

BEOWULF AND TYPOLOGICAL SYMBOLISM

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By

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## PREFACE

In view of the prevalence of Christianity in England throughout what we can consider the age of the Beowulf poet, an exploration of the influence of typological symbolism would seem to be especially useful in the study of Beowulf. In the Old English period any Christian influence on a poem would perforce be of a patristic and typological nature. I propose to give evidence that this statement applies also to Beowulf, and to bring this information to bear particularly on the interpretation of the two dominant symbols, Heorot and the dragon's hoard. To date, no attempt has been made to look at the poem as a whole in a purely typological perspective.

According to the typological exegesis of Scripture, the realities of the Old Testament prefigure those of the new dispensation. The Hebrew prophets and also the New Testament apostles consciously made reference to "types" or "figures", but it was left for the Fathers of the Church to develop typology as a science. They did so to prove to such heretics as the Manicheans that both Testaments form a unity, and to convince the Jews that the Old was fulfilled in the New. In this thesis we are concerned mainly with the sacramental typology which, being derived from Scripture, shows an essential consistency that is not affected by the whims of allegorizing exegetes. Since the typological symbolism of the baptismal rite is commonplace in

the hexameral and paschal writings of the early Church, the extent to which typology was influenced by extra-biblical allegory as well as the complexity of the variations in the early liturgy both lie beyond the scope of our present investigation.

The following technical points should be noted. All quotations from Latin authors are given first in the original and then in English; wherever no indebtedness is indicated, the translations are my own. Greek writers are quoted only in English translation. All Scripture passages are from the Vulgate; the Authorized or King James Version is the usual source of the English text because it provides the most familiar rendering. Significant divergences are pointed out, and on occasion the Revised Standard Version is used to supply a closer parallel. In the references to the Psalms, the numbering of the Vulgate precedes that of other translations; the latter is shown in parentheses. Old English quotations are taken from The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, unless otherwise acknowledged.

I would like to thank my supervisor and mentor, Dr. A. A. Lee, for kindly permitting me to read the galley proof of his forthcoming book, for drawing my attention to the gold-hall motif in the Utrecht Psalter, and for showing his interest throughout the preparation of this thesis. Professor Lee first introduced me to Beowulf and has since then provided the stimulation of his scholarly guidance.

W. H.

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## I

### HEOROT AND THE SONG OF CREATION

The Song of Creation (90-98) in the opening section of Beowulf<sup>1</sup> suggests in a fairly explicit way that the construction of Heorot has its model in the creation of the world. Since both Heorot and the pristine earth represent light and perfection brought forth in the midst of darkness and disorder, the appropriateness of the parallel becomes apparent after the most cursory examination. The elemental antithesis between harmony and chaos strikes a responsive chord in the human consciousness; the richness of the Beowulf poet's allusion is, however, lost if no attempt is made to recapture some of its early medieval connotations. It is, for example, striking that the scop selects most of his details from the third and fourth days of creation and that in so doing he presents a springtime scene. One may wonder, therefore, whether the typological or liturgical significance of this season in the ecclesiastical calendar has any bearing on the order of the newly created world and, in turn, on the harmony in the Danish gold-hall.

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<sup>1</sup>The edition used throughout is F. Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, 3rd ed.

Hroðgar, "se þe his wordes geweald wide haefde" (79), acts in imitation of the God who by the power of his creative word called the earth into being. The verb "scop" ("scop him Heort naman", 78) in this context helps to confirm that Hroðgar is, indeed, a "scyppend" or creator in his own right. Further evidence that the king's command to build the hall is a creative act can be found in the expression "folcstede fraetwan" (76), which serves as a reminder that God once "gefraetwade foldan sceatas" (96). There can be no doubt that the Song of Creation is a comment on Heorot.<sup>2</sup> If the Song is a compilation of scriptural images, it stands to reason that the early commentaries on creation have to be taken into account in interpreting the poet's allusion.

The "wlitebeorhtne wang, swa waeter bebuged" (93) became reality when God said: "Congregentur aquae, quae sub caelo sunt, in locum unum: et appareat arida" "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear" (Genesis 1:9). Writing in the same general period as the Beowulf poet, Bede discusses the third day of creation in one of his commentaries and makes the expository remark, "Et appareat arida, hoc est, Ecclesia"<sup>3</sup> "And let the dry land appear, that is, the Church"--enough to indicate that

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<sup>2</sup>The fact that Heorot is a hall while God's creation is described here as a plain presents no difficulties. The two images are interchangeable. See e.g. Genesis 146, 209.

<sup>3</sup>In Pentateuchum Commentarii, PL 91, 196B.



an a-historical twentieth-century view of Heorot is likely to be inadequate. The scop's next statement, that God

gesette sigehredig    sunnan ond monan  
leoman to leohte    landbuendum, (94-95)

recalls Genesis 1:16 and 17: "Fecitque Deus duo luminaria magna: . . . ut lucerent super terram . . . ." "And God made two great lights: . . . to give light upon the earth . . . ." Although the adjective "sigehredig" cannot be traced back to the creation account, Klaeber assures us that there is no sufficient ground for taking it as a "heidnische reminiscenz".<sup>4</sup> Bede's comments on the fourth day of creation show that Klaeber's conclusion may be justified, for Bede in his Hexaemeron connects this day with the date on which the paschal celebration was instituted:

Factum est vespere et mane dies quartus. Haec est vespera illa memoranda, in qua populus Dei in AEgypto in celebrationem paschae obtulit agnum hoc mane quod primum post excussum longae servitutis iugum, coepto libertatis itinere, vidit.<sup>5</sup>

It was evening and morning, a fourth day. This is that memorable evening when the people of God in Egypt offered in celebration the lamb of the pasch; this is the morning which first saw the yoke of long-lasting slavery thrown off, when the march of freedom began.

After quoting Exodus 12:2, where God tells Moses that the month of the passover is to be the first month of the year, Bede continues:

Qua etiam vespera, ad consummanda paschae legalis sacramenta, Dominus noster post esum agni typice mysteria nobis sui corporis et sanguinis celebranda initiavit; quo lucescente mane, quasi agnus immaculatus, suo nos sanguine redimens, a daemonicae dominationis servitute liberavit.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>"Die christlichen Elemente im Beowulf", Anglia, 35 (1911), 115.

<sup>5</sup>PL 91, 25A.

This very evening, to fulfil the sacraments of the pasch of the law, our Lord, after having been consumed as a typological counterpart of the lamb, initiated for us the mysteries of his body and blood as we are to celebrate them; this bright dawn, he as the spotless lamb redeemed us with his blood and freed us from the slavery of demonic power.

The connection between Exodus 12 and a release from the domination of the devil is, of course, a commonplace. The deliverance of the children of Israel from the Egyptian house of bondage prefigures in its very details the liberation of the faithful from the power of sin and Satan, as accomplished by Christ.<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting, however, that Bede's discussion of Exodus typology is an integral part of his exegesis of Genesis 1. The adjective "sigehredig", when used to modify "se AElmihtiga" (92), derives its appropriateness from the divine victory over the powers of hell.<sup>7</sup>

The actual mention of the sun and the moon in Beowulf--more specific than the scriptural reference to luminaria--may be further evidence that the Song of Creation has patristic tradition as its source. The words "et sint in signa et tempora, et dies et annos" "and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days, and years" (Genesis 1:14) cause Bede to embark on a detailed explanation of what he took to be the first vernal equinox.<sup>8</sup> The respective positions of sun and

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<sup>6</sup>See Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, pp. 86-98.

<sup>7</sup>Strictly speaking, that victory was Christ's; however, Old English poetry often stresses his divinity (cf. Christ 4-16, where as "sigorbeorht" king and creator he is to complete a "healle maerre"). For Christ as logos or creative word, see also John 1.

moon on the fourth day of creation and on the fourteenth<sup>9</sup> day of Nisan, the passover month, introduce the typological symbolism in which Christ is the Oriens, the Rising Sun of righteousness. Bede's discussion of astronomical data adds force to the view that the juxtaposition of "sigehredig" and "sunnan ondoman" (94) is not a reminiscence of the pagan past. The hexameral references to the aequinoctium vernale are compatible

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<sup>8</sup>Coeperunt namque discerni temporum vices ex quo sol die quarto mundi nascentis, a medio procedens orientis, aequinoctium vernale suo consecravat exortu, et quotidianis profectibus ad alta coeli culmina scandendo, rursumque a solstitiali vertice ad infima paulatim descendendo, ne mora ab infimis hibernisque locis aequinoctiales gyros repetendo, discretis temporibus quatuor notissimis diebusque praefinitis anni spatium complevit. Sed et luna vespere plena apparens, ea quae in celebrationem paschae servanda erant tempora primo suo praefixit ascensu. Ipsa est enim hora quo non solum antiquus ille populus Dei, sed et nos hodie primam in agendo pascha servamus, cum aequinoctii die transcenso, plena vespere luna, hoc est, quarta decima, in faciem coeli prodierit. Nam mox post haec ut Dominicus dies advenerit, aptum hoc celebrandae resurrectionis dominicae tempus instabit, . . . Hexaemeron, PL 91, 21B. (For the changes of the seasons began to be distinguished when the sun on the fourth day of the earth that was being brought forth, proceeding from the middle of the east, with its rising consecrated the vernal equinox, and by climbing in its daily journeys to the highest point in the sky, by descending again gradually from the solstitial vertex to the lowest point, and by repeating without delay its equinoctial cycles from the remote and wintry regions, completed the space of a year in the four distinct and well-known seasons and the fixed number of days. But the full moon appearing in the evening pointed in its first rising to those seasons which are to be kept in celebration of the pasch. For it is the very hour when not only the ancient people of God but also we today keep as the first for performing the pasch, when after the passing of the equinoctial day, the full moon in the evening--which is the fourteenth--advances into the expanse of the sky. For soon after these things, when the day of the Lord shall have arrived, this season appropriate for celebrating the resurrection of the Lord will follow closely.)

<sup>9</sup>The two dates can be identified with each other because  $14-10=4$ . Ten days is a figure of the Old Testament or the Decalogue; hence 10 is not included in the symbolism of a perfect creation.

with the impression that the Song of Creation in Beowulf describes a spring setting. When the poet adds that God "gefraetwade foldan sceatas/ leomum ond leafum" (96-97), the imagery confirms this opinion. The adornment of the earth is not directly mentioned in Genesis, but it is a common motif in patristic writings. In commenting on Genesis 1:11-12, Bede remarks, "Patet ex his Dei verbis quod verno tempore mundi est perfectus ornatus"<sup>10</sup> "It is clear from these words of God that in the springtime the adornment of the earth was accomplished". Again, the Beowulf poet indicates his familiarity with the hexameral tradition.

The above references to the works of Bede show that a typological interpretation of the creation account was known in the England of his time. To justify an examination of the influence of typological symbolism on Beowulf, one does not need to give proof of any direct relationship between Bede and the Beowulf poet. Bede was not a literary individualist; as one might expect in his era, his commentaries on Genesis are entirely in the patristic tradition. They depend heavily on the hexameral exegesis of Ambrose and on other Church Fathers.<sup>11</sup> Ambrose, too, deals at length with the springtime setting of creation, relating it to the Exodus, to the resurrection, and to baptism. During the Old English period the only possible reading of the first chapter of Genesis, as of Scripture in general, was the patristic one. The very fact that the Beowulf

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<sup>10</sup>Hexaemeron, PL 91, 21B.

<sup>11</sup>Ogilvy, Books Known to the English, 597-1066, p. 59.

poet makes use of biblical images implies that he understood their typological associations.

The Song of Creation alludes to the ideal state which has been restored in principle by Christ and which will ultimately prevail in the paradise to come. It is not merely a literary or archaeological reflection of the poet's interest in a golden age of bliss and innocence. In a typological context the Song calls to mind the Old Testament types of the redemption. The Flood and the Exodus, like the creation, are historical realities in their own right; at the same time they prefigure the new creation restored by Christ and destined to receive its final fulfilment in the new earth. The salvatory work of Christ is connected, in turn, with holy baptism; the newly baptized catechumen knows himself to be in a sacramental relationship with his Lord. Hence baptism, too, is a fulfilment of the several restorations in the Old Testament types. While baptism is a re-enactment of a historical event, Christ's victory over Satan, the new life which the baptismal candidate begins is also the outcome of a conquest that is a reality. The writers of the early Church therefore invite the catechumens to enter paradise. Cyril of Jerusalem addresses them in his Procatechesis: "Already . . . scents of paradise are wafted towards you; already you are culling mystic blossoms for the weaving of heavenly garlands . . . ." <sup>12</sup> By being baptized they would

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<sup>12</sup> McCauley and Stephenson, trans., The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, 1. On his contribution to the development of all paschal and baptismal liturgy, see M. H. Shepherd, The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse, p. 51.



fication for attributing a prelapsarian perfection to Heorot. The very next lines reinforce this view, for the Song is framed by references to daemonica dominatio. The poet tells his audience as if in a brief prologue:

Da se ellengaest earfodlice  
 þrage gepolode, se þe in þystrum bad,  
 . þaet he dogora gehwam dream gehyrde  
 hludne in healle; . . . (86-89)

After the brief presentation of paradisaal light and joy, he turns again to the darkness which lurks outside:

Swa ða drihtguman dreamum lifdon,  
 eadiglice, oð ðaet an ongan  
 fyrene fremman feond on helle. (99-101)

If the Song recalls the typology of the Old Testament, this frame is remarkably appropriate. It reminds us that the poet's description of the newly created earth is in the first place a standard for action in a fallen world.

This edifying aspect of the creation account is stressed particularly by Ambrose when in his Hexameron he relates details of the earth's beginning to the passover and the Exodus:

. . . verno tempore filii Israhel Aegyptum reliquerunt et per mare transierunt, baptizati in nube et in mari, ut apostolus dixit, et eo tempore domini quodannis Iesu Christi pascha celebratur, hoc est animarum transitus a vitiis ad virtutem, a passionibus carnis ad gratiam sobrietatemque mentis, a malitiae nequitiaeque fermento ad veritatem et sinceritatem. . . . derelinquet enim et deserit qui abluitur intellegibilem illum Pharaon, principem istius mundi, dicens: abrenuntio tibi, diabole, et operibus tuis et imperiis tuis. nec iam serviet ei vel terrenis huius corporis passionibus vel depravatae mentis erroribus . . . .

The sons of Israel left Egypt in the season of spring and passed through the sea, being baptized in the cloud and in the sea, as the Apostle said. At that time each year the Pasch of Jesus Christ is celebrated, that is to say, the passing over from vice to virtues, from the desires of the flesh to grace

and sobriety of mind, from the unleavened bread of malice and wickedness to truth and sincerity . . . . The person who is baptized leaves behind and abandons in a spiritual sense that prince of the world, Pharaoh, when he says: 'I renounce thee, devil, both thy works and thy power.' No longer will he serve him, either by the earthly passions of his body or by the errors of a corrupt mind. . . .<sup>13</sup>

This discussion, as should again be pointed out, arises out of the exegesis of Genesis 1 in a work that was well-known during the age of the Beowulf poet. The same moralizing function of this part of Scripture is evident from its use as the first lection of the Holy Saturday liturgy.<sup>14</sup> As a typological text the creation story focuses chiefly on man and his salvation. To the Beowulf audience it was much more than a source of literary ornamentation; when the scop who sings the Song of Creation is introduced as "se þe cuþe/ frumsceaft fira feorran reccan" (90-91), the word "fira" may well be considered a key word. In the setting of creation God placed man as his vice-roy and image-bearer.

<sup>13</sup>I, 4, 14, in C. Schenkl, ed., Sancti Ambrosii Opera; translated in John J. Savage, trans., Ambrose.

<sup>14</sup>Genesis 1:1-2:2. The Collect which follows this reading indicates the specific lesson which the faithful were expected to draw from it: "O God, who didst wonderfully create man and hast still more wonderfully redeemed him, grant us, we beseech Thee, to withstand with a strong mind the allurements of sin, that we may attain to everlasting happiness . . . ." Quoted in L. Bouyer, The Paschal Mystery, p. 283. For further references to the relation between Beowulf and the Holy Saturday liturgy, see chapters II and III. Note that the lections are "the same in all the Latin rituals" (Duchesne, Christian Worship, p. 308). On the uniformity of post-Nicene lections for Holy Saturday, see also Shepherd, The Paschal Liturgy and the Apocalypse, p. 55.



Hroðgar is, in a sense, king of creation. As such it is his responsibility to follow the great example of his divine superior; the realm of the Danes must reach for the standards of the civitas Dei. Bede's reference to the plain of the newly created world as Ecclesia--especially since this mention is made in a commentary on Genesis 1--thus becomes applicable to the Danish kingdom. It is even more meaningful when it is juxtaposed with the poet's identification of Grendel as the offspring of Cain;

. . . him Scyppend    forscrifen haefde  
in Caines cynne--    þone cwealm gewraec  
ece Drihten,    þaes þe he Abel slog. (106-08)

In patristic writings Abel is frequently interpreted as a prefiguration of the Church.<sup>15</sup> The contrast in Beowulf between the light of Heorot and the darkness of Grendel's domain is a form of the antithesis between Abel and Cain or between their respective civitates.

The early allusion to Abel and Cain is a further indication that Heorot is not to be identified in any simple way with Eden before the fall. Rather, Heorot represents a society in which paradise is the standard and goal of human activity. The presence of Unferð and the apprehensions of Wealhþeow with regard to the future loyalty of Hroðulf show that remaining the city of God is no easy matter. Indeed, the foreshadowing of Heorot's destruction by fire as a result of

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<sup>15</sup>See e.g. Augustine, Contra Faustum Manichaeum, XII, 9.

feuding (82ff.) serves as a grim reminder of man's weaknesses and shortcomings. The fratricide of Unferð, the anticipated treachery of Hroðulf, and the fall of Heorot--all these elements reflect the predicament of the people of God as Augustine saw it; all three indicate that Heorot's problems are particularized manifestations of a fundamental malady. The main concern in Beowulf is the fratricidal ethic of vengeance, which inevitably reduces order to chaos, or which leads those identified with Abel into the bondage of Cain. In the society of the Beowulf audience, social and political harmony--peace and brotherhood--were the tangible fruits of obedience.

Although such goals were particularly applicable to early medieval societies in north-western Europe, they are by no means exclusively Germanic. In Book XIV of De Civitate Dei, the section which deals at some length with the two cities of Abel and Cain, Augustine begins his consideration with a brief summary of what is also the ideal in Beowulf:

Diximus . . . ad humanum genus non solum naturae similitudine sociandum verum etiam quadam cognationis necessitudine in unitatem concordem pacis vinculo conligandum ex homine uno Deum voluisse homines instituere . . . .

As I have already stated . . . God's purpose in choosing to reproduce mankind from one man was not merely to unite the human race in an alliance based on natural likeness but also to bind it up by the tie of kinship, as it were, into a single harmonious whole held together through the bond of peace.<sup>16</sup>

Allusions in Beowulf to the creation, in a context in which the

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<sup>16</sup>Text and translation from The City of God against the Pagans, Loeb edition.

ideal harmony resulting from ties of kinship is constantly threatened, might well have served to recall the above view of God's purpose--especially if the account of creation was read as a directive focusing on man's responsibility to withstand the allurements of sin.

According to Augustine, the ideal as human beings can experience it on earth is Eden. Heorot is an Eden if the divine precepts are upheld in it. Though not perfect and prelapsarian, it does manifest ideal conditions in so far as they can exist among mortal men. When Augustine discusses the contrast between Abel and Cain, he mentions, for example, that Jews and Manichaeans, like Cain, "habitant in terra commotionis, id est in perturbatione carnali contra iucunditatem dei, hoc est contra Eden, quod interpretantur epulationem, ubi est plantatus paradisus"<sup>17</sup> "dwell in the land of commotion, that is, of carnal disquietude, instead of the pleasure of God, that is, instead of Eden, which is interpreted as feasting, where paradise was planted". Eden is the state in which man has achieved the harmony that results in feasting. Although Germanic warriors may also have had their feasts, the epulatio is a fitting Christian symbol of brotherhood. When Hroðgar "beagās dælde,/ sinc aet symle" (80-81), the banquet scene is wholly compatible with Christian heroism. It is another reminder that Hroðgar is a representative of God. In a dryht society the king is

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<sup>17</sup>Contra Faustum, XII, 13.

a giver of gifts. God, too, is a royal gift-giver.<sup>18</sup> In fact, a good king is one of his gifts. The opening lines of Beowulf make it quite clear that a merciful God who remembers the misery of a nation left "aldorlease" (15) provides a successor to Scyld Scefing. He continues to practise his generosity by bestowing "woroldare" (17) upon Beowulf Scylding. The pagan custom of placing treasures with the body of a dead hero therefore seems to have Christian overtones in Beowulf. The poet's description of Scyld's departure begins with the statement that he passed into the Lord's protection ("on Frean waere", 27); in spite of the subsequent expression of uncertainty about the vessel's specific destination, both the body and the treasures heaped around it are evidently bound for the same place. The implication could be that it is fitting to return the gifts to the giver.<sup>19</sup> When Hroðgar builds his gold-hall, his act of creation parallels that of God, who also built a hall to show his generosity. The construction of Heorot is part of a magnanimous scheme. After the rebellion of the wicked angels, God was not content with a land of darkness, "idel ond onnyt";<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>In Christ 460, where Christ's divine role as member of the Trinity is stressed, he is significantly referred to as a "singiefan", a term applied to kings in Beowulf.

<sup>19</sup>The same may partially explain why treasures are placed on Beowulf's funeral pyre--an episode in which there is a similar vagueness about the destination, although once again there is no fundamental agnosticism in this regard, for Beowulf goes to the judgment of the just, whenever or wherever it may be.

<sup>20</sup>Genesis 106. See Klaeber's note on Beowulf 413, where this expression describes Heorot during Grendel's reign of terror.

Hroðgar's related, divinely sanctioned, creative urge reflects the concept that it is everyone's duty to aim towards the perfection of God's handiwork. A king, because of his royal status, would be all the more obliged to abide by its standards. The hierarchical relationship between God and king as gift-givers comes to the fore in the statement that Hroðgar intended to distribute his wealth "swylc him God sealde" (72). Such gift-giving is an integral part of the attempt to reach for paradise. In Beowulf, as in Augustine and in the Psalms, a reaching for blessedness and perfection is no vain pursuit. The object, though fleeting, can be grasped as a reality in the life of man, for the achievement of paradise, as the Beowulf audience knew, is a feature of the new life which commences after the catechumen's victory over Satan in the waters of baptism.

In the Psalms generosity is a virtue of the blessed man who fears the Lord. The beatus vir of Psalm 111(112) is of particular interest because he has much in common with the ideal king as presented in Beowulf. Augustine supplies the introductory phrase found in the Latin versions of this Psalm with an explanation that reminds us of Heorot:

Credo quod adtendistis, fratres, huius titulum psalmi, memoriaeque mandastis. Conversio, inquit, Aggaei et Zachariae. Non-dum erant hi prophetae, cum ista cantata sunt. . . . et ambo post invicem intra unum annum prophetare coeperunt, quod ad renovationem templi, sicut tanto ante praedictum est, pertinere videtur. . . . Templum enim Dei sanctum est, quod estis vos. Quisquis igitur se ad opus huius coaedificationis, et ad spem sanctae firmaeque compaginis, tamquam lapidem vivum ab huius mundi ruinosa labe convertit; intellegit titulum psalmi,

intellegit conversionem Aggaei et Zachariae. Cantet ergo quae sequuntur, non tam linguae voce, quam vitae. Erit enim aedificii perfectio, ineffabilis pax illa sapientiae, cuius initium est timor Domini: inde ergo incipiat, quem coaedificat ista conversio.

I believe, brethren, that ye remarked and committed to memory the title of this Psalm. "The conversion," he saith, "of Haggai and Zechariah." These prophets were not as yet in existence, when these verses were sung. . . . But both, the one within a year after the other, began to prophesy that which seemeth to pertain to the restoration of the temple, as was foretold so long before. . . . "For the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Whoever therefore converteth himself to the work of this building together, and to the hope of a firm and holy edifice, like a living stone from the miserable ruin of this world, understandeth the title of the Psalm, understandeth "the conversion of Haggai and Zechariah." Let him therefore chant the following verses, not so much with the voice of his tongue as of his life. For the completion of the building will be that ineffable peace of wisdom, the "beginning" of which is the "fear of the Lord:" let him therefore, whom this conversion buildeth together, begin thence.<sup>21</sup>

Although Augustine's spiritualizing of the literal text is not entirely applicable to corresponding details in Beowulf, the Psalm itself suggests several possible parallels:

Gloria et divitiae in domus eius, et iustitia eius manet in saeculum saeculi. . . . Dispersit, dedit pauperibus; . . . Cornu eius exaltabitur in gloria. Peccator videbit, irascetur; . . . (3, 9, 10)

Glory [AV: wealth] and riches shall be in his house; and his righteousness endureth for ever. . . . He hath dispersed; he hath given to the poor; . . . his horn shall be exalted with honour. The wicked shall see it, and be angry [AV: grieved].

As in Beowulf, glory, riches, honour, and justice belong together. Like the ideal king, the just man distributes his treasures, and the harmony produced by his delight in the commandments of the Lord arouses the envious anger of Grendel

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<sup>21</sup>Enarrationes in Psalmos, CXI. Translated in Expositions on the Book of Psalms, CXII; Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 8.

and his ilk. The Psalmist does not call him a king, but an illustration in the Utrecht Psalter clearly portrays a rich man seated on a gift-throne at the entrance of his royal hall.<sup>22</sup> The antlered head of a stag on the roof represents the exalted horn of verse 9. Considering the various points of resemblance between Beowulf and this Psalm, one is led to conclude that the symbolism of the "horneap" gold-hall confirms the Christian significance of Heorot.

The bliss of the beati was a reality whenever the inhabitants of the the city of God lived in obedience. In the history of the Old Testament chosen people, brief periods of light, harmony, and joy alternated with times of darkness, persecution, and exile. The children of Israel were punished every time they fell back into idolatry; nevertheless, they continued to turn to other gods at almost predictable intervals. Scripture equates such apostasy with ignorance of God and of his law.<sup>23</sup> When it is said that the people did not know the Lord, there is no reason at all to assume that they were not familiar with the existence of God or even with the requirements of proper worship. When the Beowulf poet refers to the idolatry of the Danes, he could simply be echoing commonplace

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<sup>22</sup>The royal details are very similar to those in the illustration of Psalm 44(45), where the text specifically describes a king. The Utrecht Psalter includes at least seven illustrations in which a king in his hall hands out treasures or gathers tribute. Although its origin is obscure, the Utrecht MS is known to have been in England by 1000 A.D. Its archetype may date back to the 4th-5th century. See G. R. Benson, "New Light on the Origin of the Utrecht Psalter", The Art Bulletin.

<sup>23</sup>E.g. I Samuel 2:12; Isaias 5:13, 45:3; Osee 4:1, 5:4.

phraseology:

Metod hie ne cupon,  
daeda Demend, ne wiston hie Drihten God,  
ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cupon,<sup>24</sup>  
wuldres Waldend. (180-83)

The poet's elaboration at this point is the expected, perhaps more or less automatic, response to the situation. The Danes as a tribe are never criticized, and Hroðgar is consistently upheld as a "god cyning". The reference to pagan worship is neither a statement of realistic journalism nor a psychological explanation of guilt.<sup>25</sup> It is more likely an example of a familiar narrative pattern that is also found in the Old English Daniel.<sup>26</sup> The Daniel poet begins with a passage recalling a typologically significant instance of deliverance which is analogous in theme and function to the Song of Creation in Beowulf:

Gefraegn ic Hebreos eadge lifgean  
in Hierusalem, goldhord dælan,  
cynningdom habban, swa him gecynde waes,  
siddan purh metodes maegen on Moyses hand  
weard wig gifen, wigena maenleo,  
and hie of Egyptum ut aforon,  
maegene micle. þæt waes modig cyn! (1-7)

The events in Beowulf which lead to Grendel's entry are marked by strikingly similar diction:

þa waes Hroðgare heresped gyfen,  
wiges weordmynd, . . . (64-65)

<sup>24</sup>When "ne cupon" is rendered as "did not know how to", perhaps the "how" receives undue prominence in modern English.

<sup>25</sup>The Danes are not to be judged in the light of the English reversion to paganism in Bede, Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, II, 15; III, 30; IV, 27.

<sup>26</sup>On Daniel and its relation to Beowulf, see Klaeber, cx-cxi.



Like the Hebrews in Jerusalem, Hroðgar distributed gold in Heorot. What is said of the Hebrew warriors in Daniel is true of the Danes in Beowulf:

Swa þa drihtguman dreamum lifdon,  
eadiglice, oð ðaet . . . . (99-100)

In a corresponding way, the bliss in Jerusalem lasted

oðpaet hie wlenco anwod aet winþege  
deofoldaedum, druncne gedohtas.  
þa hie aecraeftas ane forleton,  
metodes maegenscipe, swa no man scyle  
his gastes lufan wið gode dælan. (17-21)

The Hebrews listened to the counsel of God only "lytle hwile" (29) and chose "deofles craeft" (32) instead. In the Daniel poem the usual Old Testament course of events is described in an Old English adaptation, a form of which we also find in Beowulf.

One may wonder if the traditional turning to devil worship is to be identified with the appearance of Grendel. Does he as "feond on helle" (101) symbolize the sinful disobedience of the Danes? Their misery always follows their feasting. Does Heorot therefore stand condemned?<sup>27</sup> Admittedly, the poet at times reveals the undesirable aspects of communal beer-drinking. When Beowulf calls Unferð "beore

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<sup>27</sup>Margaret E. Goldsmith, The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf, links Heorot to the city built by Cain (p. 112) and refers to Danish "depravity aggravated by the devilish assaults" (p. 117). To her "Heorot recalls Babylon" (p. 144) and she sees in the history of the hall "a microcosm of the story of carnal man, his technical achievements, his destructive antagonisms and his ultimate ruin" (p. 248).

druncen" (531), it is no compliment; in the later report of Unferð's folly he is again described as "wine druncen" (1467). The poet's praise that Beowulf "nealles druncnes slog/ heard-geneatas" (2179-80) shows that some were apparently guilty of such excesses. In Hroðgar's account of Danish suffering, there may well be a trace of ironic intent:

Ful oft gebeotedon beore druncne  
ofer ealowaege oretmecgas,  
paet hie in beorsele bidan woldon  
Grendles gupe mid gryrum ecga. (480-83)

Nevertheless, the scenes of peace and brotherhood in the gold-hall are criticized in none of these references. As the first seven lines of the Daniel poem also make clear, the feasting of warriors is in itself beautiful and good. Beer-drinking is part of the paradisaal perfection in which the cup is passed around in almost sacramental fashion. The first example in the poem is the festive scene when the Song of Creation was sung: "paer waes hearpan sweg,/ swutol sang scopes" (89-90). Another memorable instance follows Beowulf's repudiation of Unferð's abuse:

Daer waes haelepa hleahtor, hlyn swynsode,  
word waeron wynsume. Eode Wealhþeow forð,  
cwen Hroðgares cynna gemyndig,  
grette goldhroden guman on healle. (611-14)

The gracious and gold-adorned queen is a symbol of delicate harmony and peace.<sup>28</sup> This scene, like the first, ends with an

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<sup>28</sup>"Goldhroden", in Beowulf the standard epithet for queens (614, 640, 1948, 2025), appears to be derived from the imagery of Psalm 44(45). The queen in the Psalm is dressed "in vestitu deaurato" "in golden apparel" and "in fimbriis aureis" "in golden borders, or fringes". Other details of the

ominous "op paet" (644). The pattern also occurs in the celebration of Grendel's defeat, after the hall has been repaired (1232ff.), and in Beowulf's report to Hygelac about the "medudream" (2016) following the victory over Grendel's mother. When Wiglaf praises his dead lord, he recalls the generosity which Beowulf practised in his "biorsele" (2635).<sup>29</sup> In each case the poet describes the scene of feasting with an overwhelming awareness that the recaptured joy of paradise is ephemeral. The gold-hall represents the perfectness and light which in this fallen world are constantly besieged by the powers of darkness. Against demonic forces man must wage his battle even though in this life he is doomed to fail. A society based on brotherhood must withstand the fratricides within and the hellish monsters without. In Beowulf this conflict is presented as a particularized form of the struggle

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royalty in the Psalm suggest that the resemblance is more than coincidence. The following exhortation calls to mind the difficulties faced by early medieval "peace-weaving" queens: "Audi, filia, et vide, et inclina aurem tuam; et obliviscere populum tuum, et domum patris tui; . . . Pro patribus tuis nati sunt tibi filii, . . ." "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people and thy father's house; . . . Instead of thy fathers, children are born to thee, . . ." The king, like Hroðgar, receives gifts as tribute; he is surrounded by the daughters of kings, while the queen has her virgin companions. Hroðgar, too, is followed by a train of maidens (924)--not a detail of effeminate weakness but a sign of royal glory, which he shares with a king who was typologically identified with Christ.

<sup>29</sup>In Exodus 531, Moses promises joy in the "beorselas beorna" as a gift to be received in the land of Canaan.

which was implied already in the Song of Creation, where the scriptural allusion calls to mind the standard for human action. All the subsequent banquet scenes follow the same plan; after redemptive activities--the building of a hall, the defeat of a demonic monster, or the quelling of chaotic forces which threaten a kingdom--peace and brotherhood prevail briefly. Though they fleet away each time, paradise is typologically very real while they last.

Indeed, feasting is always followed by misery, but to attribute the latter to the sinful pride and cupidity of Hroðgar and Beowulf is to misread the poem and to ignore completely the poet's own obvious interpretation. True, the festivities of warriors can have an undesirable aspect in the poem, for it describes a fallen world, where everything, though created good, can manifest itself in malo; however, this aspect is not dominant in the presentation of Heorot. Having established its occurrence in the poem, one is not justified in introducing the logic that Heorot cannot be good because it also harbours the bad. Conclusions to this effect arise out of the false dilemma according to which Heorot must be a symbol of wickedness<sup>30</sup> if it is not perfect in the full prelapsarian sense. But if the construction of Heorot is seen in a typological

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<sup>30</sup>See Goldsmith, The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf, p. 96: "The two great symbols, Heorot and the treasure, embody the magnificence and the wealth which are a hero's reward. But in the longer perspective they can be seen to be images of man's pride and cupidity, the two fundamental sins which tie the carnal man to the earth."

perspective, it is obviously comparable to other "new creations". Noah was a type of Christ, but soon after the Flood this lord of the renewed earth succumbed to drunkenness. The people of Israel were led through the Red Sea, but before long they yearned for the fleshpots of Egypt; Moses himself sinned and was therefore denied entry into the promised land. The catechumen in whose baptism the Flood and the Exodus are fulfilled enters a new creation as a new creature, but his life is henceforth not yet free from the struggle against sin and from the curse of mortality. Nevertheless, in baptism and its types paradise is restored. Along these lines, the construction of Heorot should be interpreted. Hroðgar and his subjects may not be without sin, but in his heroic verse the poet never probes their possible guilt--just as the Exodus poet does not explore the shortcomings of Moses or the ingratitude of Israel. In Beowulf the stress is on the suffering of a heroic dryht, not on the guilt of sinners. The typological justification for this elegiac stance will be discussed in the next chapter.

## II

### HROÐGAR AND THE HART OF BAPTISM

Hroðgar's description of Grendel's mere serves as a prelude to Beowulf's second fight, the contest in which the influence of sacramental typology has been widely recognized. Elements from traditional Christian concepts of hell are readily discernible. Almost a century ago, R. Morris remarked on the resemblance of the scene to the hell vision in the seventeenth Blickling Homily. To judge by the following, one can assume that the Beowulf poet used the same or a very similar source:

Swa Sanctus Paulus waes geseonde on nordanweardne þisne middangeard, þær ealle waetero niðergewitað, & he þær geseah ofer ðaem waetere sumne harne stan; & waeron norð of ðaem stane awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas, & ðær waeron þystro-genypo, & under þaem stane waes nicra eardung & wearga. & he geseah þæt on ðaem clife hangodan on ðaem isigean bearwum manige swearte saula be heora handum gebundne; & þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende waeron, swa swa graedig wulf; & þæt waeter waes sweart under þaem clife neoðan; & betuh þaem clife on ðaem waetre waeron swylce twelf mila, & ðonne ða twigo forburston þonne gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðaem twigum hangodan, & him onfengon ða nicras.<sup>1</sup>

In Beowulf the dwellingplace of monsters has similar overhanging "hrinde bearwas" (1363), "genipu" (1360), "wulfhleopu, windige naessas" (1358); indeed, "þa fynd on nicra onlicnesse"

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<sup>1</sup>R. Morris, ed., The Blickling Homilies, pp. 209-11. The resemblance to Beowulf is discussed in his preface.

of the Blickling Homily, who seized the many black souls "swa swa graedig wulf", recall that Grendel's mother is herself a "brimwylf" (1506, 1599), one of the demonic inhabitants of a hell. Soon after the Danes and Geats set out for the mere, they observe numerous details which confirm Hroðgar's description. Although hoarfrost is not mentioned a second time, the woods are decidedly "wynleasne" (1416); as in the Blickling hell vision, they are linked with the "harne stan", a mysterious body of water, and "nicorhusa fela" (1411). That Grendel's mere is a hellish place is a clearly established fact which can be a point of departure in further discussion of typological influence.<sup>2</sup>

To an audience steeped in patristic exegesis, Beowulf's subsequent descent into the monster-infested waters would call to mind a complex set of sacramental correspondences. His submersion is analogous to Christ's descensus ad inferos as well as to the baptismal ceremony itself; however, even before any reference is made to Beowulf's intention to seek out Grendel's mother in her own dwelling, the poet already introduces the symbolism of sacramental typology. For if the details of

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<sup>2</sup>As has been pointed out frequently, the basic components of the scenery near the mere--cliffs and overhanging trees--are also found in the "sandhills episode" of the Grettissaga. The Beowulf poet seems to have incorporated any features of Germanic tradition which he could relate to typological symbolism. A search for the influence of typology in Beowulf does not, of course, implicitly deny that the poem has a Germanic matrix. For a translation of the relevant section of the saga, see Klaeber's Introduction, pp. xiv-xvi.

hell were not in themselves sufficient to suggest baptism, Hroðgar's description of the stag on the shore would serve as a sure reminder that water has two aspects: it can represent both the murky depth of hell and the regenerative pool of baptism. To emphasize that Grendel's mere should be associated with hell, Hroðgar points out that the stag refuses to come near it:

Deah þe haedstapa    hundum geswenced,  
 heorot hornum trum    holtwudu sece,  
 feorran geflymed,    aer he feorh seled,  
 aldor on ofre,    aer he in wille,  
 hafelan beorgan;    nis þaet heoru stow! (1368-72)

Whatever pagan connotations the stag may have had, in the Christian tradition it was thought to long for the waters of baptism, like the typologically interpreted hart of Psalm 41(42):

Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum, ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus. Sitivit anima mea ad Deum fortem, vivum; quando veniam, et apparebo ante faciem Dei? (2-3)

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? (1-2)

This passage was traditionally sung as the catechumeni descended to the font. In the days of Augustine (of Hippo) it was sung by the congregation:

Et quidem non male intellegitur vox esse eorum qui, cum sint catechumeni, ad gratiam sancti lavacri festinant. Unde et solemniter cantatur hic psalmus, ut ita desiderent fontem remissionis peccatorum, quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum. Sit hoc, habeatque locum intellectus iste in ecclesia et veracem et sollemnem.

And indeed it is not ill understood as the cry of those, who being as yet Catechumens, are hastening to the grace of the holy Font. On which account too this Psalm is ordinarily chanted on those occasions, that they may long for the Fountain of remission



of sins, even "as the hart for the water-brooks." Let this be allowed; and this meaning retain a place in the Church; a place both truthful and sanctioned by usage.<sup>3</sup>

Since the liturgical use of Psalm 41(42) was confined to the baptismal rite, which was performed at the end of the Easter vigil, the stag was a common baptismal symbol. It occurs, for example, in the baptistry of the Lateran, built in about the fourth century, where English pilgrims visiting Rome could have observed the streams of water which issue into to font from the heads of seven stags.<sup>4</sup> As paradise is the appropriate setting for the hart of baptism, that is exactly where it is found in the decorations of the baptistries in the early Church.<sup>5</sup> It drinks at the springs of the paradise to which the sacrament of baptism restores man. The Church Fathers frequently took Eden, or the perfect earth before the fall, to represent the Church.<sup>6</sup> If, as will be discussed more

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<sup>3</sup>Augustine, Enarrationes in Psalmos, X I. Translated in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. The baptismal interpretation of Psalm 41(42) is further clarified by a liturgical prayer of the Roman rite, recited by the celebrant at the threshold of the baptistry: "Almighty and everlasting God, mercifully look upon the devotion of this people called to new birth, who like the hart cometh to the fountain of Thy waters, and graciously grant that the thirst of their faith may, by the mystery of baptism, sanctify their souls and bodies . . . ." Quoted in Bouyer, The Paschal Mystery, p. 299.

<sup>4</sup>Duchesne, Christian Worship, pp. 309-10.

<sup>5</sup>Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup>In a footnote, Daniélou refers to Cyprian's view of the Church as paradise, p. 36. Note also Bede's identification of the arida of Genesis 1 with the Ecclesia, p. 2 above.

fully below, Beowulf's descent into the mere has baptismal connotations, the return of the Danes to their mead-hall would seem to be related to the admittance of the catechumen into the ecclesia as full-fledged member; in view of Adam's exile, this admittance, too, is a re-entry. As soon as the waters of the mere are transformed--in analogy to the waters of baptism, after the symbolic destruction of the dragon which dwells in it--the stag in Beowulf can presumably return to its proper setting; simultaneously the Danes are restored to their proper paradise. The reluctance of the "heorot hornum trum" to seek refuge in the mere, particularly when it is "hundum geswenced", is a symbolic parallel to the virtual exile of the Danes from their "heah ond horngeap" hall. Hroðgar's dryht is beset not by hounds but by wolves, a term regularly used in Old English literature as a synonym for the monsters of hell; as we shall see later, it is applicable to both Grendel and his mother.<sup>7</sup> If Heorot is Eden in the patristic sense and if Grendel's mere

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<sup>7</sup>Wolves and hounds or dogs, aside from their biological kinship, share the same demonic connotations in works influenced by Scripture as in Scripture itself. In the illustration of Psalm 41(42) the Utrecht Psalter provides a suggestive comment on the stag in Beowulf, for the hart of baptism is shown being pursued by two dogs as it is running towards a pool. It should be noted that dogs or hounds are not mentioned by the Psalmist.

owes the features of its landscape to a traditional Christian concept of hell, then Hroðgar's remark at the end of the vignette of the hart is more than just another example of litotes. When he says at this point, "Nis þaet heoru stow!" one can hardly fail to conclude that he compares the "frecne stowe" (1378) of the mere to the "heoru stow" or pleasant place of paradise.

Evidently there is a highly suggestive relationship between Hroðgar's reference to the baptismal stag and the typological connotations of Heorot as discussed in chapter I. The possible connection between Heorot and the hart would seem to be confirmed by early baptistries in which the deer is portrayed with a serpent in its mouth.<sup>8</sup> Augustine explains such symbolism in his exposition of Psalm 41(42): "Serpentes necat, et post serpentium interemtionem maiori siti inardescit, peremtis serpentibus ad fontes acrius currit" "It destroys serpents, and after the killing of serpents, it is inflamed with thirst yet more violent; having destroyed serpents, it runs to 'the water-brooks', with thirst more keen than before."<sup>9</sup> Daniélou comments on this tradition: "It is only after vanquishing the serpent that the catechumen may come to the waters of Baptism. . . . And so the representation of the deer which,

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<sup>8</sup>Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, pp. 36-37.

<sup>9</sup>Enarrationes in Psalmos, XLI. Translated in The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

having eaten the serpent, quenches its thirst at the river of paradise summarized for catechumens all stages of their baptismal initiation."<sup>10</sup> In this connection he then refers to Cyril of Jerusalem, who in his Catecheses instructs his catechumens to perform their daily exorcism throughout the period of instruction. The exorcism expresses the conflict that is waged concerning the soul of the faithful; its purpose is to liberate the soul step by step from the power of Satan in order to culminate in the victory of baptism. One can re-enter paradise only after defeating the serpent of the sea. The question therefore arises: "Is it in this tradition, then, [*i.e.*, in the tradition of the serpent-eating hart] that we find part of the meaning of the cleansing of the serpent-filled mere, so that 'Hart' Hall may be restored to its earlier paradisaical condition?"<sup>11</sup> The answer does not depend only on the baptismal connotations of the mere and on the typological details of Beowulf's subsequent descent. Nor does it depend only on Heorot's being named after the stag of baptism. Although these factors contribute to a whole, it is an even more important point that Heorot itself abounds in associations with baptism. The name Heorot functions as a reminder of the hall's connection with the typological exegesis of the creation account. The baptismal allusions thus far examined are so

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<sup>10</sup>Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, pp. 36-37.

<sup>11</sup>The question is raised in A. A. Lee, The "Guest-Hall" of Eden (to be published in 1972).

inextricably woven into the poetic fabric of Beowulf that the answer to the above question can be a confident affirmative.

As in the discussion of the Song of Creation, so here, too, we are confronted with the problem of Danish sin and guilt. Is Hroðgar to be condemned for his failure to withstand Grendel's murderous attacks? If Heorot has baptismal significance, such questions will naturally be asked, for in a "new creation" the monster or serpent has to relinquish his control. The following passage from the Catecheses of Cyril of Jerusalem would seem to suggest the logical implications of the sacramental allusions in Beowulf:

The serpent is beside the road, watching those who pass by. Take care that he does not bite you by means of unfaithfulness. He follows with his eyes those who are on the way to salvation, and he seeks whom he may devour. You are going to the Father of spirits, but you must pass by the serpent. How can you avoid him? Have your feet shod with the Gospel of peace, so that, if he bites you, it will do you no evil. If you see any evil thought coming to your spirit, know that it is the serpent of the sea who is setting snares for you. Guard your soul, so that he cannot seize it.<sup>12</sup>

Are we to identify the lurking serpent with Grendel awaiting his chance to disrupt the harmony of Heorot? Does Heorot then represent the collective soul of Danes who have succumbed to "unfaithfulness" and "evil thought"? The difficulties are compounded with the problem of Beowulf's reply to Hroðgar's challenge to seek out the second monster. It leaves the impression that to a certain extent Beowulf finds fault with

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<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 24.

the aged king: "Ne sorga, snotor guma! Selre bið aeghwaem,/ þaet he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne" (1384-85).

For twelve years Hrodgar has taken the approach which Beowulf here rejects. Yet he addresses Hrodgar as "snotor guma", and a few lines down the poet calls him "wisa fengel" (1400), taking great pains throughout to portray a "god cyning". Since Beowulf's reply to the challenge does not seem to be intended as irony, the apparent inconsistency needs explanation, for if the cleansing of Heorot is related to baptism, one would expect Hrodgar and the Danes to be guilty of sin.

At this point it may be helpful to keep in mind the complexity of the correspondences by which the creation, the Old Testament types of redemption, the sacrament of baptism, and Christ's descent into hell are all interrelated. To the "typological imagination"<sup>13</sup> none of the elements comprising this whole could be divorced from the others. Hence, whenever Beowulf echoes the traditional teaching of the Church concerning baptism, it by the same token alludes to the descensus. If Beowulf himself to a certain degree reminds one of an idealized baptismal candidate, his exploits also serve to recall the victory of Christ. Every catechumen re-enacts Christ's descent. The more he is cast in heroic proportions, the closer will he resemble his model.<sup>14</sup> Being endowed with supernatural

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<sup>13</sup>The term is used and discussed in Robert B. Burlin, The Old English Advent, pp. 2-35.

<sup>14</sup>Properly speaking, one cannot consider Beowulf a

power, Beowulf is bound to be an unusually Christ-like protagonist. In the presentation of his successes, any features deriving from the liturgy of baptism may even tend to be overshadowed by the parallels with a catechumen's most direct anti-type, the Saviour himself.

In the line of this reasoning it is valid to compare Beowulf to the Old English Christ, where Hroðgar's lack of heroic energy has a counterpart in the frame of mind of the Old Testament patriarchs as they await their deliverance from the bondage of hell.<sup>15</sup> Some remarkable similarities appear in the brief passages quoted below. In the first selection<sup>16</sup> those awaiting the Son are in a predicament not unlike that of the Danes:

Swa þu, god of gode      gearo acenned,  
 sunu soþan faeder,      swegles in wuldre  
 butan anginne      aefre waere,  
 swa þec nu for þearfum      þin agen geweorc  
 bided þurh bylðo,      þaet þu þa beorhtan us  
 sunnan onsende,      ond þe sylf cyme  
 þaet ðu inleohte      þa þe longe aer,  
 prosme beþeahte      ond in þeostrum her,  
 saeton sinneahtes;      synnum bifealdne  
 deorc deapes sceadu      dreogan sceoldan. (109-18)

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type of Christ; since typology is defined as the study of realities in the Old Testament which reach their fulfilment in the new dispensation, it follows that there is no typology in Beowulf.

<sup>15</sup>The indebtedness of Christ I to typology is thoroughly examined in Burlin, The Old English Advent. The poem is useful as a shortcut to a discussion of Oriens imagery in Beowulf.

<sup>16</sup>Based on one of the seven "Major Antiphons": "O Oriens, splendor lucis aeterna, et Sol iustitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris, et umbra mortis." Liber responsalis sive Antiphonarius of Gregory the Great, quoted in Burlin, pp. 48, 100.

The last few lines recall the passage in Beowulf where the poet tells us that Grendel

ehtende waes,  
deorc deapscua, dugupe and geogope,  
seomade ond syrede; sinnihte heold  
mistige moras; . . . (159-62)

Grendel is here plainly referred to as the dark shadow of death which endures throughout endless night. One wonders whether the Danes, like the Old Testament saints, are also enfolded in sin.

The next quotation<sup>17</sup> hints at what such a conclusion would imply:

. . . him gehaten waes,  
paette sunu meotudes sylfa wolde  
gefaelsian foldan maegde,  
swylce grundas eac gaestes maegne  
sipe gesecan. Nu hie softe paes  
bidon in bendum hwonne bearn godes  
cwome to cearigum. Forpon cwaedon swa,  
suslum geslaehte: "Nu þu sylfa cum,  
heofones heahcýning. Bring us haelolif,  
werigum witepeowum, wope forcymenum,  
bitrum brynetearum. Is seo bot gelong  
eal aet þe anum. /þu for/ oferpearfum  
haeftas hygegeomre hider /gesec/es;  
ne laet þe behindan, þonne þu heonan cyrre,  
maenigo þus micle, ac þu miltse on us  
gecyð cynelice, Crist nergende,  
wuldres aepeling, ne laet awyrgde ofer us  
onwald agan. (142-59)

Those who longed for Christ waited patiently (146). Patience is also what Beowulf expects from Hroðgar (1395), who has, in fact, practised this virtue for years. The Old Testament saints are careladen ("cearigum", 148); the Danes are in a

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<sup>17</sup>Inspired by the antiphon: "O Emmanuel, Rex et Legis-fer noster, exspectatio gentium et salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos, Dominus Deus noster." Burlin, pp. 41, 108.



similar position, for "cearu waes geniwod" (1303) after Grendel's mother appears. The anticipated action of the Redeemer is summed up in the word "gefaelsian" (144); it is also used for Beowulf's cleansing of Heorot and the mere (432, 825, 1176, 1620, 2352). Christ in his journey ("sipe", 146) is to seek out the depths ("grundas", 145), where as "aepeling" (158) he will overcome the accursed one ("awyrge", 158). Beowulf also, in the course of his "sið" (501, 1475), is prepared to penetrate to the depths ("gyfenes grund", 1395; "meregrundas", 1449); he, too, is an "aepeling" who comes to triumph over a "grundwyrge" (1518). The faithful ones in Christ I are helpless and they admit that release is dependent on their Saviour alone: "Is seo bot gelong/ eal aet þe anum" (152-53); in addressing Beowulf, Hroðgar uses almost exactly the same words: "Nu is se raed / =bot/ gelang/ eft aet þe anum" (1376-77). The connection between Christ and Beowulf has its obvious complement in the relationship between the Old Testament believers and the Danes.

Although the patriarchs are said to be enfolded in sin, they are never censured on this account. The poet emphasizes, instead, the wretched state of their captivity and their yearning for deliverance. The same applies to Beowulf. The Beowulf poet nowhere mentions that the Danes are punished for any specific act of disobedience.<sup>18</sup> Sin is above all the pitiable

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<sup>18</sup> Although Unferð and Hroðulf are singled out by Beowulf and the poet respectively, their function in the poem does not invalidate this point.

condition in which man requires a saviour; it certainly does not call for moralistic condemnations on the part of the audience. The poet is therefore quite consistent when he portrays Hroðgar as a sad and helpless old man and at the same time stresses that he is a good and blameless king. His elegiac stance is entirely compatible with the typological tradition.

Returning now to Beowulf's statement that it is better to avenge one's friend than to sit in mourning over him, we notice that its impact is determined by the influence of typology. Hroðgar is not criticized for his lack of heroic forcefulness; his weary sorrow is to be expected in one who resembles those who "in tenebris et in umbra mortis sedent" "sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). Action is not required of him.<sup>19</sup> Beowulf himself states:

Dys dogor þu    gepyld hafa  
weana gehwylces,    swa ic þe wene to. (1395-96)

When in the same reply to Hroðgar's challenge Beowulf also

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<sup>19</sup>Here typological influence and native institutions may have found common ground. Katherine F. Drew indicates that the role of Germanic kings was peculiarly circumscribed; she presents the view that the "institution of kingship" was probably not well developed among northern tribes before they came into contact with Roman rule. A king could not make laws, for example. His duty in this respect was limited to presiding over the council which "spoke the law". Even from this perspective it could be argued that the indecision of the councillors in the idolatry passage (Beowulf 171ff.) need not impair Hroðgar's integrity. In addition, the custom to select "special war leaders, or duces, whose authority superseded that of the king for the duration of the military emergency" could help to account for Hroðgar's readiness to delegate responsibility to Beowulf. See Drew, "The Barbarian Kings as Lawgivers and Judges", in Hoyt, ed., Life and Thought in the Early Middle Ages.

declares that it is desirable to achieve fame before death, it can be assumed that in this particular situation his words apply mainly to his own actions (1386ff.). He expresses the duty of the Christian hero, to be performed in imitation of Christ the "aepeling".

A third passage from Christ 120 may render it possible to show still more conclusively that a parallel exists between the virtual expulsion of the Danes from Heorot and the similar, more directly typological, exile of the Old Testament believers:

pu þisne middangeard milde geblissa  
 þurh ðinne hercyme, haelende Crist,  
 ond þa gyldnan geatu, þe in geardagum  
 ful longe aer bilocen stodan,  
 heofona heahfrea, hat ontynan,  
 ond usic þonne gesece þurh þin sylfes gong  
 eadmod to earþan. Us is þinra arna þearf!  
 Hafad se awyrgda wulf tostenced,  
 deor daedscua, dryhten, þin eowde,  
 wide towrecene. þaet du, waldend, aer  
 blode gebohtes, þaet se bealofulla  
 hyned heardlice, on him on haeft nimes  
 ofer usse nioda lust. Forþon we, nergend, þe  
 biddað geornlice breostgehygdum  
 þaet þu hraedlice helpe gefremme  
 wer gum wreccan, þaet se wites bona  
 in helle grund hean gedreose. (249-65)

When the poet alludes to the golden gates of paradise<sup>21</sup> which the weary patriarchs ask Christ to re-open, we are reminded of Heorot, the paradise which Beowulf has come to restore to the mourning Danes. In Christ I the "awyrgda wulf . . . , deor

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<sup>20</sup>Based on the antiphon: "O Rex pacifice, tu ante saecula nate: Per auream egredere portam, redemptos tuos visita, et eos illuc revoca unde ruerunt per culpam." Burlin, pp. 43, 132.

<sup>21</sup>For the golden gates as entrance to paradise, see Burlin, p. 135. Creation is mentioned several times (224ff.); its baptismal associations are evident, for the new creation redeemed by Christ is recalled in line 259.

daedscua" has done the scattering; in Beowulf Grendel, the "deorc deapscua" (160), is his counterpart. Our third selection from Christ I reinforces the view that Heorot is Hroðgar's paradise. It follows from the similarities between him and the Old Testament patriarchs--particularly the exoneration from specific guilt--that there is no reason whatsoever to attribute the creation of Heorot and its later problems to Hroðgar's sinful pride. The happy corollary of our conclusions is that one can fully explore the baptismal associations of Heorot without having to accept Beowulf as a homiletic tract on sin and punishment.

## III

# SPRING MOTIFS AND CHRISTIAN HEROISM

## 1. The Imagery of Spring

Part One of Beowulf includes several clusters of spring imagery. The typological significance of the vernal setting of the newly created world has been discussed in the first chapter. Since the symbolism of spring evidently is of fundamental importance in patristic literature, an examination of explicit references to this season may serve to establish whether they realistically reflect the poet's Germanic environment or whether they have their origin in the literary conventions of early Christianity. If the latter can be shown to apply, our conclusions will indirectly confirm the assertions made previously, especially those regarding the nature of Heorot.

Of all the references to spring, the image cluster in the Finnsburg episode seems to be most pagan or Germanic. During his winter in Friesland, Hengest as unwilling guest

eard gemunde,  
 þeah þe ne meahte on mere drifan  
 hringedstefna,-- holm storme weol,  
 won wið winde, winter yðe beleac  
 isgebinde, op ðaet oþer com  
 gear in geardas,-- swa nu gyt dēð,  
 þa de syngales sele bewitiað,  
 wuldortorhtan weder. (1129-36)

The context is Germanic, and the theme is pagan vengeance,<sup>1</sup> however, the same imagery is to be found in the description of the vanishing sword. Here the poet uses spring details to illustrate the power of God:

þa þæt sweord ongan  
 aefter heaposwate hildegicelum,  
 wigbil wanian; þæt waes wundra sum,  
 þæt hit eal gemealt ise gelicost,  
 ðonne forstes bend Faeder onlaeted,  
 onwinded waelrapas, se geweald hafad  
 saela ond maela; þæt is soð Metod. (1605-11)

Unlike the former quotation, the latter is a simile to clarify the symbolism of a supernatural event. But in spite of this distinction, they both share the same elements. Both stress the melting of icy bonds, the change of seasons, and the concomitant effect of liberation. It could be argued that the two quotations complement each other. The possibility of sailing in the spring, as mentioned in the first, is perhaps implied in the melting ice of the second. In the same way the acknowledgment of God's control over times and seasons in the second passage does not clash with the scop's editorial observation in the first (1134-36). At the least it can be stated that both descriptions are entirely compatible with one another. They would seem to belong to a tradition which is also represented in the Old English gnomic poetry of Maxims I:

Forst sceal freosan, fyr wudu meltan,  
 eorpe growan, is brycgian,

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<sup>1</sup>David Williams shows that the poet's treatment of the feud is subservient to his Christian condemnation of heathen ethics ("Cain and Beowulf", pp. 249-67 in a preliminary copy of this dissertation); however, in what follows we are concerned only with a brief exploration of rhetorical parallels. It will be useful as a stepping-stone to other matters.

waeter helm wegan      wundrum lucan  
 eorpan cipas.      An sceal inbindan  
 forstes fetre      felameahtig god;  
 winter sceal geweorpan,      weder eft cuman,  
 sumor swegle hat,      sund unstillle. (II, 71-77)

Here similar spring details are combined in yet another way.

One might expect such imagery to derive from the pagan-Germanic tradition, particularly since it seems to fit climatic conditions in northern Europe; however, this easy assumption loses its credibility after one discovers that patristic writers describe spring in much the same way.

Several of the images of the Old English tradition are also found, for example, in The Octave of Easter by Gregory Nazianzen:

Everything contributes to the beauty and the joy of the feast. The queen of the seasons makes a feast for the queen of days and offers her everything she has that is most beautiful and most pleasing. The sky is its most transparent, the sun at its highest and brightest, the course of the moon at its most brilliant, and the choir of the stars at its purest. The springs run at their clearest, the rivers are most abundant, freed from their fetters of ice. The fields are filled with sweet grass, green things spring up, the lamb bounds in the grass. Ships go out from their ports with all the sails filled, . . .<sup>2</sup>

While there is no need to deny that Hengest or the Beowulf audience would see spring, quite realistically, as the season of new opportunity, the above passage suggests the possibility that the poet was influenced by a literary convention. Gregory Nazianzen himself is bound by a tradition; he follows a pattern into which by the laws of rhetoric he could introduce only

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<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 291, translated from PG 36, 620A.

limited variations.<sup>3</sup> It is of interest to note that in the approximate age of the Beowulf poet both Aldhelm and Bede were familiar with his works;<sup>4</sup> however, the same images occur elsewhere in various combinations.

Hippolytus, the first author to use the idea that spring is a figure of the resurrection, already mentioned that according to Jewish tradition the "beginning of months", the month of the pasch, is the time when "the sailor dares to confront the sea".<sup>5</sup> Eusebius in his Treatise on Easter explains why spring is the only season suitable for the resurrection:

Then the sun begins to run the first part of his course, and the moon at his side, in its full brilliance, transforms the whole course of the night into a luminous day. Ended are the furies of the storms of winter, ended the long nights, ended the floods. Henceforth, in the newness of a shining atmosphere, sailors find the sea calm.<sup>6</sup>

Similar discussions of spring and winter symbolism are found in many of the paschal homilies of Cyril of Alexandria.<sup>7</sup> The preaching of Gaudentius of Brescia shows that in this respect Greek and Latin churchmen shared the same tradition; he begins a sermon for the Easter vigil:

Opportuno tempore Dominus Jesus beatissimam festivitatem Paschae voluit celebrari, post autumnii nebulam, post horrorem hiemis,

<sup>3</sup>Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 291.

<sup>4</sup>Ogilvy, Books Known to the English, 597-1066, pp. 153-54.

<sup>5</sup>Daniélou, p. 288.

<sup>6</sup>Quoted in Daniélou, p. 289, translated from PG 23, 696D.

<sup>7</sup>Daniélou, p. 291.



ante aestatis ardorem. Oportebat enim Solem Justitiae Christum, et Judaeorum caliginem, et rigorem Gentilium, ante ardorem futuri judicii, placido Resurrectionis suae lumine dimovere, cunctaque in statum tranquillii primordii revocare, quae fuerant velamine tetro confusa ab illo principe tenebrarum.

The Lord Jesus Christ decreed that the blessed feast of the Pasch should be celebrated at a suitable time, after the fog of autumn, after the sadness of winter, and before the heat of summer. For, indeed, Christ, the Sun of Justice, was to scatter the darkness of Judaism and the ice of paganism before the heat of the future judgment by the peaceful light of His Resurrection, and bring back to the peaceful state of their origin all the things which have been covered with obscurity by the prince of darkness.<sup>8</sup>

The motif of the annual liberation from fetters of ice clearly is a commonplace in the paschal writings of the early Church.

One should keep in mind that the homilies of Eastertide have little significance apart from their relation to the total pattern of redemptive history. To the typological imagination, spring, the resurrection, and Exodus 12 are closely intertwined. Another strand, discussed in chapter I, is the typological view of creation. Gaudentius of Brescia continues from the above-quoted passage with the following explanation:

Nam veris tempore Deus condidit mundum. Martio enim mense dixit per Moysen Deus: Mensis hic vobis initium mensium, primus est in mensibus anni. Quem mensem verax utique Deus primum non diceret, nisi primus esset; . . . Filius ergo Dei . . . eodem die, eodemque tempore, prostratum mundum propria Resurrectione resuscitat, quo eum prius ipse creaverat ex nihilo.

It is indeed in the springtime that God created the world. And, indeed, it was the month of March that God said to Moses: "The month shall be for you the first of the months of the year." Now the truthful God would not have called this the first month, if it had not been such in fact, . . . This is why the Son of God . . . raised up the fallen world by His own resurrection at the very time in which He first created it

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<sup>8</sup>Gaudentius Brixiae, Sermo I: De Exodi Lectione Primus, PL 20, 843B-845A, translated in Daniélou, p. 292.

out of nothing . . . .<sup>9</sup>

This homily recalls on the eve of Easter that Christ the renewer of creation is also Christ the creative word of the beginning. Whatever aspect of the history of redemption is being discussed, one is always confronted with the same reality. There is little or no distinction between the theme of a hexameral commentary on the third and fourth days and of a sermon on Easter, the fulfillment of the fourteenth day of Nisan. These two forms of patristic writing also share the same imagery. In his Hexameron, Ambrose, too, refers to Exodus 12 and to the pasch of the Lord as celebrated in the spring; in the very next sentences he then declares: in hoc ergo principio mensium caelum et terram fecit, quod inde mundi capi oportebat exordium. ubi erat opportuna omnibus vernali temperies.

Therefore, He created heaven and earth at the time when the months began, from which time it is fitting that the world took its rise. Then there was the mild temperature of spring, a season suitable for all things.<sup>10</sup>

In diction reminding one of the Old English and the patristic descriptions of spring, Ambrose continues with the contrast between vernal sunshine and the winter's ice:

unde et annus mundi imaginem nascentis expressit, ut post hibernas glacies atque hiemales caligines serenior solito verni temporis splendor eluceat.

Consequently, the year, too, has the stamp of a world coming to birth, as the splendour of the springtime shines forth all the more clearly of the winter's ice and darkness now past.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>I, 4, 13, in C. Schenkl, ed., Sancti Ambrosii Opera; translated by John J. Savage.

After quoting Genesis 1:11, the account of the creation of plants and trees on the third day, he comments:

in quo nobis et moderationis perpetuae divina providentia et celeritas terrae germinantis ad aestimationem vernaе suffragatur aetatis. nam etsi quocumque tempore et deo iubere promptum fuit et terrenae oboedire naturae, ut inter hibernas glacies et hiemales pruinas caelestis imperii fotu germinans terra fetum produceret, non erat tamen dispositionis aeternae rigido stricta gelum in virides subito fructus laxare arva atque horrentibus pruinis florulenta miscere.

By this very fact both the constant mildness of divine Providence and the speed in which the earth germinates favor for us the hypothesis of a vernal period. For, although it was in the power of God to ordain creation at any time whatsoever and for earthly nature to obey, so that amid winter's ice and frost earth might bear and produce fruits under the fostering hand of His celestial power, He refrained. It was not in His eternal plan that the land held fast in the rigid bonds of frost should suddenly be released to bear fruits and that blooming plants should mingle with frosts unsightly.

The above miscellany of quotations reveals a glimpse of two closely corresponding totalities, the theological and the imaginative. Wintry darkness and fetters of ice are images of chaos, hell, and the power of Satan. The sunshine of spring and the rebirth of nature symbolize the release from daemonica dominatio; the connotations of spring, the season of the creation and the resurrection, are paradisaal. The use of the traditional imagery of spring and winter is one manifestation of the unity perceived by the typological imagination. The question remains whether the similarities between patristic images of spring and those in the two previously quoted passages from Beowulf are more than superficial or coincidental.

In all its details the seasonal reference in the Finnsburg episode reveals a possible influence of typological symbol-

ism. According to the scop, spring is the time when the melting of ice makes it possible to set out on voyages. We have seen that icy bonds are a patristic commonplace and that Gregory Nazianzen, Eusebius, and Hippolytus all happen to state that spring is a time for sailing, for in spring the storms of winter cease. The "wuldortorhtan weder" (1136) mentioned in Beowulf provides a further hint. The noun "wuldor", the Old English equivalent of the Latin gloria, is invariably used in Beowulf in a specifically religious sense; in fact, in extant Old English literature "wuldor" (and its compounds) is usually a scriptural term reserved for the description of a divine attribute. Finally, the expression "op daet oper com/ gear in geardas" (1133-34), may indicate that spring was considered to be the beginning of the year. It is obvious from Bede's computational works that this medieval practice was more than a reflection of the annual cycle of nature in which spring is the time of renewal. To Bede the typological significance is primary.<sup>11</sup> From this the phenomena of nature derive their appropriateness, not vice versa. The month of the creation and the resurrection is also the month of the Exodus, and therefore the Mosaic injunction still applies in spite of astronomical variations and complications: "Mensis iste, vobis principium mensium: primus erit in mensibus anni" "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you" (Exodus

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<sup>11</sup>See De Mensibus, De Temporum Ratione XI, in Charles W. Jones, ed., Beda Opera de Temporibus.

12:2). Every element of the scop's brief description is compatible with patristic tradition. Since there is not a single dissonant detail, the passage may help to demonstrate that the Beowulf poet was typologically conditioned. This impression is strengthened by the fact that the spring quotation belongs to an account of the pagan past, a context in which one would be least likely to expect evidence of Christian influence. Perhaps it would not be far-fetched to assume that the Finnsburg episode functions in Beowulf as a Christian lesson on pagan sin.<sup>12</sup> If it is, the typological allusions may be an example of ironic comment which the poet then chooses to emphasize by means of the scop's interjection ("swa nu gyt dæð, . . . , 1134ff.). But even if the poet does not consciously employ his diction to develop a theme, the suggestion of typological influence still stands.

The description of the vanishing sword-blade presents a more clear-cut example (1605-11). Here the poet states clearly that God the Father is the one who loosens bonds of ice or water-fetters, for he "geweald hafað/ saela ond maela" (1610-11). The latter expression recalls the power by which the sun and moon were called into being on the fourth day, when the Creator declared on the occasion of the typologically significant vernal equinox of the beginning: ". . . sint in signa et

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<sup>12</sup>From a different perspective this discussion corroborates the view of David Williams on the thematic importance of Hengest's exploits. See his dissertation "Cain and Beowulf".

tempora, et dies et annos" "let them be for signs, and seasons, and for days, and years" (Genesis 1:14). Spring imagery offers a fitting reason to mention God's control over times and seasons. Since the allusion to the creative word would presumably remind the audience of the connection between the fourth day and the resurrection, the details of the spring simile are highly suitable as a comment on the transformation of the wintry landscape as brought about by the defeat of Grendel's mother. When Beowulf, Hroðgar, and their party first approach the rimy woods around the mere,

ofereode þa æþelinga bearn  
steap stanhliðo, stige nearwe,  
enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad,  
neowle naessas, nicorhusa fela. (1408-11)

It is worth noting that later, when Beowulf has emerged as victor and proceeds to Heorot with his loyal Geats to present Grendel's head to Hroðgar, the return journey is effortless by comparison. Instead of climbing laboriously over cliffs, in single file along "stige nearwe",

gumdryhten mid  
modig on gemonge meodowongas traed. (1642-43)

Beowulf's success has transformed the fear which occupied individuals into a joy that is shared communally. Hence the mention of "meodowongas", the plain near the mead-hall. The "uncuð gelad" has become "cuðe straete" (1634). The hellish landscape has made way for a setting in which social harmony dominates, and, as suggested by the simile which describes the melting of the sword, winter has changed to spring. The Christ-like hero

has restored a paradise.<sup>13</sup>

Two other episodes are indirectly connected with spring. In his account of the contest with Brecca, Beowulf tells that after he destroyed "fah feondscada" (554ff.) a change in the weather occurred:

Leoht eastan com,  
beorht beacen Godes,      brimu swaþredon. (569-70)

The struggle at sea foreshadows the later fight with another "meredeor" (558), Grendel's mother. In both instances, the monster is quelled, the waters are calmed, and the light of spring prevails. In the Brecca episode, Beowulf reveals his credentials to the court of Hroðgar. The light from the east, specifically described as "beorht beacen Godes", suggests that the hero's exploits are to be linked with the deliverance by Christ. The role of Christ as Oriens is firmly based on the typological interpretation of the Old Testament which is also reflected in the Song of Zacharias: ". . . visitavit nos oriens ex alto, inluminare his qui in tenebris et in umbra mortis sedent, ad dirigendos pedes nostros in viam pacis" "the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79). In view of the elegiac stance of Hroðgar--who waits in darkness for the light of grace--the allusion to solar typology is entirely fitting.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Luke 3:5 and Isaiah 40:4, where Christ is the one who makes rough places plain.

<sup>14</sup>Note also the combination of "Oriens" and "Sol

Finally, there is the departure of Beowulf and his men from the land of the Geats--an event marked by a sense of freedom and release from the limitations which winter no doubt imposed on the activities of a Germanic hero. But Beowulf is at the same time a Christian warrior who sets out to overcome the enemy of God. Therefore the springtime voyage is appropriate also from a typological perspective; it is wholly in keeping with patristic motifs. The impression that a symbolic contrast between spring and winter may be significant in this particular context is reinforced by the total effect of the almost one hundred lines (100-93) which precede the introduction to Beowulf's plan. This section is devoted completely to Grendel's twelve-year reign of darkness, during which the Danes helplessly await the advent of their salvation. Since Beowulf appears as their Oriens, we have a further indication that the poem is indeed the product of a culture in which typological exegesis was prevalent. The thematic and rhetorical unity of paschal and hexameral descriptions of spring is reflected in the linking of the fallen paradise of Heorot to the coming of a heroic redeemer. The question now arises as to what extent Beowulf measures up to this role.

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iustitiae" in the antiphon quoted on p. 33, n. 16, and the poetic treatment of the same theme in Christ I, 104ff. For a discussion of the scriptural basis of solar typology, see Burlin, The Old English Advent, pp. 100-04. For a list of patristic discussions of the Oriens, see especially Bouyer, The Paschal Mystery, pp. 280-81.



## 2. The Spring-time Hero

As we have seen in chapter II, the reference to the stag on the shore implicitly identifies the mere as a hellish place awaiting a baptismal cleansing. In harmony with this introduction to Beowulf's descent, the poet observes a certain decorum arising from sacramental ceremony. In moments of introspection the candidate for baptism would prepare to die symbolically with Christ. The subdued hero, too, at length considers the possibility of death. Indeed, the waiting Danes later conclude with such certainty that Beowulf has been killed by the monster that they in their habitual despair leave the scene of action. At the same time it is clear from the start that the venture is not doomed to failure, for the poet in his elaborate description of Beowulf's warlike accoutrements stresses the virtues of the "herebyrne" (1443) to which the hero subsequently owes his survival (1503-05, 1552).<sup>15</sup> This emphasis may reflect the pre-baptismal anointing of the catechumen in pectore et inter scapulas,<sup>16</sup> but it should also be noted that it was normal in the early Church to compare baptism to enlistment in the militia Christi. Cyril of Jerusalem

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<sup>15</sup>The combined expectation of death and victory is also found in scriptural discussions of baptism. See e.g. Romans 6:4, Colossians 2:12.

<sup>16</sup>Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 42. See the discussion based on Daniélou's work in Allen Cabaniss, "Beowulf and the Liturgy", in his Liturgy and Literature.

exhorts the baptismal candidate in military fashion:

You are taking up arms against the enemy. You are taking up arms against heresies, against Jews, against the Samaritans, against the Gentiles. Your enemies are many: take plenty of ammunition; you have targets in plenty. You must learn to shoot down the Greek and do battle with heretic, Jew, and Samaritan. Your weapons are sharp, and sharpest of all is "the sword of the Spirit". But your own right hand must strike with a holy resolution, to fight the fight of the Lord, if you would conquer the opposing powers and make yourself proof against every stratagem of heresy.<sup>17</sup>

Beowulf's venture can therefore be considered an example of Christian heroism. One could object that Grendel's mother does not seem to fit into one of the traditional categories of the foes of Christianity; however, Cain and his kin were regarded as types of the Jews, the enemies of the Church. Cain's slaying of Abel prefigured the responsibility of the Jews for the death of Christ. Since Grendel is Cain's offspring and Heorot is linked to the ecclesia by its baptismal connotations, the hostile attacks on the Danes evidently are manifestations of a fundamental conflict. Besides, Grendel is twice referred to as a "haepen" (832, 986), a clear indication that he belongs to the powers of darkness.

It might seem dubious to apply the connotations of Grendel to the presentation of Grendel's mother if the poet had not make himself clear on this point. Grendel is a member

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<sup>17</sup>Procatechesis, 10; translated by McCauley and Stephenson. Other illustrations of the military aspect of baptism may be found in Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Tertullian, and Gregory Nazianzen; see quotations in Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, pp. 58-59.

of "Caines cyn", and from the fratricide of Cain

. . . untydras ealle onwocon,  
eotenas ond ylfe ond orneas,  
swylce gigantas, þa wið Gode wunnon  
lange þrage. (111-14)

Efforts at scientific classification are futile here; neither is it possible to distinguish between creatures that live on land and those that inhabit the water. The Book of Genesis itself does not describe the land to which Cain was exiled and which was afterwards populated by his progeny. To fill the gap, early commentators searched other parts of Scripture for possible references to it. Since they assumed from the circumstances of Cain's exile that the region in question had to be a remote wasteland of some sort, they applied details from Job 30 to the dwellingplace of Cain and his descendants: "In desertis habitabant torrentium, et in cavernis terrae, vel super glaream" "They dwelt in the desert places of torrents, and in caves of the earth, or upon the gravel" (30:6). The poet associates Grendel with a similar forsaken landscape.<sup>18</sup> In spite of the numerous creatures which are later shown to inhabit the mere, it is a place where each individual is an "angengea" (165, 449), like Grendel when he "com of mere under misthleopum" (710). Since Grendel bears closer resemblance to a human being than his mother does, it is appropriate that in his case the poet connects him mainly with fens and moors, the elements of a wasteland or place of exile which fit into the experience of the

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<sup>18</sup>Williams, "Cain and Beowulf", p. 133.

Beowulf audience. Grendel's mother has fewer human characteristics and is therefore more suitably linked with a landscape that would be less familiar and, hence, even more clearly iconographic. We do not learn of Grendel's underwater home until after his death.

The seventeenth Blickling Homily proves that it was not unusual to combine land and water imagery in the portrayal of hell. The confusion of the two derives from Job 26:5, which was read as another reference to the place where the sons of Cain lived: "Ecce gigantes gemunt sub aquis, et qui habitant cum eis" "Behold, the giants groan under the water and those that live with them".<sup>19</sup> The last-quoted passage from Beowulf, which includes "eotenas" or giants among the progeny of Cain, shows why it is not incongruous that

Grendles modor,  
ides aglaecwif yrmbe gemunde,  
se þe waeteregesan wunian scolde,  
cealde streamas, sipðan Cain weard  
to ecgbanan angan breþer,  
faederenmaege. (1258-63)

The differences in the way the poet refers to Grendel and Grendel's mother shows that zoological inconsistency did not trouble him. A monster is a monster. Using an underwater setting for Beowulf's second fight, he depicts Grendel's mother, though not uniformly, as the sea monster required by the typological allusions. Thus she is a "grundhyrde" (2136)

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<sup>19</sup>This rendering is found in the Vulgate, not in the Authorized Version. It is discussed in Williams, "Cain and Beowulf", p. 133.

banished to the "cealde streamas". She is a "merewif" (1519) and a "grundwyrge" (1518) or accursed monster of the deep. The latter term calls to mind the "wearga" of the Blickling vision of hell, and the "awyrge" of Christ I (158), whom the expected Saviour is to overcome.<sup>20</sup> By its use, the Beowulf poet provides an important clue that the hero's descent is analogous to Christ's descensus ad inferos.

Grendel's mother is also called a "brimwylf" (1506, 1599). As the wolf-simile in the Blickling Homilies suggests, the poet here, too, attributes demonic qualities to Beowulf's opponent in the mere. The Exodus poem supplies another illustration. In the poetic treatment of a scriptural episode which has obvious typological significance, the Egyptian warriors are described as "heorowulfas" (181). They are the demonic forces from which Moses, as type of Christ, delivered the people of Israel. The account of the passage through the Red Sea in Exodus 14:24-31 is one of the traditional readings of the Holy Saturday liturgy; in the commemoration of Christ's descent into hell, the Church conveyed the typological teachings concerning baptism, for the waters of the Red Sea prefigure the waters of the font. Again, the typological influence on Beowulf is apparent.<sup>21</sup> In Christ I the expression "awyrge wulf" (256)

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<sup>20</sup>See above, pp. 24-25, 37-38.

<sup>21</sup>Although the contrast between sheep and wolves is a common one, the typological importance of the latter is not derived from the canonical Scriptures; however, in the apoc-

is applied to the "deor deadscua" (256) which has scattered the flock, and Christ must come to release them from the miseries of exile and bondage by commanding the golden gates of paradise to re-open. It is worth noting that Satan, here referred to as a wolf, acts in the manner of Grendel--further evidence that we are not to draw any sharp distinction between the action of Grendel and of his "brimwylf" mother.

When setting or circumstances require it, Beowulf's antagonist has the characteristics of the ancient dragon which Christ overcame in the watery depths of hell; when the situation

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ryphal Book of Enoch the Egyptians who were drowned in the Red Sea are repeatedly called wolves: "But the wolves began to pursue those sheep till they reached a sea of water. And that sea was divided, and the water stood on this side and on that side before their face, and the Lord led them and placed Himself between them and the wolves. And as those wolves did not yet see the sheep, they proceeded into the midst of that sea, and the wolves followed the sheep, and /those wolves/ ran after them into the sea, And when they saw the Lord of the sheep, they turned to flee before His face, but that sea gathered itself together and became as it had been created, and the water swelled and rose till it covered those wolves. And I saw till all the wolves who pursued those sheep perished and were drowned." Enoch 89:23-27, in a translation by R. H. Charles. There is some evidence that the Book of Enoch was known in the Old English period. See Ogilvy, Books Known to the English, 597-1066, p. 69. Other sections are also of interest to students of Beowulf: e.g. ch. 106, a fragment on Noah and on the origin of the giants who are to be cleansed from the earth in a great deluge; ch. 76, with its references to the hoar-frost of the north; and ch. 77, describing a northern area which, like the Grendel landscape, "contains seas of water, and the abysses and forests and rivers, and darkness and clouds"--all adjacent to a "garden of righteousness" which may call Heorot to mind.

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early in the poem calls for an envious murderer who disrupts the harmony of an ideal society, the monster takes on the characteristics of Cain. Grendel, too, is a "sceadugenga" (703), a "wonsaeli wer" (105) exiled to a land of mists and shadows. But he is also an "ellengaest" (86) and a "feond on helle" (101).<sup>22</sup> Essentially Grendel and his mother represent the same demonic power. In both fights Beowulf's success is analogous to the victory of Christ. Judging by the Grettissaga, one may perhaps assume that Beowulf's single exploit, his cleansing of Heorot, is presented in a manner determined by a Germanic narrative pattern in which the hero, after subduing a Grendel-like troll-wife, seeks out a second giant in his cave.<sup>23</sup> In Beowulf the gender of the monsters is reversed, for the male is defeated before the female. This arrangement may reflect the influence of the Book of Enoch on the motifs of typological literature. In a fragment of the Book of Noah (Enoch 60:7-8) we read: "And on that day were two monsters parted, a female monster named Leviathan, to dwell in the abysses of the ocean over the fountains of waters. But the male is named Behemoth, who occupied with his breast a waste wilderness named Dûidâin, on the east of the

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<sup>22</sup>His supernatural qualities indicate, in spite of Augustine's allegorization of the sons of Cain, the persistence of an earlier exegesis in which the "sons of God" of Genesis 6 were interpreted to be angels who seduced the daughters of Cain. See also Enoch 106. From these angels the giants were thought to have inherited their superhuman traits. What counts in Beowulf is that the giants, like the Egyptians of the Exodus, are demonic and as such prefigure the fate of Satan.

<sup>23</sup>See Klaeber's Introduction, pp. xv-xvi.

garden where the elect and righteous dwell, . . ." While Grendel's mother recalls Leviathan and Grendel can be linked with Behemoth,<sup>24</sup> both monsters in Beowulf are characterized by the same demonic identity.

The variations in their portrayal represent no dichotomy but suggest that each of the two divisions of Beowulf's unified adventure among the Danes is marked by its own typological decorum. Both Behemoth and Leviathan, as described in Job 40 and 41, are impersonal creatures, but it seems credible that of the two the beast of the land should be identified in Beowulf with evil in the more human form. Since God had expressly forbidden the slaying of Cain, it was perhaps inappropriate to present the death of Grendel, Cain's offspring, right in Heorot as the direct result of Beowulf's power.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, Grendel's escape to the mere, where "him hel onfeng" (852), is quite compatible with the desired fate of the tormenting murderer in Christ I:

. . . we, nergend, þe  
 biddað geornlice breostgehygdum  
 þaet þu hraedlice helpe gefremme  
 wergum wreccan, þaet se wites bona  
 in helle grund hean gedreose. (261-65)

This passage belonging to the section in which Satan's malice

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. the Babylonian Apsû and Tiâmat--perhaps the primary source. See also Enoch 54: 7-8.

<sup>25</sup>This point is made in Stephen Bandy's dissertation, "Caines Cyn", p. 80. The Grettissaga is somewhat similar in this regard (see Klaeber, p. xv); the poet may have adapted Germanic details because of their suitability.



is comparable to that of Grendel<sup>26</sup> confirms once again that the influence of typology is by no means confined to the account of Beowulf's descent into the mere. The relatively impersonal quality of Grendel's mother does not imply, at least from the perspective of typology, that she is more a monster than her son. She takes on the non-human nature of the Leviathan of Scripture because she is presented in an environment unsuited for man. While the term "brimwyrf", as has been noted, helps to connect Grendel's mother with the Egyptians of Exodus, her affinities with Leviathan provide evidence of the same typological significance. In Ezekiel 29:3-4 an Egyptian pharaoh who is described as a great dragon happens to show obvious resemblance to Leviathan as portrayed in Job 41:1-2. In both chapters the monster is a scaly sea-beast.

The symbolic associations of Grendel's mother may be typologically more suggestive than those of Grendel, but the thematic function of the two is exactly the same. Their similarity is further exhibited in the Beowulf poet's emphasis on their pedigree. Since they are both specifically connected with the giants before the Flood, the "giganta cyn" who are also "Caines cyn", the poet reminds us that the Exodus account is not the main source of the typological motifs in Beowulf. The Great Deluge is another type of Christ's descent into hell

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<sup>26</sup>See above, pp. 34-38, especially pp. 37-38.

and, therefore, also of baptism. The giants, like the Egyptians, also prefigure the dragon vanquished on Holy Saturday. The poet stresses that the analogies between this type and Beowulf are not confined to Grendel's mother. The characteristic expression used in the poem to describe the punishment inflicted on the giants is: "He [God] him ðaes lean forgeald." It first occurs when the Flood is mentioned as part of the introduction to Grendel (114). It is again connected with the destruction of "giganta cyn" (1690) in the comment: "him þaes endelea/ þurh waeteres wylm Waldend sealde" (1692-93). The expression used in line 114 occurs in exactly the same form in line 1584 to describe the defeat of Grendel; it is an event clearly influenced by the typology of the Flood.

Of the victories over Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf's latter feat may seem to be the greater. Since its symbolism is more obviously related to typology, one could assume that it must therefore be of greater importance to a "Christian interpretation" of the poem; however, the poet draws no such distinctions. Beowulf mentions the fate of the Grendel kin in one breath and even suggests that the death of Grendel's mother is secondary:

and þa þas worold ofgeaf  
gromheort guma, Godes andsaca,  
mordres scyldig, and his modor eac. (1681-83)<sup>27</sup>

The focus is on Grendel, the enemy of God. Indeed, from a

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<sup>27</sup>Cf. lines 1282-84.

typological perspective the highlight of Beowulf, Part One, is the point when the hero discovers the body of Grendel and hacks off his head. It here that the poet, by his use of the expression "He him paes lean forgeald", draws the parallel with the punishment of the giants in Genesis. Here, finally, Beowulf has achieved what he set out to do.

In the light of scriptural and patristic references to the head of the dragon, Grendel's head makes a fitting trophy. Already in the protevangel of Genesis 3 we read that the seed of the woman is to crush the head of the serpent (3:15). The same motif occurs in an ancient Greek prayer for blessing baptismal water: "Thou, Thou hast sanctified the waters of the Jordan by sending from on high Thy Holy Spirit, and Thou hast crushed the heads of the dragons hidden therein."<sup>28</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem states:

The dragon Behemoth, according to the book of Job [where, incidentally, Behemoth is depicted as primarily a terrestrial beast], was in the waters and received the Jordan into his mouth. As it was necessary to break the heads of the dragon, Jesus descended into the waters and bound the Strong One, so that he acquired the power to walk upon scorpions and serpents.<sup>29</sup>

In Psalm 73(74) the heads of monsters have a similar prominence:

"Contrivisti capita draconum in aqua. Tu confregisti caput draconis" "Thou hast broken in pieces the heads of dragons in the water. Thou hast broken the head of the dragon" (13-14).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Quoted in Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 42.

<sup>29</sup>Third Catechesis, PG 33, 441A, quoted in translation in Bouyer, The Paschal Mystery, p. 312.

<sup>30</sup>Version used by Augustine in Enarrationes in Psalmos. The Vulgate has "capita" instead of "caput".

The considerable attention devoted to the heads of demonic creatures indicates that as a symbol of victory Grendel's head may well have biblical and typological precedents. It is obvious that the Beowulf poet sees the decapitation of Grendel as a highly significant detail. He concludes his commentary on Beowulf's second fight with the words: "ond hine þa heafde becearf" (1590); he further mentions that the hero took the head with him to the surface (1614), that four of the Geats carried it to the gold-hall with great difficulty (1637-39), and that it was finally presented there to Hroðgar and the Danes (1647-50). Later Beowulf in his report to Hygelac seems to apply these particulars to the head of Grendel's mother instead, for he says:

ond ic heafde becearf  
in ðam guðsele      Grendeles modor  
eacnum ecgum.      (2138-40)

Since Beowulf or the poet apparently recognizes no essential distinction between the two monsters, we have here yet another confirmation of the unity which Part One of the poem owes to the previously discussed typological parallels.

A confusing element in the second fight is the failure of the hero's normally invincible handgrip. This time he depends for his success on the ancient sword revealed to him by divine intervention:

. . . me geuðe      ylða Waldend,  
þæt ic on wage geseah      wlitig hangian  
ealdsweord eacen.      (1661-63)

In interpreting the function of this weapon, we should keep in

mind that in Scripture, too, a monster can be destroyed only by God's own sword; in fact, it is then normally wielded by God himself. The prophet Isaiah declares:

In die illa visitabit Dominus in gladio suo duro, et grandi, et forti, super Leviathan, serpentem vectem, et super Leviathan, serpentem tortuosum, et occidet cetum qui in mari est. (27:1)

In that day the LORD with his hard and great and strong sword will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon /great fish, according to the Vulgate<sup>7</sup> that is in the sea. (RSV)

The "wlitig" quality of the sword may have its origin in Deuteronomy 32, where the second canticle of Moses quotes the following oath of God:

Si acuero ut fulgur gladium meum, et arripuerit iudicium manus mea: reddam ultionem hostibus meis, et his qui oderunt me retribuam. Inebriabo sagittas meas sanguine, et gladius meus devorabit carnes, . . . (41-42)

If I whet my glittering sword, and mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to mine enemies, and will reward them that hate me. I will make mine arrows drunk with blood, and my sword shall devour flesh; . . .

The general context of this passage is the deliverance from Egypt when it is about to culminate in the entrance into the promised land. Interestingly enough, the sword is personified in a suggestively Anglo-Saxon manner. It is not merely fanciful to assume that details of the second Song of Moses have a bearing on Old English poetry, for in the Exodus poem the destructive flood in which the Egyptian battle-wolves perish is presented as the "alde mece" (495) of the Lord.<sup>31</sup> In underwater con-

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<sup>31</sup>In the Utrecht Psalter illustration of the second Song of Moses, the Christ-Logos is shown lifting up his hand to heaven and grasping the "glittering sword" of verse 41. An unusual

frontations with demonic monsters a sword provided by God is quite an appropriate weapon.

The failure of Beowulf's handgrip in the second fight does not imply an indictment of the hero. Rather, there is a contrast between the sword supplied by a man and the sword revealed by the grace of the Lord. Beowulf never blames Hrunting; he even absolves it of responsibility:

Ne meahte ic aet hilde mid Hruntinge  
wiht gewyrca, þeah þæt waepen dūge. (1659-60)

When Beowulf casts it aside, the poet still praises it:

wearp ða wundenmael wraettum gebunden  
yrre oretta, þæt hit on eorðan laeg,  
stid onð stylecg. (1531-33)

There is no hint at all that this praise and exoneration is ironic. The sword has an identity of its own which is unaffected by the guilt of Unferð, its fratricidal owner. In harmony with typological influence, it is simply inadequate in a situation which calls for a God-given weapon. As for Beowulf's "mund-gripe", its failure is also mentioned in the poet's account of the fight without any suggestion of shortcomings on the part of the protagonist. We can assume that his usual method of warfare does not fit in with the setting. Significantly, in his own report to Hroðgar he omits his brief reliance on the strength of his hand. It does not belong to the typologically

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feature is the warrior's tunic which he wears in this particular instance; one may well wonder if this iconography has any connection with the importance of Beowulf's "herebyrne" in the second fight.

appropriate contrast (1659-64).<sup>32</sup>

The curious melting of the sword-blade confirms that God is in control. As discussed previously, the details of spring which mark this phenomenon provide the imagery of a new creation. Every spring was considered to be an anniversary of the creation of the world; Christ's resurrection, after his triumph in hell, signifies a new creation which also took place in the spring, and it is, in turn, a prefiguration of baptism. The sacrament of baptism was originally administered in spring and is itself a new creation and a restoration of man to the paradise from which Adam was first exiled. In analogy with baptism and Christ's victory, Beowulf's action brings about the restoration of the paradisaal features of the society which has its centre in Heorot. His venture calls to mind the liturgical use of Psalm 22(23) as a compendium of sacramental typology. The still waters of peace which are mentioned in this Psalm are identifiable with the mere after Beowulf has cleansed it. "Meodowongas" (1643) and "graesmoldan" (1881) recall the pastures of the same Psalm. Cyril of Alexandria sums up the typological interpretation of these details in the following comment: "The

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<sup>32</sup>It should be added that Beowulf's "mund-gripe" may be related to the frequent Old Testament references to God's powerful hand, particularly in the Book of Psalms. In the illustrations of the Utrecht Psalter, a huge hand of God is portrayed no less than thirty-five times, although there often is no corresponding mention of it in the text. In Genesis 61-63, God "grap on wræde/ faum folmum, and him on faedm gebraec/ yrre on mode". The manner in which Grendel is subdued is also compatible with the Christian iconography of Beowulf.

place of pasture is the Paradise from which we fell, to which Christ leads us and establishes us by the waters of rest, that is to say, by Baptism."<sup>33</sup> Of the types of baptism and of Christ's descensus, the Flood is one of the more familiar examples. The Deluge motif is also the typological allusion which the Beowulf poet develops most explicitly. He is quite specific in interpreting the inscriptions on the sword which God had provided, thus noting some of the particulars of an event which has a parallel in Beowulf's defeat of the Grendel kin. The two occurrences may not match literally. Grendel's mother, unlike the "giganta cyn" (1690), was not destroyed in a flood; in the same way, Christ's descent into hell does not in its details exactly resemble its type, the Deluge. Typologically, however, no distinction exists. Noah's role was thought of as a conquest of the dragon which dwelt in the waters of the Flood; Christ showed that he was the anti-type of Noah when he also overcame the serpent in the watery depths of hell, and the catechumen in the baptismal pool symbolically re-enacts this victory. In terms of typological symbolism, therefore, the poet's interpretation of the inscription on the sword-hilt very directly recalls Beowulf's own exploit. Noah, Christ, and the baptized catechumen, in their own respective ways, are new Adams of new creations. Beowulf, too, restores a paradise. Hence it is highly suggestive that the hilt

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<sup>33</sup>PG 69, 841A, quoted in translation in Daniélou, The Bible and the Liturgy, p. 181.



on which an important type of baptism is recorded belongs to the very sword which by the melting of its blade introduces the imagery of spring. Indeed, when the Danish episode of the poem comes to an end, Beowulf as "guðrinc goldwlanc graesmoldan traed" (1881)--a golden hero in a setting of green. He has completed a springtime task of Christian heroism.

#### IV

##### DOOMSDAY AND THE PLUNDERED HOARD

In the fight against Grendel, Beowulf is pitted against a very specific form of evil, the fratricide of Cain as it is perpetuated by his offspring. Cain slew his brother Abel and so, for the first time in human history, disrupted social harmony; Grendel, identified with Cain, follows his inherited inclination to break up a society that is based on brotherhood. His aim in attacking the Danes in Heorot is left beyond any doubt:

Geseah he in recede rinca manige,  
swefan sibbedgriht samod aetgaedere,  
magorinca heap. þa his mod ahlog;  
mynte þæt he gedaelde, aer þon daeg cwome,  
atol aglaeca anra gehwylces  
lif wid lice, þa him alumpen waes  
wistfylle wen. (728-34)

The "sibbedgriht samod aetgaedere" is the object of Grendel's hostilities. The pervasive theme of social chaos, first introduced by the violence of the cannibalistic "muðbona", is further developed in the behaviour of Grendel's mother. Unless we recognize the thematic unity of the first two contests, we may partially excuse her by assuming that it was her duty to avenge her son. It is, however, ironic that Grendel's mother, coming from an environment where each individual being is an "angengea", should rise to the defence of a kinship that is

paradoxically rooted in fratricide and so use Grendel's death as a pretext for attacking Heorot. Her instinctive and impersonal mode of action is no obstacle to this view, for by the time she appears the demonic motivation of all Cain's descendants has been established in the Cain-like ways of her son. Those belonging to "Caines cyn" all represent the anti-social ethics of the mere to which the values that Beowulf stands for in the first and second fights provide the ultimate contrast within the poem.

One may ask whether the typological aura of the hero in Part One also applies to the final struggle. The poet's choice of words suggests that there is no essential difference between the dragon and the Grendel kin. Like Grendel, the dragon first appears on the scene after the king of the land has completed a successful fifty-year reign. The first mention of the dragon is like the introduction to Grendel (100), who "rixode" (144) in Heorot "sweartum nihtum" (167); peace and brotherhood prevail in Geatland "oð ðaet an ongan/ deorcum nihtum draca ricsian" (2210-11). Grendel wished to devour the members of a "sibbegedriht" (cf. 728-34); as for the dragon in Beowulf's kingdom, where the same ideals of kinship were upheld, the poet reports: "no ðaer aht cwices/ lað lyftfloga laefan wolde" (2214-15). The path to the dragon's "stanbeorh steapne" is reminiscent of the way to Grendel's mere or to the Red Sea in Exodus: "stig under laeg/ eldum uncud" (2213-14). The barrow is situated on a plain, but it is "waeterydum neah" (2242) and "be naesse" (2244). The dragon is later shoved over "weallclif" by the

sea (3132). As in the Blickling vision of hell and in Hroðgar's description of the mere, there are again references to "harne stan" (2553, 2744). The landscape resembles the wasteland of Part One. The dragon himself is, like Grendel, a "gaest" and a "mansceaða" (2312, 2514). By relating the victory over the Grendel kin to the contest with the dragon, the poet and Beowulf both imply that the two situations, though different in their details, are comparable (2351-54, 2521). The "gaest" of Part Two can be classified with Grendel and his mother among the "geosceaftgasta" (1266) owing their origin to Cain and dwelling in the mere, for this category includes "wyrmcynnes fela" (1425), "saedracan" (1426), "wyrmas ond wildeor" (1430). Just as in the Grendel episodes the descriptive terms for the monsters are used inconsistently, depending on the context, so the poet's choice of epithets varies in Part Two when the situation calls for a creature who is in the first place identified as the guardian of a hoard.

The connections between the dragon and the Grendel kin are such that it is to be expected that the dragon shares their moral significance. Since he does not act until he has been provoked, he has, like Grendel's mother, been considered somewhat justified in his anger. The treasure, however, is called a "haepnum horde" (2216). After the confusing details of the spell--and in spite of them--the poet without hesitation continues:

pa waes gesyne,    paet se sið ne ðah

þam ðe unrihte inne gehydde  
wraete under wealle. (3058-60)

The dragon and the heathen who hid the treasure share a single intention; they wish to prevent others from letting gold serve its normal function in a harmonious society, where peace and brotherhood manifest themselves in gift-giving and gift-receiving. A hidden treasure serves no purpose. Thus when a man comes to take a cup from the hoard, intending to put it back into circulation and to settle a feud in this way, the poet justifies his action: "Nealles mid gewældum wýrmhord abraec" (2221). Since the dragon embodies the spirit of Cain, he is hostile to the restoration of social equilibrium; he gives way to the anger which springs from avarice, a combination of sins associated with the first fratricide. The so-called thief clearly has the sympathy of the poet; after describing the safe escape from the dragon, he comments:

Swa maeg unfaege eade gedigan  
wean ond wraecsid se ðe Waldendes  
hyldo gehealdeþ! (2291-93)

When the dragon guards his gold-hall, he is in an ironic position. As defender of a kingdom without subjects, in which gold is not and cannot be put to proper use, he is hardly justified in seeking reparation by laying waste the realm of an ideal king. The dragon "onbad/ earfoðlice, oð ðæt aefen cwom" (2302-03), like Grendel the "eatol aefengrom" (2074) who "earfoðlice/ þrage gepolode, se þe in þystrum bad" (86-87), and like Grendel's mother, who scheduled her assault "syþðan aefen cwom" (1235).

Since the circulation of treasure, like the music and feasting in Heorot, represents social harmony, the two parts of Beowulf clearly deal with the same conflict. The dragon, too, stands for the kind of wickedness which the Flood once cleansed.<sup>1</sup>

The identification of the dragon with the Grendel kin and, hence, with the symbolism of the Deluge suggests the underlying unity of the poem. Our impressions of this essential unity receive a boost from the unvarying moral import of the actions of the protagonist, for the triple testimony of the poet, Wiglaf, and the messenger tells us that throughout his reign Beowulf is an ideal king. Sometimes readers of Beowulf assume that he eventually fell prey to the evils which Hroðgar in his homily urges him to avoid; even a brief analysis will, however, show that the extended reminder of human mortality (1761-68) is not causally connected with the sin that Hroðgar warns against. It serves primarily to underscore the need to keep from pride and avarice since life is too fleeting to be used otherwise. The exhortation may derive much of its immediate appropriateness from the commonplace moral import of

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<sup>1</sup>The demonic rage which characterized the dragon is associated by Bede with the serpent of Genesis 3:14-15: "Et serpens insidiatur calcaneo mulieris, quia circuiens Ecclesiam diabolus velut leo rugiens quaerit quem devoret, quomodo gressus bonae nostrae actionis evertat" "And the serpent lies in wait for the heel of the woman, because the devil, who is going round about the Church as a roaring lion, seeks whom he may devour and how he may upset the course of our good action" (Hexaemeron, PL 91, 58C). The obvious allusion to I Peter 5:8 in a commentary on Genesis indicates the typological perception of affinities in Scripture. The dragon and the other monsters in Beowulf thus do not derive from a specific and straightforward scriptural source.

baptism and its type. Hroðgar gives his admonition as a response to both Beowulf's submersion, with its baptismal overtones, and the Deluge account inscribed on the hilt of the mysterious sword. Although it is not made clear whether Hroðgar was himself able to decipher the inscription, the poet's elaboration on the punishment of "giganta cyn" (1690) happens to precede the homily which outlines the standards of the new creation. But Beowulf does not merely represent the ordinary catechumen and, therefore, as we have seen, his supernatural exploit more closely approximates the descent of Christ into hell. One could easily argue that Hroðgar's sermon is fitting not in the first place because Beowulf stands in need of admonition but, rather, because the baptismal context may well require it. Beowulf's desire to overcome the dragon and to win its treasure should not be regarded as a fulfilment of misgivings supposedly expressed by Hroðgar, nor as a suitable reason for punishment. Just as Hroðgar's misery did not spring from avarice and pride, so the later tribulations of the Geatish kingdom cannot be traced to a particular sin committed by Beowulf. Hroðgar's remarks are prophetic only to the extent that Beowulf is a man and must eventually face death.

A defence of the hero's actions in Part Two requires an explanation of his troubled response to the news that his royal hall has been consumed by the dragon's fire:

pa waes Biowulfe broga gecyðed  
 snude to soðe, þaet his sylfes ham,  
 bolda selest brynewylmum mealt,

gifstol Geata.    þaet ðam godan waes  
 hreow on hredre,    hygesorga maest;  
 wende se wisa,    þaet he Wealdende  
 ofer ealde riht    ecean Dryhtne  
 bitre gebulge;    breost innan weoll  
 þeostrum geþoncum,    swa him geþywe ne waes.  
(2324-32)

Before taking this reaction as psychologically realistic evidence of guilt, one should pay attention to the manner in which the destruction takes place. The flames in Beowulf seem related to the doomsday conflagration described in Christ III:

Swa se gifra gaest    grundas geondseced;  
 hipende leg    heahgetimbro  
 fylled on foldwong    fyres egsan,  
 widmaere blaest    woruld mid ealle,  
 hat, heorogifre.    Hreosað geneahe  
 tobrocene burgweallas.    Beorgas gemeltað  
 ond heahcleofu, . . . (972-78)

In both situations the effect of fire is a melting process. In both poems lofty buildings are destroyed. Moreover, the dragon in Beowulf in his behaviour resembles the "gifra gaest" of the final judgment in Christ III.

Doomsday ultimately brings about the deliverance of the saints by the fire of baptism. Nevertheless, in prophetic passages of the New Testament it is announced as a time of great suffering. It is not presented simply as something to look forward to. In the brief apocalypse of Mark 13, Christ declares: "Erunt enim dies illi tribulationes tales quales non fuerunt ab initio creaturae, quam condidit Deus usque nunc, neque fient" "For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created



unto this time, neither shall be" (13:19).<sup>2</sup> In II Peter 3, where it is noted in some detail that the judgment is the final fulfilment of the Flood, the destructive aspect of the baptism of fire, especially its dissolving or melting effect, is accentuated:

Adveniet autem dies Domini ut fur: in quo caeli magno impetu transient, elementa vero calore solventur, terra autem et quae in ipsa sunt opera, exurentur. Cum igitur haec omnia dissolvenda sint, quales oportet vos esse in sanctis conversationibus, et pietatibus, exspectantes, et properantes in adventum diei Domini, per quem caeli ardentes solventur, et elementa ignis ardore tabescent? Novos vero caelos, et novam terram secundum promissa ipsius exspectamus, in quibus iustitia habitat. (10-13)

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire! But according to his promise we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (RSV)

Peter refers several times to the melting caused by fire. While he mentions the promised new earth, he devotes considerable attention to the forces of annihilation; he uses them to point out the need for godliness. The action of the fire-dragon is only an anticipation of doomsday; yet the above-quoted passage could help to explain Beowulf's introspection. The anxiety produced by it is a standard soul-searching response to the divine judg-

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<sup>2</sup>Augustine states that it is usually impossible to distinguish whether such passages refer to the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem or to the great last day of judgment--which is a suggestive comment on the use of doomsday imagery in Beowulf. See De Civitate Dei, XX, 6.

ment. It is not necessarily a sign of Beowulf's guilt, as the following quotation from Christ III should prove:

Forþon nis aenig wundor hu him woruldmanna  
seo unclaene gecynd, cearum sorgende,  
hearde ondrede, ðonne sio halge gecynd,  
hwit ond heofonbeorht, heagengla maegen,  
for ðaere onsyne beoð egsan afyrhte,  
biðað beofiende beorhte gesceafte  
dryhtnes domes. (1015-21)

Even the archangels tremble as they await the judgment.

The poet mentions Beowulf's restlessness a second time: "Him waes geomor sefa,/ waeffre ond waelfus" (2419-20). Klaeber cautiously points to a possible precedent in the sadness unto death which Christ experiences in the garden of Gethsemane.<sup>3</sup> To show that the allusion is more than an isolated coincidence, he notes several other similarities to the Gethsemane episode. The disciples abandon their master when he is taken captive;<sup>4</sup> in the same way Beowulf's men "on holt bugan,/ ealdre burgan" (2598-99). In Wiglaf's heroic assistance Klaeber even sees something of Peter's willingness to come to Christ's defence.<sup>5</sup> When Beowulf orders his followers: "Gebide ge on beorge" (2529),

<sup>3</sup>"Die christlichen Elemente im Beowulf", Anglia, 36 (1912), 192-93. Mark 14:33 (cf. Matthew 26:37): ". . . et coepit pavere et taedere. Et ait illis: Tristis est anima usque ad mortem" ". . . and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them: 'My soul is very sorrowful, even to death'" (RSV).

<sup>4</sup>"Tunc discipuli eius reliquentes eum omnes fugerunt" "Then they all forsook him, and fled" (Mark 14:50).

<sup>5</sup>See Matthew 26:51, John 18:20.

his words are reminiscent of Christ's command: "Sustinete hic et vigilate" "Remain here, and watch" (Mark 14:34).<sup>6</sup> There is no exact parallel between Christ in Gethsemane and Beowulf near the dragon's hoard, but it would seem that the poet continues to regard the action of his hero as an imitation of Christ.

The two preceding paragraphs explaining Beowulf's frame of mind may seem unrelated. The one connects him with the attitude of the archangels to the day of judgment; the other suggests that Beowulf acts as Christ did in Gethsemane. A look at the context of the Gethsemane episodes as they are presented in the synoptic Gospels may prove enlightening. In Matthew, the chapter describing Christ's anguish in the garden comes after a chapter in which Christ predicts the time of tribulation. "This prophecy fits clearly into the typology of the baptism by fire: "Sicut autem in diebus Noe, ita erit et adventus Filii hominis" "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (24:37). A little earlier the same chapter contains the familiar prophecy of "wars and rumours of wars": "Consurget enim gens in gentem, et regnum in regnum . . ." "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom . . ." (24:6-7). In Mark 13-14 and Luke 21-22 we find exactly the same pattern.

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<sup>6</sup>Klaeber notes that a West-Saxon translation renders it as: "gebidað her, on waciað", p. 193. See also Matthew 26:38.

The three Gospel chapters describing the agony of Christ in the garden belong to a context that is marked by an overwhelming sense of the passing of things. Like the evangelists, the Beowulf poet combines motifs of doomsday and Gethsemane. In Beowulf it is the messenger who speaks of wars and rumours of wars. When he reaches the Geats to announce the death of their king, he foretells the misery which is to follow a fifty-year reign of peace; Franks, Frisians, and Swedes can now be expected to launch their hostilities. The same theme is taken up by the old woman who in her dirge laments the approach of slaughter, terror, and captivity:

swylce giomorgyd    sio geomeowle  
 aefter Biowulfe    bundenheorde  
 song sorgcearig,    saede geneahhe,  
 þaet hio hyre hearmdagas    hearde ondrede,  
 waelfylla worn,    wigendes egesan,  
 hyndo ond haeftnyd. (3150-55)

The details of her "giomorgyd" accord with Christ's prophecy as we find it in the Gospel of Luke: "Erit enim pressura magna super terram, et ira populo huic. Et cadent in ore gladii; et captivi ducerentur in omnes gentes, . . ." "For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: . . ." (21-23-24). Throughout Part Two of Beowulf the poet conveys his tragic vision in the manner of the Gospels.

The apocalyptic passage in Matthew is of particular

significance in an examination of Beowulf. It indicates the typological link between the days of Noah and the coming of the Son of man, or between a type of baptism and the ultimate purification which is the fulfilment of all baptismal symbolism.<sup>7</sup> The reference to Noah confirms that it is reasonable to connect the dragon with the specific form of evil confronted by Beowulf in his struggle against the Grendel kin. Noah overcame the giants produced by the fratricide of Cain; Beowulf triumphs also over fratricidal forces which, in imitation of Cain, seek to destroy a harmonious society. In the second epistle of Peter we find the same relationship:

. . . caeli erant prius, et terra de aqua, et per aquam consistens Dei verbo: per quae, ille tunc mundus aqua inundatus periit. Caeli autem, qui nunc sunt, et terra eodem verbo repositi sunt, igni reservati in diem iudicii, et perditionis impiorum hominum. (3:5-7)

. . . by the word of God heavens existed long ago, and an earth formed out of water and by means of water, through which the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (RSV)

In this passage, too, the Flood is a type of the fire of judgment.<sup>8</sup> Like Matthew 24:37-39, it recalls the wickedness of the giants to which the Grendel kin and also the dragon are

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<sup>7</sup>See Daniélou, From Shadows to Reality, pp. 84, 86. Both are also related to the more immediately relevant suffering of Christ, referred to in its totality as a baptism (Mark 10:38-39).

<sup>8</sup>The passage also shows the intimate typological connection between the Flood and the creation of the world.

related; however, the Matthew text provides an additional clue to the unity of Beowulf. It indicates that the Gethsemane episode, because of its proximity to Christ's apocalyptic prophecy and its similar atmosphere of gloom and anguish, can be associated in the typological imagination with the eschatological symbolism of the Flood.

Christ uses his references to the Deluge to explain that the end will come suddenly, for only the Father knows the day and hour (Matthew 24:36). The control of God the Father over times and seasons is a well-known scriptural concept. It is discussed in hexameral commentaries on the fourth day,<sup>9</sup> when the sun and moon were called into being. Christ states quite plainly in Acts 1: "Non est vestrum nosse tempora vel momenta, quae Pater posuit in sua potestate" "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power" (1:7). Since the day of the Lord will therefore come without warning, it is compared in II Peter 3:10 to a thief. Using the same image, Christ declares in Matthew 24: Illud autem scitote, quoniam si sciret paterfamilias qua hora fur venturus esset, vigilaret utique, et non sineret perfodidum suum. Ideo et vos estote parati: quia qua nescitis hora Filius hominis venturus est. (24:43-44)

But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (RSV)

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<sup>9</sup>See above, pp. 4-5, 47-48. Another scriptural reference is found in Mark 13:32.

It is worth noting the general context of the thief-metaphor in the Gospel of Matthew. One may well wonder whether it has anything to do with the way the thief in Beowulf unexpectedly introduces the imagery of doomsday.

The Gospels twice record an express comparison made by Christ between the day of judgment and a thief. The metaphor occurs not only in Matthew 24:43-44, but also, in practically identical wording, in Luke 12:39-40. In these two passages the theme of watchfulness does not function in quite the same way. In Matthew the reference to the thief concludes a lengthy account of the signs that are to mark the sudden end, although it also introduces the parables of the faithful and unfaithful servants (24:45-51), the ten maidens (25:1-13), and the talents (25:14-30). Judgment is an element which all three parables have in common; they are suitably followed by a description of the final judgment itself, when the sheep will be separated from the goats (25:31-46). (The very next chapter includes an account of the Last Supper and of Christ's agony in Gethsemane.) A glance at Luke 12 will show that the thief-metaphor of this Gospel does not have the same eschatological connotations. Here it serves as the moralizing conclusion to the parable of the watchful servants (12:35-40), which, in turn, is followed by another parable on the faithful and unfaithful servants (12:41-48); since Luke 12 fits into a series of chapters containing Christ's parabolic preaching, it not surprising that patristic commentators stress the theme of spiritual vigilance. In a

passage which Bede quotes verbatim, Gregory comments:

Nesciente enim patrefamilias fur domum perfodit, quia dum a sui custodia spiritus dormit, improvisa mors veniens carnis nostrae habitaculum irrumpit, et eum quem dominum domus invenerit dormientem necat, quia cum ventura damna spiritus minime praevidet, hunc mors ad supplicium nescientem rapit.

While the householder is unaware, the thief breaks into the house, because while the spirit sleeps, neglecting its guard, unforeseen death comes to burst into the little dwelling of our flesh, and kills him whom he finds sleeping, the master of the house, since when the spirit does not look ahead to the penalties to come, death snatches him unawares to torment.<sup>10</sup>

The thief represents death and evil, but the expositor does not pay much attention to him. Since he is comparatively ignored in an explanation of Luke 12, it is reasonable to expect that in Matthew 24, where the metaphor is closely linked with the Second Coming, his associations with wickedness are even more remote.<sup>11</sup> The thief is mentioned in the first place to illustrate just how unexpectedly doomsday will arrive. From the apocalyptic surroundings of Matthew 24:43-44 we may conclude that this passage is more likely to have a bearing on Beowulf than Luke 12:39-40. Perhaps we can go a step fur-

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<sup>10</sup>Gregory is quoted in Bede, In Lucae Evangelium Expositio; see explanation of Luke 12:40. The passage is quoted and translated in Goldsmith, The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf, pp. 197-98, in a discussion of the watchfulness which Hroðgar recommends in his homily.

<sup>11</sup>This assumption is confirmed by the exposition which Jerome gives of Matthew 24:42-43; he stresses the unexpectedness of the thief rather than his wickedness. See Jerome, Commentariorum in Evangelium Matthaei, PL 26, 80C. Besides, the account of future tribulations in Matthew corresponds to Luke 21--not to chapter 12, where the thief-metaphor is found in Luke.



ther to suggest that there is a connection between Matthew 24:43 and chapter 12:29 in the same Gospel, where we find yet another reference to an unexpectedly plundered house:

Aut quomodo potest quisquam intrare in domum fortis, et vasa eius diripere, nisi prius alligaverit fortem? et tunc domum illius diripiet.

Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods [Vulgate: vessels], unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. (RSV)

Augustine comments that the strong man is the devil, out of whose bondage Christ plunders his faithful ones.<sup>12</sup> The dragon in Beowulf is in the position of the strong man whose house, like the "eordhus" of line 2232, is to be plundered without warning. The word "peof" (2219) as applied to the anonymous intruder therefore has no criminal connotations. The robbing of treasure from a "haednum horde" (2216) may be considered an exemplary Christian act; the thief reaches the dragon's barrow by way of the "stig . . . eldum uncud" (2213-14) which is elsewhere associated with typology, and he succeeds with the gracious help of God (2291ff.). Since Beowulf himself completes the plundering initiated by the thief, his action in Part Two of the poem is not in the least reprehensible.

If one objects that the binding of the strong man was interpreted as an allusion not to doomsday, but to Christ's conquest over the dragon on Holy Saturday, Augustine provides the

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<sup>12</sup>Discussed at length in De Civitate Dei, XX, 8.

answer:

Haec autem adligatio diaboli non solum facta est, ex quo coepit ecclesia praeter Iudaeam terram in nationes alias adque alias dilatari; sed etiam nunc fit et fiet usque ad terminum saeculi, quo solvendus est, quia et nunc homines ab infidelitate, in qua eos ipse possidebat, convertuntur ad fidem et usque in illum finem sine dubio convertentur; et utique unicuique iste fortis tunc adligatur, quando ab illo tamquam vas eius eripitur.

The Devil's binding has been a fact from the day the Church began to expand beyond Judea into nation after nation. What is more, this binding is a present fact, and will continue until his liberation at the end of the world. The Devil is bound whenever men are converted to the faith from the infidelity in which he possessed them, and there will certainly be conversions until the end of time. For each such convert, plundered, as it were, like goods [or a vessel] from the 'strong man's house', Satan is bound.<sup>13</sup>

The binding of the devil began when Christ descended into hell, but it subsequently occurs each time someone becomes a Christian and receives the sacrament of baptism. The process is to be brought to completion at the end of the thousand years.<sup>14</sup> In Book XX of De Civitate Dei, a section dealing solely with the final judgment, Augustine repeatedly mentions the plundering of the strong man's house as an analogy of the redemption by Christ. It would be possible to maintain on this basis alone that the Beowulf poet alludes to Matthew 12; the suggestion that he connected this chapter with Matthew 24 has the advantage of showing possible evidence of greater

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<sup>13</sup>De Civitate Dei, XX, 8, translated in G. G. Walsh and D. J. Honan, trans., The City of God, Books XVII-XXII.

<sup>14</sup>See De Civitate Dei, XX, 7, 13.

unity and coherence in the poem.

Matthew 12:29 is not the only place in Scripture where Christ can be compared to a thief, for we read in the Apocalypse: ". . . veniam ad te tanquam fur et nescies qua hora veniam ad te" ". . . I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee" (3:3), and, "Ecce venio sicut fur" "Behold, I come as a thief" (16:15). These are plain statements. Not only the day of the Lord but the Lord himself will come as a thief. Like the "þeof" in Beowulf and Beowulf himself, he is, in fact, a robber of precious vessels. The "sincfaet" (2231, 2300) and the other golden cups stolen from the hoard have their source in the vasa of the strong man in Matthew 12. Augustine adopts this imagery in the above quotation from Book XX of De Civitate Dei, where he compares each new convert to a plundered vas; he mentions it also in his commentary on Psalm 58(59):

Si intellegantur qui sunt fortes, primo ipsum diabolus Dominus fortem dixit: . . . Alligavit ergo fortem vinculis dominationis suae; et vasa eius arripuit, ac vasa sua fecit.

If it would be perceived who are the strong men, at first the devil himself the Lord hath called a strong man: . . . He hath bound therefore the strong man with the chains of His dominion: and His vessels He hath carried off, and His own vessels hath made them.<sup>15</sup>

The plundering of treasure from the dragon's hoard in Beowulf evidently is a Christ-like act.

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<sup>15</sup> Enarrationes in Psalmos, LVIII, Sermo I, translated in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Note that of all the components of the treasure in Beowulf vessels or cups are mentioned most frequently.

The metaphor of the thief who robs the house of the devil also has a bearing on the mysterious curse:

Swa hit oð domes daeg- diope benemdon  
 peodnas maere, þa ðaet þaer dydon,  
 þaet se secg waere synnum scildig,  
 hergum geheaderod, hellbendum faest,  
 wommum gewitnad, se ðone wong strude,  
 naefne goldhwaete gearwor haefde  
 Agendes est aer gesceawod. (3069-75)

It could be argued that this is an evil spell and that the famous princes responsible for it are guilty of attempting to keep the treasure out of circulation, thus rendering it useless. From their point of view, as from the dragon's, the thief who plundered that place--"se ðone wong strude"--would deserve punishment. But the hoard can be kept hidden only if God allows it. He who is in control of times and seasons will determine when the powers of darkness will have to give up the treasure. The curse mentions doomsday because that is when the final surrender will take place and the demons will be destroyed. If the last two lines (3074-75) are to attributed to the "peodnas maere", who in Beowulf represent demonic forces, they seem to make allowance for the fact that God will put an end to the devil's rule when he sees fit. Only the Father knows the day and hour. It is appropriate that Beowulf, in the role of the Christ-like thief, completes the plundering at a time which in the poem is an anticipation of doomsday. The death of the hero follows the end of the dragon's rule so closely that the two are almost simultaneous. This is as it should be. The repeated scriptural references to the mystery of the unexpected end of

the world are transferred in the mystery how and when Beowulf will die:

Wundur hwar þonne  
 eorl ellenrof      ende gefere  
 lifgesceafta,      þonne leng ne maeg  
 mon mid his magum      meduseld buan.  
 Swa waes Biowulfe,      þa he biorges weard  
 sohte searonidas;      seolfe ne cude,  
 þurh hwaet his worulde gedal      weorðan sceolde.  
(3062-68)

The final victory and the passing of the hero constitute, as it were, the doomsday of the poem. It is therefore also a suitable occasion for pushing the dragon over the cliff into the sea, in anticipation of the fate of the ancient serpent of the Apocalypse, who after the thousand years will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone (20:10). The poet himself directs us to this suggestion. The much-discussed curse<sup>16</sup> can be regarded as a repetition and elaboration of the passage in which the spell is first mentioned:

Him big stoda      bunan ond orcas,  
 discas lagon      ond dyre swyrd,  
 omige þurhetone,      swa hie wið eorðan faeðm  
 þusend wintra      þaer eardodon;  
 þonne waes þaet yrfe      eacencraeftig,  
 iumonna gold      galdre bewunden,  
 þaet ðam hringsele      hrinan ne moste  
 gumena aenig,      nefne God sylfa,  
 sigora Soðcýning      sealde þam ðe he wolde  
 --he is manna gehyld--      hord openian,  
 efne swa hwylcum manna,      swa him gemet ðuhte.  
(3047-57)

Essentially this passage has the same significance as the curse

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<sup>16</sup>For a summary of opinions, see the note on lines 3074-75 in Klaeber, ed., Beowulf and Fight at Finnsburg, p. 227.

itself. It confirms that God will decide when the time is ripe for the plundering of the "hringsele". The events of the poem show that Beowulf is the man of God's choosing. The symbolic "pusend" links the whole episode of the third fight with the end of the millennium, the point of time which lends appropriateness to the release of the dragon from his hall and his raging about the countryside at the end of Beowulf's life.

The treasure for which Beowulf gave his life is ultimately burned and buried. Yet the death of the hero is presented as a worthwhile sacrifice:

Nu ic on maðma hord mine bebohte  
frode feorhlege, fremmað gena  
leoda pearfe. (2799-801)

Beowulf offers thanks to God for having been able to win such gain for his people. The robbing of the hoard is related in purpose to Christ's plundering of the devil's house.<sup>17</sup> It may seem that Beowulf's death is in vain; surprisingly, however, interest in the hoard does not cease once he is gone. The double allusion in the curse to the plundering by Christ comes after the messenger has proposed the destruction of the gold by fire, and it still seems to be necessary to remove the wealth from the dragon's hall. The Geats apparently do so without

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<sup>17</sup>Klaeber notes that the verbs "gebohte", "gecyppte", and "ceapode" are used in Christ 1462, 1471, and 1095 in connection with the redemption. See "Die christlichen Elemente im Beowulf", Anglia, 36 (1912), 192. Cf. also "geceapod" and "gebohte" in Beowulf 3012, 3014.

reluctance. The confusion may in part reflect the influence of the Gospels. There, too, the sacrifice of Christ is immediately related to approaching slaughter and captivity. When the messenger declares that the gold must melt in the fire, he re-introduces an allusion to the flames of doomsday. He then continues with details that accord with the tribulation foretold by Christ. In the same context the messenger speaks of Beowulf's sacrificial death in terms that fit the redemption (3012, 3014).

The positive value of Beowulf's accomplishments is maintained to the very end. But although he is the hero of a Christian poem, Beowulf is not Christ. The treasure may be associated with redeemed believers, but it remains real gold. As an element of the earth--whatever its other connotations in the poem may be--it is reserved for the final destruction by fire.<sup>18</sup> After Beowulf's death, the gold continues to be typologically significant, for it re-introduces the eschatological imagery of baptism.<sup>19</sup> The spiritual importance of his achievement is transferred to his "biorh". In his own mind, too, this monument represents his

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<sup>18</sup>Cf. similar details of destruction in Christ II:  
 Brond bið on tyhte,

aeleð ealdgestreon unmunlice,  
 gaesta gifraest, þæt geo guman heoldan,  
 þenden him on eorþan onmedla waes. (811-14)

The pride of those hoarding wealth could be attributed not to Beowulf but to the dragon and his kind.

<sup>19</sup>After it has served this purpose, it can be burned, buried, or forgotten. Once the dragon's hoard has been robbed completely in the end, the treasure loses its typological function; it is no longer something for Christ or a Christ-like hero to plunder.

true value as Christ-like hero. After thanking God for the treasure, Beowulf devotes considerable attention to the barrow which is to be built on Hronesnaes in his memory:

Hatað heaðomaere hlaew gewyrcean  
 beorhtne aefter baele aet brimes nosan;  
 se scel to gemyndum minum leodum  
 heah hlifian on Hronesnaesse,  
 þaet hit saeliðend syððan hatan  
 Biowulfes biorh, ða ðe brentingas  
 ofer floda genipu feorran drifað. (2802-08)

In the last lines of Christ II we find a passage which may shed light on the spiritual import of the above:

Nu is þon gelicost swa we on laguflode  
 ofer cald waeter ceolum liðan  
 geond sidne sae, sundhengestum,  
 flodwudu fergen. Is þaet frecne stream  
 yða ofermaeta þe we her on lacað  
 geond þas wacan woruld, windge holmas  
 ofer deop gelad. Waes se drohtað strong  
 aerþon we to londe geliden haefdon  
 ofer hreone hrycg. þa us help becwom,  
 þaet us to haelo hyge gelaedde,  
 godes gaestsunu, ond us giefte sealde  
 þaet we oncnawan magun ofer ceoles bord  
 hwaer we saelan sceolon sundhengestas,  
 ealde yðmearas, ancum faeste.  
 Utan us to þære hyðe hyht stapelian,  
 ða us gerymde rodera waldend,  
 halge on heahpu, þa he heofonum astag. (850-66)

The perilous flood which is here described is the realm of the "hron", the cetus of the Vulgate, also called Leviathan, the dragon of the sea. Just as Christ, the ascended Lord, is the guide to the haven of salvation, so Beowulf, who rose to the judgment of the just (2820), provides by his example a beacon for the Geats. The monument of his achievements will remind them of their lord even after his death. There is every indication that the Geats can expect a season of storm and darkness



in which they will have Beowulf's "biorh" to inspire them to perseverance. For a time Beowulf's people will suffer misery, but the forces of fratricide and social chaos will not triumph forever. The final destruction of the spirit of Cain, in the eschatological fulfilment of the Flood, will render possible the true kinship of the new earth, where youthful heroes will not be subject to the curse of mortality and where everlasting spring never turns to winter.

While Beowulf's success in Part One is achieved in imitation of a specific historic event and its related types, his exploit in Part Two derives its Christian symbolism from features associated with the day of judgment. Although the doomsday motifs form an extension of Flood and baptism typology, coherent scriptural precedents which can provide a core of historic reality are lacking this time. An occurrence that is still anticipated tends by its very nature to be more elusive than a past event. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence that Beowulf as a Christ-like, though mortal, hero acts to the very end in a manner consistent with typological symbolism.

## V

### RECAPITULATION

By its allusions to the traditional patristic exegesis of the third and fourth days, the Song of Creation shows that there is a connection between Heorot and baptismal typology. The gold-hall represents man's effort in this fallen world to reach the paradisaal perfection which, though it is inevitably short-lived, is from the typological point of view an attainable reality--in the same sense as the post-lapsarian "new creations" initiated by the sacrament of baptism or its principal Old Testament types, the Flood and the Exodus.

The typological connotations of the hall are reinforced by Hroðgar's description of the stag on the shore of the mere. As symbol of baptism, the "heort" refuses to seek shelter or salvation in monster-infested waters. Since baptism is normally regarded as a cleansing from sin, one might be inclined to see Grendel's reign in Heorot as evidence of the pride or cupidity of Hroðgar; however, his lack of heroic energy can be justified in the light of typology.

The spring imagery in Beowulf has patristic sources and confirms the typological influence in the poem. The wintry darkness associated with Grendel is demonic; Beowulf is a Christ-like hero of spring. In his struggle against Grendel

and his mother he acts in imitation of Christ's conquest over the dragon of hell. Essentially the two fights constitute a single cleansing. Part One of Beowulf owes its unity to the typology of baptism, particularly to the symbolism of the Flood.

In Part Two, Beowulf continues to be the Christ-like hero pitted against fratricidal forces. He has not succumbed to pride or avarice; his troubled response to the news of destruction is quite appropriate in a situation which has its parallel in the eschatological fulfilment of the Flood. The elements in Beowulf's behaviour that are reminiscent of Christ's agony in Gethsemane indicate a coherence that is also found in the Gospels. A singularly important concept for the interpretation of Beowulf is the role of Christ as thief; Beowulf, too, plunders precious vessels from a dragon's hoard. To the very end of his life he provides the Geats with an example to follow, and even in death he shows the way to the ultimate restoration of paradise.

## VI

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