fertile ground on which we can appraise our contemporary world'.³²

For example, when the queer, mid-century American poet Jack Spicer worked on a translation of *Beowulf* alongside his fellow queer poet Robin Blaser for a seminar with the Berkeley philologist Arthur G. Brodeur, the Old English poem became an unlikely node of intimacy between two men within the rhythms of a pre-Stonewall, gay, West Coast community. As Robin Blaser would later recall:

Well, as time goes on, Jack and I will do *Beowulf* together and we work three hours a night, five nights a week, and on Friday nights we can go out to the Red Lizard. That's a queer bar. Once a week you can go out and have a big time. The rest of the time you're really doing this job, and I have my translations and Jack's of the *Beowulf*, and so on. They are better than anybody's so far, Jack's especially.³³

Performing at once a series of intimate translations between languages, times, avocations, and subcultures, as well as the intimacy of translation itself, *Beowulf* is thus partly constitutive of a community whose intimacies simultaneously disrupt the bar scene, the philology classroom, and the world of the poem itself.

Indeed, Blaser and Spicer seem to have directly considered the complicated relationship of their mid-century, queer homosocial intimacy to the 'heroic' homosocial intimacies in the narrative of *Beowulf*. As an obscure but intimate register of this, in Spicer's notes for his *Beowulf* translation, he scrawled 'Robin - / The death of Hygelac',³⁴ which might seem too elliptical to be of critical interest if at the time of the seminar Brodeur had not already been at work on his *The art of Beowulf*, which argues not only that 'the defeat and death of Hygelac' (Beowulf's king) is at the heart of the poem,³⁵ but also that '[i]t is Hygelac who supplies the *Leitmotiv*, which is the interwoven harmony of Hygelac's death and Beowulf's love for him'.³⁶ An emphatic use of a conspicuous possessive adjective in a speech that Beowulf makes about King Hrethel (Hygelac's father and Beowulf's fosterer) reveals to Brodeur in a single touch the intense social and literary functions of this intimacy: 'næs ic him to life laðra owihte, / ... þonne his bearna hwylc, / Herebeald ond

Hæðcyn oððe Hygelac min' ('Never in life was I a whit less dear to him ... than any of his children, Herebeald and Hæthcyn, or *my Hygelac*') (2432–4).³⁷ Italicizing that last clause in his translation, Brodeur maintains that within this 'strongest expression of human feeling in the whole poem', this one phrase functions as the fulcrum for an immense weight of intimate intensities.³⁸ Against this backdrop, we might speculate that Spicer's scrawled note similarly, if fragmentarily, indexes the weight of working out a fraught, marginalized intimacy.

Blaser and Spicer were never lovers, but this tiny corner of their coterie frames crucial questions about the politics of describing intimacy in the context of the academic humanities. 'What kind of community is it, exactly,' asks Dinshaw, 'that consists of two people? How can we avoid triviality and idiosyncrasy as we discuss community formations?'³⁹ Despite the overwhelming homophobia of mid-century American culture, the relative privilege of Blaser's and Spicer's queer coterie with *Beowulf* in its midst stands, for example, in stark contrast to the loneliness in which the mid-century Scottish poet Edwin Morgan worked out his own intimacy with *Beowulf* while translating the poem at the same moment. In 'Epilogue: Seven Decades', Morgan notes how 'At thirty I thought life had passed me by, / translated *Beowulf* for want of love. / And one night stands in city centre lanes – / they were dark in those days – were wild but bleak.'⁴⁰ Looking to this constellation of autobiography, loneliness, and desire, Chris Jones observes that the poem 'reveals the other, more surprising need that Old English fulfilled for Morgan ... *Beowulf* was a palliative against the loneliness of having to live a secret life as a gay man in Glasgow in the late 1940s.'⁴¹

So, intimacy has long been a part of the experience of reading and translating *Beowulf*, with the poem itself becoming an intimate as well as a touchstone for broader communities. But another reason why intimacy is a particularly useful rubric for thinking about an old poem is that it productively multiplies critical problems as well. With a poem such as *Beowulf*, which is so often canonically situated at the very beginning of the 'English literary tradition', intimacy can feel both deceptively easy and especially difficult to achieve. This multiplies the possibilities for differing kinds of intimacy with the poem and opportunities for interpretative interventions, '[f]or intimacy only rarely makes sense of things', as Lauren Berlant so robustly observed.⁴² Indeed, as Giorgio Agamben notes, intimacy is at once a sensation of utmost familiarity and perpetual inaccessibility, for love is '[t]o live in intimacy with a stranger, not in order

to draw him closer, or to make him known, but rather to keep him strange, remote ... forever exposed and sealed off'.⁴³

From the outset, *Beowulf* seems to resist this, with Beowulf himself assuring the Danish coast guard that nothing should be kept secret: 'Ne sceal þær dyrne sum / we san, þæs ic wene' (There must be nothing secret, I should think) (271b–272a). 'But there are secrets in *Beowulf*', as Benjamin A. Saltzman reminds us.⁴⁴ Indeed, there is constant anxiety in the text about the failure of intimacy and the resulting atmosphere of secrecy and suspicion that enters in whenever intimacy cannot be established. In the world of the poem, every agent must be recognizable; to be anonymous, to withhold information and identity, is to pose a threat. And the very logic of secrecy itself often operates as a promise of something like intimacy (with the secret itself, with the one who delivered the secret) while delivering only its impossibility – much in the way that the engraved sword from Grendel and his mother's underwater gallery wall ultimately remains inscrutable (1687–98a). By Jacques Derrida's influential account, there is much one can do with a secret, and yet it does not exceed obscurity in the service of any intimacy but 'rather towards a solitude'.⁴⁵

At the same time, *Beowulf* is a poem that many of us think we know well. But intimacy is tricky. Sometimes we can return to a passage that we have read many times and realize that either we are more intimate with it than we thought or that we hardly know it at all. Like many early medieval texts, the poem wavers between gossip and withholding, sometimes relying heavily on implications and raised eyebrows – a kind of 'bless her heart' digressiveness – and sometimes pointedly leaving certain things unsaid or enigmatic. When read for intimacy, however, *Beowulf*'s ellipses and litotes, its silences and hints become a kind of 'getting around the Hollywood code', fading to black, or mobilizing the 'indirect kiss' that becomes more erotic because of its misdirection. By omitting explicit references, the poem trades in a culture of discretion that relies on audiences being able to fill in the gaps, as Roberta Frank explores at greater length in her chapter in this volume. And so a 'hermeneutics of intimacy' offers a new means of relating to Old English literature, which is frequently characterized by its reticence.

Yet intimacy itself is rarely visible, or only becomes visible under certain conditions when things do not work the way they are supposed to. Berlant recognizes that 'intimacy reveals itself to be a relation associated with tacit fantasies, tacit rules, and tacit obligations to remain unproblematic. We notice it when something about it takes

on a charge, so that the intimacy becomes something else, an “issue”.⁴⁶ Within an academic subdiscipline, especially one as small – and yes, intimate – as Old English studies, the intimacies of the field and its members similarly become noticeable when they take on a charge and render normally ‘tacit fantasies, tacit rules, and tacit obligations’ more explicit. For such a subfield this ‘charge’ often appears when intimacies otherwise private to the field become public, or when public ‘issues’ intrude on the normal protocols of intimacy otherwise obscured within the relative privacy of the field. In the wake of both #femfog in 2016 and white supremacists’ racist investment in an ‘Anglo-Saxon’ past in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017,⁴⁷ several intimacies and their obverses that may not have been previously visible to everyone in the field became visible as such: the intimacy of hate-groups with a construction of the past that scholars may or may not find recognizable, the field’s historical intimacy with misogynistic and racist ideology, and our ongoing complicities in structural racism.⁴⁸ Within this very volume for instance, we notice that not a single person of colour appears among our contributors. We thus note the ways in which intimacy can – regardless of intentions – reproduce forms of exclusion, as Benjamin A. Saltzman investigates in his chapter. Indeed, despite the intentionally international character of the list of contributors, this volume also remains largely grounded in North American discourses of Old English studies.

Of course, *Beowulf* itself also dramatizes and enacts these charges that render intimacy noticeable as a critical question. The poem presents many versions of arrivals and departures, losses and discoveries. Sometimes its guests are welcome, and sometimes they reveal the precarity of the most supposedly intimate of spaces: homes; sleeping chambers; and sites of parenting, friendship, and romantic love. There are the halls of men and the homes of figures such as Grendel, his unnamed mother, and the dragon curled around its treasures. Indeed, Grendel and his mother live in a hall, even if it is only revealed as such when its intimacy is transformed by violence and it becomes a ‘niðsele’ (‘battle-hall’ or, more bluntly, a ‘violence-hall’) (1513a). To the perspective of the human reader, only Beowulf’s intrusion reveals that it was a ‘sele’ (hall) all along: an intimate, hidden retreat for mother and son – itself a place of child-rearing and domestic comforts. Even as the fight ensues, the space is described as a home, filled with heirlooms and tucked in under the bubbles. It is – or at least was – a space of safety and refuge.

Intimate relationships can prove similarly precarious. Hrothgar's great hall Heorot is finally burned by his own son-in-law: a fiery ending that is presaged even as the hall's construction is announced (67b–85). As the poem's digressions similarly underscore and as Mary Kate Hurley will explore in greater detail in the pages ahead, even the closest ties of marriage and kinship, inheritance and family heirlooms can quickly turn intrusive or hostile. It is an erotic of aftermaths. Even as Heorot is being built, we are reminded that it will burn – and thus that it has burned by the time we are reading the poem. For Beowulf, too, 'his sylfes ham' (his own home) (2325b) is melted by the heat of the dragon's 'brynewylmum' (burning flames) (2326b), constituting 'hygesorga mæst' (the greatest of mind-sorrows) (2328b) for the king whose reign – though he does not know it – is about to draw to a close. So, *Beowulf* also explores intimacies of scale: fleeting encounters and one-time transactions as much as intergenerational ties – all lasting only 'oð ðæt' (until...) to 'oð ðæt' (until...).

Similarly, we are often permitted the intimacy of hearing characters mourn, as Mary Kate Hurley, Robin Norris, and Mary Dockray-Miller explore in greater complexity in their chapters. Remembering 'min ylðra mæg' (my big brother) (468a), who was killed in battle, Hrothgar achingly confides, 'se wæs betera ðonne ic' (he was better than I [am]) (469b), while the bereaved Hrethel is likened to a father mourning his hanged son in one of the poem's most heart-breakingly intimate passages (2444–62a). As the *Beowulf* poet succinctly explains, for the grieving father, 'þuhte him eall to rum / wongas ond wicstede' (it all seemed to him too spacious / the pastures and the living quarters) (2461b–2462a). After the death of the beloved if misbehaving child, no space is experienced intimately; everything is ripped open and unenclosed.

Getting physical

But even as the conceptual field of intimacy expands to necessitate such philosophizing (as well as realpolitik), intimacy remains inextricably tied to experiences of sensation. Carolyn Dinshaw's account of queer (medieval) historiography enacts what we might characterize as queerly incomplete intimacies in 'partial connections, queer relations between incommensurate lives and phenomena'.⁴⁹ These intimacies across centuries amount nevertheless to 'a history of things touching'.⁵⁰ Such 'touches' may not always be intimate touches, nor are they necessarily the touches proper to

the physiology of the human organism, but neither does the latter rule out the possibility of historiographical and community-catalysing intimacies.

The intimacy of this sort of ‘touch’ should be apparent in considering *Beowulf* in its persistently intractable, enigmatic, and materially incomplete state. Just as the poem’s brightest and most glorious halls are also some of its most precarious spaces, the precarious nature of the survival of the poem itself is difficult to forget now that its brittle pages must be reinforced by protective supports. Indeed, in literal terms, *Beowulf*’s brightest moment of all was when it was actually on fire, during the infamous 23 October 1731 Ashburnham House fire that burned much of the sixteenth-century antiquarian Robert Cotton’s library. While we were both in London during the summer of 2016, we stood together in the Treasures Room of the British Library, pressing our hands to the thick glass that guards the dimly lit manuscript as these events and modern security threw the complexity – and, as North American scholars who had received institutional money for research travel, the privilege – of our intimacies with the poem, scholarly and otherwise, into high relief. Our collaboration was in its infancy, and we were then more intimate with that sealed-off manuscript than with this project, or each other’s modes and rhythms of thought and work. As Ahmed notes,

There is nothing more vulnerable than caring for someone; it means not only giving your energy to that which is not you but also caring for that which is beyond or outside your control. Caring is anxious – to be full of care, to be careful, is to take care of things by becoming anxious about their future, where the future is embodied in the fragility of an object whose persistence matters.⁵¹

This is especially true for a sole survivor like *Beowulf*.

Even – or perhaps especially – in the flames, however, there is intimacy to be found. The distraught librarian famously leaped from the burning library in his nightshirt, running directly from bed to the Codex Alexandrinus, which he carried out in his arms.⁵² So sometimes the most precarious situations can provide the greatest opportunities for intimacies that might otherwise elude us, because they allow normative barriers to temporarily recede – as, for instance, when Wiglaf forms a heightened attachment to the dying Beowulf, in part because the other retainers have abandoned him, as Mary Dockray-Miller explores in this volume’s closing chapter. One of

the most intimate relationships on Earth, at least in biological terms, is that between a parasite and its host. The relationship is precarious for both parties and pernicious in its intimacy, but as Michel Serres has articulated, ‘The parasite is a differential operator of change. It excites the state of the system.’⁵³ Non-human intimacies like this remind us that the often asymmetrical instability and power of and within the intimate relation – as a kind of catalyst or retardant, shifter or modulator of *pace* within dynamic or living systems – can modify one or more parties in ways that are existentially or biologically differentiating. Intimacy can sustain, kill, and transform beyond recognition.

The *Beowulf* manuscript preserves other kinds of codicological intimacy as well, with the poem in its current form bound amid the other texts of the ‘Nowell Codex’: *The Life of St Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, and *Judith*. This manuscript is also composite in another way, as the Nowell Codex itself was conjoined with another Old English manuscript in the seventeenth century, with the sole surviving copy of the Old English translation of Augustine’s *Soliloquies*, a fragment of *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, *The Debate of Solomon and Saturn*, and eleven lines of a *Saint Quintin Homily* providing an additional cluster of intimates for *Beowulf*.

Moreover, the poem as we have it was copied by two scribes: one older and one younger, switching over in the middle of line 1939 – its b-verse now both a point of separation and of ultimate collaboration. Folio 172v, where the transition occurs and where the scribes’ distinct styles of handwriting are still clearly visible, is thus one of *Beowulf*’s most intimate places. Community here arises out of interruption; it becomes something that disrupts larger social patterns and structures. Or, as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it, ‘Incompletion is its “principle”.’⁵⁴ As Overing argues, the poem’s own logic of temporality, history, and corporeality ‘offers a space to undo controlling distinctions between past and present temporalities; a space where moments of rupture and suspension can mutually reveal past and present perspectives, where our time can intersect with that of the poem’.⁵⁵ Moreover, such intersections are available to be *felt* by the body of a reader, for whom, ‘to enter the world of *Beowulf* is to experience change at a visceral level, whether such change is temporal, spatial, or embodied’.⁵⁶

What can be tricky, and what each of the contributors was implicitly tasked with in delineating various intimacies in and with

Beowulf, is to tease out how – with what discourses, structures, reading tactics, or theoretical manoeuvres – to render such intimacies legible. Although the intimacy of Dinshaw’s ‘touch’ appeals to registers aside from strictly human corporeality, it is worth noting that conceiving of such touching may seem all the more difficult within Old English and Anglo-Latin texts, because they appraise the human bodily senses in historically particular ways, privileging sight within a schema very different from modern hierarchies of sense, and yet, in effect without departing from the general and long-standing Western dominance of the visual register. As Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe forcefully articulates, sight was considered the highest sense in early medieval schematizations, while ‘[t]ouch, by contrast, though proper to the largest organ in the body, trails the others in statements of value or is overlooked entirely’.⁵⁷ Thus a delicate critical posture of philological intimacy is needed to tease out how Old English texts attempt to encode, generate, or harbour non-visual sensory experience and its affective functions. Here, belabouring the point that ‘touch’ and ‘sense’ invoke a broader paradigm of sensory-affective perception, we stress the need to connect work by scholars of pre-modernity in the history and theory of the emotions to those in the history of the senses.⁵⁸

But intimacy will never be sufficient for the positivist. Such touches, as a locus of historiographical intimacy, may yield a degree of epistemological dubiousness and a partial, fragmentary, or otherwise incomplete intimacy that may resist normative modes of historiography, desire, and sexuality. Dinshaw’s queer historian, we recall, may be a queer historiographical fetishist who is ‘decidedly *not* nostalgic for wholeness and unity’ and yet ‘nonetheless desires an affective, even tactile relation to the past such as a relic provides’.⁵⁹ If the touch imbues the historiographical act with latent intimacies, positing a queer fetish as its object multiplies their complexities but also the potential for intimacies that eschew the intimate as determined by the private, the known, and the lasting, in favour of the public, the anonymous, the fleeting, the ghostly, or even the utopian, as in José Esteban Muñoz’s conception of ‘queer futurity’.⁶⁰ A touch can be intimate without knowing what it is that one touches or that which one is touched by, and one may or may not know more about one’s intimate life through touch.

Aside from terms such as ‘excessiveness’⁶¹ or ‘tension’,⁶² Dinshaw has left relatively untouched the precise phenomenology of such touch in its relation to intimacy with old texts, and one thing the chapters in this volume do is begin to answer that question by talking about

Beowulf from a variety of critical vantage points. But the reader will be hard-pressed to pin down a single sensation, affect, or other bodily experience proper to intimacy. Intimate feelings tend towards the vague, the slippery, the notional, even the spectral. As a limit, or perhaps paradigm, of intimacy, tactility involves that dizzying register of perceptual organization that Sedgwick sweepingly refers to as ‘the whole issue of texture’.⁶³ Texture, Sedgwick suggests, renders the touch-er a kind of open-ended experimenter, left to post a series of questions that contribute to a general resistance to the totalization of intimacy: ‘To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?’⁶⁴

So while the chapters that follow, we suggest, engage *Beowulf* intimately by perusing the texture of both the poem and our possible range of relationships to it in ways that *ask* these two questions, they will also resist providing quantifiable or stable accounts of the former, or instrumentalisable or commodifiable possibilities for the latter. As the ground of touch-sensation, texture speaks to the multiply entangled *scales* of experience, politics, economics, affect, sexuality, and so forth, on which intimacy operates: ‘the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself’.⁶⁵

Intimacy may thus be *sensed* or experienced in/as/on the sites of textures; but this contributes directly, it would seem, to the difficulty of describing the senses (in the full semantic range of that term) of intimacy, and the recalcitrance of intimacy to totalizing accounts. And in this way, describing texture (in its elusive, interruptive, and a-systematic effects that must be tracked slowly, carefully, and closely) is not only a task well suited to the philologically trained critics of Old English who populate this volume, but also a way of describing intimacies and their risks.

Intimacy tends towards the touch within deconstructive discourses of ethics because, as Jean-Luc Nancy formulates it, it is ‘touching the limit’ that constitutes ‘the possibility of touch itself’.⁶⁶ And for this reason, the intimacy of touch and the touch of intimacy remain disruptive and risky in such discourses in ways that both echo and differ from either more general cultural critique or Serres’s account of the parasite. So it is worth noting that even patristic accounts of touch, which shaped Anglo-Saxon evaluations of the

hierarchy of bodily senses, singled out touching as an act of particular vulnerability and danger. As O'Brien O'Keeffe helpfully summarizes,

Theological suspicions about the sense of touch are easy to find: while Jerome could write to Eustochium about the spiritual touch of the Bridegroom [of *The Song of Songs*], he was unyielding on the dangers close by through the *fenestras* [windows] of the senses. His ascending catalogue of sensory dangers is capped by carnal touch.⁶⁷

A desire for intimacy with a poem such as *Beowulf*, with its continuing appropriations within the horizon of fascist myth, may run very particular risks. For Nancy, the intimacy that belongs to 'community' presents not interior secrets but mutual exteriorities, which Nancy determines as 'sharing': 'sharing comes down to this: what community reveals to me, in presenting to me my birth and my death, is my existence outside myself'.⁶⁸ This sort of intimacy is not a special case, but rather, ontologically constitutive: it turns the question of intimacy from that of normative figures of lovers and bourgeois privacy to the political. The worldly intimacy of sharing is thus fundamentally interruptive of the fascist, fusional, communal will, and, as Nancy puts it, 'community is, in a sense, resistance itself'.⁶⁹

Here the communal intimacy that *Beowulf* the warrior and king might share in the society of dead heroes 'eager for fame' differs markedly from the intimacy that we sense in the voice found in the passage of *Beowulf* often referred to as the widow's lament, sung by a woman referred to only as a 'Geatisc anmeowle' (lone Geatish woman) (3150b) but occasionally presumed to be *Beowulf*'s widow:⁷⁰

swylce giomorgyd Geatisc anmeowle
 Biowulfe brægd bundenheorde
 sang sorgcearig saelðe geneahhe
 þæt hio hyre heardagas hearde ondrede
 wælfylla worn werudes egesan
 hyðo ond hæftnyd. (3150–5a)

(just so, a lone Geatish woman drew up a grief-song for *Beowulf*; with her hair bound up, anxiety-ridden, she sang profusely about the future – that she greatly dreaded days of harm for herself, a glut of casualty-piles, the terror of groups of soldiers, trafficking and slavery).

Despite its anonymity, the texture of the voice registers an ethnically marked, gendered being, exposed by the fusional forces of her society

to enslavement and probable rape and/or death ('hyðo ond hæftnyd') (3155a). Like the singularity of a texture that resists immediate interpolation into the totality of system or structure, intimacy with *Beowulf*, or other early medieval texts, thus requires neither a dispensing with historicism nor a supposedly exhaustive, positivist, historical narrative into which to fit the text without remainder, as the narrative of *Beowulf* itself assembles a series of remainders drawn from other poems, places, and voices.

Going home together

In order to navigate continuing critical impasses and open new directions for further study, *Dating Beowulf* thus mobilizes a range of readerly modes. While some contributors take up the kind of autobiographical literary criticism termed 'the intimate critique' by Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Murphy Zauhar,⁷¹ others examine intimacy itself as a guiding concept for the poem, drawing on Critical Race theory, animal studies, feminist and queer theory, affect theory, and Actor-Network theory, and taking a diversity of approaches ranging between and sometimes blending traditional philological analysis and more experimental modes. All explore the various intimacies imbricated in close reading and translation.⁷²

We have organized the chapters into playful clusters, though in the spirit of promiscuity their boundaries remain permeable, and many chapters could find a natural home in two or more of our thematic arrangements, which approach *Beowulf* in public, at home, and outside, before examining the poem's contact list and finally finding *Beowulf* in bed. Throughout, we have edited so that each chapter may stand alone and be read independently, but we have also shaped the volume as a unified whole, with cross-references to highlight points of particularly close contact between chapters. These clusters, in their playfulness, are also meant to suggest the simultaneous functions of the chapters collected here as both readings of *Beowulf* that will shape critical conversations and knowledge about that particular poem, and contributions to a larger theoretical conversation in the humanities – beyond medieval studies – about intimacy as a critical term and its place in fields such as affect studies, queer theory, and histories of the emotions and the senses.

Our opening section, '*Beowulf* in public', approaches the poem as from within a crowd or at a party, exploring *Beowulf*'s crowded places as well as its various publics. First, Benjamin A. Saltzman's 'Community, joy, and the intimacy of narrative in *Beowulf*'

demonstrates that intimacy's dual associations – its adjectival sense 'intimate' and its verbal sense 'to intimate' – merge in *Beowulf's* scenes of shared storytelling. As Saltzman argues, this narrative intimacy forges not only community but also joy, particularly in Hrothgar's great hall Heorot. Turning to Grendel and Unferð, however, the chapter raises a haunting question: 'Is intimacy always dependent upon some form of exclusion?' A closing meditation centres this question for the field of Old English studies as a whole.

Roberta Frank then takes up the intimacy inherent in ambiguous allusions in 'Beowulf and the intimacy of large parties', which asks how *Beowulf's* many allusions to 'things offstage' invite readers to fill in the gaps. She thus seeks to get intimate with the poem's little-mentioned yet all-encompassing back stories, with *Beowulf's* largest back story of all – the fall of the Scylding dynasty that has led the field to lovingly catalogue correspondences between *Beowulf* and later medieval Scandinavian and Icelandic texts – prompting Frank to wonder why we keep straining '[t]o hear what is not being said in *Beowulf*'. As she contends, the poem's submerged narratives beckon excavation, for '[t]he *Beowulf* poet counts on his hearers' intimacy with Scylding legend to "get it" when he means more than he says'.

Building on this interest in the poem's silences, in 'Beowulf as Wayland's work: thinking, feeling, making', James Paz unites moving meditations on his own background as a working-class, first-generation scholar with an appeal to get to know *Beowulf's* unseen makers: its metalworkers, embroiderers, and craftspeople of all kinds. As Paz elucidates, 'craft' provides an illuminating rubric for getting intimate with the poem, even as the poem's craftworkers – both anonymous and legendary, as in the case of Wayland – frequently prove elusive. Whereas printing and teaching *Beowulf* alongside images of Sutton Hoo overemphasizes the poem's aristocratic material culture, Paz centres the poem's skilled labourers instead.

Like many of the chapters that could feel at home in different couplings, Paz's piece transitions beautifully from the public to the personal. Fittingly, then, in the next section, we find *Beowulf* at home, with two chapters on household space both within the poem and as the poem intersects with the present. In 'Beowulf and babies', Donna Beth Ellard searches for scenes of childbirth and infant caregiving, moving from the poem's opening description of the orphaned Scyld Scefing to think about Beowulf's own early childhood experiences. Ellard deftly reconstructs a backdrop of early medieval

abandoned children, which illuminates the intimate ties shared by both Scyld and Beowulf. As she demonstrates, attending to these ties allows us as critics to push back against *Beowulf's* seeming ambivalence and to queer our own relationships to the poem.

As with the kinds of ecological intimacies articulated above by Michel Serres, the fen next becomes a site of intimacy and domesticity, resistance and colonization for Christopher Abram – and for Grendel. In ‘At home in the fens with the Grendelkin’, Abram thus lets Grendel take him home to meet his mother. As he argues, the fen is thus a true home, while Heorot ‘is something ecologically malevolent’, ‘encroaching on a landscape to which it can never belong’. In this dazzling ecological reading, Abram reveals Grendel as a figure of indigenous resistance, with Hrothgar trespassing on Grendel’s domain rather than the other way around.

Abram’s chapter thus transitions smoothly to the next section, on ‘*Beowulf* outside’. Here, the volume makes a further turn towards the ecocritical and animal, examining the pressure that the non-human places on our use of intimacy as a critical term with two chapters by Mary Kate Hurley and Mo Pareles. In ‘Elemental intimacies: agency in the Finnsburg episode’, Hurley turns to one of *Beowulf's* most famous – and most intimate – digressions, focusing on the moment when the bereaved queen Hildeburh places her dead son on her own brother’s funeral pyre. Drawing on Actor-Network theory, Hurley illuminates the agency of the pyre’s flames, which create their own collectivity out of the failures of the human actors to do the same. The network of forces that Hurley beautifully reconstructs ultimately allows for a new reading of Hildeburh as well, revealing the queen’s joy as well as her loss.

In ‘What the raven told the eagle: animal language and the return of loss in *Beowulf*’, Mo Pareles turns to intimacies to which the human world of the poem is not privy, measuring animal communications as threats to human modes and norms of intimacy. Bringing new perspectives from critical animal studies and eco-theory, Pareles revisits the poem’s account of the Grendelkin as well as a notable instance within *Beowulf* of the so-called ‘beasts of battle’ trope – a traditional reference in Old English poetry to the raven, eagle, and wolf that tend to mark violent death – in which the raven is said to ‘speak’ with the eagle about a post-battle plunder of carrion. Pareles reads this avian intimacy as a question of translation, arguing that the poem allows ‘the birds an ambiguity’ which exposes the ‘shadows of failure and grief’ that haunt the poem’s attempts at a ‘portrait of a heroic culture that values homosocial intimacy’.

The section entitled ‘*Beowulf*’s contact list’ is a little voyeuristic. Imagine these chapters as taking a peek at the poem’s phone – or, perhaps, in an earlier moment, its little black book. To whom or what does *Beowulf* try to get close? What does the poem push away? Drawing on an intersectional constellation of scholars of gender, Critical Race theory, and indigenous studies, Catalin Taranu’s ‘Men into monsters: troubling race, ethnicity, and masculinity in *Beowulf*’ follows a thread of *anxiety* as it runs through and stitches together the emotional ground of intimacies in *Beowulf*’s characters and in the poem’s audiences. Taranu’s argument suggests that such anxieties in *Beowulf* – and the poem’s anticipation of such anxieties in its audiences – register the ways that the Welsh and Danes are racialized in early medieval English literature, and that the emotional grounds of textual intimacies are raced, gendered, and ethnicized in ways that press directly on the dynamics of abusive intimacies, racisms, and misogyny in today’s professionalized humanities.

The volume renders this linkage of the affective dynamics of intimacy within *Beowulf* to the lived experience of the present perhaps even more explicitly in Robin Norris’s ‘Sad men in *Beowulf*’, which processes the underlying misogyny of prevailing critical attitudes to displays of male sadness in the poem in relation to the emotional and sexual politics of a field marked by the ongoing operations of toxic masculinities. As Norris reveals, drawing on Richard Delgado’s work on empathy, the effect of this inheritance is that, while ‘*Beowulf* is populated by sad men’, we, as critics, ‘have overlooked their emotions by focusing on the mourning of Hildeburh and the Geatish *meowle*’ – one of whom, as Hurley reveals, may better be recognized for joy.

Like the above anecdote of Blaser’s and Spicer’s intimacies with and amid translations of *Beowulf*, David Hadbawnik’s chapter, ‘Differing intimacies: *Beowulf* translations by Seamus Heaney and Thomas Meyer’, is a crucial demonstration of the importance of questions about how well the dynamics of textual translation can speak to the dynamics of human intimacy, and how ‘extratextual’ intimacies determine or allow different modes of translation. Hadbawnik pairs two of the most currently important *Beowulf* translations, which at first glance appear among the most wildly divergent, teasing out a powerful critique of customary critical and reviewing practices that (often tacitly) plot translations of *Beowulf* in terms of a false dilemma of ‘fidelity’ against ‘creativity’.

The final section, 'Beowulf in bed', attempts to shift and subvert assumptions about normative modes and environments of intimacy's intensities, ends, and climaxes. The chapters are thus not about the sex-acts that are explored only tangentially in the Old English poem, with the brief reference to Hrothgar withdrawing from the hall 'Wealhþeo secan, / cwen to gebeddan' (to seek Wealhtheow, the queen as a bedfellow) (664b–5a). Irina Dumitrescu instead offers us meditations on intimacy by way of considering *Beowulf's* closest bedfellow – in very literal terms – in literary history, the Old English poem *Andreas*. Dumitrescu shows us that this other long Old English poem, sometimes maligned for what critics have characterized as heavy and clumsy borrowing from *Beowulf*, is 'Beowulf's most loving reader'. She thus reveals the entangled and reciprocal logics of intimacies, as *Andreas's* borrowings of *Beowulf's* style lead us to changed encounters with both poems.

In contrast to the intimacy of sometimes verbatim textual borrowing, Peter Buchanan's 'Beowulf, Bryher, and the Blitz: a queer history' considers a literary-historical relationship to *Beowulf* that reveals a queerness at the heart of literary modernism, leveraged through a kitschy plaster bulldog named Beowulf in a novel of the same title by Bryher. Bryher's *Beowulf* does not, Buchanan argues, directly adapt or correspond to the Old English poem of the same name but rather performs a kind of 'historical palimpsest', returning us to an analysis of the women in the Old English *Beowulf* and the gendering of intimacy in the poem and its afterlives. A knot in the bed sheets of literary history and an important contribution to queer studies, intimacy here recalls Dinshaw's queer touch, the mutually transformative relationships of translation, and also that of the parasite that transforms the host: 'Part of the secret of Bryher's queer, feminist embrace of the medieval past lies in her refusal to take it simply as it is.'

Speaking again to the problem of sad men in *Beowulf*, whose intimacies, affects, and failures are governed by normalizing expectations for homosociality, Mary Dockray-Miller's 'Dating Wiglaf: emotional connections to the young hero in *Beowulf*' turns squarely on one of the most intimate relationships represented within the poem's narrative as it 'takes on a charge' and becomes palpable precisely as intimacy in the crosshairs of divergent gender performances. As Dockray-Miller demonstrates, Beowulf maintains the normative modes of affective intimacy in his asymmetrical relationship with his young retainer Wiglaf, who, alone among Beowulf's

followers, comes to his aid in the final fight with the dragon. For Wiglaf, however, tacit models of intimacy fail, and his emotional capacities and vulnerabilities outstrip those of Beowulf's 'static, heroic masculinity'.

All told, this volume thus contends that the intimacies in *Beowulf* – textual, narrative, characterological, formal, linguistic, cultural, and so forth – escape the intimate, charged confines of an early medieval poem that will probably remain – perhaps paradoxically – anonymous and undated. In addition to addressing ongoing, crucial questions about the interpretation or function of the poem, then, these chapters ultimately give us a *Beowulf* whose relationship status will always display 'it's complicated', but which nonetheless remains available for intimate touches, rewritings, translations, mournings, trysts, hook-ups, and unworkings.

Notes

- 1 We thank Hilary Fox for suggesting this playful possibility.
- 2 Kenneth Sisam, *The structure of Beowulf* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 1.
- 3 We would like to credit contributor Christopher Abram with a similar observation in an earlier draft of his chapter.
- 4 'Klaeber 4' is R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (eds), *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 4th edn (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).
- 5 For this particular joke, we are indebted to Robert Hanning, by way of Mary Kate Hurley.
- 6 Eileen A. Joy and Mary K. Ramsey (eds), *The postmodern Beowulf: a critical casebook* (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006).
- 7 Stephanie Trigg and Thomas Prendergast, *Affective medievalism: love, abjection and discontent* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).
- 8 In this regard, we are especially indebted to Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional communities in the early Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon psychologies in the vernacular and Latin traditions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); and Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox (eds), *Anglo-Saxon emotions: reading the heart in Old English literature* (London: Routledge, 2015).
- 9 Roy Michael Liuzza, 'On the dating of *Beowulf*', in Peter S. Baker (ed.), *The Beowulf reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 281–302, at 283, 295.

- 10 Carissa M. Harris, *Obscene pedagogies: transgressive talk and sexual education in late medieval Britain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 8.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 *Oxford English Dictionary*, sv. intimate, adj. and n.
- 13 For a compendium of Old English terms of endearment, see Eleanor Parker, 'The language of Anglo-Saxon love' (13 February 2016), <https://aclerkofoxford.blogspot.com/2016/02/the-language-of-anglo-saxon-love.html> (accessed 4 June 2019).
- 14 Gillian R. Overing, 'Beowulf: a poem in our time', in Clare A. Lees (ed.), *The Cambridge history of early medieval English literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 309–31, at 311–12.
- 15 Gillian R. Overing, *Language, sign, and gender in Beowulf* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 75.
- 16 James W. Earl, *Thinking about Beowulf* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 11.
- 17 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The visible and the invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 130.
- 18 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching feeling: affect, pedagogy, performativity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 17.
- 19 Ibid., p. 49.
- 20 Nancy Yousef, *Romantic intimacy* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), p. 2.
- 21 Sara Ahmed, *The promise of happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 47.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., p. 31.
- 24 Louise Fradenberg and Carla Freccero, 'Introduction: Caxton, Foucault, and the pleasures of history', in Louise Fradenberg and Carla Freccero (eds), *Premodern sexualities* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. xix; and see Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting medieval: sexualities and communities pre- and postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 35.
- 25 Susan Sontag, *Against interpretation: and other essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1966), p. 14.
- 26 For an extended philosophical consideration of these questions, see Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *Powers of philology: dynamics of textual scholarship* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003).
- 27 Daniel Boyarin, 'Placing reading: ancient Israel and medieval Europe', in Jonathan Boyarin (ed.), *The ethnography of reading* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), p. 19.
- 28 Edward Said, *Representations of the intellectual: the 1993 Reith Lectures* (New York: Vintage, 1994), p. 76.
- 29 Carolyn Dinshaw, *How soon is now? Medieval texts, amateur readers, and the queerness of time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 31.

- 30 Ibid., pp. 30–1.
- 31 Ahmed, *Promise of happiness*, p. 53.
- 32 Toni Morrison, 'Grendel and his mother', in her *The source of self-regard: selected essays, speeches, and meditations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2019), pp. 255–62, at 255.
- 33 Robin Blaser, *The astonishment tapes: talks on poetry and autobiography with Robin Blaser and friends*, ed. Miriam Nichols (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2015), p. 62.
- 34 Jack Spicer Papers, BANC MSS 2004/209, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, Box 26. Quoted with permission of the Jack Spicer Literary Estate. Major selections of Spicer's translation are published in David Hadbawnik and Jack Spicer (eds), *Jack Spicer's Beowulf*, Lost and Found: The CUNY Poetics Document Initiative, 2.5, Parts 1-2 (2011).
- 35 Arthur G. Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1959), p. 77.
- 36 Ibid., p. 78.
- 37 Ibid., pp. 84–5. This is Brodeur's translation and emphasis.
- 38 Brodeur, *The art of Beowulf*, p. 85.
- 39 Dinshaw, *Getting medieval*, p. 53.
- 40 Edwin Morgan, *Collected poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), p. 594.
- 41 Chris Jones, 'While crowding memories came: Edwin Morgan, Old English and nostalgia', *Scottish literary review*, 4.2 (2012), 123–44. We thank Daniel Davies for bringing this article to our attention.
- 42 Lauren Berlant, 'Intimacy: a special issue', *Critical inquiry*, 24.2 (1998), 281–8, at 286.
- 43 Giorgio Agamben, *Idea of prose*, trans. Michael Sullivan and Sam Whitsitt (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), p. 61.
- 44 Benjamin A. Saltzman, 'Secrecy and the hermeneutic potential in *Beowulf*', *PMLA*, 133.1 (2018), 36–55.
- 45 Jacques Derrida, *On the name*, trans. David Wood et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 30.
- 46 Berlant, 'Intimacy', 287.
- 47 For an overview of both events as they intersect with the field of Old English studies, see Rio Fernandes, 'Prominent medieval scholar's blog on "feminist fog" sparks an uproar', *The chronicle of higher education*, online, 22 January 2016, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Prominent-Medieval-Scholar-s/235014> (accessed 4 June 2019); and Josephine Livingstone, 'Racism, medievalism, and the white supremacists of Charlottesville', *The new republic*, online, 15 August 2017, <https://newrepublic.com/article/144320/racism-medievalism-white-supremacists-charlottesville> (accessed 4 June 2019).
- 48 For brief reflections, see Mary Dockray-Miller, 'Old English has a serious image problem', *JSTOR Daily*, 3 May 2017, <https://daily.jstor.org/old-english-serious-image-problem> (accessed 4 June 2019); Peter Baker,

- 'Anglo-Saxon studies after Charlottesville: reflections of a University of Virginia professor', *Medievalists of Color public discourse*, 25 May 2018, <https://medievalistsofcolor.com/2018/05/> (accessed 4 June 2019); and Mary Rambaran-Olm, 'Anglo-Saxon studies, academia and white supremacy', *Medium*, 27 June 2018, <https://medium.com/@mrambaranolm/anglo-saxon-studies-academia-and-white-supremacy-17c87b360bf3> (accessed 4 June 2019). Donna Beth Ellard explores these issues at greater length in her *Anglo-Saxon(ist) pasts, postSaxon futures* (Goleta, CA: punctum books, 2019).
- 49 Dinshaw, *Getting medieval*, p. 35.
- 50 *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- 51 Ahmed, *Promise of happiness*, p. 186.
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- 55 Overing, 'Beowulf: a poem in our time', p. 317.
- 56 *Ibid.*, p. 330.
- 57 Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Hands and eyes, sight and touch: appraising the senses in Anglo-Saxon England', *ASE*, 45 (2016), 105–40, at 105–6.
- 58 E.g. Stephanie J. Trigg and Stephanie Downes (eds), 'Facing up to the history of the emotions', special issue, *postmedieval*, 8.1 (2017); Lara Farina (ed.), 'The intimate senses: taste, touch, and smell', special issue, *postmedieval*, 3.4 (2012); Richard C. Newhauser (ed.), *A cultural history of the senses in the Middle Ages* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016). We are grateful to Arthur Russell for conversations on this topic.
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- 61 Dinshaw, *Getting medieval*, p. 165.
- 62 *Ibid.*, p. 171.
- 63 Sedgwick, *Touching feeling*, p. 13.
- 64 *Ibid.*
- 65 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 66 Nancy, *The inoperative community*, p. 39.
- 67 O'Brien O'Keefe, 'Hands and eyes, sight and touch', 128.
- 68 Nancy, *The inoperative community*, p. 26.

- 69 Ibid., p. 35.
- 70 This identification was first suggested by Moritz Heyne in his nineteenth-century translation, *Beowulf: Angelsächsisches heldengedicht* (Paderborn, 1863).
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- 72 We are grateful to one of our anonymous readers for this observation.