



香港浸會大學
HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Department of English Language & Literature
DEPARTMENT SEMINAR

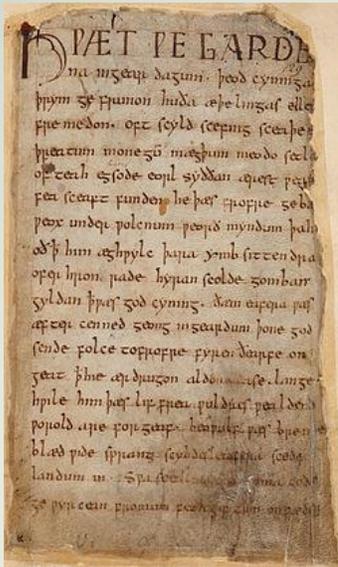
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Date & time: Wednesday, 6 December 2017; 4:30p.m.

Venue: OEM1008, 10/F, OEN Hall Building, Ho Sin Hang Campus

The Style of *Beowulf* and the Conversion to Christianity: A Study in Historical Aesthetics

Leonard Neidorf



Abstract: This paper reconsiders the historical plausibility of Fred C. Robinson's argument for the use of an "appositive style" in *Beowulf*. The poet, in Robinson's view, contrasts paganism and Christianity by placing their representative elements into a state of apposition, which enables the audience to perceive both the admirable and regrettable aspects of the pagan past without passing explicit judgment upon it. Several critics have denounced Robinson's interpretation as anachronistic and implausible, but this paper contends that its credibility is increased in the light of a hitherto unrecognized historical analogue. A letter written by Daniel, Bishop of Winchester, about methods for converting pagan Germanic peoples is shown here to recommend rhetorical strategies that distinctly resemble the appositive

style of *Beowulf*. The composition of *Beowulf* is consequently situated in a milieu close to the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons, in which an aesthetic of pagan and Christian apposition evidently prevailed.

About the speaker: Leonard Neidorf is Professor of English at Nanjing University, where he teaches courses on medieval literature and the history of the English language. He received his Ph.D. from Harvard University and his B.A. from New York University. Before coming to Nanjing, Neidorf was a Junior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows. He is the author of *The Transmission of Beowulf: Language, Culture, and Scribal Behavior* (Cornell University Press, 2017) and the editor of *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment* (Boydell & Brewer, 2014), which was named an Outstanding Academic Title by CHOICE. His articles have appeared in such journals as *ELH*, *Tolkien Studies*, *Modern Philology*, and *Review of English Studies*.

