

thew and the Gospel of Luke incorporated into their texts most of the Gospel of Mark. They did so without acknowledgment.

These writers composed in a context apart from our universe of print. So did King's father, his grandfather, and other black preachers King heard as a child and adolescent. Adapting their procedures of voice merging to print, King mined others' texts while crafting addresses and essays. For that reason, his essays are not elegantly fastidious constructions.

We should judge his works, however, not according to their failure to conform to academic standards, but according to their rhetorical effect. King's discourse convinced white America to outlaw a system that oppressed and degraded millions of human beings. When we recognize the full dimensions of that monumental achievement, we will understand that King's language is truly sublime.

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### The Varieties of Choice

To the Editor:

Andrew Galloway's engaging article "*Beowulf* and the Varieties of Choice" (105 [1990]: 197–208) raises some fascinating philosophical, philological, and generic questions. Before I address these issues, let me point out an error that escaped the scrutiny of the readers of the article: "The *Beowulf* poet uses (*ge*)*ceosan* as frequently as any other Anglo-Saxon Christian poet—eight times in thirty-two thousand lines" (202). In fact, there are only about 3,200 lines in *Beowulf*. [See editorial correction on page 1168.]

As for the philosophical problem, the concept of choice implies freedom that is not incompatible with duty, obligation, and even fate, which only condition freedom without taking it away. Only the Supreme Being can have unconditional freedom. All human beings are endowed with conditioned freedom. I have three reservations about Galloway's survey of choice literature: (1) Galloway builds up his case on insufficient evidence from Old English literature, which we have inherited in limited quantity. Therefore, Galloway should have taken into consideration the Christian literary tradition of the church fathers, who can supplement what is lacking in Old English literature. (2) There is nothing really Christian about choice qua choice, except in the sense that a choice is Christian when a Christian or even a non-Christian makes the choice to follow Christ; neither case is clearly indicated in the poem, in spite of the Christian resonances of the poem. (3) Since *Beowulf* is admittedly the work of a Christian poet, it must show evidence of a clear Christian moral choice. Indeed, it does, but the choice is not what most of us expect to find there. Modern Christians tend to profess that the genuinely Christian moral choice is that of the Sermon on the Mount: "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors" (Matt. 5.44). In fact, neither does the poet preach this lofty ideal nor does the hero *Beowulf* practice it. On the contrary, it is the *lex talionis* (eye for eye, tooth for tooth) that the poem celebrates. My point is that the ideal of revenge is not to be considered un-Christian in that Christian poem.

Why? The poet followed the ethical ideal of revenge celebrated in another Christian canonical work used by the Anglo-Saxons of the time, the Apocalypse of John, which is one of the major sources of *Beowulf*'s ethics and its portrayal of the monsters. Dorothy Whitelock's work, which Galloway cites, has a short section on the Anglo-Saxon moral view of revenge.

The philological problem has to do with the association of the Latin *gustare* with the Old English *ceosan*. If we apply Grimm's law blindly, that is, consistently—most dictionaries, like those Galloway consulted, seem to do that—these two words must be cognate. The Latin *gustare* is cognate, however, with the English *taste*. Now, *choice* and its Germanic and Romance cognates are related to the Latin *causa*, which is cognate with the Greek *krinein*, Latin *creare*, and Sanskrit *kr*, *karana* 'cause,' *karma* 'deed,' and *kartavya* 'duty,' 'obligation'—philologically speaking, duty, at least in Sanskrit, is derived from action. The two other possible cognates in Sanskrit to the Old English *ceosan* are *chesht* 'move,' 'command,' and 'do' and *choosh* 'drink,' 'suck,' and 'screw up.'

The generic problem arises because of *Beowulf*'s use of *ceosan*. Galloway draws a very appropriate conclusion: "[T]o have *Beowulf* die by choosing the deathbed reads as a conscious archaism or heroicism. . . . The vision of earthly choice . . . is finally sealed off from Christian ideals by this 'archaic' and archaizing formula" (206). Galloway does not spell out clearly in what this "archaization" consists, except that it is not Christian. Earlier, Galloway refers to Byrhtnoth's choice that "reflects the pressure between his individual human agency . . . and what might be called a heroic ethos of inevitability" (199). Tolkien also recognizes this phenomenon when he talks about the "fusion" between Christianity and paganism or about the poet "repaganizing" the work rather than Christianizing it (202). I suggest that Galloway's archaization and Tolkien's repaganization-fusion are none other than the Old English poet's conscious attempt at classicizing *Beowulf* in the image and likeness of the classical epics of Vergil and Homer. The special form of *Beowulfian* classicization vis-à-vis choice consists in the author's attempt at diminishing the role of God, emphasizing destiny, and accentuating the social dimension of choice and heroic action. Briefly stated, both in the classical epics, like the *Aeneid*, and in *Beowulf* there is an intentional interplay of choice and destiny; that is what epics are about.

Finally, the article reminds us that *Beowulf* is an "open" text and that we read it again with some skepticism rather than with the certainty of faith in received interpretations. *Tolle et lege*.

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### Antimetabole and Chiasmus

To the Editor:

Why does Thomas Mermall write of *chiasmus* rather than *antimetabole* in "The Chiasmus: Unamuno's Master Trope" (105 [1990]: 245–55)? He utilizes a wide array of time-honored as well as recent technical vocabulary but, textbook lists of defi-