



HAL
open science

Beowulf Told to the Children of the English Race, 1898-1908

Lise Jaillant

► **To cite this version:**

Lise Jaillant. Beowulf Told to the Children of the English Race, 1898-1908. "Young Reading Habits in Europe", ESRs SHARP Posters workshop, 2013, Le Mans, France. 2014. hal-04574253

HAL Id: hal-04574253

<https://univ-lemans.hal.science/hal-04574253v1>

Submitted on 3 Jun 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial - NoDerivatives 4.0
International License

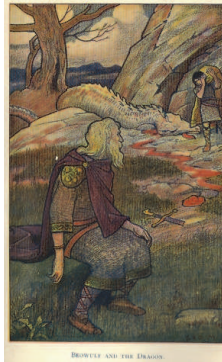
1. Introduction

When publishers started marketing the tale of *Beowulf* to a large audience of children (and adults) in the 1880s, they capitalized on the aura of the Middle Ages by selling editions with golden titles, decorated initials and reproductions of medieval drawings. The medievalizing aspect of these children's books offered a suitable format for a tale presented as the founding text in English literature. I argue that the heroic and nationalistic ideology of these early versions is anchored in their material aspect. The analysis of three juvenile adaptations first published between 1898 and 1908 – A. J. Church's *Heroes of Chivalry and Romance*, Thomas Cartwright's *Brave Beowulf*, and H. E. Marshall's *Stories of Beowulf Told to the Children* – shows that their 'bibliographic code' was closely intertwined with archaic translations inspired by nineteenth-century Anglo-Saxon scholarship.

2. A. J. Church's *Heroes of Chivalry and Romance* (1898)



- Published in Britain by Seeley & Co and simultaneously in the US by Macmillan
- Sold to an **audience of middle-class readers** for the mid-range price of 5s. in Britain and \$1.75 in the US
- **Scholarly credentials:** A. J. Church was a "former Professor of Latin in University College London" (Title-page) → inspired by the philologist John M. Kemble
- **BUT wide audience of adults & children** (appeal of coloured illustrations)
- **Difficult language:** archaic inversions, use of the pronouns 'ye' and 'thou,' revived inflections on the end of verbs
- Marketing an **idealized past:** heroism, but also mourning



4. H. E. Marshall's *Stories of Beowulf Told to the Children* (1908)



- Published in Britain by T. C. & E. C. Jack and in the US by Dutton
- Targeted **very young children** (Jack Told to the Children Series)
- **Medievalizing packaging & language** associated with a by long past
- **Nationalistic pride** closely intertwined with Marshall's celebration of British imperial expansion (see *Our Empire Story*)
- **Accentuation of the most striking elements:** detailed description of the ogre, emphasis on the beauty of the queen

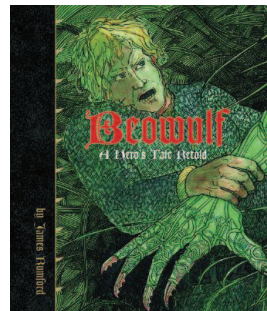


3. Thomas Cartwright's *Brave Beowulf* (1908)



- Published in Britain by Heinemann (Every Child's Library) and in the US by Dutton
- *Beowulf* placed in the **larger context of Germanic legends of the Middle Ages** (see Cartwright's *Sigurd the Dragon-Slayer*, 1907)
- Presented as both **fun and instructive** (drawings, glossary)
- Young readers encouraged to relate to their heroic ancestors: "*Brave Beowulf* should be a prime favourite with **Anglo-Saxon children all the world over**"
- The only woman featured in the illustrations is **Grendel's mother** → role of positive female characters downplayed

5. Conclusion: Contemporary Adaptations



- Recent retellings of *Beowulf* for children continue to show **signs of the medieval in their bibliographic and linguistic codes**
- **Example #1:** James Rumford's *Beowulf: A Hero's Tale Retold* (2007) → Gothic type and illuminations → uses only words that can be traced to their Anglo-Saxon origins
- **Example #2:** 2007 retelling of *Beowulf* by Gareth Hinds (2 editions) → the Candlewick Press edition uses what the author describes as 'a more straightforward prose translation by A. J. Church' → the self-published edition draws on 'a more archaically-flavored verse translation'
- *Beowulf* is still tied to history, archaeology, and the search for origins

6. Further Readings

Echard, Siân. *Printing the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2008.

Howsam, Leslie. *Past into Print: The Publishing of History in Britain, 1850-1950*. London: British Library, 2009.

Jaillant, Lise. "A Fine Old Tale of Adventure: *Beowulf* Told to the Children of the English Race, 1898-1908." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 38.4 (Forthcoming).

Smol, Anna. 'Heroic Ideology and the Children's Beowulf,' *Children's Literature* 22 (1994): 90-100.