Interperformativity and *Beowulf*

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Whether it was itself composed orally or in writing, the Old English *Beowulf* is profoundly indebted to the world of orality on which it draws and into which it offers itself as performed artistic utterance. In an obvious sense, then, any informed interpretation of the poem must, in one of its movements, detextualize the text as *thing* and reconstitute it imaginatively as *event*. Yet the performance event entails far more than just a specific performance occasion; indeed, the text of *Beowulf* contains no direct allusions to performance in this sense. Rather, the poem consistently orients itself towards oral traditional *diachrony*, which interpenetrates the narrative on several levels. On the level of the act of narrating, diachrony as the collective rememberance of past utterance emerges as the source of poetic discourse, both when the poet authenticates his narrative through the formula "I heard," and when he draws on traditional aphorism as a standard by which to evaluate his characters. On the level of the action itself, a belief in the immediate pertinence of diachrony is exhibited by the many digressions into genealogy and tribal history. Both forms of narrative movement into the past attest to a common conception of the known and the knowable in communication and in time. For it is through the medium of the chain of oral performances that traditional lore reenacts and thus perpetuates itself within an oral world.

The Old English *Beowulf*, as most scholars today would acknowledge, is in one sense or another heavily indebted to the world of orality. For whether or not it was actually *composed* orally, in the Parry-Lord sense, its poet probably envisioned its dissemination through oral rendering before a listening audience; yet in any case one could hardly deny that the poem relies on oral tradition for many of its materials and rhetorical assumptions.[1] The oral dimensions of *Beowulf*, and of other medieval poems as well, have been opened out to scholarly recognition and inquiry largely through the efforts of oralformulaists and folklorists. And yet this enterprise is continually thwarted by the longstanding insistence in literary studies on converting utterances into books. Few scholars, for example, would even contemplate employing a cassette reading in place of Klaeber's *Beowulf* as the "source text" for their interpretations, even though doing so might bring them into far better attunement with the poem's original audiences.[2] More generally, the drift of recent critical discourse, centering on terms like "textuality", "intertextuality", "reading", "écriture", and the like, implicitly denies orality through its very metaphors. Or rather, it converts oral discourse into a kind of literary colony that will be recognized

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[1] For introductions to pertinent scholarship, see Foley 1981 and 1985 and Olsen 1986. For an important recent treatment of the vocality of medieval literature, see Zumthor 1987.

[2] I too find it exceedingly difficult to study the poem in non-textual form; accordingly, all my citations will be based on Klaeber's masterful edition (1950).

nized and appreciated to the degree that it can bring itself into conformity with the ways of the imperial text.[3]

My aim in this paper will be to develop a critical framework by which the embedding of the narrating act in *Beowulf* in oral diachrony can be more easily conceptualized. My operative term is *interperformativity*, which bears analogy with the notion of intertextuality while relying on the folkloristic idea of performance. Consider the case of tale $\underline{T}$, that gets transmitted in multiple versions ($\underline{T}^1$, $\underline{T}^2$, $\underline{T}^3$, etc.) by a succession of tale-tellers ($\underline{A}$, $\underline{B}$, $\underline{C}$, etc.), each basing his rendering on what he heard from the tale-teller before. (Note that this model describes, in a reductive and generalized way, the intergenerational transmission of story matter in primary oral societies.) The transmission of $\underline{T}$ down this performance chain is accomplished through two kinds of movements, the *performative* and the *interperformative*. The performative transmission of $\underline{T}$ embraces its transmission from its tale-teller to the audience within the context of a performance. Performative transmission is relatively synchronic, in that raconteur and audience must be concentrated on the same point of narration at virtually the same moment of time for communication to be achieved, and relatively unilocal, in that all participants in the performance must be within hearing range. Interperformative transmission, while brought about through a series of two or more performative acts, comprehends the movement of $\underline{T}$ in its multiforms down this performance chain. Interperformative transmission is always diachronic, relying on long-term memory for the retention of story material between performance; and it can sustain geographical movement between performances, though nothing in the nature of interperformative transmission requires this.[4]

Interperformativity, then, comprehends those dimensions of a performance residing in its relationship with other performances. I intend this definition in the broadest sense, but to clarify, let us consider some lines of application. A particular rendering of $\underline{T}$, let us say $\underline{T}^3$, would be told by its teller and interpreted by its audiences in the "context" of other versions. An ancient Greek audience well-versed in the traditions of *nostos* or return songs would bring to its first encounter with the *Odyssey* expectations that readers innocent of this experience could not enjoy. On another level, formulas such as *dios Odysseus* or *podas ōkus Akhilleus* acquire their resonance through their life in an oral tradition which enforms their present use. Even the rejection of traditional context is an interperformative act in the sense that it fulfills itself through the agonistic juxtaposition of this current performance against others. In these and countless other ways the individual performance does not stand in isolation but offers itself up to the world of performance discourse. This aspect of its being is its interperformativity.

In what sense does the notion of interperformativity serve us where "intertextuality" and other terms in the current hermeneutical lexicon do not? The crucial distinction lies in the eventuation of performance as opposed to the reification of the written text. While the text is a thing, the performance happens. Of course a text, if it is to enter into discourse, requires at least two performances, the

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[3]While it contains many superb contributions in themselves, the organization of the recent collection of essays entitled *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers* (Finke and Shichtman 1987), subdivided into sections entitled "Textuality", "Intertextuality", and "The Reader", does not seem to allow for the possibility of non-writerly-readerly communication, even though the issue of oral performativity is surely pertinent both to medieval texts and present-day readers of them. Yet one of the contributions to that volume - by Alain Renoir - deals explicitly with the oral-formulaic approach. This illustrates the ease with which highly textualized scholars can still slip in to ignoring that not all communication is of a textual sort. On interrelations and distinctions between oral, chirographic, typographic, and electronically-based thought, see Ong 1982.

[4]For further discussion of these two transmission modes, see Parks 1987a and 1987b.

author's and the reader's. Yet both of these acts presuppose what I will call the primary reification of discourse that transpires when utterance incarnates into textual materiality. Authors and readers, in standard written communication, do not encounter one another directly. Rather they encounter physical texts, usually (in the present era) in the form of visible signs in dark ink on a light paper background. The oral performance, by contrast, unfolds more fluidly in time, subsists more in the relationship between communication principals than as an individuated object term. To reduce interperformativity to intertextuality, then, would be to presuppose the very thing (the text) that has not yet happened.

Now it must be recognized that this distinction between the materiality of text as opposed to the eventuality of performance is a question of degree, not an absolute difference. A book does not communicate until its visible signs enter into an extraordinarily abstract interpretive process in the mind of a reader. Nonetheless, texts as discourse interject themselves into sensory experience far more fully than oral utterances do. For most people the acts of reading and writing directly entail vision and touch: I must see my text and hold it in my hand. More peripherally, I can hear the swish of pages or the clatter of typewriter keys; new books exude the odor of glue; and in principle I *could* taste a book, though I would not ordinarily do so. A spoken utterance, by contrast, cannot be seen, touched, smelt, or tasted, but only heard. Moreover, because of the ephemerality of utterance as opposed to the longevity of text, a (responsible) listener cannot attend to its auditory materiality to the point of impeding his interpretation, which proceeds under time constraints of which the reader is free. In short, then, the spoken utterance, while not lacking in materiality altogether, cannot begin to rival the book as a material object sensually perceived within human consciousness.

Yet while the pure, abstracted utterance may lack full materiality, the performance does not. Yet its materiality resides in the performance scene and participants. A flesh-and-blood singer is sensorily apperceptible to a flesh-and-blood audience in a real physical setting. The materiality of the agents and environment of discourse has, as it were, displaced the materiality of the discourse itself. In written communication, by contrast, either the author or reader is present to his text, but seldom both at once. Further, because of the demands of intersubjectivity that attend all human discourse, writers and readers must interact through conventions acceptible to both. Thus the materiality of the text - common to both the writing and reading acts - comes to the foreground; writers, readers, and scenes of writing and reading become at most shadowy presences in the world of written communication.

Textualized thinking in all its forms operates within horizons contoured by actual, materially verifiable texts that stand objective to and independent of particular speakers or interpreters. Interperformative thinking, by contrast, finds its "material" present in the immediately current spoken word of performance; interperformativity conditions that performance-present through the echoes and resonances of the memory. The genius of oral tradition lies in the degree and intimacy of its relationship with memory, which is perpetually tapering into the immateriality of unconsciousness yet which provides the sole repository, in a primary oral setting, for the entire history of song. Yet memory is not exclusively an individual matter. To the contrary, oral performance is profoundly intermnemonic, in that its success depends on its ability to arouse the memories of the singer-audience group and to make them relevant to this tale here now. The "commonplaces" of memory (such as formulas of all types), which in an interperformative setting condition the current performing instance, perhaps correspond in a rough sense to texts cited in footnotes in textualized discourse, citations that contour that discourse yet ultimately will yield themselves to open material display as the memories of past performances cannot.

So much for theory; now in what sense can this be made pertinent to *Beowulf*? My claim is that the traces of the narrating act in the text of *Beowulf* seem to point to a storyteller operating in an interperformative rather than an intertextual setting. For the world of discourse into which the *Beowulf*-narrator interjects his tale never emerges into textual materiality but environs in the manner of past events held in common remembrance. Now since the entire text of *Beowulf* could be studied as the culmination of a narrating act that produced it, I will not be able in this space to sound this topic exhaustively, treating narrative style, point of view, and the full circle of concerns ultimately bearing on problems narratorial. Rather, I will focus on a small sampling of passages in which the narrating act comes into special prominence. "Marked" passages of this kind are particularly useful in that they bring the narrator into greater visibility and enable us to identify his specific characteristics. In particular, I will focus on passages in *Beowulf* that foreground the narrator in three ways.[5] First, the narrator calls attention to himself when he uses a first person pronoun, *ic* or *we* (in various case forms). Second, through gnomic commentary he brings explicit evaluation to the action of the story. Third, by modulating out of his principal story line into narrative digressions, he gives indications of the style of relationship obtaining between the *Beowulf*-story and other tales in his tradition. While I cannot hope here to review more than one or two representative instances from each of these categories, these may serve to suggest that the notion of interperformativity characterizes the narrator's orientation (through these three modalities) to his world of discourse more sensitively than textualized concepts can do.

Turning to the first category, we find the *Beowulf*-poet employing first-person pronouns self-referentially (that is, to refer to himself as narrator) eighteen times in the poem.[6] And extraordinarily enough, in every instance (if we accept the editorial restoration of *gefrægn* in 2694) the first-person pronoun is used in an "I heard" or "we heard" phrase that authenticates or dramatizes some detail in the narration. For example, in the opening three lines of the poem, the poet employs an allusion to a history of the glorious deeds of the Danes as a lead-in to his own story:

HWÆT, WĒ GĀR-DEna in gēardagum
þeodcyninga þrym gefrūnon,
hu ðā æþelingas ellen fremedon!

["Lo, we have heard in former days of the glory of the spear-Danes, of those kings of people, how those noble ones did valorous deeds."]

While in this unique instance the poet speaks as a voice from the collective ("we"), his essential act of summoning story material from his tradition to stand duty in his current narrative account is repeated throughout. Consider a much later and much less foregrounded instance (2752-55) that narrates Wiglaf's raiding of the dragon's barrow as Beowulf has requested:

Ðā ic snūde gefrægn sunu Wihstānes
æfter wordcwydum wundum dryhtne
hȳran heaðosiocum, hringnet beran,
brogdne beadusercean under beorges hrōf.

["Then I heard that Wihstan's son quickly obeyed the injunctions of his wounded lord sick from battle; he bore his ring-net, his woven coat of mail, under the barrow's roof."]

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[5] Of course, *Beowulf* foregrounds its narrator in other ways besides these three. Notable among these are the use of litotes, a topic recently investigated by Harris (1988).

[6] See *Beowulf* 1-2, 38, 62, 74, 776, 837, 1011, 1027, 1196, 1197, 1955, 2163, 2172, 2685, 2694, 2752, 2773, and 2837. The current discussion is a shortened version of my examinations of these formulas in Parks 1987b and forthcoming. See also Rumble 1964, Greenfield 1976, and Niles 1983: 197-204.

The narrative detail is in itself unremarkable; what I wish to emphasize is that the narrator is characterizing it as something that he heard before and is repeating again now. Whether the historical *Beowulf*-poet really did hear this particular incident in a previous version of the story or whether he is really inventing it (fictionalizing) for himself is beside the point. What is significant is the turn of mind displayed in this rhetorical act of calling upon a tradition of spoken discourse standing outside his current narrative as a means of substantiating (filling out) his own story.

Now this invocation of tradition through "I heard" formulas - and instances of the phenomenon can be found throughout the Anglo-Saxon poetic canon - provides us with an unambiguous instance of interperformativity. For the poet is situating his current narrative, or narrative detail, or narrative moment, in an interperformative chain of multiple tellings: A tells T^1, B hears T^1; B tells T^2, C hears T^2; etc. More specifically, our narrator, let us call him B, is alluding to the prior act of hearing (B hears T^1) which is the foundation of that very narrative act (B tells T^2) which, by telling this story, he is engaged in. Thus his rendering of *Beowulf* seeks its place as a performance in a succession of performances, not as a book cheek by jowl with other books in a library. In fact, in a previous study surveying the Anglo-Saxon poetic corpus (1987b) I differentiated between four types of "I heard" formulas - the representational, the negative, the comparative, and the negative-comparative. The examples cited above are re-presentational: that is, the narrator says "I heard" to preface his saying again what he heard. In negative formulas (of which there are no instances in *Beowulf*), on the other hand, the narrator tells us what he did *not* hear; and in the comparative and negative-comparative formulas he says that the X that he is talking about - whatever X may be - has more of the quality Y than any other X that he ever heard of. While these strategies differ, in all four cases the narrator is defining and valorizing his current story through reference to other stories orally narrated. The world of discourse to which he relates himself is a world of spoken events. Texts never enter into it.

Yet texts do enter into *Beowulf*; but the very manner of their doing so further substantiates my point, that the dominant orientation of the poem is indeed interperformative. For the one clear "text" in *Beowulf*, the inscription on the sword-hilt that the Geatish hero retrieves from Grendel's lair, [7] was not wrought by human hands at all. To the contrary, it was an *enta ærgeweorc*, "ancient work of giants" (1679), that devolved into human ownership only after the "fall of devils" (*dēofla hryre*, 1680). Further, the story that it relates, concerning the mythic, primordial struggle between God and the giants, while plainly relevant to Beowulf and his recent adventures, does not in itself feature human principals. Obviously I do not intend to disparage the sword or deny its narrative importance. My point is that, in its sources and manner of admission into the story, the hilt inscription is most emphatically portrayed as alien to human culture. In no way does it enjoy the priviledged intimacy to the wellsprings of human discourse that oral tradition does each time the narrator calls upon it by saying "I heard".

The second category of evidence, the gnomic commentary, exhibits its narratorial self-reflexivity not through pronominal self-reference but through evaluations directed towards the action of the narrative. The topic of maxim lore, in *Beowulf* and out of it, is too broad for full tratement here.[8] For my present purpose I would like to start with the fairly commonplace observation that the *Beowulf* gnomes,

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[7] For a recent reading of this passage, see Köberl 1987.

[8] My present discussion is particularly indebted to Shippey 1982. Kemp Malone (1960) provides a useful, thorough survey of the *Beowulf* gnomes; a classic, older treatment of the subject in Anglo-Saxon literature at large is Williams 1914. On small points of text and interpretation, see Greenfield 1982 and Robinson 1982.

taken in themselves and at face value, are not expressive of an individualized narratorial outlook but give voice to typical, generalized attitudes of a sort that might obtain in a larger community or tradition. Consider the narrator's gnomic approbation bestowed upon Beowulf for his courage in the battle with Grendel's Mother (1534b-36):

> Swā sceal man dôn,
> þonne hĕ æt gūðe gegān þenceð
> longsumne lof; nā ymb his līf cearað.

["So must a man do when at battle he intends to win long-lasting praise; he does not care about his life."]

One could find this attitude substantiated in the martial displays of many heroes of early Germanic lore: the gnome simply epitomizes a standard heroic attitude. Further, the communality of the sentiment sorts well with the performance situation, in which the phatic requirements of communication are especially insistent. A taleteller must keep contact with his audience. The evocation of a typical heroic conceit in a story with heroic subject matter can serve as a centering device, a point of common reference, like the refrains which many of the most effective preachers and politicians rely on even to the present day.

Yet the intersubjectivity of viewpoint in the *Beowulf* gnomes is conjoined with an unremittingly situational orientation. The gnomes are situational in two senses: in reference to the story, and in reference to the narrating occasion. Most literary studies concentrate on the "situationality" of gnomes as commentary within the text. The *Beowulf* maxims are undoubtedly situational in this sense; the lines cited above, for example, respond specifically to the hero's predicament at that moment in the story. Shippey (1977) has argued elegantly on this point, showing that the banality attributed to proverbs is an effect of the book-learned approach to them; appreciated on their own terms, they can be found greatly to enrich Old English poetry, in *Beowulf* and out of it. Yet I share with Shippey reservations about the tendency to ironize the maxims in such fashion as to make them confute themselves. Such interpretations rely on a primary textualization for *both* tale-teller and audience: if we grant, say, an intended oral presentation of an originally written *Beowulf*, what audience could be expected to work out such subtleties on the fly, when even modern scholars cannot agree on them? A hyper-textualized implied reader can always be imputed to any poem when it is studied in textual form by an interpreter accustomed to doing this. Yet ensuing "situational ironies" may merely be an effect of this mode of interpretation. Further studies of the maxims need to take due account of the possible performativity of *Beowulf* as against the radical textuality of outlook characterizing most current exegetes.

Texts, because they *seem* to be context-free, that is, self-existent independently of extratextual authors and readers or specific scenes of performance, tend to be viewed in the context of other texts or of their own textuality. To read a gnome "in context", to most literary critics, would mean to read it in light of what comes before or after in the page's typographic layout. Yet the *Beowulf* gnomes are situational in another sense as well: they exist in the context of being said in a particular place by someone to someone. Occasionally the situationality of its maxims gets figured visibly into the *Beowulf* narrative. In no passage does the tradition of wisdom literature emerge to the surface more powerfully, for example, than in Hrothgar's sermon (1700-84), which most emphatically must be interpreted as the advice of an experienced, older king to an emerging young hero. Here we know the speaker and addressee, since the text records this information for us; yet in the context of an oral performance the narrator's maxims too would be situational, since the performer is giving expression to them through his own physical voice, and physically present, listening audiences are hearing them with their physical ears. Further, any relevant

traditions of Anglo-Saxon aphoristic discourse (as seems to be recorded at some level of textual remove in "Maxims I" and "II" of *Exeter Book* and Cotton Tiberius B.i) would conjure memories of similar human interactions. Thus the interperformativity of the gnomes comprehends not merely the interaction of bits of discourse, but of the persons and situations that produced them as well. In this respect too it differs from intertextuality. For since the text does not demand the physical presence of its author and readers during all moments of its life as text, intertextuality does not invest itself to the same degree in these human resonances. Its materiality, as discussed earlier, resides in the texts themselves, not in the human articulators and receptors.

Gnomic interperformativity in *Beowulf*, then, involves not merely interrelations between gnomes but interrelations between gnomes and people. Some of the gnomes themselves register awareness of such interactiveness between discursive traditions and the people who are their spokesmen and subjects. In the opening Danish genealogy, for example, a narratorial maxim (20-24a) praises the Danish Beowulf for the youthful generosity that will inspire loyalty among the retainers in later years; the narrator concludes with the generalizing observation (24b-25)

> lofdǣdum sceal
> in mǣgþa gehwǣre man geþēon.

["... by praiseworthy deeds will one prosper among the people everywhere."]

Here traditions of praise mediate between the doers of fine deeds and their laudators who, through their very encomiums, commit themselves to reciprocal action. Or again, at the other extremity of the poem, as Beowulf's people mourn their great leader's passing, the narrator comments on the propriety of such behavior (3174-77):

> - swā his gedē(fe) bi$\eth$,
> þæt mon his winedryhten wordum herge,
> ferh$\eth$um frēoge, þonne hē for$\eth$ scile
> of līchaman (lǣded) weor$\eth$an.

["... so it is fitting, that a man should praise his friendly lord with words, love him in his spirit, when he must be brought forth form his body."]

In neither of these passages does the narrator use gnomes to speak of gnomes; gnomes are used to express the narrator's approbation for the proper use of another speech genre. Yet what holds for the interperformativity of the discourse of praise (*lof-*, 24b; *herge*, 3175b) holds for gnomic interperformativity as well: it does not bring pure utterance to bear on pure utterance so much as a tradition of discursive occasions to bear on a discursive occasion. Throughout, discourse remains embedded in human life contexts.

Let us now turn to the third category of evidence, the digressions, which reveal to us another aspect of the interperformative discursive aesthetic. Customarily the digressions are read in terms of their textual interrelatedness (or lack thereof) with the rest of the poem.[9] That is, a particular digression's phrasing, structure, thematics, and so forth, are directly juxtaposed with those of other passages in the poem in a manner that could be accomplished only by a reader with text in hand; and the ensuing readings, however divergent in other respects, share this common starting point. Such textualized research methods cannot be condemned in themselves: a scholar in the contemporary era can hardly pursue his or her researches otherwise.

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[9]For a classic example, see Bonjour 1950. Despite the excellence of Bonjour's study and many others, the problem of the connections between the digressions and main story needs to be reexamined from the start with a heightened sensitivity to the diversity of possible performance modes.

Yet *Beowulf* seems to me to project the self-concept of a song among songs: its very proem, cited earlier, seems to establish it in a song-tradition context. From this standpoint the digressions could be "read" as the visible impingement of interformativity upon performance. Through them the *Beowulf*-poet situates his story of Beowulf in a world of songs.

Interperformativity takes place within the (conscious and unconscious) memory, for, outside of memory, and in the absence of texts, how could discrete performances be made interactive at all? Yet for the performance group, memory has both a subjective and an intersubjective aspect. It does not suffice, for example, for an individual - the performer, say - to remember another potentially relevant story: he must induce his hearers to remember it as well. Yet if a digression accomplishes this, if the performer succeeds in stimulating the recollections of his audiences sufficiently to make this adjacent story as "present" to the common consciousness as his purposes require, there is no need for him to elaborate further, rendering a version of the story that can stand independently as text outside the performance moment. Thus several of the digressions in *Beowulf* - the Finnsburg tale, for example - are notoriously obscure; to make sense of them editors like Klaeber must spin ingenious webs of intertextual association spanning sometimes half a millennium and thousands of miles of northern Europe. Yet while our method of recovery must thus be intertextual, we have no grounds for supposing that *Beowulf*'s allusiveness was that for its original audience. The song-present can summon the recollection of song through an immediate mnemonic juxtaposition. Having just killed Grendel, Beowulf deserves to be praised. Petal-pointing within this discourse of praise-and-blame, the poet modulates interperformatively into the tales of Sigemund and Heremod (875-915), praise- and blame-worthy kings respectively. Thus song penetrates song. What have texts to do with it?

Indeed, the introduction of the Sigemund-Heremod digression provides us with a clear emblem of its interperformativity. For the poet tells us that a thane of Hrothgar,

guma gilphlæden, gidda gemyndig,
sēðe ealfela ealdgesegena
worn gemunde, word ōþer fand
sōðe gebunden; secg oft ongan
sīð Bēowulfes snyttrum styrian... [868-72]

["... a man laden with proud speech, mindful of songs, one who remembered a great many old traditions, found new utterance well-knit in truth; the man began again to recount wisely the journey of Beowulf..."]

The tale of Beowulf, and the tales of Sigemund and Heremod which follow it, are now coinhabitants in the world of tradition recalled through the memory. The thane's performance feeds into the world of interperformativity, just as interperformativity, through this digression, contributes back into it. The movement between them is accomplished through the scene of man-speaking-to-men, figured against a mnemonic backdrop of similar past occasions. This is not the only digression so introduced.[10] The Creation Hymn, for example, paraphrases the words of the *scop* at Heorot (88-100), while the swimming match with Breca is related in rival versions by the flyting adversaries Unferth and Beowulf (499-606). But if we allow, again, that *Beowulf* was intended for oral delivery, then even the digressions without these tale-telling or speech-making frames are fully as interperformative as those that have them. But in such cases the interperformative act is accomplished not by some fictive character within the story but by the flesh-and-blood performer of the

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[10]For a thorough review of evidence pertaining to *scops* and *gleomen* in Anglo-Saxon England, see Opland 1980.

poem. The linking of the Modthrytho digression, for example, is not unlike that of Sigemund-Heremod: for the narrator's juxtaposing of the bad and good phases of Modthrytho's career beside praise of the young queen Hygd (1925-62) parallels Hrothgar's thane's movement from praise of Beowulf to praise-and blame of the two kings. The explicit introduction of the thane helps bridge the interperformative movement in the earlier (Sigemund-Heremod) episode; lacking such a fictionalized mediator, the Modthrytho digression has seemed gracelessly interjected to some readers. But to a listening audience the agent of this shift in stories would be visible to all, as he is not in the written page.

Since scholars approach Beowulf through texts and employ methods cultivated through a history of textual study, it is always possible to find reasons for believing that the poem is fundamentally textual, just as, if one freezes a cup of water, one can then find ample grounds for believing that the cup contains not water but ice. I cannot claim here to have proven such beliefs in error. The issue of the oral performativity and/or textuality of *Beowulf* is far more complex than my account in this short space has been able to represent. Admittedly my arguments for the interperformativity of the narrating act in *Beowulf* are incomplete and speculative. Yet the poem does provide evidence in support of such view, whereas I cannot see that it ever directly represents itself in textual terms. Indeed, the notion of interperformativity gives coherency to an assortment of phenomena relating to the poem's narrative outlook, phenomena which, in textualized conceptions of the poem, seem to wind up getting explained away. Yet the underlying problem of formulating critical-theoretical constructions adequate to the challenge of orality is not unique to the study of this poem. It is merely emblematic of the encroachments on a textually-fostered literary scholarship by the world outside itself. As this world changes - not least of all through the current revolution in communications whereby texts are ceding place to the electronic media - it will become more and more imperative for scholars to rise to these occasions.

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Interperformativnost i Beowulf

SAŽETAK

Prilog je usredotočen na odlomke u Beowulfu u kojima se ističe sam čin pripovijedanja. Autora posebno zanima razina tzv. autoreferencijalnosti pripovjednog teksta. Isticanje položaja pripovjedača-izvođača, tj. onog koji izvodi pripovjedni čin u cijelosti, autor zove