

IDENTITIES IN SEAMUS HEANEY'S TRANSLATION OF *BEOWULF*
IDENTIDADES EN LA TRADUCCIÓN DE *BEOWULF* POR SEAMUS
HEANEY

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Abstract

The present article sets out to prove the hypothesis that the Modern English translation of *Beowulf* by Seamus Heaney reflects his Irish political and cultural roots. His interpretation aroused the interest of critics by its use of Hiberno-English and dealing with linguistic structural tasks in a different way for the first time. By considering specific examples from the original and the translated version of the poem, the present article analyses the linguistic choices made by Heaney in his translation of the Old English version of *Beowulf* taking into account its critical reception and the author's personal opinions and experiences. It sets out to establish the roots of this translation in Heaney's upbringing in rural Ireland by observing specific memories from his own childhood, family members, politics and surroundings. The article also compares this translation to previous ones to provide the reasons for the uniqueness of Heaney's rendering and establish its importance in today's literary scene.

Keywords: *Beowulf*; linguistics; literature; Old English; poetry; translation.

Resumen

El presente artículo parte de la hipótesis de que la traducción al inglés moderno de *Beowulf* realizada por Seamus Heaney refleja sus raíces políticas y culturales irlandesas. Su interpretación ha despertado el interés de los críticos por el uso del hibernoinglés y por abordar las tareas lingüísticas estructurales de una manera diferente por primera vez. A través de ejemplos específicos del poema original y la versión traducida, el presente artículo analiza las decisiones lingüísticas tomadas por Heaney en su traducción de la versión en inglés antiguo de *Beowulf* teniendo en cuenta su recepción crítica y las opiniones y experiencias personales del autor. Se pretenden encontrar las raíces de esta traducción en la educación de Heaney al brindar recuerdos específicos de su propia infancia en áreas rurales de Irlanda, miembros de la familia, política y sus alrededores. El artículo también compara esta traducción con las anteriores de la misma obra para proporcionar

razones de la singularidad de la interpretación de Heaney y manifestar su importancia en la escena literaria de hoy.

Palabras clave: *Beowulf*; inglés antiguo; poesía; lingüística; literatura; traducción.

1. Introduction

In Seamus Heaney's own words, poetry is "the most apt interpreter" of our "inner world of ... feelings and thoughts", because it is a "source of images" and "of possible meanings" that has "a sure claim on our understanding" (Heaney, *Beowulf* 20-23). It can be interpreted, therefore, that for him translating poetry was not a tiresome venture but one full of possibilities and choices. For instance, he could use dozens of different words to refer to his land or parts of the landscape. This lexical richness, which is examined in detail in this article, comes from his childhood and can be appreciated in his work, both original and translated. In a review, Joseph McGowan points out the importance of poetry, which he completes with his cultural background:

Heaney "credits poetry" in threefold manner: for making possible "this spacewalk" by which the rural student becomes world-famous poet; for "encouraging [him]self (and whoever else might be listening) to 'walk on air against your better judgment'"; and "ultimately because poetry can make an order as true to the impact of external reality and as sensitive to the inner laws of the poet's being as the ripples that rippled in and rippled out across the water in that scullery bucket fifty years ago". The poet is gifted with an artistic craft which in Heaney's case is developed in a country with dual history and personality. (n.p.)

Heaney's literary legacy consists of fifteen collections of poems, several translations of works in different languages, critical essays and articles. Still, these facets are not clear-cut, for Heaney translation is an "integral part of making poetry" (Brunetti 94). It is a way to express inner feelings and ideas and even though there is not much freedom for the translator, he always manages to leave a personal mark. His complete translations and adaptations into Modern English are Sophocle's *Philoctetes* (*The Cure at Troy*) and *Antigone* (*The Burial at Thebes*), the Irish poem *Buile Suibhne* (*Sweeney Astray*), *The Midnight Court* by Brian Merriman (*The Midnight Verdict*), *Treny* by Jan Kochanowski (*Laments*), and a song cycle by the Czech Leos Janáček (*Diary of the One Who Vanished*). They all prove that he was as prolific a translator as a poet, so it is worth researching how he developed this task.

This article sets out to prove the hypothesis that Heaney's translation of the greatest Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf* reflects his Irish origins and culture through specific linguistic choices.

2. Literature Review

As a translator, Heaney builds a bridge between the original language (source) and the language of a certain English-speaking modern society (receiver) and by doing so, he is responsible for modifying both languages and identities of both societies. Looking at Heaney's comments in the revealing introduction to his translation of the poem, we can perceive his attempts to avoid the strict division of English and Irish and rather see them as "adversarial tongues, as either/or conditions rather than both/and" (Heaney, *Preoccupations* xxiv). However, in this article the author's linguistic choices are analysed because, this intention is not an easy endeavour. As Ráez Padilla points out, "the cultural and political redressal of a verse translation from Old English by an Irish author does not pass unnoticed" (293).

According to Heaney, identities are not stable, they are continuously changing and translations play a central role in the process of differing them. In his view, identities change through history and are re-established by translation. It is a cultural process which subtly helps both sides interact and share their cultures. In the case of *Beowulf*, Heaney shares that due to undertaking the translation process he was given the opportunity to rethink "his self-pertinence and he felt the text as "part of my voice right" (Heaney, *Preoccupations* xxiii). As Lawrence Venutti has noted, "the viability of a translation is established by the relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it was produced and read" (18), so Heaney's way of staying true to his culture is successful and compromised.

The critical audiences are generally supportive and commend his achievement to return the life and interest of *Beowulf*. Scholars agree and clarify that:

Beowulf is much admired for the richness of its poetry—for the beautiful sounds of the words and the imaginative quality of the description. About a third of the words in *Beowulf* are words known as *kennings*. *Kennings* are words that are in themselves metaphorical descriptions, and were a typical feature of Anglo-Saxon poetry. *Kennings* combine two words to create an evocative and imaginative alternative word. By linking words in this way, the poets were able to experiment with the rhythm, sounds and imagery of the

poetry. *Beowulf* contains over a thousand *kennings*. (British Library 2006)

Seamus Heaney contributes to the translation a huge number of modern words, some of them with Irish roots—Hibernicisms, which are central to the present study. Part of his biography now sums up the importance of his work:

His muscular translation of the 8th century Anglo Saxon epic *Beowulf* was yet another contribution to literature. In it he balanced the formal and colloquial. His learning is assured and wide ranging, but his intellect always looks to his instinct. It was Seamus Heaney who championed the English translation of Beat Sterchi's powerful Swiss German novel, *Blösch*, he directed the reader to "the reek and frenzy of the yard-workers' world" and saw the tragedy of a favourite's undignified decline. As poet, teacher, critic, spokesman and as witness, Heaney, a most human and humane voice, has contributed to poetry and literature—to Ireland and the world. If initially not the most likely successor to Yeats as national poet, Heaney's art, robust graciousness and candour have brought honour to the task. (Poetry Foundation, n.d.)

Much has been speculated about the cultural identity adopted in the translation; Terry Eagleton insists that *Beowulf* "ultimately retains its pride of place in English studies mainly due to its function, from the Victorian period forward, as the cultural tool of a troubling nationalist romance with an archetypal and mythological past" (16). Similarly, Tom Shippey shares Eagleton's opinion on the political importance of *Beowulf*, "one has to say that the poem itself at all times appeared as a source of potential authority and power" (n.p.). He supported the work when he wrote in a review for the *Times Literary Supplement*:

Seamus Heaney is a Nobel Prize-winner; his translation of the poem was commissioned for and is going straight into *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*; set for virtually every introductory course in English on the North American continent ... and he is a Northern Irish Catholic, one of the excluded, a poet in internal exile. All this, within the power poker of American academe, gives him something like a straight flush, ace high; to which any reviewer must feel he can oppose no more than two pairs, and aces and eights at that ... Like it or not, Heaney's *Beowulf* is the poem now. (n.p.)

Still, this leaves the reader with so many questions. Why did Seamus Heaney undertake this task? What makes his translation of *Beowulf* stand out amongst more than sixty others? How is it received by critics and scholars?

3. Methodology

The main methodology in the present study consists in extracting significant examples of the original Old English version of *Beowulf* and analysing the approach Heaney applies to translating them. For this purpose, journal articles and critical companions have been consulted and analysed since there were often disagreements about the correct translation or why Heaney made a specific decision. Therefore, the following part follows this practical contrastive methodology focusing on the linguistic choices as means to reflect identity, politics and culture.

4. Analysis and Discussion

For Seamus Heaney, the cultural aspects of Anglo-Saxon life must be maintained in the translation in order for it to be successful. Thus, when translating *Beowulf*, he did not aim to compose a Modern English version of it. The use of Hibernicisms marks this translation as unique and original. The term “Hiberno-English” is generally used to indicate the variety of English spoken in Ireland, which can be further divided in many variants corresponding to the different districts. Filppula (32) and other scholars distinguish between “northern Hiberno-English”, spoken in the historical province of Ulster (where Heaney was brought up), and “southern Hiberno-English”, spoken in the provinces of Leinster, Connacht and Munster. However, further distinctions could be made, depending on vocabulary, vowel quantity and lexical distribution of phonemes. Generally, it can be referred to as “the non-standard language of a sub-group” (Heaney, *The Drag* 16). The Hiberno-English words in this translation are: *thole* (“to suffer”, line 15), *bawn* (with the meaning of Hrothgar’s or Hygelac’s “hall”, lines 522, 720, 721, 1304, 1968, 1970), *brehon* (means “spokesman”, line 1456), *clan* (“tribe”, for example in line 9), *keens* (“laments”, line 1118), *kesh* (to indicate a bridge or a passage, line 539), *bothie* (“hut”, line 140), *sept* (“branch of a family”, line 1673), *howe* (“barrow”, line 2774), *hirpling* (“limping”, line 975), *graith* (“harness” or “armour”, lines 324, 2988), *session* (in “hall-session”, used with the Hiberno-English meaning “gathering”, line 767), *wean* (“young child”, line 2433), *hoked* (“rooted about”, line 3026), *scaresomly* (“terrifyingly”, line 3041).

A main feature of Heaney’s translation that needs to be discussed is his representation of culture, known as cultural redressal. The translator shares that “there was one area, however, where certain strangeness in the diction came naturally. In those instances where a local Ulster word seemed either poetically or historically right, I feel free to use it” (Heaney, *Beowulf* xxx). The fact that the word “historically” is used here is ideologically charged and points to the fact that

many of these words derived from Old English, therefore, closer to the original, which, at times, made them the logical choice for the author.

In his introduction, Heaney also explains how his Irish past and education define his usage of language and also how several words resonated in his work with his memories of what he once perceived as distinctly Irish words, but now he calls them “loopholes” in his own linguistic barriers. First, he was inspired by the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins who used the Anglo-Saxon rhythm and meter. Thus he became familiarized with Old English style and its intricate structure. Later, he was astonished by Ted Hughes’ poetry, which combined Northern Irish tradition with Anglo-Saxon. But the turning point of acceptance of “the gradual acceptance of the voice of the other” (O’Brien 32), was when he found the word *polian* “to suffer” (used nine times in his translation), extinguished in Modern English but still existing in the Ulster dialect to refer to someone suffering sudden difficulty. This not only served “... to persuade myself that I was born into its language and that its language was born into me took a while” (Heaney, *The Drag* xxiii) but also guided him to the right “note and pitch for the overall music of the work” (Heaney, *The Drag* xxvi). According to Ráez Padilla, “*polian* is, in fact, the password to Heaney’s translation, conscious as the poet is that the work has deep roots in the foundations of the English language” (293). This way, the Irish culture is closely intertwined with the English language. This word has shown Heaney the right path of translation (“it opened my right of way”), and also inspired him to finally try to give an answer to the question he had never faced before: “the relationship between nationality, language, history and literary tradition in Ireland” (Heaney, *Beowulf* xxiv).

Heaney felt attracted to Anglo-Saxon language and *Beowulf* itself but the decision to accept the invitation to translate the poem was not easy and unconsidered. The first main reason to take it was “a way of ensuring that my linguistic anchor would stay lodged on the Anglo-Saxon sea-floor” (Heaney, *Beowulf* xxi), he shares in the introduction. In spite of the hardship he passed through in the beginning “the whole attempt to turn it into modern English seemed to me like trying to bring down a megalith with a toy hammer” (Heaney, *Beowulf* xxi), he finds the text very close to his own style and language and sees similarities between Old English and his Ulster dialect. What is even more remarkable, in his poem “Digging” (1966), he had used the same metrics and alliteration—“each line divided into two balancing halves, each half containing two stressed syllables” (Ráez Padilla 293). So, in the translation, the linguistic style varies from formal to colloquial depending on the situation. For example, in official speeches of warriors towards an audience the reader can perceive more formal language but in more intimate conversations the lexical decisions have been more informal.

Moreover, he involves his cultural, historical, political and ideological background from his life in Northern Ireland.

According to Sauer, "Heaney even calls this recognition 'an illumination by philology'. The use of surviving Old English words as well as of Gaelic words has to do with Heaney's post-colonial appropriation of *Beowulf*" (101). This is a serious claim that needs a thorough analysis of specific examples. The beginning of the translation: the exclamation *Hwæt* (line 1), an interjection normally related to the oral context, articulated by scopas when they wanted to assemble the people or call their attention. Heaney's "So" marks a more familiar tone of speech, unlike other English translations like Michael Alexander's "Attend!" (line 1973), Liuzza's "Listen!" (line 1999), Crawford's "Lo!" (line 1926) that call for the reader's attention rather than Heaney's seeming to calmly continue or restart a story. Howe claims that Heaney's translation, in the very first lines, tends to "level the diction" of the poem and to "flatten [its] claim on the audience" (34). Still, for Heaney, it is legitimated by the Scullions' typical way of calling for attention. As Sauer remarks: "from the choice of the very first word the poet seems thus to provide an Irish background to his translation" (345). The fact that this word did not belong to the language of Northern Ireland authorized Heaney to recreate the tone of the Anglo-Saxon poem through the voice of the 'Scullions', common people. In this way, the refined reader realises they are before a culturally and linguistically ground-breaking translation of *Beowulf*.

In his recreation, Heaney himself notes the peculiar character of the first word of the text, *Hwæt*, and writes that previous translations "tend towards the archaic literary, with 'lo', 'hark', 'behold', 'attend' and—more colloquially—'listen'" (Heaney, *Beowulf* xxvii). The use of a more "archaic" version is intended to remember the, as he calls them, "big-voiced scullions" of his Anglo-Irish community, whose speech involved it as colloquial and familiar word, thus closer to the voice of the *Beowulf* poet. He translates *Hwæt*, as *So*, using it in the same way as the Scullions of his family did, with a twofold purpose. On the one side, to "obliterate ... all previous discourse and narrative", thus creating the illusion of continuance. On the other hand, its goal is simply to call for attention (xxvii). This *So* can be interpreted as a discourse marker between a long expectation for the beginning or an implicit idea. As a word often used to change topics, or to move to a different part of the discourse, it adds a conversational tone to the poem and the pause right after it emphasizes these effects.

Focusing on further examples of cultural redressal, special attention needs to be paid to the word "bawn", which refers to Hrothgar's hall. It has historical roots, in Elizabethan English, "bawn" (from the Irish *bo-dhun*, a fort for castle) used specifically is fortified dwellings that the English planters built in Ireland to keep the dispossessed natives at bay. So, it seemed the proper term to apply to the

embattled where Hrothgar “waits and watches”. Adrian Barlow notices that this choice is “willed” and it bears “historical suggestiveness” (65) leading to Hrothgar’s castle and 16th century fortified English dwellings in Ireland, he places the Old English epic to a modern context. For Heaney, however, translating this word is a project to reflect the complex history of conquest and colony and the resistance they received. Having spent part of his childhood in a farmhouse in a rural area called Mossbawn, the sound of a water pump was one of the first ones he heard. It is of great significance to him since it seemed to produce the melody of “omphalos, omphalos” and Heaney idealizes this familiar Irish sound and equates it to the Greek mythology notion of omphalos, which was a token considered as the navel of the world (Ráez Padilla 291).

On occasions, the translator does not turn to modern English but to his dialect where Old English words are still in use, which is another remarkable difference from other translators. That is why some critics are not in favour of the use of Irish words as it distances the text from a wider audience. Chickering claimed this translation was “disservice to students” (173), to people who face *Beowulf* for the first time, because Hiberno-English words mislead the reader, suggesting the idea that the original poem contained Gaelic terms mixed with the Anglo-Saxon ones, which is not true. Furthermore, Howe (35-36), Gruber (73-74) and Chickering (173) saw a provocative and polemical intention behind the use of Irish English. Actually, these words sound encroaching because, mixed with Standard English, they remind the political conflict between Ireland and England and the hard historical moment of Irish colonization. They represent not only an “act of appropriation” of *Beowulf* but, in a way, also a “political claim” (Howe 35), as though they tried to “subvert the Englishness of the poem” (Chickering 174). However, this translation is far from only a political polemic about historical backgrounds. The Irish poet creates a language of its own, in other words a mix of different languages, supported by footnotes when needed creates a universal language.

Another example of Hibernicisms in Heaney’s translation can be found in line 140, Heaney translates *būrum*, meaning “in the chambers/apartments/dwellings” as “in the *bothies*”, “chamber” (line 1310) and “dwelling” (2455), related to individual places. It is a corrupted Gaelic word referring to a basic accommodation, usually used without charge by travellers, townsfolk, and workers:

It was easy then to meet with a man
shifting himself to a safer distance
to bed in the *bothies*, for who could be blind
to the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness
of the hall-watcher’s hate? (lines 138-42)

In translating the Anglo-Saxon masterpiece, the Irish poet passes it through the prism of his cultural and national identity, thus domesticating it for a certain audience, creating a bridge between Old English and Irish (colonizer and colonized), and making it sound foreign at times when the reader needs to consult external material to experience fully Heaney's *Beowulf*. American students, for example, will need external sources in order to understand the complete poem. He has achieved his initial target to "come to terms with that complex history of conquest and colony, absorption and resistance, integrity and antagonism" (Heaney, *Beowulf* xxx), using a complex study and astonishing translation talent.

It is a fact, however, that Heaney's translation of *Beowulf* was an immediate success and it was published not only in Norton's Anthology edition but also in several others. It was broadcasted on the radio and media read by Heaney and it was even given the Whitbread Book of the Year Award for 1999, a prize usually intended for original literary works. We can observe two major features that make it look like an original work: the use of Hibernicisms and that of some non-conventional structure choices like running titles and notes. Critics, especially those who are not experts in Old English, have received positively this translation and praised the good command in use of alliteration and line stresses, the syntax and the directness to the reader. It was readable and nice and at the same time it accomplished many Anglo-Saxon poetry formal features.

On the other hand, experts such as the Anglo-Saxon philologists Shippey, Howe, Chickering and Gruber have provided the toughest criticism to the way Heaney has translated Old English. They noticed some flaws in the alliterative scheme and the use of "Ulsterisms" and, therefore, disregard that the poet's translation as limited, "in its dullest passages, no worse than many others" (Howe 37). However, the use of words deriving from old English has also been justified as "the consequence of nine centuries of English dominance over Irish affairs, life, and language?" and more as a result of "lingering discomfort that the foremost poet writing in English should come from where he does" (McGowan 40)

The stylistic features of the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* have been another aspect that the experts scrutinised, Howe (2000) claims that the syntax seems looser because it lacks the epigrammatic force of Old English. Chickering claimed that Heaney has not reproduced the caesura correctly as he had to—in the middle of the line, thus provoking misbalance in the lines; he also underlines the vocabulary the translator used—he considers it too mixed (archaisms alongside with recreated poetic compounds) and colloquial: "with a flattening effect on the diction of the poem" (167).

As can be seen, the critical responses to this work were varied but those who criticized it—Howe (32-33) and Chickering (2002, 161-62)—might have

forgotten that Anglo-Saxon poetry is rich in formal patterns that do not exist in Modern English, which makes them hard to transform. It has to be remarked that in Old English, meter was created in accordance with completely different syntax, so, translated into Modern English the devices that would serve to emphasize the important parts of the speech or new characteristics of formerly mentioned characters turn into a senseless repetition (Howe 35). Howe also stresses on the enormous difference between vocabulary of Old English and of contemporary English—today it is harder for the reader to understand the meaning of a certain word than centuries ago. Heaney clarifies that he tries to be true to both languages and respects translation and metrical laws whenever possible.

It is known that Old English is also called “the alliterative measure”. In his introduction to *Beowulf*, Michael Alexander states that “the key to Old English meter is the caesura in the middle of the line: the two halves of the line on either side of the break are felt to be equal in weight” (46). According to him, the alliteration is less important than the stress pattern, “Of the four stresses in the line, the first and/or the second must alliterate with the third, and the fourth must be different. Only the four fully stressed syllables of the line enter into this calculation, and it is necessary to distinguish a fully-stressed from a half-stressed syllable” (46), Alexander contends. Heaney confirms this pattern and he also admits he has not followed the strict metrical rules of Anglo-Saxon *scop* but did save the fundamental pattern of four stresses to the line but allows himself “several transgressions”. In other words, he prefers the natural shape and sound to the linguistic correctness. This decision is supported by experts in the field: “it is amazing how much of the alliterative music of the original he is able to keep alive” (Murphy 213). In line 64, for example, the *caesura* is definite and the verse is underlain by the original four-stress metrical structure: “the fortunes of war favored Hrothgar.”

Revising the other translations of *Beowulf*, different patterns of alliteration can be appreciated. Michael Alexander, for instance, breaks the line and alliteration: “then to Hrothgar was granted glory in battle” (line 65). His example of a balanced line which contains two half-lines consisting of two stresses and two unstressed syllables is: “the fell and fen his fastness was” (line 104). Heaney’s poetic interpretation imitates the original alliterative meter of the Old English original and is translated as: “and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time” (line 104). As Sauer points out, “the Old English alliterative long line consists of two half-lines. Each half-line has two stressed syllables, i.e. the long line has four stressed syllables, and two or three of the stressed syllables alliterate, i.e. they begin with the same sound (or letter in the written form)” (93). What Heaney achieves is to maintain these rules in his lines and this shows profound knowledge and mastery of linguistic resources.

One of the popular laws of alliteration is the Equivalence rule. It attributes more prominence to stressed syllables and this was established by Old English rules. For example, two stressed root syllables alliterate if they begin with the same consonant. The alliteration can be reinforced by the location within the line. The complexity of language is significant:

The language of the poem is grammatically distorted because of the alliteration. This breaking up of the natural word order is characteristic of skaldic poetry after the ninth century, and the Anglo-Saxon agrees with those later skalds also in his accumulation of subsidiary and parenthetical clauses, poetic verbosity with artificial twisting and tortuousness. (Shippey and Haarder 210)

Through focusing on the alliterative patterns, it can be stated that Heaney creates both target-oriented and source oriented piece of translation. It is extraordinary that both original and translated works end at the same line. He makes it easier for the reader to get closer to the original work and culture and he maintains the source as intact as possible even though he had to apply modern words to keep the musicality of the poem.

5. Conclusion

Apart from being a remarkable poet, translator, playwright, lecturer and a Nobel Prize winner, Seamus Heaney was, above all, an Irishman. That is what changed his perspective of language in *Beowulf* and makes his translation probably the most criticized and praised one at the same time. In this article, it has been shown that in his translation different languages and traditions are brought together and, building on his personal history and culture, he has managed to create a rendering of a work in a way that “would not be simply a badge of ethnicity or a matter of cultural preference or an official imposition, but an entry into further language” (Heaney, *The Drag* xxv).

In spite of the few negative responses by some critics due to metrical and structural alterations discussed above, they have been justified from linguistic, cultural and poetical point of view. Reading this translation, we witness a union of two sides in which each has changed. Anglo-Saxon has lost part of its original metrical patterns but has gained a new aspect—that of the Irish culture related back to the Old English origins. This is achieved through a careful and implicit use of words and, as Ráez Padilla states, “Heaney is not the loud iconoclast, but the quiet diplomat. One is usually on guard against the former, although the virtue of reliability makes the latter a much more effective rebel against orthodoxy” (297).

Through his poetic rendering of the Old English poem presented in a poem that combines English and Irish tradition, he contributes to the overall popularity of the poem. Despite the fact that some critics claim that it brings a subtle political meaning (Irish-English historical conflicts), this translation has by no means caused any consequent problems in the mentioned countries. In fact, it is suggested that Heaney's version "may do more for Anglo-Irish literary relations than any other text of the late twentieth century *Beowulf*" (McGowan 42).

So, it can be concluded that it is thanks to, not despite, Heaney's political and cultural choices based on his Irish upbringing that he revolutionizes the stereotypes and brings different cultures and languages together to create a perfectly synchronized translation without losing its original ornateness and brilliance. For all this, Heaney's *Beowulf* has become, for many, the definite verse translation of the great poem.

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