Reconsidering Liedertheorie:

How German Nationalism Affected Beowulf Scholarship in 18th and 19th Century Europe

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I have a love/hate relationship with *Beowulf* and, as it turns out, so did 19th century German scholars (but that will come later on). In high school I was told *Beowulf* originated as an Old English oral tradition that was told among families and friends as a form of entertainment during the dreary and plague-ridden “Dark Ages”, but college taught me, among other things, that my high school *Beowulf* lessons were nothing more than vastly oversimplified versions of the truth, that nobody actually knows anything conclusive about the poem’s origins and that scholars never refer to the medieval period as the “Dark Ages”.

Medieval scholarship suffers from a unique problem: because the subject matter is both literary and historical, post-modern and post-post-modern interpretations of poems with unknown origins like *Beowulf* may be interesting, but they do not assist in expanding our knowledge of the text. Very few medieval texts exist in their full, undestroyed format. Many of them are fragmented, like Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*; others are known about but lost like *The Finnsburg Fragment*; still others were destroyed by fires or the overall mistreatment of manuscripts like the Cotton Library fire, which burned hundreds of medieval manuscripts. Not only are many manuscripts damaged or destroyed, but they are also written in older versions of modern languages, some of which are not fully understood or translatable into modern English. There are words in Old English that appear only one time in the entire corpus. Scribal errors turn proper nouns into incomprehensible word-jumbles, and not everything written down, even in supposedly historical medieval documents, seems to be accurate: take, for instance, *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle*, which includes at least two separate dragon sightings. Medieval
literary scholarship is therefore limited, both by the small number of accessible texts and the small quantity of trustworthy historical evidence.

*Beowulf* is certainly a victim of medieval-uniqueness, as the manuscript seems to have been abused over the past thousand years or so. The text actually disappeared from literary history after the 1100s and did not return until around the 1500s. Nobody knows what happened to the original text, and the only remaining manuscript was transcribed by two people, A and B, who presumably were not as familiar with the Old English used in the old manuscript as they were with the Old English they spoke, a result of the language evolving over time. Within the text they have created a large number of apparent spelling errors, sometimes an accidental consequence of the scribe trying to “fix” the poem so it matched his more modern Old English. They also misspelled many of the proper names, more evidence pointing to their unfamiliarity with the older version of their language. To confuse matters even more, scribe A only finished about half of the text, so scribe B went back and corrected parts of A’s translation. Later on the manuscript caught fire, causing many words to disappear because of burns and subsequent crumbling. Edges of pages have fallen off due to wear and tear and the fragility of the paper. Bookworms have left holes in the paper, as they chewed through parts of the book. Pages have been partially destroyed, blotted out, and there are some passages that were left unreadable. Scholars have no way of knowing how much of the poem has been lost due to the destruction of the only surviving manuscript.

We also do not know when the original *Beowulf* story was created. A popular theory is that it started out as oral tradition, but even so, scholars are unable to pinpoint an exact date of when this might have happened. The closest we have come is between
the year 1000, which is when the two scribes were copying the manuscript we have today, and the year 525, because of historical dated events mentioned in the poem with enough detail to imply that the poet knew about the events on a historical level, such as the legendary 6th century Swedish Wars. We are left with a text that has an unknown author, an unknown date, and an unknown origin.

All of these unknowns, of course, are opportunities for medieval scholarship to push the boundaries of literary and historical analysis in an effort to discover something conclusive about the Beowulf poem. The poem has always been used in an opportunistic way, ever since its resurgence into the public sphere in the 1700s. The Danes wanted to claim it as their own, taking away England’s ownership of the old epic, a task that would be given to a somewhat incompetent scholar who, as will be noted later on in Chapter 2, was never even able to understand the Old English he attempted to translate. The Danes had started a trend, and soon other countries wanted to claim Beowulf as their own, a goal picked up enthusiastically by the Germans, who at the time were a group of people living across Europe without a country to call their own. The logic was that if somebody could prove the poem was actually German in origin, then it would also prove that they were a historical group of people with a long-lasting culture worthy of being their own sovereign nation. Because of this nationalist bias that appears in much of German medieval scholarship during the 18th and 19th centuries, modern scholars have written off much of their work based on the idea that it is too biased to be helpful to our analysis of the poem.

Writing off an entire century or more of medieval scholarship, however, is more harmful than trying to wade through the nationalistic biases that we scholars find so disconcerting. Without the technology available to us today and without the in-depth
understanding of proper translations of the poem into our modern language, the German philologists were nevertheless able to uncover facts about the poem that we now take for granted. They were able to parse through the two separate Beowulfs who appear in the poem and recognized that the first Beowulf mentioned was in no way related to the second Beowulf, who acts as the hero of the story. They untangled the messy manuscript, despite the complicated and dated grammar that appears in the text, with much credit going to philological geniuses, Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm. To ignore or dismiss the German’s early scholarship not only takes credit away from where credit is due but also may cause scholars to waste time rediscovering something that has long ago been discovered.

My *Beowulf* research, using the lexomics program in particular, has paralleled literary analysis done by German scholar, Karl Mullenhoff, which will be explored in depth in chapters 2 and 3. Mullenhoff is now infamous for his outrageous desire to make his homeland, a swamp region in the Ditmarsch of Holstein, the origin of the *Beowulf* poem. He encouraged medieval scholars of his time period to use an analytical technique known as Liedertheorie, which consisted of finding distinct lays or sections of a poem that are not original to the piece but were added later either by the same poet or by someone else. He therefore broke *Beowulf* up into separate lays, noting shifts in not only plot but also narrative style and poetic structure. He used a Liedertheorie lens to explain why there were plot, style, and structural contradictions in the Old English epic.

Because of his harsh demeanor and unwavering dismissal of any analysis not done through Liedertheorie, Mullenhoff’s work was largely forgotten after his death in 1884. People were so turned off by his angry nature and overall mean-spirited criticism
that once he was gone and no longer able to defend his own scholarship, it was abandoned, eventually acquiring a reputation of being outrageously unreasonable. Using a computer program surely lacking any type of nationalistic bias, modern scholarship has also created a fragmented version of Beowulf where different shifts in the poem’s style seem to suggest heterogeneous text. The dendrograms I created using the lexomics program suggest that perhaps Mullenhoff’s Liedertheorie was not so crazy after all.

I plan to use Liedertheorie in an unbiased context in order to understand the potential benefits modern scholars can gain from applying this theory to Beowulf. Using dendrograms from my previous lexomics research, textual evidence, and a slight modification of the definition of what constitutes Liedertheorie, I will show that Mullenhoff’s ideas, while nationally biased, were closer to the truth than often credited. Liedertheorie as an analytical tool is not outdated or outrageous but instead can provide enlightening interpretations of different texts, especially medieval poems that we know little about historically. Reasonable evidence exists that shows that Liedertheorie is a viable form of literary analysis and applying it to texts like Beowulf or other fragmented and seemingly contradictory poems can help make sense of parts of the poem that are viewed as both confusing and unexplainable.
Chapter One: A Brief Recap of German History, or Why the Germans are so Grumpy

A Homeless Nation

The origins of Liedertheorie coincided with the struggle for an independent German state, causing literary theory to act as both a form of textual analysis and part of the political agendas of leading German scholars. Every German publishing something in the late 18th and 19th centuries had some sort of nationalistic motivation; they either wanted to form their own German country or join previously existing nations like Denmark or France. Once the Germans actually became a nation, they quickly entered into and, arguably, helped cause two World Wars, and their reputation as a country plummeted. The rest of the Western world avoided their literary scholarship like the plague\(^1\). In the medieval field, German scholarship was dismissed as being too unreasonable due to its extreme nationalistic tendencies.

For the Germans, literary analysis was a way to show that they had a long, rich history despite not having any claims to land, and therefore they wanted to prove that older medieval texts, like *Beowulf*, were somehow influenced by their ever-present German culture. Liedertheorie was one of the types of analysis to be left behind in the 19th century because after World War II people stopped translating German scholarship into other languages, keeping it from becoming popular knowledge.

To fully understand why medieval German scholars were so adamant in proving that medieval texts historically belonged to them, one has to look closely at the history of the nation. The Germans were a culture without a homeland, and despite their social unity,

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\(^1\) Medieval plague pun certainly intended here.
they had no political power. For decades they were nothing but a fragmented people scattered across Europe. No existing governments really spoke for them, and their lack of voice and power created a unique type of identity crisis, one that was not cultural but instead focused on historical relevance\(^2\). The Germans already felt culturally unified and unique, but they needed to find the historical evidence that would prove that their feeling of unity was legitimate. By turning to history, they found connections leading back to the Middle Ages where literature and language seemed to show that they were not only a historical group of people but that they also always maintained the same types of characteristics, values, and ethics as their ancient Germanic counterparts. As will be discussed later in more detail, it seems likely that much of the German scholarship that took place during the late 18\(^{th}\) and early 19\(^{th}\) centuries was heavily influenced by a desire to find any type of evidence to prove Germany’s worth as an independent nation. A few scholars, in particular Karl Mullenhoff, the leading proponent of Liedertheorie, tended to force evidence to fit theories rather than adjusting the theories to match the evidence, likely because of the desire to overcome certain political turmoil that impeded German independence.

The Germans’ difficult quest for sovereignty led to an increase in interest in medieval literature as an area of scholarly study. With the *Beowulf* poem in the public sphere, due to the Danish scholar Grimur Jonsson Thorkelin’s 1815 Latin translation\(^3\), German scholars hoped to claim the poem as their own in order to use it as an opportunity to show their intelligence as well as prove their longevity and historical significance.

In the 1700s the Germans were a fictitious empire spread throughout different European states. With the onset of the Napoleonic wars and France’s ambitious attempt to seize as much land as possible, the rest of Europe’s respect for the French aristocracy started to diminish. The self-identified Germans were no exception, and they, along with England and Holland, developed an anti-aristocratic attitude aimed specifically towards French cosmopolitanism. Inspired by England’s revival of Shakespearean plays, German literature strayed from the neo-Aristotelian dualistic rhetoric popularized by the French, causing patriotic German writers to suggest creating their very own theater to mobilize their public sphere. The first German theater in the independent state of Hamburg failed after only a few years, but the scholarship and literature created during its existence started to give the Germans a collective identity. With European intellectuals like Gotthold Lessing expressing the importance of German theater for the fractured nation to bond as a society and engage in intellectual and egalitarian conversations, theatrical practices soon followed. Because the Germans were not interested in neo-Aristotelian rhetorical criticism, their literary scholars were not looking at history and literature pluralistically but instead focused on their intrinsic relationship to one another, a method of analysis that would soon be backed up by German philosophers as well.

It was German philosopher, Johann Gottfried von Herder, who in 1772 spoke of cultural relativism in a way that allowed the Germans finally to trace their own history despite the lack of a nation-state. Herder emphasized language as providing humanity’s prime distinction from animals: it is our ability to speak, communicate, and record through words that differentiates us from the animal world. He also attempted to answer

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4 NTE. p. 95.
5 NTE. p. 96.
6 NTE. p. 97-98.
questions about how language formed, and evolved. His influential interpretations caused more literature to be translated into German, often in the form of the lied (song), which would later become the traditional German form in literature. Most importantly, Herder asserted that a culture does not need to have a pre-established “high literature”; oral traditions and folk songs should invoke just as much pride, as they demonstrate that the nation has a historically cultural if not physical existence. German nationalism, therefore, originated through common language and oral-traditions rather than as an overt quest to gain back rightful land, building a polity on philological ideals long before Jacob Grimm’s influential work in the same area of study.

Unlike France and England, who had land first and developed their culture afterwards, the Germans created a culture first before establishing any national state. Such a backward look at cultural development also took place in Italy, suggesting a pattern in the formation of the soon-to-be Axis powers in sixty years. In 1808 German philosopher, Johann Fichte, in Reden an die deutsche Nation, claimed that nations should be defined as something more than social democratic contracts; they are moral and transgenerational communities. The nation became a type of large family, where loyalty and patriotism start to look more and more like family values. Despite the nonexistence of a German Empire, Fichte’s definition of “nation” made the Germans feel as if they had more legitimacy to form a nation of their own. He argued that despite having no land, the German people kept their traditions, language, and rituals active and without much

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7 NTE, p. 98, also Johann Gottfried Herder on Humanity, and Sonia Sikka Cultural Difference: Enlightened Relativism.
change, making them culturally stronger than most already existing nations.\(^8\)

The Germans were not only invested in traditions and language that could be traced back hundreds of years; they were also connected by an ethnic similarity, as their ancient German tribes the Catti, the Bajuwali, the Boii, the Borussi, the Suebi, the Franci, and the Saxones continued to exist, at least nominally, in the modern times, using similar nomenclature.\(^9\) The Germans did not need to be taught about unity; being German was supposed to come with an innate feeling of connection towards fellow German tribes. All of the tribes had spoken the same ancestral language and felt that no matter how the rest of Europe changed and transformed, their traditional speech meant that they maintained a rare type of “moral superiority”\(^10\), though it is unclear how morality and historical maintenance of a dialect are truly connected. Their so-called moral superiority\(^11\) seemed to be more of a concept used to spark a feeling of patriotism among fellow men rather than a philosophical analysis.

They also felt a “moral” obligation to maintain their same culture and not fall under the influence of France, a powerful nation that threatened to undermine the material they were using as the building-blocks for establishing their culture on a more globally recognized scale. As Napoleon’s war raged on, the tension between the Germans and the French grew, until it climaxed in 1807 when he was thought of as the most powerful man in Europe, and Germany was a weakened band of people spread across the

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\(^8\) Of course this is highly debatable and I am not asserting that German culture was any better or worse than any other culture. This was, however, the mindset of some leading German thinkers of the time period which is why I mention it here.

\(^9\) NTE, p. 115.

\(^10\) NTE, p. 114 – 115.

\(^11\) I use the term ‘moral-superiority’ because it was the term used by Leerson to describe how the Germans thought of themselves, as morally superior. That being said, they did not have a set definition of what their morality was, and many leading German philosophers of the time highly disagreed with one another about what true morality and moral laws actually were. I add this only to point out that it was one of the ways the Germans looked at themselves to excuse some of their behaviors and actions.
continent. The Germans decided to build the equivalent of the Pantheon in Austria\textsuperscript{12}, which they called the Walhalla. It displayed busts of historic German figures and plaques honoring their advancements in science and art. In the same year, German historian, Johann Cristoph von Aretin, prefaced an ancient script he was editing with an essay about Charlemagne and his threat towards the German empire one thousand years beforehand, directly comparing it to the threat of Napoleon against the Germans. Aretin created a trend, and soon other scholars were using texts to boost German morale. Four years after Aretin the scholar Friedrich Heinrich von der Hagen, a German philologist, modernized a German text, the \textit{Nibelungenlied}, translated as \textit{The Song of the Nibelungs}, which opened many doors for medieval German scholarship as its age and influence once again solidified the German belief that their historical language and long-lasting culture provided enough evidence for them to become an independent country\textsuperscript{13}.

**Epics, Philology, and National Agendas**

The \textit{Nibelungenlied} was an epic written in Middle High German that tells the story of Siegfried, who slays a dragon. Slaying the dragon protects him from death except for one spot on his neck, which is left vulnerable. He also receives the dragon’s hoard. He eventually battles other men for a woman’s hand at marriage, overtakes a kingdom, and partakes in various other adventures until he is murdered by Hagan, who slaughters him.

\textsuperscript{12} At the time of construction, the Walhalla was built in Austria, but it’s location is now modern Bavaria, Germany.

\textsuperscript{13} NTE, p. 121.
by hitting his vulnerable spot and then steals the hoard of treasure from Siegfried’s wife, Kriemhild. Kriemhild seeks revenge and eventually marrys King Etzel of the Huns.\textsuperscript{14}

The Hun army fights the Burgundians, slaughtering everyone except Siegfried’s murderer and another man, as Kriemhild wants him to tell her what he has done with her treasure. When he refuses, she cuts off his head. Shamed by her actions and the deaths of so many men, the mentor Hildebrand kills Kriemhild and the epic ends.\textsuperscript{15}

Siegfried was regarded as a German hero for his bravery, strength, and sacrifices, and because the \textit{Nibelungenlied} could be traced back with some historical accuracy, its age made it a piece of literary evidence that the Germans had a heroic cultural presence going back as far as the 13th century.\textsuperscript{16} German scholars would eventually try to seek out the same type of historical evidence in \textit{Beowulf}, as it was an even older poem with the potential to possibly prove land-right for the Germans as well as ancient ancestry.\textsuperscript{17}

It was around this time that Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm started working on the development of philology as a discipline and were the first to look at languages in a systematic fashion.\textsuperscript{18} The two brothers viewed culture as if it were a country’s historical record and advocated that their readers should adapt to the historical aspects of texts rather than adapt texts to the modernized world of the reader. In other words, the Grimm brothers’ ideas about the “authenticity” of language were directly linked to the culture that spoke that language, and they wanted scholars working with the older languages to

\textsuperscript{14} ‘Etzel’ is actually Attila the Hun.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Nibelungenlied} summary pieced together based on information from Professor Drout, a brief summary in NTE p. 168, and parts from Stephen O. Gloseki \textit{Myth in Early Northwest Europe}.
\textsuperscript{16} Jere Fleck, \textit{The Adventure Divisions of the “Nibelungenlied”}.
\textsuperscript{17} This information will be explored in a later chapter.
\textsuperscript{18} The Grimm brothers did not appear out of thin air. They were influenced heavily by the philological work of Franz Bopp and Rasmus Rask who also worked on Indo-European languages. While they deserve name-recognition, their timelines do not quite match up with the timeline I am focusing on for the main purpose of my thesis, and therefore I only mention them here.
consider the pieces as a look back in time rather than use the texts in a way that might say something about the present day\textsuperscript{19}. In other words, they believed old poems and stories were ways to look into the past, not a way to analyze the present. Soon afterwards, reconnecting the past to the present through literature became an obsession with German scholarship, as it gave the Germans a way to show the nation had an in-depth and rich cultural history. German scholars started viewing epics such as the \textit{Nibelungenlied} and \textit{Beowulf} as insights into the German culture of the past and linked it directly with their present culture. While the Grimm brothers did not necessarily think the analysis should be compared to the present day, the other German scholars disagreed and used it as evidence to show how little the culture had changed from its ancient roots. Even though their analytical techniques did not catch on, their methodology started a trend, doing for literature what physics later did for the sciences.

The Grimm brothers also uncovered word patterns and sound changes, such as Grimm’s Law, which helped trace languages back to their original form. The more “pure”\textsuperscript{20} language became, the closer it resembled the Germanic tongue as opposed to other Latin or romantic dialects\textsuperscript{21}. In 1822 the second edition of their \textit{Deutsche Grammatik} was published, a 600-page volume detailing the intricacies of German grammar without much analysis written about why their discoveries were important. It seemed the brothers hoped that through their research, somebody would eventually discover what the big picture should actually look like. Even without the proper analysis to go along with the grammar book, the long, dense, and complex methods of philology

\textsuperscript{19} T. A. Shippey, \textit{The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous (TSW)}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{20} I use the word ‘pure’ because the Germans believed that as you went further back into the history of language, you would find an original version that, to them, was ‘pure’ because it had yet to split off into so many other pieces. They thought the original ‘pure’ language was likely closer-sounding to their German language than any other existing language at the time.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{NTE}, p. 150 – 151.
used in *Deutsche Grammatik* resembled a type of science. Without fully taking the time to read or understand the content of the text, German scholars wrongfully viewed the book as if it acted as hard evidence to back up the claims that Germanic languages, which they believed coincided with German culture, existed long before the formation of the Holy Roman Empire.  

This pan-Germanic nationalism continued to spread, encouraged by Herder and Immanuel Kant and then picked up by philological scholarship soon after. Kant supported collective self-determination. A nation based on respecting the rights and equality of others should be given its own sovereignty and political status without outside interference. Any German-speaking people were encouraged to join the movement, including those who spoke Low German, Frisian, and Dutch. The supporters of the movement desired to form a Greater Germany under the rule of the Austrian Empire.

The attempt at forming a Greater Germany was soon destroyed by a conflict between two Danish Dithmarschen, Schleswig and Holstein. The conflict created a gap between the Danes and the Germans that would not only stop the formation of a Greater Germany but also heavily affect the literary scholarship taking place at the time. The region of Schleswig was part of the Danish monarchy which would eventually crumble during the European Revolutions of 1848. The monarchy also owned Holstein, which was populated mostly by people who identified as German rather than Danes. The Germans in Holstein revolted against the movement from Schleswig keep both Schleswig and Holstein entirely under Denmark’s rule, because the German Holsteiners wanted both

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22 TSW, 24.
23 But this should not be confused with the Greater Germany of World War I and II, which also wanted to unite all Low German, Frisian, and Dutch speaking nations under the same leadership but annexed Austria entirely.
Holstein and Schleswig to be a part of the pan-Germanic movements taking place elsewhere. The conflict resulted in brief battles, and with most victories won by Denmark a treaty was created, and the Germans quietly gave up\textsuperscript{24}.

The conflict created a rivalry between the German states of Prussia, due to conflicting views about whether the Danes or the Germans were in the right, and Austria formed soon after this, causing the proponents of a German parliament to advocate for “Small Germany” which would rid the country of Austria (which had been previously included in the creation of Greater Germany). The crown of “Small Germany” was offered to the King of Prussia, but he turned it down. Like Greater Germany, the efforts to create a “Small Germany” temporarily ended after the King’s refusal to lead the new nation, but German desire for sovereignty remained strong, and European relationships remained tense.

While turmoil continued to exist for the self-identifying Germans, the Grimm brothers were studying additional language patterns and literary developments, contributing to the nationalist movements. They uncovered certain formulas of literary mythology, which German scholarship quickly picked up and used as representative of its identity. Like the development of the country itself, these myths were formed in fragments that, when brought together, made a collection of something very “German”\textsuperscript{25} and also very old. The myths were translated and edited in Grimm’s \textit{Teutonic Mythology} and were meant to be read by fellow Germans to help them develop an understanding for the innately "German” things that the myths represented, although exactly what those

\textsuperscript{24} Lawrence C. Jennings, \textit{French Diplomacy and the First Schleswig-Holstein Crisis}.
\textsuperscript{25} The fact is, the myths were only ‘German’ because the Germans wanted something to be ‘German’. It was an attempt to label themselves and because these myths had a historical backing; they were the perfect tool.
“German” things were is as unclear today as it was to the scholars when the book was published, leaving most of the analysis of the term up for debate\textsuperscript{26}. The idea was to incorporate the mythology that most represented what it meant to be German into the educational systems in the 1800s to keep the general public from falling victim to Napoleon's propaganda\textsuperscript{27}.

The most important mythological figure was Siegfried from the \textit{Nibelungenlied}, who became a symbolic representative of the perfect German hero; however similar importance was later placed on Beowulf in his self-titled epic, as \textit{Beowulf} proved to be even older than the \textit{Nibelungenlied} and therefore, if proven to be a part of German history, it would make their identity even older, as well as grant potential land rights.

Dating all the way back to 1230, the \textit{Nibelungenlied} was a Middle High German text discovered in 1755 by Jakob Oberreit and Johann Bodmer. The poem was found in separate pieces, each with varying styles and content. But the fragments of the poem fit well together thematically, as they all followed the journey of the same main character, Siegfried. The pieces were assembled to make a complete cohesive story about the dragon slayer, his murder, and the revenge of his wife. The unique construction of the text introduced medieval scholarship to the idea of Liedertheorie.

Liedertheorie, or “song theory”, was the theory that a large poem is made up of multiple different poems or lays blended together to create a cohesive story. German literary scholars flocked to the \textit{Nibelungenlied} and attempted to recover the different lays hidden within its 32 fragments. The manuscript ignited an intellectual German culture that assisted in the development of the country as it proved to the rest of the world that

\textsuperscript{26} NTE, 180.
\textsuperscript{27} Christina Lee, \textit{Children of Darkness in Myth in Early Northwest Europe}, p. 282-283.
German literature was complex and deserving of analysis. Where playhouses and dramas attracted a type of popular culture and brought together the lesser-educated Germans, the intellectually stimulating *Nibelungenlied* attracted a higher class of Germans and brought the nation a form of respect as it marked them as a people of class and scholarship along with the longevity of their culture. They felt that the existence of their epic made them as intellectually important as the Ancient Greeks and Romans, and a history reminiscent of such quality empires caused other non-German scholars to start taking German literature seriously. In fact, it became so popular among European scholars in general that it was not a biased German scholar attempting to put Germany up on a high horse but a Swiss professor, Johann Muller, who quite innocently compared the poem to Homeric poetry. Such a compliment to Germany made them feel even more superior and deserving of their own nation.

Beowulf, the German hero?

However, even older than the *Nibelungenlied* was *Beowulf*, which at the time was a geographically unclaimed and mysterious poem that the Germans wanted to prove belonged to them, as it would not only lengthen their cultural timeline but would also potentially prove a closer relationship between Germans and Danes, possibly giving the Germans a claim to some European land. With the popularity of Hegel’s philosophies about oral history proving to be just as important as history that has been written down,

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the Germans started to view the Middle Ages as a period of freedom, strength, and virtuosity\textsuperscript{29}, exactly the qualities that the Germans wanted for their nation. Claiming their ancestry in a text like \textit{Beowulf} seemed to them to be undeniable evidence for a unified German nation, since it would show that their people had been culturally distinct and “German” since the early 800s.

Of course, \textit{Beowulf} was written in Old English, not Middle High German like the \textit{Nibelungenlied}, nor in Old High German, which appeared to mean it belonged to the English instead of the Germans. Back in 1777 Johann Gottfried Herder wrote an essay \textit{Von der Ähnlichkeit der mittleren englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst} [“On the Similarity of Middle English and German Poetry”], in which he speculated that medieval English really lead to German literature since the Anglo-Saxons were originally German and brought the culture with them to their new country. He also claimed that the Danes were Northern Germans who preserved pieces of traditional Germanic songs after much of the literature, along with the literary traditions, were destroyed by Charlemagne\textsuperscript{30}. As one of the leading German philosophers with an extremely high level of influence, Herder’s ideas made \textit{Beowulf} look like the perfect piece of German literature. If the Germans could lay claim to it, they would have evidence that their culture was extremely old, and the longer their culture had persisted, the purer it looked compared to other countries who might have existed independently as nations for much longer but had gone through different shifts in values, beliefs, and ideologies.

What held the Germans together was the fact that they were all Germans, and being a German meant the same thing a hundred years before as it did in the middle of

\textsuperscript{29} Lee, \textit{Myth in Early Northwest Europe}, p. 290.

\textsuperscript{30} Cedric Dover, \textit{The Racial Philosophy of Johann Herder}. 
the 19th century. While they currently did not have any claim to specific bodies of land, showing that older medieval texts were more German than any other type of European culture would have potentially given them a historical right to the areas where these manuscripts were written. Literary scholarship was therefore extremely important to German nationalism, as it represented the thread that held everything together. Their culture and history was based on the existence of historical German literature and German languages, and through this literature they were able to pick out the types of values and norms, in terms of the thematic representation of repetitive characteristics that often reoccurred in the poems and prose, which they used to build an image of an “ideal German”. They were able to use characteristics and themes from the literature because people like the Grimm brothers and other literary scholars pushed the idea that mythologies were examples of cultural beliefs captured within a fictional text. The texts were therefore used as a way for the Germans to look back at themselves, although, as will be noted in a later chapter, there certainly seems to be a lot of bias in exactly what it was they viewed when reading through their manuscripts.

A brief look at German history clarifies why they were so attracted to literature like Beowulf. With its age and its arguably heroic themes, proving that the poem came from some Germanic region would solidify their claim that they deserved to become an independent country. Not only would it give Germany an older timeline as a culture, but German scholars felt it would also prove their purity as the nation had not changed much from its ancient roots, a trait that would later come back to haunt them in the 20th century with the onset of World Wars I and II when their obsession with purity would result in the Holocaust. However, when their only real chance at freedom was proving to the rest

31 NTE, p. 181 – 182.
of Europe that they had not changed in hundreds of years, despite being fragmented all 
over the continent, one has to wonder if it is surprising that they were still not ready to 
change when they actually got what they sought and became a nation in 1871.
Chapter Two: Biased Medieval Scholars, a.k.a. Give Mullenhoff a Break

Still Biased even Before Liedertheorie

The rocky history of Germany and its formation as a nation happened to coincide with a rebirth of interest in medieval literature, which actually began with a somewhat untalented Danish scholar who befriended the right people during his time as the Danish National Archivist. Their friendship eventually gave him the opportunity to translate an old, untouched medieval manuscript that nobody had looked at for centuries.

The scholar was Grimur Jonsson Thorkelin, and the manuscript was *Beowulf*, but like everything else in 18th century Europe, the resurgence of medieval scholarship was complicated by political and national biases. There were two outside forces pushing Thorkelin into reading *Beowulf* the way he wanted it to be read when he started his translating. The first was his original purpose for a trip to England that he independently took before he was given access to the manuscript. In England he wanted to find signs of communication between the Danes and the English specifically within medieval documents. *Beowulf*, being about a Danish empire and written in Old English, was his ideal text as he could use it to prove that the two nations interacted with one another. Secondly, he was commissioned by the Danish government to translate the *Beowulf* manuscript into Latin. With his own personal agenda and the encouragement from the Danish government, he desired to read enough into the text to prove its origins were actually Danish and not English. It seems as if Thorkelin saw what he wanted to see in the manuscript more so than actually analyzing the poem. He was quick to state that

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32 BCH, 91 – 97.
"Beowulf" was indeed a Danish poem written for a Danish audience despite being written in old English. His analysis of the poem was as unfinished and lacking in historical evidence as his actual translation, which was riddled with errors most likely due to his lack of knowledge of the Old English language\footnote{Shippey The Shadow Walkers, but the section itself footnotes Kevin Kiernan, The Thorkelin Transcripts of Beowulf.}. His misreading of the poem and likely his desire to prove his own point led him to think that the author was an eyewitness to the events that took place in the poem, which would also conveniently place a historically English-speaking person directly in contact with Danish warriors while also proving that the poem belonged not to the English but to the Danes. Right from the start, "Beowulf" was treated as a piece of propaganda rather than purely as a piece of literature.

Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately, for Thorkelin, he claimed to have lost almost twenty years of research, notes, and work he put towards translating "Beowulf" in 1807 during a fire caused by the Battle of Copenhagen. He did, however, manage to save two transcripts of the poem he and British Museum employee James Matthews transcribed at the beginning of the process. The fire allowed him to start his work over and finally publish the finished Latin translation in 1815\footnote{The Shadow Walkers, 4 – 6.}. Some scholars believe that Thorkelin lied about his translations being destroyed during the fire, however, and speculate that he simply had not done the work due to his incompetence.

Because of this uncertainty among his colleagues, it did not take long for critics to point out the obvious flaws in Thorkelin’s translation. N. F. S. Grundtvig, a Danish philologist, called him out for his careless errors and quick-to-judge analyses. Grundtvig, an extremely skilled philologist, was able to correct Thorkelin’s version of the poem without ever actually seeing the original manuscript. He was able to catch grammatical
errors in Thorkelin’s sentence structure as well as incomprehensible word-choice based upon his much higher knowledge of language and formulaic structures. Grundtvig’s corrections caused a stir among medieval scholars and fellow-philologists, and soon after, Johan Bulow, the government official who also happened to sponsor Thorkelin when he started his translation, offered to sponsor Grundtvig if he would translate the poem into Danish. Grundtvig was able to publish his Danish version of the poem in 1817, only two years after Thorkelin’s publication. This was the first time *Beowulf* was translated into a modern language.

While criticism can be aimed at Thorkelin, he certainly deserves credit for one thing: he brought *Beowulf* out of the shadows and into the public sphere. Medieval scholarship tends to go through waves of popularity. While some centuries the time-period seems to completely fall off the educational map, other times the field once again enters the limelight. Perhaps the Napoleonic wars, which the Danes managed to stay out of until 1807 (although not without sacrificing much of their navy after the British attacked Copenhagen in 1801), inspired Thorkelin’s desire to find historical connections between the British and the Danes, which could have provided historical reasons why the Danes and the English should act as natural allies. Whatever the reason, it marked *Beowulf* as a nationally important text, one that Germany would soon try to claim as well.

When the Danes entered the war, some of them decided to fight with the French against the German rebellion that was led by Ferdinand von Schill, resulting in two conflicts that added to the tension. The first was between the Danes who thought of themselves as true Germans and the Danes who thought of themselves as completely

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35 BCH 108 – 112.
36 Shippey, in the introduction of *The Shadow Walkers*, credits Thorkelin for bringing the poem back into the public sphere after a 700-year absence.
Danish. The full Danes did not want to lose their land to a new German nation, whereas the self-identifying Germans wanted to prove that they deserved ownership of land. The second was between the Danes who fought for the French and the Germans who already felt a deep hatred for the French. Because of their disdain for the French aristocracy, German-Danish relations became even more complicated, and soon the Germans no longer considered Denmark to be a potential German nation because they felt the Danes were acting like traitors by choosing to fight for the French during the war. With such high national tensions between the Germans and the Danes, it is no wonder that the German scholars jumped on the medieval bandwagon and did all they could to prove that they held some sort of claim on the old Beowulf manuscript, as it meant they were taking something away from the Danes.

Everyone Wants Beowulf

Ludwig Ettmuller was one of the first German scholars to try to analyze Beowulf. He dated the poem in the 8th century, but, unlike Thorkelin and Grundtvig, he called the poem simply Scandinavian, which took the credit away from the Danes and the English and broadened it to allow the Germans to potentially take some credit for the poem. Ettmuller in 1840 wrote an introduction to the first German translation of Beowulf, in which he compared Beowulf to the great German hero Siegfried and maintained that much of the poem matched the structure of German folk-poetry. In particular, he claimed

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37 BCH, p. 231 – 234.
that Beowulf in his youth was disliked, just as Siegfried was, because he was misunderstood, and others were jealous of his qualities. Such a youth, according to Ettmüller, is a sign of being a true German hero. He also notes the similar deaths between Siegfried and Beowulf, both of which was a result of fighting a “wyrm” or dragon (Siegfried was unprotected by the magical dragon blood in one spot, where he was eventually hit and killed; Beowulf was bitten by a dragon, and the poison killed him).

Perhaps more important than Ettmüller’s comparison of Beowulf and Siegfried, however, is how he marked off certain interpolations in Beowulf to show which passages he believed were later additions to the manuscript. Ettmüller was applying Liedertheorie, a German literary convention, to Beowulf: “I assert that the Beowulf-poem originally consisted of separate poems which were united into a whole,” (BCH 234), arguing that the poem was written by multiple poets and that the additional later parts of it could be easily recognized because they contained Christian interpolations. The Danes in the poem were referred to by the narrator as pagans and they practiced pagan rituals, yet the narrator occasionally added Christian allusions to the poem, such as the mention of Cain when Grendel is first introduced at lines 102 - 114. Ettmüller decided that such interpolations were likely added later on when most of Europe had converted to Christianity, but Ettmüller maintained that, despite the similarities in composition and structure between Beowulf and the Nibelungenlied, no obvious connections between the Anglo-Saxon language and Germanic tribes existed that could compel him to call the poem strictly German. However, Karl Mullenhoff was determined to prove him wrong.

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38 BCH, 233.

39 Mullenhoff would soon discredit Ettmüller by claiming he relied too much on ‘scribal errors’ when analyzing the Beowulf poem. Ettmüller in 1847 published a response article that finally conceded that Beowulf is the oldest Germanic poem and that the Christian influences are likely English because it is the
Introducing Grendel… ahem, I Mean Karl Mullenhoff

Mullenhoff was born in 1818, lived until 1884, and completely took over *Beowulf* scholarship and German medieval scholarship in general throughout his entire professional life. He evoked fear in his fellow medievalists and was known to be bull-headed, unwavering, and more often than not downright mean. In fact, Shippey, in *Beowulf: Critical Heritage*, suggests that “Mullenhoff has appeared as the Grendel of Beowulf scholarship, and the reputation is not undeserved” (Shippey 38). He apparently tore the work of other devoted medieval scholars to shreds, making many enemies who were too afraid to admit they did not like him until after he had died. He even had an intimidating German beard:

narrator who is responsible for most of the Christian interpolations, which Ettmuller believed showed a connection between the English and the Germans.
His disposition may have caused many scholars to fearfully follow his every word for about fifty years’ worth of Beowulf studies, but after his death in 1884, he was dismissed by his successors as too biased, and his work was left behind until R. W. Chambers encouraged his colleagues in 1911 to once again consider what Mullenhoff had done for Beowulf:

My reverence for Mullenhoff is not a superstitious one. But it is time to protest against the undue depreciation of that great scholar, which has of late been prevalent in England and America. This depreciation is often not according to knowledge: indeed, we find later students, even the most scholarly, either ignorant of facts which were perfectly familiar to Kemble and Mullenhoff, or else hailing such facts as new discoveries (Chambers, viii).

Chamber’s defense of Mullenhoff is one I also want to support, as new evidence shows that despite its flaws, Mullenhoff’s work is extremely useful, especially since modern advancements like the Lexomics program indicate that Beowulf may not be as cohesive as originally thought40.

Mullenhoff, despite following in the footsteps of Ettmuller, is known as the father of Liedertheorie, which he used to analyze Beowulf only a few years after the German author, von C. W. M. Grein, called Beowulf a single unified poem in 1862. Mullenhoff’s version of Liedertheorie was much more direct and pronounced than Ettmuller’s, as he originally thought the poem was made up of four different lays inspired by fairy tales

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40 The lexomics method will be discussed in its entirety in the next chapter. Beforehand, however, the reader should get a full understanding of Mullenhoff’s work, his life, and the reason why some scholars decided to disregard him. I am not faulting anyone for ignoring Mullenhoff, rather I am encouraging people to now look upon his work more fairly to give the man credit where credit is due.
originating from a duchy called Marne in Holstein, which also happened to be where Mullenhoff grew up\textsuperscript{41}. Like Thorkelin, it appears he may have been trying to force \textit{Beowulf} to fit his literary theory rather than shaping his theory to fit the \textit{Beowulf} poem.

The political issues taking place in Holstein during Mullenhoff’s peak years of scholarship were enough to cause anyone to experience a nationalist identity crisis. He identified as a true German and sought to make Holstein and Schleswig each a part of an independent Germany, despite the conflicting desires from the Danes in the area. He therefore tried to find parallels between the old folk tales that came from his obscure duchy, Marne in Holstein, and the monster plot-line in \textit{Beowulf}\textsuperscript{42}. Because he was caught directly in the middle of the Schleswig-Holstein conflict, and the Danes and Germans were fighting over what country their dithmarschen should pledge allegiance to, Mullenhoff tried to use \textit{Beowulf} to prove the Holsteiners were historically German.

One might wonder how \textit{Beowulf} fits into this conflict, and the answer comes in three parts. First and most simply, it is old, and the age would prove a long historical presence for whoever could claim it as their own. Secondly, it includes the Danes. If Mullenhoff or other German scholars could prove that \textit{Beowulf} was actually a German text than they would be able to prove that the Danes were either themselves truly German, or they could prove that the Germans were at least as old as the Danes, making an argument for keeping Holstein from being forced under Danish rule. The third and most complicated reason is because of land. The goal was not only to prove that the text was of German origin but also to find the exact location of the Danes in the poem to compare to modern land-distribution. If Mullenhoff could place the events in the poem on Holstein

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotemark[41] BCH, Shippey Introduction p. 40, eventually Mullenhoff would discover a few more lays, bringing his total up to six.
\footnotemark[42] BCH, Shippey Introduction p. 38.
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soil, then Holstein could be nothing but German territory.

Because of Mullenhoff’s political agenda, his scholarship is also focused on pushing forward his nationalist ideologies, even at the cost of ignoring any evidence that contradict his purposes. Some earlier examples of bias can be spotted in his work co-written alongside Gregor Wilhelm Nitzsch, *Nordalbinggische Studien*, where he attempted to compare the *Beowulf* text both with real places and with fairy tales that existed in or around his small town in the Holstein ditmarsch. Like many scholars from the time period, Mullenhoff believed *Beowulf* was a historical account of true events and that the narrator was an eyewitness to the action due in no small part to the *Widsith* poem found in the *Exeter* book. That poem, comprised of 144 lines, appears to be broken into three sections. The first section covers the renowned kings of the time period and their historical significance, the second section is the names of people whom the narrator supposedly visited with, and the third section lists mythical heroes and their legends. In “the history of the kings” section, Hrothgar and Hrothulf are mentioned on line 84 including an allusion to Heorot.

*Widsith*, although it makes no mention of the character of Beowulf, talks about a battle that took place between the Danes and the Heathobards, presumably the same

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41 BCH, 254-255.
43 Widsith, R. W. Chambers, 189 – 244.
44 Widsith, 205, line 84.
battle which Beowulf, upon returning home to Geatland after defeating both Grendel and
Grendel’s mother, discusses when telling his Uncle Hygelac about the momentary peace
between the Danes and Heathobards. Because *Widsith* appears in *The Exeter Book*,
there seems to be an odd similarity between two medieval texts that otherwise are in no
way connected. Foreshadowing that event, in *Beowulf* therefore makes it appear as if the
characters were widely known beyond what we have in written texts, hence why they
appear in two disconnected places. Beowulf’s brief foreshadowing of the battle is, as
William Paton Ker explains in his book *Dark Ages*, the perfect example of how the poem
“puts the irrelevances in the centre and the serious things on the outer edge” (*Widsith* 79).
In other words, odd side stories that do not fit in with the overall monster-plot involving
Beowulf and his fights with Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon are treated with
enough attention in the poem to make it appear as if it is a part of the main plot when in
reality it is just an interpolation or an addition that does not change the actual events of
Beowulf’s story. The poem’s tendency to treat outside events in such a way causes R. W.
Chambers to question if Beowulf’s comments about the son of the King of the
Heathobards, Ingeld, are perhaps taken from an Ingeld lay, which was also what
Mullenhoff believed and discussed in his article *Beovulf*.

Similarly, two characters in *Beowulf*, Hrothgar and Hrothulf, are cousins who
appear elsewhere in the medieval corpus. Mention of the two can be found in the *Saga of
Rolf Kraki*, and although their ancestry is the same, their story in *Beowulf* differs greatly
from the *Saga*, which was written a few decades after the scribes had transcribed the

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47 He is the son of the King of the Heathobards, Froda, who was killed by the Danes. Hrothgar, therefore,
sends his daughter Freawaru to marry Ingeld as a way to end the feud between the Heathobards and the
Danes.
*Beowulf* manuscript. Hrothgar and Hrothulf always seem to be mentioned together alongside foreboding evil and tension (Chambers 83), a thematic similarity that suggests the mention of the two is inspired by an even older traditional story.

Mullenhoff was also aware that the Beow48 mentioned in the opening passage of the poem is not the same character as Beowulf, the protagonist of the poem. He separated the two characters, believing that Beow was a divine hero who is known among some Germanic tribes, including Gothus (Goths), Jutus (Jutes), Suethedus (Suetondion), Dacus (Danish), Wandalus (Wendells), Gethus (whom he suggests with less certainty may be the “Geatus”)49, Fresus (Frisians), and the Saxons and Angles, a list which includes almost every German living on the Baltic and North Sea. Mullenhoff claims the Northern Germanic people were not aware of this heroic Beow but, unfortunately, does not attempt to explain why they may not be aware of someone who is supposedly extremely significant to their history. Rather, he discusses how the name “Beo-wulf” translates to bee-wolf, which means woodpecker50, and because Beowulf’s name could be shortened to Beow, it easily corresponds with the Old High German word “beo”, or “apis”, or “bee”51, which would make him therefore well known, but only among the people who lived in the same peninsula where Mullenhoff grew up since his homeland had many fairy tales involving bees. Unfortunately he thought that the fairy tales were so obviously connected to the poem that he failed to give any more information about this topic,

48 Written as ‘Beowulf’ in the actual manuscript because the A scribe, who knew he was copying a poem about a Beowulf, assumed Beow was a shortened version of the protagonist’s name. But Beow, a Danish king, is not related to the protagonist Beowulf in any way. Editors now use the name Beow to prevent confusion, and I have done the same thing here.

49 From Shippey’s *Beowulf: A Critical Heritage* p. 255.

50 This is incorrect, ‘Beowulf’ actually means ‘bee-wolf’, or honey eater, which refers to bears. Mullenhoff, however, did not know that, he was following Jacob Grimm’s translation of the name which. However modern interpretation of the name “Beowulf” is that it means “bee - wolf” or “bear”.

51 BCH, p. 255.
leaving mostly unanswered questions.

Mullenhoff goes on to connect Beowulf, the poem’s protagonist and son of Ecgtheow, to an area called Scedenige, claiming that “Beowulf son of Ecgtheow was a Geat in Scedenige, where, according to the old myth Beowulf the grandson of Sceaf is supposed to have been born” (Shippey BCH 255). Some place called “Scedeland” is mentioned in Beowulf in line 19a, however Mullenhoff is only assuming that it is an older spelling of Scedenige and he does not mention any philological evidence supporting why there would be such a change in the spelling and pronunciation of the location. Regardless, he firmly stands by his belief that Scedenige is where Beowulf was born because Scedenige is located in his ditmarsch. Mullenhoff connects other names from the poem with traditional tales told in his homeland, including Grendel, whom he claims is like the Old High German word “Krintil”, which means the devil’s hell-bolt. He also references Eiderstedt, another region in Eastern Holstein near his hometown, as a place where the “Grendel Myth” still existed even in the 1840s. The myth, he argues, changed Grendel to a devil creature that continually harasses a town and lives in a home so dangerous no man can get to it. The modern myths also featured a hero who defeats the monster, although sometimes the hero was actually a priest instead of a warrior, but the monster always comes back to try once again to enter the town in hopes of one day successfully escaping his dangerous home. Mullenhoff believes this modernized “Grendel Myth” is a metaphor for the floods that swept through the ditmarsch, which is a large swampy area and therefore prone to flooding.

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52 BCH, p. 251 – 253.  
53 BCH, p. 255.  
54 BCH, p. 256.
Mullenhoff expands his analysis of the myth and suggests that perhaps Grendel represented the same type of danger for the Geats as the floods did for the population of the ditmarsch. In 1849 he took the flood-symbolism a step further in an article called *Sceif und seine Nachkommen* where he argues that the entire poem is a mythical allegory based on Scyld Scefing\(^{55}\). In the poem, Scyld Scefing is a Danish king mentioned at the beginning of the poem who, upon his death, is laid in a boat and pushed out to sea. The “Scefing” part of his name was translated by Mullenhoff to mean Scyld who was the son of Sceaf.

Stories of Sceaf exist entirely separate from *Beowulf*, in both *Widsith* and *The Anglo Saxon Chronicle*. The stories say Sceaf mysteriously appeared in a boat as a child. In *Widsith*, at line 32, he is presented as “Sceafa Longbearda” or king of the Lombards. Mullenhoff had read in the 855\(^{th}\) year of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* that Scef, whom he thought was Sceaf, was born on Noah’s ark, making him a son of Noah. He read the reference to Noah as an allusion to flooding and cultivation because of both the Bible story of Noah’s flood and because *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* also connects Noah’s ancestors directly to Woden, one of the Anglo-Saxon and Old Germanic deities:

If now the myth says that he landed helpless, as a newborn boy, sleeping on a sheaf in a rudderless ship, surrounded by weapons, to be taken up by the inhabitants of the land as a miracle, named, brought up and in the end chosen as king, then it is undeniable that we are confronting here a myth of the beginning and introduction of old German culture (Mullenhoff, BCH 280 – 281).

Based on the ability for Mullenhoff to allegorize Sheaf as the floods that harmed his ditmarsch, he had convinced himself that Sheaf was one of the original German heroes.

\(^{55}\) BCH, p. 280.
He therefore thought the inclusion of Sheaf in *Beowulf* had to prove that there were German influences and argued that because Sheaf could be related to Woden, he is the mark of the origin of old German culture. Of course Woden is one of the most referenced deities from the pre-Christian medieval period and connects to poems written in Old English, Old Norse, and Old High German.

Mullenhoff is adamant that Sheaf is German because some versions of his story have him landing in a place called Scani. In particular he used Aethelweard’s *Chronica*, which is the only text to say that Scani is a small oceanic island. Mullenhoff believed Scani was one of the islands belonging to Holstein, which would mean Sceaf landed in Mullenhoff’s own homeland. He cited a Latin genealogy done by Kemble as evidence proving that Scani could be an island off of Holstein (however, he ignored nine other possible origins of name also suggested by Kemble because he claimed they were not popular enough types of origins). Here we see the irony of Mullenhoff, a man who so strictly demanded that his fellow scholars follow methodical analysis and only use hard evidence to support their theories, wanting the evidence to prove he was right about his ditmarsch being historically important so badly that he was willing to use evidence he gathered in the wrong way. He constantly tries to connect *Beowulf* back to his homeland, and every new analysis he argues for seems to introduce another under-explained link between *Beowulf* and his ditmarsch. Unfortunately, none of the evidence he provided was all too convincing to his colleagues and instead his hypocritical expectations of others generated a large amount of disdain for the man. The disdain would eventually cause Mullenhoff, after his death, to be thought of as both unreasonably mean and stuck on ridiculous theories.

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56 *BCH*, p. 280 – 283.
Mullenhoff Sort of Gets It

While most scholars are rightfully unconvinced that the monster trope and the inclusion of Sheaf originated in Holstein as Mullenhoff so badly wanted people to believe, he was starting to form an interpretation of a fragmented *Beowulf*, and this form of analysis deserves closer attention. Mullenhoff has already separated out the monster fights as their own separate lay, and he found what he considered to be strange interpolations in the poem, such as inconsistent Christian imagery used in reference to the pagan Danes, or supposed structural changes in writing. He uses those inconsistencies to show that there are separate poems, or lays, that can be found within *Beowulf*. In 1868, with audacious confidence, Mullenhoff wrote to his protégé Wilhelm Scherer that he has “completely come into the clear” with *Beowulf* and needs only a few weeks to “finish off the whole investigation of it”\(^{57}\). Oddly enough, in his letter to Scherer featuring the different lays in *Beowulf* he does not go into any detail about why he decided to break up the poem in the places he wrote about, but instead assumed that Scherer would be able to figure it out for himself\(^{58}\). It wasn’t until 1869 when Mullenhoff published *Die Innere Geschichte des Beovulfs*, his most influential work, that he finally talked about his method for finding lays in the poem.

He believed that *Beowulf* was comprised of six lays, which included the introduction, the first original old lay, the first continuation, a second continuation written by the A poet, the second original old lay, and then interpolations throughout that were made by both the A poet responsible for the second continuation and also a B poet. His

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\(^{57}\) BCH, p. 353.  
\(^{58}\) BCH, p. 344.
breakdown, by line, looked as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Lines</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>193, -67 B 126,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Old Lay</td>
<td>634, -32 A, -121 B 490</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Continuation</td>
<td>729, -194 A, -265 B 333,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Continuation (A poet)</td>
<td>571, -172 B 399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Old Lay</td>
<td>984, -544 B 440 lines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mullenhoff is showing that out of 193 lines in the Introduction, 67 of them have been denoted interpolations by the B poet, leaving 126 lines left of the original “old lay”. To an extent, the same logic is used for the rest of the lays, however his view of how the two continuations were constructed is a bit confusing because he changes the boundaries of the first old lay in the middle of his article which also changes the boundaries of the first continuation. The boundaries above do not include the fight with Grendel’s mother as part of the first continuation, however that changes as he discusses the ways in which he determined the lays, at which point he suddenly decides the Grendel’s Mother’s fight is a part of the first old lay after all. Because Mullenhoff had a tendency to not fully explain himself, and he often scoffed at the idea of someone asking him to do so as he believed his work was clear enough to speak for itself, I cannot account for all of the inconsistencies in his work. While there are flaws in his methods, he still creates an intensely close-reading of the *Beowulf* text that actually does attempt to follow some forms of logic, even if that logic at times contradicts itself.

It was the first original old lay about the Grendel fight that started the whole arrangement of the poem. Originally, Mullenhoff believed somebody added the fight with Grendel’s mother as a continuation, but he later changed his analysis and claimed both

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59 BCH p. 352.
the Grendel and Grendel’s Mother fight were present in the old lay. Another poet added
the dragon fight, creating the second old lay of the poem. At some point, somebody wrote
the introduction to the poem (lines 1 - 193), although he does not specify how old the
introduction is compared to the rest of the lays until later on. Another poet came through
and created the first continuation within the poem, which featured something Mullenhoff
referred to as A poet “episodes”, although he really means interpolations. Eventually he
credits the second continuation to the A poet, and claims that the B poet added a mini-
continuation onto the A poet’s work not marked in the chart above. At the end of
construction the A and B poet add in the Christian interpolations and other contradictions
throughout the entire poem. By June of 1868 he had all of *Beowulf* and its multiple lays
mapped out. A graph of his findings can be found here\(^{60}\):

\[^{60}\text{BCH, p. 344.}\]
To follow Mullenhoff’s wishes, I marked the A poet with blue and the B poet with red in my chart, as he had encouraged Scherer to do with his copy of *Beowulf*, in order to clearly mark off which sections belonged to whom and to help him recognize which parts of the poem were authentic and which parts were added later on. He argues that the two old lays must have been written at different times and by different authors and believes that the two later poets, A and B, came along and modified everything, including the first continuation. He speculates that the author of the first continuation may also be responsible for writing the introduction, but he later changes his mind and instead connects each section to their own author. It is the A poet, however, who he believes wrote the second continuation, which the B poet modifies. Finally, the B poet has about 300 lines of original work added in towards the end of the poem directly before the last old lay. Mullenhoff believes that it was these six poets whose work was compiled together over an unknown amount of time to create the entire *Beowulf* story as we know it today.

Mullenhoff’s method for distinguishing if the A or B poet added the interpolations is, admittedly, unclear as he never actually explains his choices. It often appears as if he is somewhat arbitrarily choosing a poet to blame for the mistakes he finds in the story. However, a closer look at the A poet sections versus the B poet sections show that he believes the B poet is the worse of the two interpolators. For example, every mention of anything Christian, meaning God, fate, and even hell are credited to the B poet; these are known as Christian interpolations. Mullenhoff marks lines 12 - 25 in the introduction as a B poet interpolation because the word “God” is used twice even though the Danes are supposedly pagan. He was particularly bothered by anything somewhat Christian-
sounding in the poem because it was such an easy contradiction to avoid. He blames the inconsistencies on the B poet because the B poet was the last person to add to the poem and would have likely lived at a time when the Christian conversion had taken over more fully than the rest of the Beowulf poets. Also, none of the Christian elements actually appeared to be necessary to the plot, causing Mullenhoff to believe it therefore is dispensable and in no way original to the poem.

Looking closer at the A poet’s interpolations also provides more clarity as to how Mullenhoff chose between marking something as belonging to the A or B poet. The A poet originally appears in an interpolation in the first old lay at line 612. The A poet adds in a piece about Wealtheow, the Queen of the Danes. According to Mullenhoff, Wealtheow does not appear in the original old lay, she is only in Beowulf because the A poet writes her into the story. The A poet often adds in scenes that incorporate more about Hrothgar’s family, including not just his wife but also his two young sons and a nephew that Wealtheow talks about to Beowulf at one point in the text. Mullenhoff believes she cannot be a part of the original old lay because of an inconsistency that takes place both times she is present in the hall. Wealtheow passes a cup around to the Geatish warriors as they feast in the hall on two separate occasions, the first being the feast before the Grendel fight around lines 612 - 664, and the second being the night after the Grendel fight around lines 1167 - 1190. Both evenings, however, King Hrothgar leaves the hall by claiming he is going to “seek his wife” and go to bed, as if she had not been present. However, both times Wealtheow was in the hall passing the mead cup to the warriors or, as is the case at line 1167, she was actually speaking directly with Beowulf. According to Mullenhoff the contradiction shows that a new poet must have added some type of
Wealtheow interpolation causing the contradiction, likely by accident. He also believes that the Wealtheow interpolations are written with notably lower poetic-quality than the previous “original” sections of the poem. Because the Wealtheow interpolations make no mention of a Christian God, Mullenhoff credits these sections to the A poet.

Mullenhoff also gives credit to the A poet for any mention of Wealtheow because there are times when the B poet actually interrupts the A poet’s work. One of the A poet’s Wealtheow interpolations comes directly after the battle with Grendel, and Mullenhoff believes the B poet adds to it the puzzling Finnsburg episode. The Finnsburg episode is a story told by a minstrel after Beowulf defeats Grendel. It describes a battle between the Danes and the Frisians who had attempted to remain peaceful by having the sister of the Danish king marry the Frisian prince, however the peace is broken and the Frisians are slaughtered. Mullenhoff uses a couple indications to show that the Finnsburg episode is written by the B poet and not the A poet, the first being the fact that the entire episode can be taken out of the A poet’s interpolation and it does not subtract from rhyme scheme and meter of the text. At line 1063 the A poet uses the word *sweg* or “song”, then the B poet adds his interpolation that includes the minstrel telling the entirety of the Finnsburg episode. After that ends, the word *benchsweg*, or “bench melody” is used at line 1161, directly after the minstrel has finished his tale but also right before Wealhtheow gives her speech in the hall\(^6\). The fact that Mullenhoff already thought he was reading an interpolation when he came upon the sections with Wealhtheow, only to be interrupted again by something that also seemed to be an interpolation, the Finnsburg episode, he believed that that mark of the A poet was anything regarding Hrothgar’s family, and the mark of the B poet was anything Christian, unclear, and poorly written.

\(^6\) BCH, p. 351.
The Finnsburg episode that interrupts the A poet’s interpolation is known for its obscurities, which Mullenhoff blames on the B poet’s “meagre skills”. For example, whoever wrote the Finnsburg episode randomly called the Frisians ‘eotenas’, or giants\(^\text{62}\), but the Frisians were regular warriors, not mythical beasts. He thinks the misused word was likely due to the B poet’s lack of knowledge about the lineage of the Frisians. Since Mullenhoff believed the B poet was extremely unskilled, he blamed the poor word-choice on him. While his logic was imperfect, Mullenhoff did have a method he followed when determining which poet was responsible for the different inconsistencies and contradictions he spotted in the text. He took what looked like haphazard errors and found a pattern within them, making sense of parts of *Beowulf* that up to that point nobody was able to understand.

It should be noted that his method for finding lays was not always impartial. Originally Mullenhoff’s first old lay ended directly after Grendel is defeated, and he thought the Grendel’s Mother fight was a continuation written by another distinct poet, although he does not including any evidence as to why he believed the Grendel fight and Grendel’s Mother fight were separate lays. But later in the article he changed his mind and claimed that the Grendel’s Mother fight was also a part of the first old lay. Mullenhoff believed that the Grendelkin fights in the poem had the same origin as the folk tales from Marne, Holstein, his homeland. By including both of the Grendelkin fights in the first old lay, the lay’s plot matched the plots of the folk tales better, as often the monster attacking the towns from the folk tales came back after the hero and the town assumed it had been defeated. He also believed the minstrel’s song, which appears around line 846 and includes a mention of Siegfried, was written by the B poet and he did

\(^{62}\) BCH 351.
not believe it was part of the first old lay. Siegfried is the protagonist of the German epic, the *Nibelungenlied*, which was published about a century after the *Beowulf* manuscript was transcribed. He kept the Grendelkin story as an original part of the lay and excused the Siegfried reference as a later addition to the poem to both maintain the German heritage of the story but to also make sure the stories from his ditmarsch remained older and more important to the poem.

Similarly, Mullenhoff decided the first old lay must be older than the second old lay, which includes everything from the dragon fights up through Beowulf’s funeral and only has interpolations from the B poet. Mullenhoff believed that a story about Beowulf fighting a dragon existed long before the A or B poets came along and originally, he also thought the dragon fight existed before the fight with Grendel’s mother. However, once he rearranged his lays so that the Grendel’s Mother fight was also included in the first original lay, he determined that it was the Grendelkin fights that are the oldest lay in the construction of *Beowulf*. Ultimately he argues that the Grendelkin fights are the oldest because the protagonist is still young and therefore not yet well-known when it was created. He believed that the second old lay was written by a poet who had been inspired to continue the tale of Beowulf’s life after he heard the Grendelkin story. Determined to make the Holstein folk tales historically important, he was careful to always argue that the Grendelkin fights were in the superior lay.

In *Die Innere Geschichte des Beovulfs*, Mullenhoff also included an alternate version of lays that he thought might exist in the poem. The second version of the text was broken up into five parts that focused specifically on the different Beowulf storylines present in each section:
The Introduction (1 - 193)
I Beowulf’s fight with Grendel (194 - 836)
II Beowulf’s fight with Grendel’s Mother (837 - 1628)
III Beowulf’s return home (1629 - 2199)
IV Beowulf’s fight with the dragon and death (2200 - 3183)

Without focusing on any smaller interpolations by Mullenhoff’s proposed A and B poets, he presented a version of Beowulf that featured five different lays, each of which focused on different story-arch Beowulf experienced (besides the introduction, which Beowulf the Geatish hero is not present in). In section I Beowulf is fighting Grendel, in section II he fights a new monster, Grendel’s mother. In section III Beowulf returns home and retells the story of his fighting to his uncle and king of the Geats, Hygelac. And section IV features the fifty year jump into the future where Beowulf, now a king, fights a dragon.

It appears Mullenhoff wanted to develop his alternative Beowulf lays further, but unfortunately he did not have the chance to do so before his death. Liedertheorie died with him, because his mean nature and unlikeable attitude pushed fellow scholars away, giving them an excuse to ignore the care and detail he put into his Beowulf scholarship once he was gone\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{63} BCH, p. 347.
Almost 200 years later Mullenhoff’s Liedertheorie work still remains relevant to medieval scholarship. Mullenhoff knew that the *Beowulf* manuscript was transcribed by two people, known as the A-scribe and the B-scribe. The A-scribe transcribed the first section of *Beowulf*, up until Beowulf’s journey back to Geatland. The B-scribe transcribed the rest of the poem and then went back and changed some of what the A-scribe worked on. Scholars know there were two different scribes working on the *Beowulf* manuscript because they had very different handwriting, making it easy to see when the A-scribe stopped working and where the B-scribe began. Mullenhoff’s first and second old lays in *Beowulf* coincide with the actual scribal shift in the manuscript which is odd since he made no mention of believing that the A-scribe or B-scribe were responsible for writing any original content in the manuscript. At the very least, matching the two old lays to the scribal shift shows that Mullenhoff was trying to follow some type of pattern in how he was breaking up the poem rather than arbitrarily making decisions, as he seemed to be using the two scribes as indicators as to where the poem naturally separated. It also appears as if he found the scribal confusion as evidence that something in the original text was wrong because when the scribes were confused they often made spelling mistakes. That confusion, he figured, must have been caused by the presence of lays written by new, lesser competent poets. While the execution was flawed, his consideration of the scribes show that Mullenhoff was trying to find in-text, hard

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64 I am referring to the original lays he suggested, not the alternative lays. As mentioned in the text, he died before he could provide more insight into how the alternative lays may be more accurate than his first proposal, therefore I have no account of what his actual motivation were for breaking up *Beowulf* the second time.
evidence from the manuscript itself that supported his belief that *Beowulf* was comprised of different lays.

Mullenhoff’s inclusion of the A and B poets who modify the lays, however, are separate from how the A and B-scribes worked on the manuscript. Rather than look at the actual structure of the manuscript itself, Mullenhoff used strictly textual evidence when he was dedicating different interpolations to the poets. Anytime the story contradicted itself, Mullenhoff marked it as a potential A or B poet interpolation. Again, he is not arbitrarily marking off spots in the poem as lays, but he is using actual evidence within the *Beowulf* text itself to support the places he believed were lays. While Mullenhoff and other scholars during his time period already knew how the manuscript itself was structured, by the A-scribe working on half of the text followed by the B-scribe who finished off the poem and then fixed some of the A-scribe’s work, he attempted to take his analysis a step further by figuring out how the content of *Beowulf* itself was constructed. And while the way he broke up the text into lays originally appears to be senseless, a closer analysis of his work shows that he was following a type of logical structure based not only on scribal evidence but also on textual evidence, including plot contradictions, shifts in tone and story-line, and changes in poetic quality. His analysis of his work may have been biased, however, his method still depended on gathering legitimate evidence from the text itself.

Mullenhoff’s application of Liedertheorie caused him to ask relevant questions about the inconsistencies and vagueness of the poem that no other scholar dared ask. He wondered why there was a Danish warrior who would later become king also named Beowulf, like the Geatish protagonist, but that no mention of the coincidence was made.
by Hrothgar or any of the Danish warriors. Similarly, he questioned why all of Hrothgar’s brothers are named in the poem but his sister, who is alluded to in the text, remains nameless. He recognized that there was something off about the introduction of the poem, and to try and provide reasons for why the inconsistencies were present in the text he used a Liedertheorie analysis to come up with solutions. He did not think the introduction was plot-relevant, in fact he believed the introduction lay was only added to *Beowulf* because it included information about Hrothgar’s lineage, which caused him to deduce that it was added to the text after the first old lay had already been established.

Mullenhoff believed that a poet recognized the name of Hrothgar in the first old lay and created the introduction in order to show the King’s lineage and to introduce the start of the Grendel attacks. He also deduced that it came before the A and B poets, who could not have written the introduction because there are inclusions of Christian interpolation within it, which shows that it existed in written form before the B poet came back through and added religious elements to the text. Regardless of his biases and political agenda, Mullenhoff familiarized himself with both the *Beowulf* manuscript and the *Beowulf* story to such an extent that, through the lens of Liedertheorie, he was actually able to find reasons for why the contradictions are present in the text.

It is a misconception that Mullenhoff’s Liedertheorie analysis took away any amount of credit from the skill of the authors involved in the compilation of the poem, one of the main criticisms Liedertheorie often faces. He suggests “one can gain some idea of the excellence of the poem and the great skill of the poet from the fact that the interpolators left almost two hundred lines untouched” in the first old lay of the poem.

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65 BCH translation of Mullenhoff’s article, pages 346 - 357.
66 BCH, p. 349.
He does not think *Beowulf* should be looked at as being less skillfully made or less literary just because it is a combination of different poems written by different authors. He actually wants to show that the compilation of lays cleans up some of the loose ends and contradictions found in the *Beowulf* manuscript. He finds actual solutions for what otherwise would look like silly mistakes in the poem by showing that it has a much more detailed and carefully composed structure than any other scholar had beforehand assumed.

Unlike other scholars, who wanted to prove that the *Beowulf* poet was some sort of literary genius, he did not get hung up on the idea that the poet had to be the best in the world who wrote everything with a purpose, and yet he still maintained that the poem was just as important as it would have been had the poet somehow actually been infallible. He believed that the instances in *Beowulf* that scholars could not make sense of, i.e. the Christian interpolations and contradictions, were not due to the scholars being unable to understand the depth of the poet’s genius but were instead simply mistakes made by whoever was putting the poem together. In a way, Mullenhoff had a far more realistic expectation of the *Beowulf* poet(s) than most other scholars in his time period and following his death. He held a high respect for the old lays, arguing that “the last lay… is superior to the first in depth of poetic composition and motivation but is less powerful in tone and style” (CBH 352) than the first. He was already ahead of the scholars of his time in that he was at least able to recognize not only the skillfulness and talent within *Beowulf* but he also recognized its flaws.

Mullenhoff’s opinions of the poets can be summarized as follows; the original poets of the first and second old lays are the best poets, followed by a continuation, and the interpolator A, and lagging behind these, the unskilled and uneducated B poet. The
poets of the old lays and the continuation all follow the structure of the traditional epic much better than B does, causing Mullenhoff to believe that B was likely a seventh-century cleric hired by an Anglo-Saxon king. Regardless if the poem was created by separate authors or not, his literary analysis at the very least made its inconsistencies clearer and easier to spot. His version of the poem separates certain episodes that modern scholars still refer to, such as the Finnsburg episode. He also developed a high level of knowledge and understanding about the poem itself, as is evidenced by his close analysis of the lays by line number. He studied the material, looked for similarities in language, shifts in tones and in narrative style. He deduced from his findings that the entire poem was actually a compilation of multiple poems by different poets.

It is interesting that Mullenhoff, a proud member of the fragmented Germans, dedicated the end of his life to understanding the fragmented nature of Beowulf. His real bias is actually only present when he tries to place the origin of the poem, at which he does everything he can to prove it came from his ditmarsch even though he has little evidence to back him up other than the similar nature of the fairy tales that came from his homeland and the nature of the Grendel and Grendel’s mother fights. Of course it would be perfectly legitimate for a critic of Mullenhoff to argue that he only praised the superiority of the two old lays because they covered the Grendel fight and dragon fight, which would mean the aspects of the poem he believed came from his ditmarsch were the oldest, the original, and the highest quality aspects of the epic. Even if the criticism is true, and it very much seems to be, it does not invalidate the usefulness of a Liedertheorie reading of Beowulf.

Mullenhoff was influenced by his national identity when it came to his scholarly

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67 BCH p. 352 - 353, although Mullenhoff admits he is only assuming, not trying to make an argument.
research. He wanted Germany to be its own independent country with its own land and sovereignty. He also wanted to prove that the land Germany deserved was the land he was born and raised on. Because *Beowulf* was the oldest epic that appeared to have some German influences within its pages, he and other German scholars knew that if they could show that *Beowulf* was a German text, they would have evidence proving that the German culture was also old and that they had historical land-rights to the land where *Beowulf* was composed. Because the *Nibelungenlied* was the main German text written by multiple authors, if Mullenhoff could prove that *Beowulf* was compiled in the same way, it would become a German text based on its traditionally German epic structure.68

The bare bones of Mullenhoff’s work, the way he breaks up the poem and his ideas of separate lays and the timeline of when the poets wrote their sections, may actually be accurate. New technology allowing us to compare the distribution of vocabulary in large literary works, a set of methods known as Lexomics, suggests that while *Beowulf* may not be made up of entirely different poems, there is something about certain sections of the poem that are qualitatively different from other sections. The evidence extracted from the Lexomics methods suggests that at the very least Mullenhoff’s work should not be discarded or ignored but that Liedertheorie needs to be reconsidered.

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68 In case I wasn’t clear here, the Liedertheorie structure of the *Nibelungenlied* was considered, by German scholars, to be the traditional German structure of epics. So, if *Beowulf* had the same unique structural foundation as the *Nibelungenlied* than it would appear to also be German.
Chapter Three: 21st Century Liedertheorie, a.k.a. Trust Me, I’m a Dendrogram

Understanding Liedertheorie

Up until now, Liedertheorie has only been discussed in the context of how Mullenhoff and other 19th century German scholars used it for the Nibelungenlied and Beowulf. Few, if any, modern scholars consider it to be a legitimate method of analysis for Beowulf to this day, and if it is taught at all, it is only referred to as a far-fetched theory Mullenhoff was not willing to let go of. Often the “rules” of Liedertheorie are over-emphasized, but those “rules” only appear to be so strict because the Germans were using them as tools to prove biased theories that had much larger intentions than simply trying to understand the construction of Beowulf. Because the Nibelungenlied was comprised of multiple different lays and was obviously a piece of historical German literature, they wanted to show that other old poems like Beowulf also took on a similar German-style construction so they could claim it had German origins. Their view of what constituted a fragmented structure was therefore limited, as they wanted something that would closely resemble the Nibelungenlied.

Despite being created and used by scholars with biased intentions, Liedertheorie really isn’t a picky theory. The German word “Liedertheorie” literally translates to “song theory”. The “song” refers to lays, which are simply separate or distinct poems that fit together to make one cohesive poem. If a literary work of substantial length was comprised of multiple different sources and systematically arranged to make a new, unique story, then a Liedertheorie reading is recommended.

Liedertheorie’s origins may have been somewhat directed by Mullenhoff’s desire
to help put his town in the Ditmarsch in the history books, which is why he believed the oldest original lay was the Grendelkin fights, because he believed its plot developed from the same point of origin as the monster-tales native to Marne, Holstein. But Liedertheorie was also absolutely accurate in regards to organizing and understanding the *Nibelungenlied*, which was compiled from dozens of separate fragments written by multiple authors in slightly different time periods. The *Nibelungenlied* should be looked at as reassurance to modern scholars that multiple works from different authors could be connected to make a complete story worthy of being considered quality literature without any nationalistic motivations. The reason why Liedertheorie comes across as being so irrelevant is because the theory requires both an updating and a reminder of how lenient its guidelines actually are.

Technically, any number of lays can be used in literature for a Liedertheorie analysis to be informative. Even if a work is a compilation of two separate lays, it follows the theory’s guidelines. Scholars do not often think of Liedertheorie in such a simple way, as they often assume a large number of lays are needed in order for the theory to be relevant. However, such an assumption is partly the reason why it is not taken as seriously as it should be. For example, J. R. R. Tolkien’s final book, *The Children of Hurin*, can be read with a Liedertheorie lens even though there is technically only one person who added any lays to the book. Tolkien did not finish writing it before he died. The published version of the book was edited by his son, Christopher Tolkien, who added interpolations to the manuscript to create one fully finished, cohesive story. A Liedertheorie reading of *The Children of Hurin* would consider Christopher’s fragments as lays that are unoriginal to the text. Something as simple as editing an old work and
modifying it in any way that changes it from its original format can be analyzed by Liedertheorie.

Similar to the number of lays, there can also be any number of potential authors. In fact, it is possible that a piece structured with composite authorship could have been written by only one person rather than multiple people, still validating a Liedertheorie reading. Don DeLillo wrote the novella *Pafko at the Wall* in 1992. Five years later, he used it as the prologue for his magnum opus, *Underworld*, but simply changing *Pafko’s* title to *The Triumph of Death* in the newer publication. A Liedertheorie reading of *Underworld* would therefore view the prologue as a separate lay. The addition or recycling of sections in novels is not an uncommon practice. Oscar Wilde added a prologue to his amended version of *A Picture of Dorian Grey* one year after it was originally published, and through Liedertheorie analysis one would view that prologue as its own lay. Charles Dickens published his books mostly in the form of serial fiction, and often changes were made when compiling the full story together in order to create more cohesion. Applying Liedertheorie to a novel by Dickens would therefore pick out any changes, edits, or new additions in his novels as separate lays. Because all of the texts previously mentioned have sections within them that were not a part of the original text, a Liedertheorie analysis would refer to those sections as separate lays. As an analytical tool, it can help explain texts by authors of classic literature as well as by contemporary writers. There are enough literary works that are composed in such a way that keeps Liedertheorie interpretations applicable today. It not only accounts for the existence of an original text but also brings to the reader’s attention that something may have been changed, added, or written by somebody else. Even if the change does not affect the plot
of the story, a Liedertheorie reading still helps record the history of the construction of said story. If used properly, Liedertheorie interpretations can therefore allow scholars to recover historical facts about how literature was composed.

Composite Authorship

A Liedertheorie analysis can untangle the composite authorship of a text. When the work of different authors, or multiples works by the same author, are compiled to make one big cohesive text, the structure is considered composite authorship. As an analytical tool, it allows us to determine how many authors were involved in the make-up of the text based on the number of lays that are discovered. A text made up of lays by the same author at separate times, such as the Charles Dickens or Don DeLillo examples from above, can still be considered a form of composite authorship. DeLillo wrote both *Pafko at the Wall* and *Underworld*, but he wrote them distinct from one another, making the plot of *Pafko at the Wall* unoriginal to the plot *Underworld* even though it is used to move the plot forward.

A modernized version of Liedertheorie pushes the boundaries even further by considering not only distinct poems as separate lays but also any part of a text heavily reliant on an outside source. While reliance on something is not the same as the distinct texts lays often denote, it can be seen as a type of fragment separate from the original work of the author because he is heavily influenced by another person’s work, making it less personal to the author and more of a retelling. For example, if an author has a
character tell a Bible story, the author is able to use whatever words he likes, maintaining his own creative license, but he must stay within a specific context to fully reference the Bible story in a recognizable way. He did not copy down the tale word for word from a specific text, but he did use a similar language and style in order to stay true to whatever Bible story he chose.

Of course, the author actually could copy down an outside source word for word, or perhaps he has a specific anecdote memorize that he writes down on the page, this would also be considered a lay through a modern Liedertheorie analysis. If an author is actually using the written story or memorized piece in his work, that part of the work, plot-wise, no longer belongs to the new author but is instead a replica of or homage to an already established piece of work. Set pieces are still used today: at Christmas time a huge array of *A Christmas Carol* movie/tv specials play all season long (with new ones made each year). For a non-literary example, television shows often feature a *Star Wars* themed episode where they recreate part of the plot of the original Lucas Films but within the scope of the show. Applying Liedertheorie to such shows would emphasize the fact that some features of them are based on the Star Wars films and are not simply original works.

To reference Tolkien once again, another example where a Liedertheorie reading is relevant is in *The Hobbit*, Bilbo goes into a dragon’s lair and steals a cup from the treasure hoard, the theft of which eventually wakes up the dragon and causes him to attack the nearby city. Tolkien is referencing the end part of *Beowulf* when an unknown thief finds the dragon’s horde and steals a cup, which also results in the dragon waking up and attacking the nearby town. Allusions such as the three previous examples are
nods to past works, and knowledge of those past works needs to be known in order to appreciate and fully understand the references.

Liedertheorie as a literary tool forces us to consider the extent of such allusions, giving scholars a way to mark down where in literary works a reader needs to familiarize themselves with another story in order to fully understand the meaning and creation of the text. The modern adaptation of Liedertheorie therefore fits the spirit of what the original theory was trying to accomplish, which was a way to mark what parts of a literary work were original and what parts came from somewhere, something, or someone else.

If we allow for a broader definition of Liedertheorie, then we may develop deeper understandings about literature that is heavily influenced by outside sources because we will be able not only to recognize allusions in the text intended by the author, but it also helps us understand why there are certain inconsistencies, unexplained plot-points, or lesser-developed ideas in some areas of a text than in others. Such a re-interpretation of Liedertheorie becomes especially helpful for medieval literature because it allows for a more fully-developed literary analysis, and it also helps create a fuller picture of the history of how a work was created, two subjects medieval literary analysis requires. Because the finite amount of factual medieval historical knowledge that exists is more limited than most other historical time periods\(^6\) even the literature needs to be looked at with a historical perspective in order to get a fuller understanding of the truths and the fictions of medieval life. Through Liedertheorie one can learn not only more about how

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\(^6\) I accept and acknowledge that other time periods could be said to be more limited. Medieval literature, however, is a long period of time (about 1000 years) with few historical documents left in their complete form for us to study. Literary prose and poems therefore can and should be used simultaneously as literary scholarship and historical interpretation.
the old poems were structured, but also if there are any potential set-pieces or commonly memorized pieces that a majority of the medieval population may be familiar with. Knowledge of popular texts can help develop a fuller picture of medieval society as it may emphasize certain values, morals, or character traits.

Considering the modified and fully-defined version of Liedertheorie mentioned above, the reasons for applying it to Beowulf become clearer, especially in regards to spotting potential allusions in the text which can help explain why true events and historical medieval figures appear as characters in a fictional poem. Beowulf himself is fiction as far as we know, however his story takes place amongst a handful of real historical people. Hygelac, the Geatish king, is thought to be real, as is his son Heardred. The Danish king Hrothgar appears in Widsith and is thought to have been real. Ongentheow, the Swedish king, and his son Onela were also likely real. Through Liedertheorie, the inclusion of real people in a fictional story, especially people who lived in different decades, shows that as time passed, historical events or important figures could be commemorated by being included in popular stories. If someone wanted to impress a king, adding him to a grand and popular epic would have been a decent way to do it, and while Siegfried was not real, stories of the famous dragon slayer circulated before he was included in Beowulf as Sigemund, which can be noted through a Liedertheorie reading because the mention of Sigemund is brief and not fully explained (luckily multiple sources, including the Nibelungenlied, have taught modern scholars a fuller-version of his epic), as if the poet assumed the reader would be able to recognize the name.

The origin of historical events included in the poem, such as the Finnsburg
episode, can be explained through a Liedertheorie reading. We know the event appears in other manuscript elsewhere, however the manuscript itself is lost and we only have access to a vague translation. The translation does not seem to be based on what is written in *Beowulf*, nor do the scenes in *Beowulf* appear to be based on the translation. A Finnsburg story, therefore, existed separate from both *Beowulf* and the known existing translation. Because a Liedertheorie analysis of *Beowulf* emphasizes the parts of the poem that come from outside sources (or are formed through composite authorship), scholars are able to speculate why those stories would be included in a popular poem in the first place. Something about the battle at Finnsburg must have been important since it was referenced to in an epic poem and was also written about in its very own manuscript. Through a Liedertheorie lens, analyzing Finnsburg leads to speculating if there may be a social message or lesson that can be taken away from the battle that would have caused medieval authors to use in two seemingly unconnected texts.

Similarly, acknowledging that the poem is comprised of different lays, using the looser version of the term, could help scholars understand more accurately the timeline along which different pieces of *Beowulf* were constructed. Rather than trying to date *Beowulf* as a whole, we could reference different lays of the text as being older or newer than other lays. If there is a way to determine which sections of the poem are based on external pieces of literature or well-known people and historical events, then we would know the poem was not created in one sitting, or even over a few months by one man. Instead *Beowulf* would be a story constructed over time, perhaps decades or even centuries, thus changing the way scholars attempt to date the poem since it is likely that its dating is actually quite untraditional. We would no longer try to find one single date
but instead we would be trying to determine when the different parts of the poem were likely constructed.

There is textual evidence supporting the idea that Beowulf is a string of different stories from different medieval time periods fitted together to make one full story. For example, the beginning of the poem alludes to Hrothgar and his Danish kingdom as being pagan, which would initially cause a scholar to believe the poem must have been written sometime before the European Christian migration that happened between approximately 500 - 600 A.D. However the poem also occasionally uses Christian language. The evidence for the Danes being pagan or Christian is fairly even-handed, as the Danes are called pagans at the beginning of the poem and are said to worship ‘heathen gods’. Also, there is absolutely no mention of Jesus in Beowulf, nor any specific allusions to Bible stories beyond the narrator calling Grendel the “kin of Cain”. The narrator also often refers to a singular almighty God and tends to reference the heavens as well as fate. Through Liedertheorie the pagan/Christian contradiction could suggest that an older version of a Beowulf story existed in the pre-Christian migration where the Danes in the story actually were purely pagan, but that later on a poet attempted to “Christianize” the story in order to keep it religiously relevant. The Christian aspects of the poem would therefore be interpolations added to the manuscript sometime after the main story (where everyone was pagan) was written. Dating the poem would no longer mean finding one specific date but instead would mean discovering the different time-periods when certain aspects of the poem were likely to be written, including the original all-pagan version of the story as well as when the Christian interpolations were added. It is not likely that scholars will be able to find the exact date of when Beowulf was written simply because
we lack the historical facts and the scientific ability to discover such a thing at this time. However, when applied to *Beowulf*, Liedertheorie changes the task of dating the poem from finding that one specific year to instead creating a timeline of when certain events in the poem were likely written.

Liedertheorie helps explain the aspects of the poem that are otherwise thought to be unexplainable. For example, the original poet of *Beowulf* seemed to know who the Merovingians were, whereas the scribes who copied down the manuscript we use today butchered the word, as if they did not recognize the name. The scribes finished the manuscript around the year 1000. They seemed to have trouble with a lot of proper names, so they attempted to either turn them into other words (as if the written text they were copying had misspellings in it that they needed to fix) or simply misspelled character’s names, place names, and the names of different groups of people.

In particular, they turned the Merovingians into “merewio ingas milts”\(^\text{70}\). The Merovingians were subject to damnatio memoriae (Latin for “cursing of memory”) after being overtaken by the Carolingians around the year 751, which means the Carolingians tried to erase every trace of the Merovingian existence they possibly could, taking their names out of history texts and ruining any art or literature they left behind. The fact that the Merovingians are mentioned implies that the text must have been written before the Carolingians erased the Merovingians from history in 751, and the fact that the B scribe does not recognize the name also implies that the damnatio memoriae likely worked. Of course the Merovingian misspelling could be explained by the fact that *Beowulf* was written much earlier, likely 700 - 750, than when the scribes were copying it down in 1000, however a Liedertheorie analysis would lead to questioning if the section of the

\(^{70}\) From the *Klaeber IV* version of Beowulf.
text that included the misspelling could possibly be a lay. If it proves to be based on an outside source, the inclusion of the Merovingians would likely distinguish it as an extremely old lay, giving medieval scholarship more insight into how and over what length of time *Beowulf* was constructed.

A Liedertheorie reading can also help in our understanding of the mention of Siegfried (as “Sigemund”) in *Beowulf*, as it appears as if his inclusion to the story is based on some sort of set-piece. As mentioned before, there appears to have been stories about Siegfried circulating long before the story of *Beowulf* because his full story is not told, rather he is compared to Beowulf as a way to compliment the Geatish hero’s bravery and strength. The poet certainly assumed the readers would recognize the name and know exactly what Sigemund's full story was, especially because the minstrel starts the tale “after Sigemund’s death” (884n - 885a). In *Beowulf* we are only told about how Sigemund defeated a dragon. A full epic about Sigemund will appear again a few hundred years later in the *Nibelungenlied*, revealing much more to his story beyond the dragon slaying, including romance, battles, his death, and revenge. Sigemund must have existed before his mention in *Beowulf* added to the story, suggesting that it could be the mark of a lay. The fact that a minstrel is reciting the tale might mean the poet actually had a set-piece he was transcribing in the story itself. A Liedertheorie analysis of the Sigemund episode can provide us with more than what a close reading reveals, which is that Sigemund is used to foreshadow the fact that Beowulf will eventually fight, and be killed by, a dragon. By looking at Sigemund as a lay, we would have access to a well-known set piece from the medieval period, and it could help us better understand the details of oral tradition. Because of the *Nibelungenlied* we know Sigemund had a wife
who eventually marries Attila the Hun after Sigemund dies, and stories about Attila are thought to have been told orally from the time he was the leader of the Huns in 434, which implies that the Sigemund story could have also been an oral tale partially written down in *Beowulf*.71

A Liedertheorie reading helps scholars look at the Sigemund episode as a story that existed orally before it was written in the *Beowulf* poem. While it is normal and often expected that readers will familiarize themselves with outside sources mentioned in a text even without a Liedertheorie reading, as that is simply a close-reading of the text, the method of analysis I am proposing helps emphasize with even more clarity and assertion which other parts of the poem are actually outside sources, especially ones that we may not have written access to because the manuscript is lost or they are oral traditions. We do not have a record of a Sigemund text that we know was written before *Beowulf*, but through a Liedertheorie analysis we can be more confident that some type of text or oral tradition did exist before the poem was written down. A reader executing a Liedertheorie analysis would not only understand that Sigemund/Siegfried is a character who existed outside of *Beowulf*, but would then treat that part of the poem as both a literary device and a piece of historical evidence. The literary device is the allusion to a well-known hero, which luckily does translate well enough for modern readers since we do know who Siegfried was, who foreshadows that Beowulf will eventually also be slaying a dragon, whereas the historical evidence would be realizing that mention of Siegfried means he was not only from an outside source, but that he was also a popular and well known hero. It matters to modern scholars to know where the *Beowulf* poet was using outside sources

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71 *Beowulf* mentions events that happened after the year 500, also it has Christian influences and the Christian conversion period did not take place in Europe until the year 600, so it is likely that *Beowulf* was not composed until the 7th century.
because it allows us to expand our knowledge of the time period, taking full advantage of the limited information we have available to study.

Through a Liedertheorie reading, we see that the inclusion of the Finnsburg episode that appears towards the beginning of the *Beowulf* poem is a separate lay. While it is possible that the poet actually had access to the Finnsburg manuscript that exists separate from *Beowulf*, there is little evidence to support this, and therefore scholars believe a separate account of the Battle of Finnsburg must have been circulating. The episode in *Beowulf* is about 90 lines long and retells the story of the Battle of Finnsburg. The manuscript that included the other version of the Finnsburg Battle is lost; it is a short, loose text that used to belong to the Archbishop of Canterbury. It starts in medias res and tells the story about the battle of Finnsburg, which was a conflict between the Frisians and the Danes that occurred around the year 450. The story of Finnsburg is about Hildeburh who is married to the Frisian King Finn in an attempt to create peace between the two kingdoms. But a sudden battle between the Danes and the Frisians breaks out, resulting in the death of Hildeburh’s brother, Hnaef. She is sad, and winter has arrived, so a Danish warrior named Hengest makes a pact with Finn to remain peaceful since the Danes cannot leave for home. However, Hengest eventually seeks revenge for the death of Hnaef, the Danes slaughter all of the Frisians, raid their hall for treasure, and take Hildeburh back home to Denmark.

The tale is thought to have been well known in Europe around the time *Beowulf* was written, mostly because the story is recited to the warriors by the same minstrel who told the story of Sigemund. In *Beowulf*, the Finnsburg episode is a self-contained story, but mentions of Finnsburg appear in both the separate Finnsburg manuscript as well as in
We cannot be sure if *Beowulf* or the Finnsburg manuscript came first, as we do not have access to the manuscript since it is lost. However, the fact that a fragment exists separate from *Beowulf* implies that the stories were based on a common source, which means the battle must have been a familiar plot-device. A Liedertheorie reading of *Beowulf*, therefore, provides us with a new way to look at the Finnsburg episode as it turns it into a historically relevant battle that we know of from an outside source and may possibly even be an allusion to a real historical event.

Despite not having access to the Finnsburg manuscript, scholars can now use the information in *Beowulf* to help shape what the Fragment possibly looked like. A transcript of the manuscript was made in the 17th century; however the original manuscript itself was either stolen or lost. Similar to the *Beowulf* manuscript, we do not know how accurate the transcription actually is to the original. However, a Liedertheorie reading of *Beowulf* shows us that the Finnsburg episode in the poem and the transcription of the lost manuscript seem to both be based on the same outside source, implying that a separate *Finnsburg* text existed at the time *Beowulf* was being composed.

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72 Scott Gwara’s *The Foreign Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, and W. S. Mackie’s *The Fight at Finnsburg*. 
The Lexomics Method and Applied Modern Liedertheorie

In 2013 I spent an entire summer using a lexomics program to break down *Beowulf* in hopes of making sense of how the poem was structured and figuring out which parts of the poem may have been based on outside sources. I based the breaks in *Beowulf* on a previously established version\textsuperscript{73} that separated the story by scenes; in other words the introduction was one whole piece, the Finnsburg Fragment was another, the Unferth Episode, etc. A detailed photo of the separations can be viewed on the following page:

\textsuperscript{73} The normalized version of Beowulf used was created by a previous Lexomics team, Leah Smith and Professor Drout, the year before I joined.
Using the lexomics method, I compared sections of the poem to each other based on word frequency. The lexomics program produces dendrograms that show which parts of the poem are the closest to one another based on vocabulary distribution. The dendrograms can show which parts of the poem do not seem to fit with the rest of the work as well as which aspects of the poem are stylistically written very similarly.

Before we could enter *Beowulf* into the lexomics program, the text needed to be normalized because the original manuscript was copied by two different scribes who used different spellings for certain words. The A-scribe used an “eo” diphthong in words like “heo” (which means “she”). The B-scribe, however, used an “io” diphthong. Because the Lexomics program is checking for word frequencies, the two different spellings would count as two different words, which is not helpful because all it shows is if the A-scribe or B-scribe was working on a particular section of the text which we can determine simply by looking at their hand writing; we do not need state-of-the-art technology to help us there. The normalized version of *Beowulf* therefore has all root-words spelled exactly the same way to create consistency throughout the entire poem. Thorns (þ) and eths (ð) were also normalized so that the program did not read them as two separate letters since they are essentially interchangeable (both are a “th” sound). The version of *Beowulf* that we used therefore has consistent letter-use and scribal diphthongs, meaning the “eo”/”io” shifts; that way the A-scribe and B-scribe do not affect the outcomes of the poem. All root words are consistent and all of the punctuation (often added by editors) was also taken out of the manuscript as well. The size of the sections used for comparison

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74 I use ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ because I worked with a team of about 10 students and 2 faculty members. However, four of us in particular studied *Beowulf*: Leah Smith, Allison Dennett, myself, and Professor Drout.

75 Professor Drout and Leah Smith also broke up the A section of the poem into its respective parts.
must also be of a certain similar length, and after testing multiple different sized chunks, a word limit between 400 - 1500 was established. We determined chunks should all be around the same size, so either all about 400 or all about 1500, otherwise the outliers remain on the outside solely due to their generally overall lower or higher word counts. A dendrogram looks as follows:

Let me begin by introducing some vocabulary to avoid confusion. Figure 1 above is called a dendrogram. The dendrogram splits off into different branches known as clades, as labeled above. A clade is made up of individual chunks or segments, the words can be used interchangeably. Chunks are labeled above by their individual letters, including three circled ones, the M chunk, L chunk, and O chunk. Those three chunks form a clade (along with the P chunk, which is not circled). The length of the branches, also circled
above, indicate how similar the chunks are to one another based on vocabulary distributions. When two segments appear in a clade, it means they have similar vocabulary distributions. If chunks continually link together into clades even when changes are made to how we split the poem, they are known as robust clades.

Mullenhoff, remember, believed there were two old lays, the Grendel fights and the dragon fight. The dendrograms, while they are not necessarily showing us that the two sections are distinct lays, do seem to agree that there is something fundamentally different about the two halves of the text, but because the “Danish” half of the poem takes up more lines than the “Geatish” half, dendrograms made up of the whole poem seemed to only provide us with results about the first half of the text rather than the second half. The dendrograms created a very constant pattern with the first half of the poem, which contained the introduction up to the Geats setting sail for Geatland, chunks A - I. While we were able to find robust clades from the first half of the poem, the second half of the poem remained inconclusive, partly because we were not sure how to break it up into segments, but also because it contains much less actual text than the first half. While we could see that the chunks from the second half of the poem were often separated from the chunks from first half of the poem, besides the occasional straying segments that would jump in and out of clades but never enough to be considered robust, the details of the second half of the poem still remained unknown. We therefore decided to use the full-poem to analyze the first half of the text, and then break off the second half of the poem which contained everything starting at the Geats return to Geatland, and analyzed it separately to get a

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76 The branch can also show how closely related different clades are if you are comparing a line that connects one clade to another, like how the D and G clade are connected to a much larger grouping of different segments and clades in the dendrogram above.
When we began making dendrograms out of the full poem, we expected clades to form based on the presence of unique words, like character names that only appear in a couple of places in the text. Because of our preconceived notions, we expected a monster clade to form that consisted of a segment with the Grendel fight and a segment with the Grendel’s Mother fight. Originally, the Grendel fight fell in the D chunk and the actual fight with Grendel’s mother fell in the H chunk, but D and H would not form a clade no matter how logically we broke up the poem. When we looked at what specific words were actually being compared to one another in order to create the dendrograms, we learned that they were not the particulars like proper names or words only used a one or two times in the poem, rather they were common things like “and”, “of”, and “the”. We quickly realized that the dendrograms could not pick out plot lines or thematic similarities in a text, therefore the search for a thematic monster clade was actually not the right way to think about the information the dendrograms were producing. We wanted to explore the boundaries of the lexomics method more, to get a better understanding of what the data was trying to tell us, so we did something called “blending” to the G and H chunks. Blending consisted of rearranging the text so that all like-scenes are featured in the same chunk. Upon closer inspection we realized that the G chunk had the first attack from Grendel’s mother within it, followed by a lot of hall talk. Not coincidentally, the H chunk had the entire Grendel’s mother fight but also a lot of talking in hall. We moved every hall talking aspect from the G chunk into the H chunk, and moved all of the fighting from the H chunk into the G chunk. We created a $G_1$ chunk that consisted of every mention of Grendel’s mother, including her first attack and the actual fight,
followed by and H₁ chunk that was full of hall business and speeches. When we ran the “blended” Beowulf through the system, the result was the robust monster clade that we had expected to form all along.

We realized that the dendrograms were pointing something out that is easy to miss when simply reading the poem, which is that between the Grendel fight and the fight with Grendel’s Mother there are a large amount of plot-irrelevant side stories. There is the mention of Finnsburg, Sigemund and Heremod between the two fights. It is already accepted by scholars that stories of Siegfried and Finnsburg existed before Beowulf was composed, and a Liedertheorie reading would consider the minstrel’s two tales separate lays. The outside sources stuck in between the two monster fights were too distinct, and they pushed the fights into separate directions rather than pulled the pieces together. We also realized that the segments we placed upon the text contained within them two separate plot points: actions in the hall and the Grendel’s Mother fight. But dendrograms cannot analyze plots or themes within a text, that is beyond the scope of the information they produce. What the dendrograms were showing us before the blending, therefore, was the vocabulary distribution of a chunk that consisted of two distinctive plots. We therefore blended the segments to create single plot chunks, one specifically made up of actions in the hall and the other specifically the Grendel’s mother fight. We now had a way to incorporate plot into the dendrograms, even though the dendrograms cannot specify plot on their own, which can be done through precise blending.

Notice in Figure 1 above that the H₁ chunk is in a clade with E. After the blending, H₁ and E formed a robust clade. The E chunk contains mostly songs by the minstrel and speeches, including the story of Sigemund, the story of Heremod, speeches exchanged
between Beowulf and Hrothgar, and gift giving (this is in celebration of Beowulf defeating Grendel earlier on). H₁ now has a lot of talking within it as well, specifically Hrothgar’s lament in reference to the attack by Grendel’s mother, Beowulf promising to kill Grendel’s mother, and Beowulf’s return to Heorot. The parts that were taken out and given to G₁ include the actual mother fight, fighting the other sea monsters, and his boast, which we referred to by the Old English word ‘beot’. E and H₁ form a clade that features only hall business; people are telling stories in the hall (Sigemund story), exchanging gifts, exchanging promises, lamenting in the hall, and even returning to the hall. The E and H₁ robust clade is enlightening as it shows that the comparison of word frequency may be very good at finding different discourses within a text and fitting those discourses together. By discourses I specifically mean styles of talking or, in this case, of writing, based on specific subjects. When the Beowulf poet wrote speeches in the hall, he used similar word frequencies, causing sections that seem irrelevant plot wise to fit together specifically because they all follow the subtle formalities a poet uses when talking about something happening in a hall.

The ability to spot different discourses in a text like Beowulf is beneficial when doing a Liedertheorie analysis not because it necessarily leads to finding lays, but because it provides stylistic reasons as to why a lay was likely included in the text in the first place. Access to technology like the lexomics method gives us in text, hard evidence of the presence of different discourses, and often those discourses coincide with sections of Beowulf that are thought to be heavily based on an outside source. By looking at a few select dendrograms, it becomes clear that there are unique discourses in the poem, including monster flights, hall business, battle scenes, and historical allusions. The

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77 Original idea about dendrograms showing discourses came from Professor Drout.
following two dendrograms have a key written out on each branch, representing what
parts of the poem fall into each chunk.

[Figure 2]

[Figure 3]
Figures 2 and 3 are versions of a normalized *Beowulf* text broken up into even chunk sizes, Figure 2’s chunks have 1100 words whereas Figure 3’s chunks have 1200 words. Because we extracted the robust clades by originally using chunks that were determined logically based on where different scenes began and ended, we wanted to see if those clades would still form when the poem was sliced into even chunks, no matter what part of a scene it started or ended in.

The above dendrograms show two important details: that A and F are a consistent, robust clade and that something in the C section does not fit in with the rest of the poem. We determined that we could learn just as much by what the dendrogram doesn’t show us than we can learn by what it does show us. The C chunk, for example, is seemingly incompatible with the rest of the text, as it never forms a clade with any other part of the poem. We decided to slowly shift the boundaries of the C chunk in order to discover which part of the segment causes it to act as an outlier. The C chunk in Figure 1, therefore, is slightly different than the C chunks in Figures 2 and 3. Almost always, the C chunk had within it the Unferth Episode, which is when Unferth, a Danish warrior, questions if Beowulf actually has the ability to defeat Grendel because he had heard that Beowulf lost a swimming match to Brecca. Beowulf then defends himself by saying he did not lose the swimming match because he was inferior to Brecca, but because he had to battle off dozens of sea monsters that attacked him while he was swimming. He briefly retells the story of his match and accuses Unferth of being both drunk and a kin-killer.

The difference between the C chunk in the Figures is where the segments begin and the length of the chunk: in Figure 1, C starts directly at Unferth’s criticism of
Beowulf, but in Figure 2, it starts a little earlier in the text where Beowulf offers to kill Grendel. Figure 3’s C chunk is slightly larger than the other two, but it starts a little later than Figure 2. It includes Hrothgar accepting Beowulf’s offer to fight Grendel all the way up to a section we call “Joy in the Hall”, which features the happiness and feasting in Heorot; between these two pieces the entire Unferth episode and Brecca story can be found. Notice that in all three Figures the C section stands off entirely on its own, which implies that something within that chunk is innately different from everything else in Beowulf. A Liedertheorie analysis suggests that the Unferth episode may represent a lay, but scholars have never found any other mention of Unferth besides what is in the Beowulf poem. Brecca, the man Beowulf swims against, is mentioned in Widsith as the lord of the Brondings. His presence in a text that scholars believe is unrelated to Beowulf but that has mentioned a few other characters who appear in the epic, including Hrothgar and his kin, suggests that a story about Brecca and Beowulf could have existed as a part of an oral tradition before Beowulf was composed.

Mullenhoff did believe that the Unferth episode, and practically all of what we considered to be C, was included in the original first old lay. Possibly he was on to something and spotted a piece in the poem that is based on a story that actually is older than everything else mentioned. However it is also possible that the Unferth episode is newer than the rest of the poem, which would explain why it doesn’t fit with pieces we think actually are from older sources like the mention of Sigemund or the Finnsburg episode.

Looking at the Figures above, we see that segments A and F consistently form a clade, making it extremely robust. The A chunk is made up of lines 1 - 188 (notice that
these line numbers, completely by chance, are only 5 lines from what Mullenhoff considered to be the Introduction lay of the poem, lines 1 - 193). The lines include the introduction of Scyld Scefing, the introduction to Heorot, Grendel first attacking the Danes, and then the Danish response to the Grendel attacks. The F chunk is made up of the Finnsburg Fragment, Wealthow talking to the warriors in the hall and giving Beowulf a priceless necklace, and preparations in the hall for bedtime. The A/F clade therefore has within it the one of the parts of the text that a Liedertheorie analysis considers to be a lay, the Finnsburg episode.

The A/F clade cannot be a young part of the poem; we know that Finnsburg would have been a historical reference recognized among readers during the medieval period and we know that Scyld Scefing, who is mentioned in the introduction, is one of the oldest known Danish kings (otherwise known as Skjoldr). To successfully allude to the battle of Finnsburg the poet has to stay within the boundaries of the event that is being retold; the poet has little room for creative license. I do not mean that the poet cannot be vague with details, because the Finnsburg episode in Beowulf is certainly vague. However there are certain parts of the Finnsburg battle that must be mentioned in order for people to recognize that it is about Finnsburg, and that stylistic boundary is the reason why a Liedertheorie analysis maintains that the mention of Finnsburg is a lay. Therefore, even if the Scyld Scefing introduction and the Finnsburg episode in Beowulf were written around the same time, the allusions to both the person and the event are historically older.

Because dendrograms do not point out plot-similarities, rather it emphasizes discourses, we consider A and F to be a Danish history discourse. The Danish history discourses in the text features a lay that we believe may be one of the oldest aspects of Beowulf, but C
never forms a clade with it. The C chunk is likely not as old because it does not conform to the type of writing style and subject matter that the dendrograms have allowed us to deduce are representational of old passages.

Now Let’s Play Scrabble... with Discourses!

To visualize what the discourses look like in *Beowulf*, we created something called scrabble diagrams, simply because they look a bit like a scrabble board. A scrabble diagram focusing only on the discourses in the first half of the poem looks as follows:

The Denmark Scrabble Diagram above shows the line numbers of each chunk we used in
most of our dendrograms. Notice that A and F are in the same row, that is because it represents the A/F clade, which make up the Danish History discourse. The D/G clade, therefore, is a part of the Grendelkin Fight discourse, and B/ I, as well as E/H, form clades that seem to represent discourses based on hall narratives. Segment C is left on its own; we cannot be certain what type of discourse it represents because we have no other section of the text to compare it to, therefore we call it the Unferth Brecca Digression. A scrabble diagram of the second half of the text looks as follows:

[Geatish Scrabble Diagram]

Unlike the Danish Scrabble Diagram, we cannot include line numbers to mark the boundaries of the chunks we used for K-P because the dendrograms we analyzed created the above pattern, which we call an envelope pattern, regardless of how we segmented the second half of the text. Breaking the second half of *Beowulf* into individual chunks was especially difficult due to the narrative structure of the poem. Unlike the first half,
where we could create chunks based on different scenes in the story, the second half of 
*Beowulf* is not so focused on scenes meant to move the plot forward, and features a sort of homogeneous style that made it almost impossible to find obvious shifts that could correspond to different chunks.

Before we decided to create dendrograms made up on only the second half of the text to see if we could make sense of it without the larger first half influencing any of our outcomes, we noticed that chunk J, which is not included in either scrabble diagram above, would either pull certain pieces towards it or push them away depending on how large we made it. J often consisted of the Geat’s journey back to Geatland, the comparison between the pure queen Hygd and the evil Queen Modthryth, Beowulf’s entry into the hall where we speaks with Hygelac, and the tale about Freawaru the young Dane who marries a Heathobard in order to help create peace. Sometimes Beowulf’s retelling of the Grendelkin fight is also included in J, and depending on how much or how little of the retelling we put in the segment, it inconsistently moves around the dendrograms. If only part of the retelling is included in J and the other half is included in K, J moves into clades with chunks from the first half of the text, and despite half of the retelling appearing in K, the two segments almost never form a clade. We wondered if perhaps there was something written towards the beginning of the J chunk that was causing it to pull in different directions, so we started to chop off 100 lines from the beginning of the journey back to Geatland, then 200, then 300, and so on. The most productive dendrograms had 300, 400, and 500 words cut off from the beginning of the second half of the poem. A Liedertheorie analysis would cause us to infer that whatever section of the text we found was causing the ambiguous movement of J may have within
it a potential lay. We assumed that we would find some sort of odd section of *Beowulf* that kept the chunks from fitting together the way one would expect, but that odd section, we discovered, was actually the full J segment:

[Figure 4]
The more we chopped off from the beginning of the second half, the more noticeable a pattern became. With only 300 words taken out, Figure 4, the second half started not with the journey back to Geatland but instead it started with the comparison between Queen Hygd and Queen Modthryth. Ignoring the chunk marked 6679 (it was over 600 words larger than the rest of the chunks and therefore likely was too big to actually be useful), the mutilated J section stood out on its own. When we took 100 more lines off of the beginning of J, Figure 5, the second half started during Beowulf’s entry into the hall where he meets King Ecgtheow, and J still didn’t fall into a clade. In Figure 6, where we took 500 words off from the beginning of the second half of the text, causing segment J to start almost at the very end of Beowulf entering into the hall, we realized that almost the entire traditional J chunk was gone. Figure 6 was also our cleanest dendrogram.

A closer look at segment J revealed the reason why it was not attaching itself to any one specific clade in the dendrograms. J consisted of Beowulf’s return to Geatland and his retelling of everything that happened when he was in Denmark; it is the literary transition in Beowulf between Denmark and Geatland. The reason why Beowulf’s journey back home and retelling of the Grendelkin fights was written with such ambiguous style is a result of J actually being a source of itself. Segment J is a retelling of sections A - I, meaning it is a lay based off of the whole first half of Beowulf. The dendrograms struggle to place J anywhere particular because as a retelling, it has within it basically every discourse identified in the Denmark Scrabble Diagram above.

Using Figures 4 - 6 above, you can also see how we eventually formed the Geatish Scrabble Diagram and ultimately made sense of the second half of the poem.

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78 This is also why we left it out of the scrabble diagram, because it technically did not represent any specific discourse anyway so it would not make sense to include it in a diagram focused purely on discourses.
Starting with Figure 4, there are only two present clades, L/O and K/M/N. The L/O clade featured a lot of pieces we considered to be filled with talking. L contained Beowulf’s dark thoughts where he questions if he has done something wrong that is causing the dragon attacks, his decision to fight the dragon and to build an iron shield to protect him from the dragon’s flames, the retelling of how Hygelac died, the thief leading Beowulf to the dragon’s barrow, a story from Beowulf about Geatish succession, and then another tale by Beowulf about war and revenge for Hygelac. O contained more talking, including Beowulf’s last words and his death, Wiglaf’s criticism of the retainers who did not help Beowulf fight the dragon, and the entirety of the Swedish wars.

The K/M/N clade in Figure 4 all featured some mention of the dragon attacks. Chunk K contained Beowulf giving the treasures he had received from Hrothgar for defeating the Grendelkin to his uncle Hygelac, a fifty year time jump in which Beowulf becomes the king of the Geats, the very first introduction of the dragon when the thief sneaks into his barrow and steals the cup, and the lay of the last survivor which is a lament told from the perspective of a warrior who is the only surviving member of his people. Segment M contained the first half of the dragon fight, the introduction of Wiglaf and his ancestry, and then part of the end half of the dragon fight. Segment N continued with the end half of the dragon fight, including the slaying of the dragon, also Beowulf’s words to Wiglaf after he has been bit by the dragon, and Wiglaf’s entry into the dragon’s barrow to bring back the treasure that Beowulf wants to look upon before he dies. The O/L clade in Figure 4 can therefore be compared to the L and P sections in the Geatish Scrabble Diagram under the discourse of Geatish history, while the K/M/N clade matched the M, N, and O blocks in the scrabble diagram labeled as dragon fighting.
discourses.

Focusing on Figure 5, which moves every chunk forward in the text by 100 lines, we see the same pattern forming but with a slight variation from Figure 4. Instead of creating a Geatish history clade like Figure 4, we get a funeral and buried treasure clade, K/O. Segment O contains everything from Beowulf giving the gifts he received from Hrothgar to his uncle Hygelac to Beowulf’s grief about the dragon attacking, which means that the introduction of the dragon also appears in segment K but the important section seems to be the lay of the last survivor, which as the wandering warrior is lamenting the death of his people there is also mentioned of a buried treasure. Segment O also contains pieces of Beowulf’s funeral, which includes gathering the Dragon’s treasure hoard to be buried with him. Many medieval funerals, especially when the person who died was of royal blood, featured the dead being buried with treasure, which caused us to consider the K/O clade a funeral and buried treasure discourse, which corresponds to the letters K and Q in the Geatish Scrabble Diagram above.

A dragon fighting clade forms in Figure 5 as well, clade L/M, even though the introduction of the dragon himself appears elsewhere. L and M contain the entirety of the dragon fight as well as the introduction of Wiglaf’s ancestry. Once again, the dragon fighting discourses labeled in the Geatish Scrabble Diagram are present in the dendrograms.

Finally a look at Figure 6, which has practically eliminated the traditional J segment since it starts 500 words into the second half of the poem, solidifies the envelope pattern of the discourses as drawn out in the Geatish Scrabble Diagram. There are two clades, J/L, and K/O. N and M sort of sticks out on their own in the middle of the
dendrogram not fully committed to any other particular clade. I do not include M in the K/O clade because the branches fall in a sort of even stair-pattern, and such a result in a dendrogram is inconclusive.

The J/L clade represents another variation of the dragon fighting discourse. Figure 6’s untraditional J chunk contains part of Beowulf giving Hygelac the gifts he received from Hrothgar, the fifty year time jump to where Beowulf is king of the Geats, the introduction of the dragon and the their stealing the cup from the treasure horde, the Lay of the Last Survivor, and the first time the dragon attacks Beowulf’s kingdom. Segment L contains all of the first half of the dragon fight, the introduction to Wiglaf and his ancestry, and the entirety of the end half of the dragon fight as well.

The K/O clade represent the funeral and buried treasure discourses, as K has within it the death of Hygelac, in which directly after he describes Hygelac’s death he then goes on to describe the many treasures Hygelac had given Beowulf throughout his life, including gold, armor, and land. The O section of the poem contains every aspect of Beowulf’s funeral and the dragon’s treasure that was buried along with him.

Finally, the M and N chunks may not form a distinctive clade, but the stair-pattern branch that connects them together suggests small amounts of similarities in their style. Within segment M we have the events leading up to Beowulf’s last words and death, including Wiglaf going into the dragon’s barrow to bring Beowulf some of the gold, and part of Wiglaf’s criticism of the retainers. Following that the N segment contains the rest of the criticism of the retainers and all of the retelling of the Swedish wars. M and N, although not as clearly as Figure 4, represent the Geatish History discourses.

Now that we have a clearer idea of what scenes often fall into what discourses
based on the dendrograms above, we can see what scenes from the second half of the poem the blocks in the Geatland Scrabble Diagram often contain. K, a funeral and buried treasure discourses, contain the death of Hygelac and the treasure he gave to Beowulf, sometimes the Lay of the Last survivor, which mentions burying the treasure hoard that belonged to his destroyed kingdom. K can also contain the introduction to the dragon, because that scene really only focuses on the thief stealing the cup from the dragon and waking him up, the dragon does not actually attack until later on, making the treasure the important aspect of that scene. The Q block, which is the other buried treasure and funeral discourse, features all of Beowulf’s funeral and the dragon’s treasure that is buried with him. The dragon fighting discourses, M, N, and O, contain the first time the dragon attacks Beowulf’s kingdom, sometimes his dark thoughts as he questions why the dragon is harming his people and if possibly did something wrong, and the full extent of the dragon fight. Finally L and P, the Geatish history discourse, contains all of the tales about Geatish succession, past Geatish wars, and the entirety of the Swedish wars.

We were able to conclude that the reason why the second half of the poem was so difficult to break into absolute chunks was because, like the original G and H chunks from the first half of the text, the segments we created often contained more than one type of plot-point within them. We attempted to blend some parts of the later text, including something we called the Dragon Blend, but because the Geatland portion of Beowulf is so short it proved difficult to create even-sized chunks that the dendrograms could properly compare to one another.

Similarly, the envelope pattern of the discourses in the second half of the text likely added to our difficulty in pinning down precise segment boundaries. The second
half of the poem shifts from discourse to discourse so smoothly that we, as readers, cannot spot the shifts that the lexomics method can. Being so good at marking the discourses, the dendrograms appear to be trying to emphasize the envelope pattern no matter how we segmented the poem, hence why we were able to use multiple different chunk sizes as well as different numbers of chunks but still produce the same outcomes. Unlike the first half of the texts where the boundaries of the chunks do make a difference to the dendrograms, the envelope pattern in the Geatland half of the poem will present itself regardless of the boundaries of the chunks, making them far more fluid than the first half of the poem.

However, we did learn that the second half of the text, rather than being analyzed only with dendrograms, was easier to understand when we visualized it in the envelope pattern that the Geatish Scrabble Diagram represents above. It also forced us to write out every specific discourse within *Beowulf*, including the first half of the text, which provided us with more details about the specificity of the discourses that the dendrograms produce. The first half of the poem has historical discourses within it, ones about the Danes that we believe are likely very old. The second half of the text also has historical discourses; however the history itself is focused on the Geats instead of the Danes. Because the dendrograms do not form clades that include both the Danish and Geatish history discourses, it appears as if there is a subtle difference between the way a poet would write about the Danes and the way a poet would write about the Geats.

Similarly, poets seem to use different styles of writing for monster fights than they do for dragon fights. The Grendelkin fights never form a clade with the dragon fights, suggesting that like the differences between whose history a poet is referring to,
the discourses also vary depending on what type of monster a poet’s protagonist is fighting. No matter how we blended and segmented *Beowulf*, a pure monster clade consisting of the Grendelkin fights and the dragon fights never formed. The method for writing a monster fight, like one between Grendel and Beowulf, is just stylistically fundamentally different from how a dragon fight is written, even if those fights include the same main character.

The technical differences in most specific discourses are too subtle to be noticed by even the closest of readers. Luckily, the subtlety and specificity of discourses is exactly the type of thing the lexomics method is made to identify. The dendrograms provide us with a systematic comparison of vocabulary usage in a text, and not just the unique words but the actual voice of an author based on the frequencies of words like “of” or “and”, words that do change depending on what type of subject matter is being written on. A fiction piece by a 19th century Romantic period author will use a different variation of articles and prepositions than a Harlem Renaissance poet. The dendrograms spot those differences, providing us with new insight into how discourses relate to authorial style by emphasizing the slight changes in wording an author automatically and subconsciously uses when writing a scene that falls within a different discourse.
Wait, but what did all of THAT have to do with Liedertheorie?

A Liedertheorie lens of *Beowulf* is enhanced by the discovery of different discourses like the ones commented on above. While finding a discourse in a piece of literature is certainly not an indicator of the existence of a particular lay, the discourses can provide us with textual evidence as to why a lay may have been included into a text in the first place.

Historical and literary evidence allude to the Finnsburg episode as being a lay within *Beowulf*, and without using the lexomics method to analyze the text we would have been left with only pure speculation as to why the poet chose the include a Finnsburg lay, similar to Mullenhoff when he was first applying the theory. But the dendrograms we created using *Beowulf* showed that the segment that contained the entire Finnsburg episode actually formed a robust, conclusive clade with the introduction of the text that featured the history of the Danish King Hrothgar’s lineage. Realizing the dendrograms cannot pick up on plot or themes, but do emphasize particular discourses with a text, we learn that the Finnsburg episode represented an important aspect of Danish history, therefore the poet included it in a section of the poem that was retelling different Danish historical tales. Even if we know little to nothing about the lay, as if the case with the Finnsburg episode, a Liedertheorie analysis with a consideration of the discourses within a text enlightens us as to how the lay fits in the poem, showing that the pieces are not necessarily arbitrary just because, at face value to the modern reader, they may not appear to follow an order.

Similarly, when dendrograms produce a discourse that does not fit anywhere else
in a text, like the C chunk featuring Unferth episode and the Brecca swimming match, a Liedertheorie analysis can look at the outlier as if something in its style may be the mark of an older story or newer addition to the tale. Because there are already older historical texts in *Beowulf*, we can use the fact that the Unferth episode is written with a discourse that is not present anywhere else in the text as an indicator that it may be a newer part of the story because it does not stylistically match the older discourses. Of course historical evidence would need to be used in order for the argument that the Unferth episode is a newer lay in the text to actually be convincing, and the fact that Brecca’s name is mentioned in the medieval text *Widsith* admittedly doesn’t teach us enough to fully be able to argue anything completely conclusive. Regardless, the Liedertheorie lens with a consideration of the discourses within the text brings attention to the fact that something about the mention of Unferth in the poem is different, both stylistically and perhaps historically as well.

A Liedertheorie analysis can also help us make sense of why segments in the dendrograms may not fully commit to any one specific discourse after all, as was the case with the allusive J chunk. At the beginning, we could not understand why the J segment wouldn’t fall into a robust clade, but eventually we realized that it will not actually fit in any one specific clade because it is, in a strange way, its own lay. It retells the events that took place while Beowulf was in Denmark, in other words it is a piece of text based after itself. When Beowulf tells Hygelac about his fight against Grendel and Grendel’s mother in Denmark, the poet has to follow certain guidelines that come from the first half of the text in order to keep the retelling both relevant and accurate. Oddly enough, Beowulf’s retelling does actually contain a some new information that differentiates it from the
original events in Denmark. For example, Beowulf mentions during the retelling, for the very first time, that Grendel had a bag made out of dragon skin with him, although he provides no more details about why the bag was important, what Grendel did with it, or why he decided to mention it in that moment. Also Beowulf names the warrior who was killed by Grendel’s Mother, Auschere, for the first time in his retelling of the fights. Where the name came from and why it wasn’t used in the original fight is still unknown.

A more in-depth Liedertheorie analysis would take the inconsistencies as a sign that perhaps there is a disconnect between Beowulf’s retelling of his time in Denmark and the actual first half of the time. The fact that the dendrograms also do not recognize a specific discourse in that section of the text could possibly lead to a new understanding of the retelling portion of the poem.
Conclusion: Don’t be so Critical when being Critical

Liedertheorie may have been used to push the nationalistic biases of 19th century German scholars who were so desperate to form an independent Germany that they believed the fastest way to achieve that goal was through manipulating medieval literary scholarship just enough to make epics like *Beowulf* somehow German, however, the historical use of the theory should not deter modern scholars from using it today. The biases and nationalism can be taken away from the theory and reveal a type of analysis that can help us expand upon texts we know very little about. *Beowulf*, with no known author, date, or point of origin, is the perfect piece to benefit from such a boundless reading. Liedertheorie is a legitimate form of analysis that can provide scholars with real explanations as to why there are inconsistencies present in the text, and it can help us find new ways to approach old problems, like dating the poem or discussing the author and authorial intent in *Beowulf* and beyond.

The reason Liedertheorie was abandoned after Mullenhoff’s death in 1884 is not because his colleagues had a problem with the theory itself, but rather because they did not like the man who promoted it. He was biased, rude to fellow scholars, never fully explained himself in his works, and scoffed at anyone who dared ask him to. But still, I defend Mullenhoff. Not because I think everything he published was true; I am as unconvinced by his “evidence” that the Grendel plot line shares the same origins as the folk tales from Marne, Holstein as everyone else. However, his knowledge of the *Beowulf* manuscript and his dedication to his scholarly technique is both impressive and enlightening. The man was able to mark every single Christian interpolation present in
the manuscript, he discovered obscure inconsistencies such Hrothgar claiming he is going to seek his wife when going to bed even though Wealthow's is present in the hall, and even though his intentions were biased he always applied some form of logic into the analysis of the evidence he found. Reading through Die Innere Geschichte des Beowulfs, his last and most influential work published before only a few years before his death, one can't help but feel convinced that the poem can be explained in no better way than by the six unknown poets and their respective lays.

The truth is, Mullenhoff likely died believing his attempts were successful. Germany did become its own unified nation in 1871, and having died in 1884 Mullenhoff was not around to witness German involvement in World War I, the German revolution, or the inexcusable actions of World War II. But because Mullenhoff pushed so heavily for German independence while he was alive and because, almost directly after receiving that independence, Germany entered into two World Wars, his scholarship was wrongfully used as symbol of extreme German nationalism. Mullenhoff certainly wanted to show that Beowulf came from his ditmarsch in Holstein, he did want Holstein to end up as a part of independent Germany, and he believed that proving Beowulf was somehow part German in origin would convince others that Germany deserved to be its own nation. But Mullenhoff also knew the Beowulf text better than anyone else. He was not just a biased, angry German trying to prove his own point. He was a legitimate scholar who used a new and innovative form of analysis in order to explain why Beowulf had within it inconsistencies and contradictions.

Just because Mullenhoff was biased, it does not mean Liedertheorie as a form of

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79 For the record, Holstein is now a part of northern Germany, although, no one really believes that Beowulf came from Mullenhoff’s ditmarsch.
literary analysis is innately so as well. The theory challenges traditional ways of looking at authorship, as it not only acknowledges that a poem like *Beowulf* may actually be a creation made by multiple poets at different times, but it also shows that one author can recycle his or her own work in a way that would also be a form of composite authorship. For medieval texts, where it is almost impossible to understand the intent of the author as we often do not know who the author actually was nor do we have any records indicating what exactly the purpose was when he wrote the poem or prose, a Liedertheorie analysis is an alternative way to uncover authorial intent. It causes us to look for the sources an author found important enough to include in a text which, depending on the theme of such a lay, can emphasize socially, culturally, or even historically important characteristics, figures, or events. We will likely never have a name for the *Beowulf* poet, but a Liedertheorie lens does provide us with a better idea of how, and even why, he structured the poem the way he did.

Besides emphasizing composite authorship, a Liedertheorie analysis also provides us with a new way to talk about the age of the text. Rather than referring to the poem as if it was written over a short period time, we can talk about the potential age of scenes in the poem with respect to one another. We can compare the lays we believe are older, like Sigemund or the Finnsburg episode, to portions of the text that a Liedertheorie analysis suggests may be younger, such as the Unferth episode. Because the individual pieces in the poem appear to have been written at different times, and because we currently do not have the ability to date the poem in a specific and precise way, a more realistic proposal for talking about the timeline of the poem could be realized. Scholars can now focus on specific elements within the poem and compare them to when those chunks were likely
composed in relation to the rest of the poem, similar to how Mullenhoff broke up the text into the six different parts. Liedertheorie keeps us within the scope of a text yet also allows us to analyze it in new ways.

With technological advancements like the lexomics method, we can now find specific discourses within *Beowulf* that can help provide us with in-text evidence as to why certain lays may have been included in the poem. We use historical and literary evidence to find separate lays in the poem, but we can now use dendrograms to inform us about what discourses the lays fit into. Understanding the discourses provides us with a new way to make sense of lays, especially if they are based on an outside source we do not have physical access to, like the Finnsburg episode.

A Liedertheorie analysis of *Beowulf* also provides us with an actual reason as to why there are inconsistencies and imperfections within the text. The reason why the Danes are supposed to be Pagan but there are Christian elements that appears throughout the poem is because those elements were added later on, they are separate lays. A Liedertheorie analysis would also attempt to explain why Beowulf claims that Grendel had a bag made out of dragon skin when he was retelling the events of the Grendelkin fights to Hygelac in Geatland even though no bag of any kind was ever mentioned during the actual Grendel fight. If one of the sections is proved to be a lay, then we are no longer confused by the appearance of the bag, rather we would know that one poet believed Grendel had a bag and the other did not. Mullenhoff used Liedertheorie to help explain certain aspects of the text that he couldn’t understand. Modern scholars have the ability to try and do the same thing, as long as they are willing stop focusing on the biased

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80 I am using these as example, not necessarily arguing that I have the evidence to prove that all Christian interpolations are actually lays or that the Grendelkin retelling is its own lay. Further research would need to be done in order to prove either claim.
intentions the scholars of the past used in their Liedertheorie interpretations and instead consider just the basic elements of the theory itself.

Mullenhoff’s work should not be looked at as simply the attempt of an angry man to make his homeland famous, nor should it be looked at as the epitome of 18th and 19th century German nationalism. His work, and his description of Liedertheorie, provides medieval scholars with new ways to look at the few texts we have in our canon, even the ones we only have a limited amount of information on. *Beowulf* is one of those limited texts. But we are now able to make sense of not only the inconsistencies and imperfections of the piece, but we also have access to potential reasons why those inconsistencies exist. A Liedertheorie reading is therefore no longer a theory made up of educated guesses, unprovable hypotheses, or improbable analysis. We now have the technology to provide us with factual reasons, backed up by proofs within the text itself, as to why lays and discourses are connected. To take advantage of such an expansive theory, one has to credit the father of Liedertheorie himself, Karl Mullenhoff, which requires us to stop referring to him as a man with crazy ideas and instead consider him to be somewhat of a victim of his time, and whose reasonable scholarship was unfortunately clouded by political agendas that were so important during his lifetime.
Bibliography


