THE CAUTIONARY MONSTERS OF *BEOWULF*

PERVERTED HUMANITY:

THE CAUTIONARY MONSTERS OF *BEOWULF*

by

MARC ANDREW HEWSON, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Marc Andrew Hewson, B.A. (McMaster University)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the metaphorical language of *Beowulf*, presenting the monsters of the poem (Grendel, his Mother, and the Dragon) as symbols of perverted ideals of humanity. Through a close reading of the descriptions and actions of these creatures, the paper emphasizes the artistic skill with which the *Beowulf* poet contrived his masterpiece. The use of both human and inhuman epithets to characterize the monsters proves the conflicting and ambiguous identities with which the poet imbued them. By detailing the various facets of these ambiguities, the thesis underscores the importance of maintaining a polysemous interpretation of the poem.

The thesis treats each of the monsters individually and in detail. It is argued that the synthesis of human and inhuman identities establishes the creatures as exaggerated, monstrous examples of human evil. Grendel represents the evil thane whose primary goal is the destruction of the fraternal loyalty of the *dryht*-system. The female monster becomes a perversion of the role of the queen or peace-weaver who instead of promoting respect and tolerance seeks war and violence. The dragon, finally, is viewed as a metaphorical extension of evil human kingship. His avaricious hoarding of treasure and his failure to obey the laws he himself is meant

to enforce as king make the worm a parody of good rule. Through the examination of these figures, then, the importance of proper human conduct is emphasized. The poet uses these creatures as cautionary figures as a means of describing the necessity of virtue to humanity.

The contribution to knowledge made by this study is two-fold. First, the close reading is meant to underscore the poet's conscious use of metaphorical language. As well, the very object of that metaphorization, the monsters, become important signs of universal human evil.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr. Alvin Lee for his integral involvement in the creation and completion of this thesis. My introduction to the intricate and exciting world of *Beowulf* is due solely to him; it is his own genuine fascination with the poem which inspired me to take a more than average interest in it. Having Dr. Lee as a guide through my first tentative foray into Anglo-Saxon poetry transformed a possibly burdensome task into a joyous event. For his assistance and above all for his enthusiasm in this project I am ever grateful.

Fæder alwalda
ðec gehealde
mid arstafum
siða gesunde!

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INTRODUCTION

An overestimation of the significance and prevalence of metaphor in *Beowulf* is nearly impossible. Almost all of the words allude to meanings other than their strictly contextual ones. The Anglo-Saxon mentality which created this poem conceived of the world as a web of relationships. By such an understanding, nothing in the world is independent. Here, all things, animate and otherwise, have natural bonds with each other. Thus, people and objects are linked to those people and objects around them. Metaphor in the poem is therefore unavoidable. Seemingly, "on the whole, we note a scarcity of conscious poetic metaphors, by the side of the more numerous ones of faded and only dimly felt metaphorical quality."[1] Yet such a bold statement ignores the fact that *Beowulf* is indeed written in allusive language. Metaphors and similes are unconscious because they are pervasive. Each character, action and setting, each word in the poem, connotes meanings far beyond the literal. The figures, places and events of *Beowulf* are what Frye calls implicit metaphors.[2] As such,

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[1]Friedrich Klaeber, *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. exington: D.C. Heath and Co., 1950) lxiv.

[2]See Northrop Frye, The Great Code (New York: Harcourt Brace vanovich, 1982): "The principle of implicit metaphor means among her things that when a 'true' meaning is decided on for a word, will usually be a choice from a number of metaphorical

their identities are freely associative. The subtlety of this type of metaphor allows for layers of meaning, for polysemous interpretation. Specific semantic definitions cannot be determined, at least not without detrimental reduction of the poetic significance of the work. The words of the poem thus offer a pool of meaning. Through such an allusive use of language, *Beowulf* refuses monolithic meaning. The poet's skill with metaphor demands loose interpretation, and nowhere is this polysemous approach to *Beowulf* more necessary (and indeed more easily documented) than in the criticism of the monsters, who are characterized as both human and inhuman, as grotesque creatures and parodic mortals.

Since Tolkien offered them new life in 1936, studies of the Grendel-Kin and the dragon have flourished. No longer are they despised or ridiculed as childish and primitive insertions into an otherwise sophisticated work. The once prevalent notion of their worthlessness has faded before a modern understanding of their intrinsic importance, though this importance has been variously understood by *Beowulf* scholars and critics.[3] The monsters have been interpreted as figures of universal malignance, of Christian demonic evil,

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ssibilities, and those other possibilities will still be there" 9).

[3]Eric Stanley, In the Foreground: *Beowulf* (Rochester: D. S. ewer, 1994) 1-68 gives a good overview of the important holarship on the poem.

and of human rage and violence.[4] While such characterizations are often opposed to each other, the monsters, through the highly charged allusive language which describes them, encompass all of them without difficulty. The attempt by Goldsmith to promote their Christian evil does not negate or supersede the attempt by Tolkien to describe them as the unstoppable forces of death in the mortal world; both critics

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[4]These are the respective views of Tolkien, Goldsmith, and ving: See J. R. R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the itics," Publication of the British Academy 22 (1936): 245-95 rpt Interpretations of *Beowulf*: A Critical Anthology R. D. Fulk, ed. loomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 14-44; Margaret E. ldsmith, The Mode and Meaning of *Beowulf* (London: Athelone Press, 70); Edward B. Irving Jr., A Reading of *Beowulf* (New Haven: Yale iversity Press, 1968). The landmark interpretations of these holars have gained numerous proponents. James W. Earl, Thinking out *Beowulf* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994) and rbert G. Wright, "Good and Evil; Light and Darkness; Joy and rrow in *Beowulf*," An Anthology of *Beowulf* Criticism, ed, Lewis E. cholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963) 257-68 th follow Tolkien's argument. Stephen C. Bandy "Cain, Grendel, d the Giants of *Beowulf*," Papers on Language and Literature 9 973): 235-49, Ruth Mellinkoff, "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in *owulf*, Parts I and II," Anglo-Saxon England 8 (1979): 143-62; 9 981): 183-89, Niilo Peltola, "Grendel's Descent from Cain considered," Neuphilologische Mitteilungen 73 (1972): 284-91 and rnard F. Huppé, The Hero in the Earthly City: A Reading of *owulf* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 84) agree with Goldsmith in viewing the poem as an Augustinian paration of the Divine and Earthly Cities. Irving's opinion of e monsters' inherent humanity is echoed by Stephen Atkinson, eowulf and the Grendel-Kin: Thane, Avenger, King," Publications the Missouri Philological Association 9 (1984): 58-66, and Oððæt an ongan...draca ricsian': Beowulf, the Dragon and ngship," PMPA 11 (1986): 1-10; Norma Kroll, "Beowulf: the Hero Keeper of Human Polity," Modern Philology 84 (1986): 117-29, therine O'Keefe, "*Beowulf*, Lines 702b-836: Transformations and e Limits of the Human," Texas Studies in Language and Literature (1981): 484-94, and S. L. Dragland, "Monster-man in *Beowulf*," ophilologus 61 (1977): 606-18.

are supported by the words of the poem. The poet's allusion and metaphor do not create static identities for these creatures (nor for the other figures, events and settings in the work). Rather, the metaphorical quality of the words makes the poem a delta where multiple theories converge.

The epithets characterizing the monsters are subtle in their allusion; no strict definitions are to be found in *Beowulf*. The language of the poem creates intricate and subtle relationships between and among the characters. Through the allusive wording, the monsters take on the appearance of other figures in the poem. They exist as both monsters and humans; they are not simply creatures, but metaphors. Yet, these metaphorical identities are not concretized. The creatures must be monstrous and human at once.

It is through this dual identification and through the presentation also of other, human, examples that the poem offers a view of good and evil in the world. The depiction of human existence is an important element of *Beowulf*. Human nature and mankind's struggle between virtue and sin is the backdrop against which the narrative is set, and the metaphorically charged monsters come to symbolize the defeat of good by evil. The simultaneous juxtaposition and association of the monsters with mankind shows humanity to be capable of evil. The poet warns against such improper conduct

by displaying paradigms of human goodness in the hero and others, by dictating maxims underscoring the importance of these paradigms, and by describing the horror of those characters who fail to match them. The monsters, as metaphorical humans, are the latter, horrendous expressions of the failure of virtue.[5] They ignore the values and morals of Anglo-Saxon society, each becoming a perverse ideal of a human role in the *dryht* system.

Grendel is a metaphorical evil thane. His acts of violence and their irrational motivation represent the failure of loyalty and love expected of retainers. Grendel dislikes the happiness and brotherhood among the people of Heorot and seeks to end them with his murderous raids. By disregarding and even destroying the essence of community, Grendel works against the conception of a thane as a friend and comrade. He is a figure of dishonour and disorder, becoming a foil to the hero. Like Unferð, Grendel epitomizes the unruly and usurping thane who destroys the camaraderie of the *dryht*.

Grendel's mother, too, is analogous of human wrong. Through metaphor she becomes a model of depraved queenship and

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[5]By this I do not mean strictly an ignorance or lack of ristian Virtues. Rather, I am suggesting that the monsters erate outside a central and universal set of values by which nkind can live peacefully and happily. That is, I see a morality the poem which works outside of a religious framework, depending stead on the good will of all humanity. Of course, it is possible to discount the Christian element completely; see 6-10, -19 below.

motherhood, a monstrous perversion of the peace-weaving role which Anglo-Saxon women were to fill. Such a depiction juxtaposes her to the other female figures in the poem, such as Wealhðeow and Hildeburh, who present the proper conduct of a woman in the *comitatus*. Counter to the traits typically ascribed to noble women, Grendel's Mother has neither respect nor honour for her fellows. As a peace-weaver, she is supposed to promote tolerance and friendship between battling tribes and among members of her own tribe. Yet the monster-woman, like Modþryð, instead promotes violence, furthering the animosity between the Grendel-Kin and mankind.

Finally, the dragon, also, is representative of human evil. He exists as a parody of the ideal of kingship, his actions resembling those of a violent and evil ruler. He is a twisted incarnation of guardianship who extends dictatorial control over the kingdom and ignores the rules and laws which he himself is charged to uphold. The act of creation, otherwise important to kingship, is nowhere found in the worm's actions; it is destruction which marks his reign. Moderation, too, the balance of power with wisdom, is a kingly trait which the dragon lacks. Unlike the human kings who use power to the benefit of their communities, the dragon instead

does detriment to the kingdom of Geatland.[6] He twists and corrupts those virtues normally displayed by good kings and so is analogous to Heremod.

As ironic examples of the human thane, queen and king, however, Grendel, his mother and the dragon do not lose their monstrous identities. Indeed it is the very admixture of human and inhuman in these creatures which emphasizes the existence of evil on a human plane and which, along with the maxims and positive examples of human conduct, demonstrates the didactic quality of *Beowulf* as a warning against improper behaviour and failure to comply with social codes of human conduct.

These creatures are the meeting place of human and inhuman. Their carefully crafted identities invite but do not force a relationship with the human figures in the poem. The poet's subtle use of language creates multiple layers of meaning for them. The dark character of human immorality is witnessed in and defined by the monsters' actions. They become cautionary figures warning against evil and prove, by horrific negation, the importance to human life of virtuous conduct.

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[6]I argue that the dragon is the symbolic (and perhaps even the teral) ruler of Beowulf's dryht, as 2207a-2211b indicate. See -72 below.

CHAPTER I: HUMAN GOOD IN *BEOWULF*

It is through the presentation of positive human examples, through the virtuous conduct of the hero and others, and through the moralizing maxims of the poet that the horror of the monsters is established; the poem offers both implicit and explicit moral guidelines which the audience is encouraged to emulate. The introduction of virtuous characters and of gnomes stressing adherence to social standards promotes a notion of goodness inherent in humanity, Beowulf and his fellows representing humanity's potential for virtue, the gnomic intrusions delineating the importance of meeting that potential. The traits and actions expected of a virtuous human being are defined by the maxims and found in the models.

The human realms of Heorot and Geatland exist as images of virtuous if not Paradisal worlds. Indeed, Hroðgar's hall is metaphorically linked with the Garden of Eden.[1] This linkage leads to a connection of God with Hroðgar, who comes to symbolize the magnanimity, goodness and creativity of the Deity. Heorot grows out of Hroðgar's imagination much as earth grows from the mind and hand of the Creator: *se Ælmihtiga eorðan worhte, / wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter*

[1]See Alvin A. Lee, The Guest-Hall of Eden (New Haven: Yale iversity Press: 1972) 171-223 for a detailed study of this entification.

bebugeð [the Almighty worked the earth, the beautiful bright plain which encompassed the water, 92a-93b].[2] Both Heorot and Earth are fashioned, worked, by their creators with an attention to beauty. Hroðgar is eager for a better hall *þonne yldo bearn æfre gefrunon* [than the children of men ever heard of, 70a-b]. Therefore, *weorc gebannan / manigre mægþe geond þisne middangeard, / folcstede frætwan* [he ordered a work from many tribes throughout this middle dwelling: to adorn the folk-stead, 74b-76a]. This attention to splendour is echoed in the description of God's Creation: *gefrætwade foldan sceatas / leomum ond leafum* [He adorned the earth's surfaces with limbs and leaves, 96a-97a]. Beyond this simple attractiveness, moreover, both creators have prosperity (bodily and monetary) as their goal: Hroðgar *beot ne aleh, beagas dælde, / sinc æt symle* [did not leave his promise unfulfilled: he dispensed rings and precious objects at the feast, 80a-81a], implying a guest-hall inhabited by healthy and wealthy men and ruled by a kind and generous lord. God's created world too is rich and alive:

> *gesette sigehreþig sunnan ond monan*
> *leoman to leohte landbuendum,*
> .....
> .....*lif eac gesceop*
> *cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.*
> [victorious, He established the sun and moon,
> lights to lighten the land-dwellers
> .....

[2]All excerpts are taken from Klaeber's 1950 edition.

> ...He also created life
> for each of the races which moves about alive,
> 94a- 98b].

Both Hroðgar and God create their paradisal worlds for the betterment of humanity. It is out of their magnanimity that Heorot and Eden are born.

The Dane gains his power from the Godhead: *him on mod bearn, / þæt healreced hatan wolde* [it came into his mind that he would have a hall-building, 67b-68b]. Strictly speaking the idea is not Hroðgar's at all. He does not think of the plan himself; it is sent to him. The very *heresped* [war-success, 64b], too, which allows him the opportunity to command the assembly of a new hall is not his own. He did not win success. Rather, it *wæs...gyfen* [was given, 63a-b], presumably by a higher power. This presumption is soon corroborated; Hroðgar says he will *eall gedælan /...swylc him God sealde* [distribute all that God has given him, 71b-72b]. This is an important example of both explicit and implicit association of the two figures, explicit in that it states that Hroðgar gained all of his power from the Deity, implicit given the simple apposition of their name and pronoun (*him God sealde* [to him God gave, 72b]).

This word order greatly affects the succeeding depiction of Hroðgar's creation of Heorot. After the connection has been made between God and Hroðgar, the origination of power switches. No longer does the Danish king

labour under divine guidance. He has assumed the mantle of Godhead in creating Heorot. Hroðgar, not God, *weorc gebannan* [ordered the work, 74b]. Similarly, Hroðgar acquires God's defining capacity: *scop him Heort naman* [he assigned it the name Heorot, 78b]. As God creates Earth and defines it, so does Hroðgar, his hall. The wielding of power is remarkably similar in both God and the king. God wields the imaginative force which *on mod bearn* [came into [Hroðgar's] mind, 67b], while the king himself also wields this power through his vocalization of it: *se...his wordes geweald wide hæfde* [he...wielded his words far and wide, 79a-b]. While God is the force behind Hroðgar, He is soon eclipsed by the presence of Hroðgar's own (God-given) power. This transfer of power is an important factor in the poet's description of the virtue of humanity. The shift from divine guidance to human action makes goodness a human not a superhuman concern. God bestows power initially. However, it is the human king who must wield it well.

The linkage between the Christian Deity and the Danish King allows a transfer of benevolence from one to the other. In commissioning the hall to be built, Hroðgar carries on God's tradition of compassion. As a virtuous creation by a virtuous king, Heorot, too, becomes a talisman of goodwill. In it *drihtguman dreamum lifdon, / eadiglice* [men lived in joy, blissfully, 99a-100b], making it *foremærost foldbuendum*

/ *receda under roderum* [the most famous of buildings for land-dwellers under Heaven, 309a-310a]. Just as the God-created world has *sunnan ond monan / leoman to leohte landbuendum* [the sun and the moon, lights to lighten the land-dwellers, 94b-95b], so too is Heorot a region of brightness. The hall *lixte se leoma ofer landa fela* [shone its light over many lands, 311]. This defense against darkness and evil makes Heorot a metaphorical guardian of the Danes;[3] Heorot is *ðrypærn* [a stronghold, 657a], implying not only a sturdy construction but also a sense of protection. Indeed, though it allows the entry of Grendel, or rather is unable to defend against the magic by which the doors *onarn* [sprang open, 721b] at his touch, Heorot does not fall before the forces of evil. *Se winsele / wiðhæfde* [the wine-hall withstood, 771b-772a] the battle brought on by Grendel. It *fæste wæs / innan ond utan irenbendum / searoþoncum besmiþod* [was fast inside and out with iron-bonds, smith-fastened with skill, 773b-775a].

The inhabitants of Heorot are also marked by virtue and

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[3]Indeed, the hall might be described as the fortress home of l humanity. The poet's application of various geographical ithets to the Scyldings (*Norð-Dene* [the North-Danes, 783b], *Suð-ne* [the South-Danes, 463b], *East-Dene* [the East-Danes, 392a], *st-Dene* [the West-Danes, 383a]) makes them metaphorical habitants of each corner of the world and thus allusive of mankind. For a detailed examination of proper names, see Godfrid orms, Compounded Names of Peoples in *Beowulf*: A Study in the ction of a Great Poet (Utrecht-Nijmegen: Dekker en Van de Vegt, 57).

grace, at least prior to the attacks of the Grendel-Kin.[4] The Danes enjoy happiness *hludne in healle* [loud in the hall, 89a]. Indeed their joy dates back further even than the creation of Hroðgar's hall. From their beginning they are a favoured tribe: after perceiving their lordless suffering, *God sende / folce to frofre* [as a consolation to the folk, God sent 13b-14a] a king. For this blessing the Scyldings are grateful. They repay the debt through loyalty to and respect for their lord, providing a marvellous burial ship at his death. Scyld, too, is mindful of honour. He *monegum mægþum meodosetla ofteah* [deprived many tribes of mead-seats, 5], orchestrating victories for his people. His son too is *woroldare forgeaf* [granted world-honour, 17b] because of his *fromum feohgiftum* [splendid treasure-giving, 21a] and the cycle of grace and repayment continues to Hroðgar's time. Righteousness and generosity become the foundation of the Danish *dryht*. The God-given power of these kings is repaid through their proper use of that power.

This attention to virtue and conduct is exhibited in the poem's other human court also. During his reign in Geatland, Beowulf continues Hroðgar's example of goodness. There is, though, little of the religious metaphorization

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[4]Of course, certain exceptions are evident, most notably the timations of feuding between Hroðgar and Hroþulf and of Unferð's ter treachery.

surrounding Beowulf's kingship that is suggested of Hroðgar's rule, despite the fact that the Geat has *ginfæstan gife, þe him God sealde* [ample gifts which God gave him, 2182].[5] In fact, during the Geatish adventure, Beowulf and God are almost negatively linked. While Hroðgar has the Lord's favour, the king of the Geats worries that he has somehow displeased God: *wende se wisa, þæt he Wealdende / ofer ealde riht ecean Dryhtne / bitre gebulge* [the wise one thought that he had bitterly offended the Wielder, the Eternal Lord, 2329a-2331a]. At his death, he feels constrained, even, to prove his worthiness of God's favour: "*me witan ne ðearf Waldend fira / morðorbealo maga*" ["the Wielder of men need not lay charge on me for the murder of kinsmen," 2741a-2742a].

Despite his more secular power, however, the link between Beowulf and Hroðgar continues. Beowulf emulates the Dane in his unfaltering attention to social and personal duty. He is *frod cyning* [a wise king, 2209b] (like Hroðgar before him (1306b)), who *geheold tela* [held (the kingdom) well, 2208b]. His commitment to good kingship is evident in his actions and their motives. The decision to fight the dragon rather than to *lete hine licgean, þær he longe wæs* [let him

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[5]Indeed, references to God are far fewer in Part II. The most mmon epithets of God (*Alwalda*, *Dryhten*, *God*, and *Metod*) are used ly a combined eight times from 2200-3182, in contrast to the nish Adventure where the four are employed a combined fifty-three mes. Even allowing for the differing length of the two sections, e discrepancy is large.

lie where he long was, 3082] is a necessary one. Beowulf ignores the pleas of Wiglaf and his other thanes *þæt he ne grette goldweard þone* [that he not greet the gold-guard, 3081] because as a king he must obey his duty to protect the realm. Though *hyt lungre wearð /...sare geendod* [it was quickly to be sorely ended, 2310b-2311b] for him, death cannot outweigh virtue for Beowulf. He fights the dragon because it is right to do so; it is a king's duty to avenge the destruction of his home and his people.

A conscientious king's main concern is the life of his realm, and so Beowulf's desire for the hoard of treasure is also evidence of his virtue. The exchange of wealth for fealty is primary to the continuance of the Anglo-Saxon *dryht* society; only through the perpetual circulation of rings and riches does the kingdom function normally. Beowulf, therefore, vows to win the hoard or die: *'ic mid elne sceall / gold gegangan, oððe guð nimeð, / feorhbealu frecne frean eowerne!'* ['I shall gain gold with my courage or war, the terrible life-bale, shall carry off your lord!' 2535b-2537b]. The treasure is an imperative part of Beowulf's war; he enters the battle to exact both physical and financial revenge. He is thankful that he *mote...leodum / ær swyltdæge swylc gestrynan* [might gain such treasure for the people ere his death-day, 2797a-2798b]. Though after his death it is *eldum swa unnyt, swa hit æror wæs* [as useless to men as it formerly

was, 3168], the treasure has the potential to revivify the *dryht*: '*Nu ic on maðma hord mine gebohte / frode feorhlege, fremmað gena / leoda þearfe*' ['Now I have sold my old, allotted life for the hoard of treasure; attend still to the people's need,' 2799a-2801b]. The importance of treasure to Geatland's existence is suggested by the proximity of gold and kingship in this command to Wiglaf. By distributing the treasure which Beowulf has won with his life, Wiglaf might sustain the Geatish society.[6] Beowulf's active pursuance of treasure for the purpose of magnanimous gift-giving is an important indication of his observance of proper human conduct. Through it and through his defense of the realm, he fulfils his kingly duty and proves a further example of virtuous humanity.

Of course, examples of human good in the poem come also in other forms. The paradigms of queenship and thanehood too are presented. Through Wealhðeow and Wiglaf, the roles of queen and retainer become as important to the health and wealth of the realm as that of king. Their attention to duty underlines the moral imperative of humanity to act for good.

As the first lady of Hroðgar's hall, Wealhðeow's duty

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[6]Yet in his decision to bury the gold, Wiglaf ignores the ıport of Beowulf's words and proves himself to be an unfit ruler. ıere is thus an interesting inversion of Beowulf's character in .glaf. While the hero was once a poor thane in his youth who grew) be a good king, Wiglaf's heroic thanehood fails to mature into)od kingship.

is one of mediation, of considering the needs of both king and retainer. It is her responsibility to maintain a bond between governor and governed. This obligation of Anglo-Saxon queens occasions the description of them as peace-weavers.[7] Wealhðeow fulfils this office by being *cynna gemyndig* [mindful of customs, 613b] and *mode geþungen* [excellent in mind, 624a]. She shows her respect for the power wielded by Hroðgar and for his preeminence among the Danes through her bestowal of the mead-cup first upon him during the feasting scenes in Heorot. The importance of his retainers is then acknowledged by her passing of the vessel subsequently to them. This systematic and personal show of respect for her king and his soldiers indicates the active role which a queen plays in the maintenance of a healthy society. Wealhðeow takes care to ensure the life of the hall herself, physically promoting friendship among the Danes. This respect and camaraderie she extends to the Geats as well through her *wisfæst wordum* [wise words, 626a] and deferential actions. Her bearing of the cup to Beowulf and her praise of his future kindness are indicative of her knowledge of etiquette and her existence as *friðusibb folca* [a peace-pledge of the folk, 2017a]; she becomes an exemplum of queenly duty, and her actions, the

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[7]It is curious to note, however, that only the vindictive and murderous Modþryð is called *freoðuwebbe* [peace-weaver, 1942a] in the entirety of *Beowulf*, denoting perhaps the poet's sense of irony, and proving certainly humanity's potential for evil.

standard by which other women in *Beowulf* may be measured.

Wiglaf, too, is a yardstick of human goodness in *Beowulf*. His unfaltering allegiance to Beowulf is a powerful example of the duty and friendship required of virtuous thanes. Unlike the cowardly Geatish retainers who *on holt bugon, / ealdre burgan* [fled into the holt, protected their lives, 2598b-2599a], *ne gemealt him se modsefa, ne his mæges laf / gewac æt wige* [his spirit did not melt, nor his kinsman's sword fail at war, 2628a-2629a]. He *gemunde...ða are, þe he him ær forgeaf* [recalled the honour that (Beowulf) had ere given him, 2606] and repaid the gifts with loyal friendship at battle. His first duty is the defense of his king:

> *"God wat on mec,*
> *þæt me is micle leofre, þæt minne lichaman*
> *mid minne goldgyfan gled fæðmie.*
> *Ne þynceð me gerysne, þæt we rondas beren*
> *eft to earde, nemne we æror mægen*
> *fane gefyllan, feorh ealgian*
> *Wedra ðeodnes"*
> ["God knows in me,
> that it is better to me that the flame enfold
> my body-covering with my gold-giver.
> It seems not proper to me that we bear our rounds
> home again, unless we first may
> fell the foe, protect the life of the
> Weder's chief," 2650b-2656a].

Despite the possibility of death which accompanies his decision to aid Beowulf against the dragon, Wiglaf considers only the debt of honour he owes his king: *"Deað bið sella / eorla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!"* ["death is better for every

earl than a life of disgrace!" 2890b-2891b]. Duty is his primary concern, for if a thane should fail in his duty, then so too *sceal sincþego ond swyrdgifu, / eall eðelwyn.../ lufen alicgean* [shall treasure-receiving, sword-giving, home-joy and love fail, 2884a-2886a] and the *dryht* will die. Wiglaf is the archetypal comrade in arms, the retainer who consistently provides friendship, honour and loyalty. He, like Beowulf and Wealhðeow, is an example of the potency of virtue in humanity. With this exemplary thane, model king and ideal queen, the poet presents standards of virtue against which to match the other human figures of the poem.

As well as these physical embodiments of goodness, there is a verbal promotion of virtue and morality; gnomic phrases scattered throughout the poem complement the positive examples of Beowulf and his fellows. These aphorisms are the summation of the characteristics of their respective roles. The duties and obligations of lords, ladies and retainers are delineated precisely by them. In addition to categorizing the characters of the poem, they also help to delimit the responsibilities of those roles in the world beyond the text; they are signals to the audience of the importance of proper human conduct, offering advice to live as the poem's good human characters do, to obey social obligations and follow virtue.

As is made evident by Beowulf and Hroðgar, the poem

describes good kings as generous and wise men who strive to maintain the livelihood of their kingdoms. The poet further emphasizes the admirable nature of their kingship by repeatedly praising them. Scyld, Hroðgar and Beowulf are all noted for their virtue: *þæt wæs god cyning!* [that was a good king! 11b, 863b, 2390b[8]]. The words serve as a refrain, emphasizing both the similarity of their virtuousness and the diversity of their virtues. Thus, Scyld's vigour at battle, Hroðgar's generousness and magnanimity, and Beowulf's defense of his kingdom all become important characteristics of kingship. As the words state, each man is virtuous in his own right. The repetition of the gnome takes their example a step further, intimating the cumulative nature of such traits. By repeating the formula, the poet implies that the good king exhibits not one but all three of these characteristics.

Retainers too are characterized by authorial comment. Maxims become explicit guidelines in defining the duties and traits of young warriors: *swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean / fromum feohgiftum on fæder bearme* [so should a young man

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[8]There is a certain ambiguity in this instance. Semantically, :t could apply either to Beowulf or to Onela (mentioned scant .nes before). Thus the sense of the passage might be either that ıela was good for letting Beowulf rule the Geats, or that Beowulf .mself was good in his rule of them. I prefer the latter, since ıere is little in the poem which can be accredited to Onela as a .gn or example of good kingship. His treachery and thirst for)wer run counter to the indicators of proper rule evidenced in :owulf and Hroðgar.

work good by dispensing splendid treasure while in his father's lap, 20a-21b];[9] *swa sceal man don, / þonne he æt guðe gegan þenceð / longsumne lof* [so should a man do (trust his strength) when he thinks to win enduring praise at war, 1535a-1536a]; *spræc / mildum wordum, swa sceal man don* [speak with mild words, so should a man do, 1171b-1172b]; *swa sceal mæg don, / nealles inwitnet oðrum bregdan* [so should a kinsman do (give treasure) not weave a malice-net for the other, 2166b-2167b]. Generosity, courage, polite speech and fraternal loyalty all become trademarks of virtuous thanehood. This use of maxims concretizes the vision of duty presented in the figures of Wiglaf and the other *Beowulf* thanes. The words of each maxim accord each trait an individual importance while the repetitive wording underlines the importance of attaining them all. In these aphorisms are summed up the various necessary actions and attitudes of virtuous thanes and kings.[10]

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[9]It is interesting to note that Beowulf himself has followed such advice in his youth. In earlier times the Geats *swyðe ndon, þæt he sleac wære, / æðeling unfrom* [very much suspected at he was slack, an unbold noble, 2187a-2188a].

[10]Gnomic verse is also used to introduce the duties and values queenship. In this case, however, the maxim works backwards:

ne bið swylc cwenlic þeaw
idese to efnanne, þeah ðe hio ænlic sy,
þætte freoðuwebbe feores onsæce
æfter ligetorne leofne mannan
[that is not a queen-like custom
for a lady to perform, though she be peerless -
that a peace-weaver deprive a beloved man of his life

Through the maxims which dictate and the examples which describe human virtue, the poet offers a paradigm of human existence for his audience to emulate. The positive values evident in most human endeavours in Heorot and Geatland imply a goodness at the center of human nature. Yet while good is a major presence in the poem, the existence of evil in humanity is by no means denied. Such is obvious in any cursory glance at the monsters. Through them evil enters the human realm; the dark stain of the Grendel-Kin on the brightness of Heorot is the focus of Part I, much as the dragon's shadow circling Geatland is a major element of Part II. The monsters become metaphorical of human sin through their identification with the poem's human figures. They represent the evil potential of kings, queens and thanes, denying the social duties incumbent upon humanity. Their horrific existence is a metaphor of the horror of human denial of virtue. Grendel, his Mother and the dragon parody the roles which Wiglaf, Wealhðeow and Beowulf present so virtuously, and so stand as a warning against the commission of such acts as they perform and against the display of such traits as they possess.

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after a pretended injury, 1940b-1943b].
ıstead of pronouncing the proper obligations of a lady, these
.nes denounce the ignoble actions of a poor queen. The effect
ıen is to warn the audience away from acts which would emulate
ıch violence.

CHAPTER II: GRENDEL, *HEALÐEGN*

The metaphorical language which abounds in *Beowulf* is integral to the monsters' characterization. The perverse human ideals which they represent are visible through the allusive quality of the language. Through the careful construction of his character as both human and monster, Grendel becomes an important symbol of evil thanehood. The poet takes care to build up Grendel's monstrous and human characteristics simultaneously. It is through the balance of seemingly incongruous epithets that his evil actions and attitudes are conveyed. By merging human and monster, the poet displays the horror of ignoring social duty. Grendel is not merely an inhuman foe of the Scyldings who must be vanquished. Nor is he truly a human enemy of the tribe. It is the combination of these two aspects by the use of metaphorically significant words and phrases which allows a view of humanity gone awry. Grendel becomes the epitome of false thanehood in a human context while existing also as a monster far removed from any sort of human society. This distance adds to the horrible inhumanity of his actions as a parodic thane.

In a strictly literal or physical sense, it is difficult to describe exactly what Grendel resembles. The

combination of different categories of existence is so much a part of his character that a definitive description cannot be arrived at. He is both an earthly monster and an analogue of Satan/Cain. The *Beowulf* poet is not so bold, though, as to attempt absolute identification of Grendel with any biblical figure. From the first mention of him (prior to his introduction by name), he is associated with Christian devils. He is *se ellengæst...þe in þystrum bad* [the bold demon...who dwelt in darkness, 86a-87b]. This brief introduction serves partly to define Grendel. The importance of this definition comes with the following lines detailing God's creation of the world: after the mention of *se Ælmihtiga* [the Almighty, 92a], Grendel, as the *gæst*, is necessarily linked to a Christian perspective. The figures of God and Grendel are set side by side. The comparison, though inescapable, is subtle. However, the shadowy allusion is strengthened by the epithet next applied to Grendel. He is *feond on helle* [a fiend from hell, 101b], living beyond the precincts of man. This fact favours a comparison with the evil race of Cain, whose forefather *feor forwræc, / Metod... mancynne fram* [the Measurer banished far from mankind, 109b-110b]. Cain, too, is sent outside the protection of the human world: his crime of fratricide warrants expulsion from God's Kingdom. Thus, like Grendel, he inhabits an area outside man's jurisdiction. Similarly, both the Cain figure and Grendel are warriors. Cain's progeny *wið*

Gode wunnon / lange þrage [fought against God for a long time, 113b]. The monster, too, does battle: *Grendel wan / hwile wið Hroþgar* [Grendel fought a while with Hroðgar, 151b-152a]. The closeness of phraseology employed by the poet invites comparison. The resonances of Cain and Satan in Grendel are undeniable. Yet, at once these resonances are not concretized. The poet uses metaphorical language to set up parallels; the mention of Grendel's battle cannot help but evoke memories of Cain's and Satan's conflicts against God. This allusion is further strengthened by the poem's earlier linkage of Hroðgar with God. Grendel, as *feond mancynnes* [the enemy of mankind, 164b], is a monstrous embodiment of the Christian Devil: Grendel (Satan) wars against Hroðgar (God).

Yet, at an even more basic level, Grendel's association with Cain is monstrous. More important than his representation of a Christian devil figure is Grendel's existence as *Caines cynne* [Cain's kin, 107a]. He is removed from a human context not because he is a demon from hell, but because he is a monster. Not only does he inhabit *fifelcynnes eard* [the land of the race of monsters, 104b], but he is also related to the *eotenas ond ylfe ond orcneas, / swylce gigantas* [the monsters and elves and orkneys and likewise the giants, 112a-113a] who are Cain's children. Indeed, Grendel himself is *eoten* [a giant, 761a]. The Christian colouring which tinges Grendel makes him a devilish descendent of Cain.

Beyond the religious overtones which his monstrous ancestry implies, Grendel is still a figure distant from humanity; his physical shape as a giant confirms this. Even his geographical placement on the periphery of society is an indication of his foreignness. Unlike the Danes who inhabit halls and live in a communal fashion, Grendel is cut off from a sense of brotherhood and community. He is *mære mearcstapa* [the notorious mark-stepper, 103a] walking the boundaries of human culture. His retreat is *dygel lond* [a secret land, 1357b] the way to which is *uncuð gelad* [an unknown path, 1410b]; *men ne cunnon, / hwyder helrunan hwyrftum scriþað* [men know not whither hell-demons glide in their movements, 163b-164a]. The places which the Grendel-Kin inhabit are outside of the knowledge of humanity. More importantly, their domain includes a bestial community. Grendel occupies *wulfhleoþu* [the wolf-slopes, 1358a], making his society one of monsters and beasts.[1] Grendel is excised from the human community by his literal placement outside of it; his geographical distance from men makes him inhuman. The metaphorical language of the poem creates the Mere as an unknown entity. Indeed, at points

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[1]It is interesting to note, however, that certain animals will ɔt venture into the mere. The stag hunted by hounds would rather .e at its edge than enter (1368-1372). Further, interpreting ɔorot in this example as both "hart" and "Heorot" and remembering ıe stag imagery which is used of Heorot (82, 780), it is possible ɔ establish a link between the animal and human societies in the ɔem, making Grendel's community all the more distant from ımanity.

the human characters and even the narrator do not have the words to describe it. To them Grendel is *sceadugenga* [the shadow-goer, 703a] *þe in þystrum bad* [who dwelt in darkness, 87b]. His haunt is so alien as to be indescribable. It is only as a site of secretive darkness that humanity can conceive of Grendel's dwelling place.[2] The darkness and shadow of the Mere are directly opposed to Heorot, *beahsele beorhta* [the bright ring-hall, 1177a]. His dwelling creates Grendel as a figure outside of and even opposed to mankind; while human regions are well-lit and well-known to men, his lair is a place of mystery and dark danger.

Darkness is not restricted simply to the Mere. Grendel too is linked to gloom and dimness. He is *deorc deapscua* [the dark death-shadow, 160a] and is thus connected with the inhuman and malevolent night which bounds human existence. Not only does Grendel live in the dim gloom of evening, he is himself a piece of the darkness. As *nihtbealwa mæst* [the greatest of night-evils, 193b], he is a foreign intrusion of

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[2]The Mere becomes allusive of the unknown world beyond human existence denoting a metaphorical association with the parable of the Flight of the Sparrow in Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English People, eds. Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969) 183-85. This allegory describes life as a well-lit hall. The unknown periods before birth and after death are described as a dark storm which rages outside the hall. The sparrow (allegorical of humanity) flies into the light from the darkness yet returns to the turbulent storm at death. Here Grendel's haunt is the dark and stormy unknown which lies outside the brightly lit Heorot.

the darkness of monstrosity into the world of the *Beorht-Dena* [the Bright-Danes, 427a]. The juxtaposition of bright humanity and dark inhumanity is an important one. Both Heorot and the Danes themselves appear to exude light. Grendel on the other hand is an active destroyer of light.[3] Metaphorically, he is the night which overtakes the day. It is important to note that his attacks (indeed the attacks of all of the monsters in the poem) occur at night. He is *æfengrom* [evening-grim, 2074a]. The day belongs to humanity because in the light all is visible and knowable. It is with the darkness that Grendel's inscrutable evil is inflicted.

A related yet distinct element in Grendel's characterization as a creature divided from humanity is his solitude. Though mention is made at times of his *deofla gedræg* [company of devils, 756a], Grendel is more often than not a solitary figure. As *angengea* [the lone-goer, 165a, 449a], he is cast out of any relationship. His solitude is complete until his mother's introduction; before her entrance there is no mention of other Grendel-kin. He is seemingly self-generated even: men *no...fæder cunnon, / hwæþer him ænig wæs ær acenned* [knew not of a father if any was ere begot for

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[3]Yet even here an incongruity in Grendel's existence occurs. ıough he is most often associated with darkness, there is at least ıe image of light connected to him: *him of eagum stod / ligge ɛlicost leoht unfæger* [from his eyes shone a light not fair, most ɹke fire, 726b-727b]. Once more the poet underlines Grendel's ıbiguous nature.

him, 1355b-1356b]. The lack of familial ties and his oddly immaculate birth indicate a creature who exceeds the bounds of human normalcy. Grendel's solitude is such that there is not even contact between mother and son; the two creatures are never together in the poem while Grendel is alive. He is segregated from humanity proper and from the relationships which would make him similar to humanity. He exists beyond the normal parameters of human life, showing no concern for bonds of kin or duty.

Even his motiveless attacks defy human understanding; he has no reason for his razing of Heorot apart from an anger because *dream gehyrde / hludne in healle* [he heard joy loud in the hall, 88b-89a].[4] His is an unknown evil, a malignance outside of normal human knowledge. That is to say, Grendel represents evil which operates on mankind rather than through it. The unreasoned attacks on Hroðgar's hall prove the almost purposeless enmity which Grendel holds against humanity. His actions exemplify the universality and inherence of evil in the world; through him evil exists outside of human action. his malevolence, being internalized and unmotivated, is counter to the justified or seemingly justified wars which are fought on a human level in *Beowulf*.

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[4]Grendel's motiveless malignity sets him apart from the other wo monsters in the poem whose fights against Beowulf are prompted, : least partially, by the actions of human foes.

It is, finally, as *feond mancynnes* [mankind's foe, 164b, 1276a] that Grendel is farthest removed from humanity. The epithet necessitates this distance; as the enemy of humanity Grendel must logically exist outside such humanity. In a sense similar to *Godes andsacan* [God's adversary, 786b, 1682b] whereby Grendel is opposed to God and therefore distanced from him, here also the *kent heiti* separates the foe from its object of enmity. Since Grendel battles against humanity his must be an evil apart from it.

The implication of this compound is two-fold, however, and with it the poet's delicate mastery of metaphorical language comes to the fore. While *feond mancynnes* segregates Grendel and mankind, in a subtle way the compound also equates the two. Given the simple proximity of the two elements of the word, foe and mankind enter into a relationship. The terms are reciprocal, each balanced against the other. This apposition links Grendel to humanity. At least linguistically, he is placed in a human context.

This combination of antagonists is evident also in the compound *leodsceaðan* [the people-foe, 2093b].[5] While the same sense of combining opposites in one word exists as it did in the previous instance, here there is another and more subtle point being made. While *feond mancynnes* implies antagonism to

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[5]In this incarnation Grendel is a metaphorical precursor of the ragon who also is a people-foe (2278a).

humanity as a whole, *leodsceaðan* has a narrower frame of reference. Here Grendel's evil is shown to be aimed at the Danes, at the people. While this distinction does not serve to prove a motive for Grendel's crimes, it moves the monster closer to humanity. As a people-foe he is no longer just the enemy of all humanity. Rather, the object of his hatred has narrowed. This draws Grendel closer to humanity. Such a notion is emphasized by the description of human foes by such an epithet. Modþryð is *leodbealewa* [a people-bale, 1946a]. Heremod, too, performs *leodbealo* [1722a]. These two human examples of evil are characterized as bringing affliction to the people. While *leodsceaðan* and *leodbealo* are distinct etymologically, their semantic value is similar. The link between Grendel and human evil is underlined by this careful word selection.

It is not simply as an enemy of mankind, though, that Grendel is anthropomorphized. There is a notion of humanity about him which is not contingent on his battle with the Danes. He is *earmsceapen / on weres wæstmum.../ næfne he wæs mara þonne ænig man oðer* [a miserable shape in the likeness of a man except that he was greater than any other man, 1351b-1353b]. His very appearance betokens some kinship to mankind, despite his superhuman stature. Indeed, his gigantic size is evident in human characters as well. Beowulf, according to the Danish coast-guard, is also of extra-human dimension:

næfre ic maran geseah / eorla ofer eorþan, ðonne is eower sum [never saw I on the earth a greater man than is one of you, 247b-248b]. He is humanity writ large and Grendel, also writ large, is a monstrous parody of humanity.

Grendel's geographical proximity to human society also intimates a connection between the two. Though his mere is unknown to men, it is little distant from the doors of Heorot. *Nis þæt feor heonon / milgemearces, þæt se mere standeð* [It is not far hence by mile-mark that the mere stands, 1362b-1363b]. The mere is morally distant from Hroðgar's hall: the nickers and water monsters which infest it are an evil to men. Yet, the geographical closeness to Heorot of this place of evil is important. Though he may live outside the parameters of human society, Grendel is still close at hand; he treads the borderlands of humanity. Through the geography of Denmark, human and monster are simultaneously integrated and segregated.

In fact, Grendel actually enters into human society insofar as he invades Heorot. His appearance in the gold-hall is an implicit inclusion into the human community which is housed there. Despite the fact that he is *lað* [an enemy, 440a, 815a, 841a] and *cwealmcuman* [a murderous visitor, 792a] in the hall, Grendel is nonetheless a guest in Heorot.[6] Yet

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[6]In an interesting parallel, Beowulf becomes *selegyst* [a hall-guest, 1545a] in the mere when fighting Grendel's Dam.

again, geography becomes metaphorical, and physical proximity urges a comparison of opposites. As the Danes are *hæþen* [heathen, 179a], so too Grendel has *hæþene sawle* [a heathen soul, 852a] and *hæþen handsporu* [heathen claws, 986a]. Their worship of devils is a common bond with Grendel who is himself described as *geosceaftgast* [a fate-sent demon, 1266a], *deofol* [a devil, 1680a]. Oddly, then, the Danish plea to *gastbona* [the soul-slayer, 177a] for help against Grendel is an inadvertent appeal to Grendel himself. The object of their worship is also the subject of their entreaty.

However, the link between the Danes and Grendel does not rely solely on the heathen worship of devils. Grendel's plight itself is similar to that of the Scyldings. Particularly, Grendel is metaphorical of the woe-stricken Hroðgar. The Danish king *unbliðe sæt* [sat joyless, 130b], *þolode...þegnsorge* [suffered thane-sorrow, 131], at the hands of Grendel. Yet, in a parodic parallel, the monster, too, is *rinc...dreamum bedæled* [a man deprived of joy, 720b-721a]. Similarly, Grendel *þrage gepolode* [suffered a time, 87a] because of the joy heard in Heorot. The king and the monster are described in similar terms and both of them express and experience similar emotions. The irony that each causes the other's distress must not be overlooked. It is through this reciprocal causation of pain that the two characters are linked. Grendel is anthropomorphized by his approximation of

Hroðgar's feelings and by his shared heathen status with the other Danes.[7]

Most important to Grendel's metaphorical human identity is his inclusion within the Danish *dryht*. As *healðegn* [a hall-thane, 142a] and *hilderinc* [a warrior, 986b] Grendel enters the economy of human society. He is at once Hroðgar's subject and his enemy, a position shared also by Hroþulf (though Hroðgar's nephew is not characterized in this poem by his later treachery).[8] Paradoxically, as a symbol of the human thane, Grendel plays two roles simultaneously. He represents a foil to the proper thanehood epitomized by Beowulf and is thus an analogue of Unferð. Yet at the same time there is a certain similarity between the monster and the Geat which makes them almost mirrors of one another. Thus, Grendel is an image of the negative as well as the positive thane. It is this combination which incriminates humanity in

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[7]It must be noted that Hroðgar is not implicated in the Danish vil-worship. Thus no grounds for comparison with Grendel may be und on this point. I cannot agree with Arthur Brodeur The Art of owulf, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) that "we st balance against the Danish king's noble life and pious cognition of God's mercies the poet's plain statement of the gan worship of the Danes, in which we must assume Hroðgar's rticipation" (218). That "there is not the slightest evidence at the poet meant to except Hroðgar" is wrong (198); Hroðgar is where mentioned in the so-called Christian Excursus (171-188).

[8]See Kenneth Sisam, The Structure of *Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon ess, 1965) 35-39 and Gerald Morgan, "The Treachery of Hroþulf," nglish Studies 53 (1972): 23-39 for lengthier studies of Hroþulf's aracterization.

the process of evil within the poem. Grendel's link to humanity lends it a sense of evil.

As a thane in the court of Hroðgar, Grendel is analogous to Beowulf whose task it is to rid the hall of Grendel's evil. The links which are forged between the monster and his foe are intricate. With Grendel's first foray into Heorot in the poem, little humanizing is accomplished. Yet with the second visitation of his evil, human qualities begin to become noticeable. The language which is used of him draws attention to his implied humanity. His motions which were at first obscure (*scriðan* [gliding, 703a]) are soon categorized in humanly understandable terms: *gongan* [going, 711a]; *siðian* [journeying, 720b] *treddode* [trod, 725b].[9] This anthropomorphization becomes more distinct with the introduction of Beowulf into the scene. With Grendel's move towards the Geatish warrior the semantic sense of the language becomes blurred. In this first meeting of the enemies their identities are difficult to separate:

> *Forð near ætstop,*
> *nam þa mid handa higeþihtigne*
> *rinc on ræste, ræhte ongean*
> *feond mid folme; he onfeng hraþe*
> *inwitþancum ond wið earm gesæt.*
> [(he) stepped forth nearer,
> took then with his hands the strong-hearted
> warrior at rest, the fiend reached towards (him)

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[9]O'Keefe also notes this, saying that "as the poet brings endel from the moor he brings him as well across the threshold of manity" (487).

with his hands; he quickly took (them?)
with hostile purpose and sat up against (his?) arm,
745b-749b].

Although the beginning of the description is fairly clear, in the latter lines it is difficult to differentiate Grendel's from Beowulf's actions. The *he* of 748b is ambiguous. It could relate to either Beowulf or Grendel. Indeed, the sense of 748b-749b might be either "Beowulf gripped Grendel's hand with hostile intent and sat up from his rest" or "Grendel quickly grabbed the hero intending malice and sat against Beowulf's sword-hand." This ambiguity is implicitly resolved in the next lines where Grendel is held in Beowulf's grasp, seemingly making the *he* above a referent of Beowulf. However, the very fact that the ambiguity exists to begin with is indicative of the conflation of identities which occurs between these two foes.

The hand to hand combat which is waged is another metaphorical elision of human and inhuman. While wrestling with Grendel, Beowulf *uplang astod / ond him fæste wiðfeng; fingras burston* [stood upright and fast laid hold of him; fingers burst, 759b-760b]. The final phrase is again ambiguous. The bursting fingers may belong either to Grendel or the Geat. Unlike the previous case, here there is no textual clue at all as to which figure is indicated. The two thus become synonymous. Linguistically, they are interchangeable at these points. The effect of such conflation

is two-fold. First, there is a necessary anthropomorphization of Grendel. Second, Beowulf is dehumanized by the comparison.[10]

A similar conflation of hero and monster occurs in the characterizing epithets during their battle. They are both *reþe renweardas* [fierce house-guards, 770a], *heaþodeorum* [battle-brave ones, 772a], and *graman* [grim ones, 777b]. The identification of Beowulf with Grendel is no longer based simply on the confusion or lack of pronouns. The poet moves towards a metaphorical identity of a more concrete nature. In this instance, however, the result is not reciprocal; while Grendel gains human status through the comparison, Beowulf is not lowered to a sub-human level: it is natural that Beowulf, *dryhtguma* [the dryht-man, 1768a], be described by his duty to defend the hall. Grendel's inclusion in the description is less easily understood. Though Beowulf is charged by Hroðgar to guard Heorot against evil (*hafa nu ond geheald husa selest /.../ waca wiþ wraþum!* [hold and guard now the best of houses, watch against the foe! 658a-660a]), Grendel has no such sanction to enter the hall. Indeed, he is the foe against whom Beowulf must guard Heorot. This paradoxical identity for Grendel as both guardian and foe is evident in his descendence

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[10]See O'Keefe and Dragland for studies of what they see as owulf's increasing monstrousness in the face of Grendel's growing manity.

from Cain also. As the progeny of the fratricide, Grendel is *synnum geswenced* [oppressed by sin, 975a], *maga mane fah* [a man stained by sin, 978a]. Yet he is also *fyrena hyrde* [the guardian of sins, 750b]. Thus there is a duality to Grendel. He is burdened by the very thing which he defends. Guardianship becomes not an honour in this sense but a danger. His duty to defend results in his oppression, and he becomes truly *feasceaft guma* [a wretched man, 973a], *wonsæli wer* [an unblessed man, 105a].

Even this classification of wretchedness Grendel shares with Beowulf to an extent. Just as he is *se aglæca* [the monster, the wretch, the warrior, 159a, 425a, 433b, 646b, 739a, 989b, 1000b, 1269a], so too is the hero (1512a[11]). Sigemund also is called *aglæca* (893a). The breadth of semantic possibilities in translating *aglæca* is itself a testament to the poet's skilled use of metaphorical language. The ambiguity with which this word is charged is evident in the range of characters who are described by it. All three monsters are identified this way (though in Grendel's Mother's case her

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[11]Counter to many translators, I read *aglæcan* here as a ference to Beowulf. Klaeber's glossary implies two possible terpretations of *ehton aglæcan* (1512a) as either "pursued by nsters" or "pursued the wretch/warrior", depending on the form ich is attributed to the noun. The former views *aglæcan* as a minative plural. The latter interprets it as a genitive ngular. This second variant is possible since the verb *ehtan* quires a genitive noun-form. While either interpretation is ausible in this context, it seems logical that the hero, his mour broken by beastly tusks, is defined as a wretched warrior.

gender forces an emendation to *aglæcwif* (1259a)), as are Beowulf and Sigemund. Klaeber's glossary identifies two separate meanings for the word: "wretch, monster, demon, fiend" and "warrior, hero."[12] However, this strict delineation is implausible. The two definitions cannot be so distinctly separated. Klaeber notes that the term is "used chiefly of Grendel and the dragon."[13] However, in 2592a *aglæcean* refers to both Beowulf and the dragon which undermines his argument for two divergent meanings. The attempt to make the term unambiguous is a danger. It leads to an ignorance of the metaphorical quality of the language of *Beowulf*. More plausibly, the word contains elements of both monstrosity and human heroism, requiring a translation such as "terrible warrior" or even "wretched hero" (though this latter is difficult in the case of Sigemund whose triumph over the worm would not indicate his wretchedness). Through such a polysemous translation, Grendel's metaphorical anthropomorphization is obvious. The semantic layers of *aglæca* bring Grendel into a relationship with the human figures of the poem, specifically Beowulf and Sigemund.

Yet the association of the hero with the monster is by no means categorical. Grendel is bound to Beowulf only

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[12]Klaeber, 298.

[13]Klaeber, 298.

metaphorically. The threads of similarity do not tie the two completely together. Rather, the web of allusions allows for differing and even contradictory readings of the language and symbols in the poem. Grendel is anthropomorphized by his link to Beowulf. However, his existence as a thane is emphasized specifically by his antithetical position to the hero. His execution of thanehood duties mimics yet mocks those of Beowulf. Indeed the Geat defines himself by his duty to his king and by his ancestry. He is introduced as *Higelaces þegn / god mid Geatum* [Hygelac's thane, good among the Geats, 194b-195a]. His essential and preliminary function is as a retainer. It is to aid the king that Beowulf journeys to Denmark. He *cwæð, he guðcyning / ofer swanrade secean wolde, / mærne þeoden, þa him wæs manna þearf* [said he would seek out the war-king, the famous lord, over the swan-road since he had a need of men, 199b-201b]. The definition of retainership is encompassed by this sentiment of the hero. The unconditional help given to a lord is the keystone of thanehood. Beowulf comes before Hroðgar in humble servitude, eager to give his support to the beleaguered king. The hero is mindful of Hroðgar's previous deeds in aid of Beowulf's own father, and it is *for arstafum* [for past favours, 458a] that Beowulf travels to Hroðgar's rescue. Grendel has no such motives. His gift to Hroðgar is one of violence and evil. Grendel *gewat...neosian.../ hean huses* [set out to seek the high

house, 115a-116a] to inflict punishment for his grief over the happiness enjoyed by Hroðgar and the Danes. Hroðgar's court is important to Grendel only insofar as he is barred from its glory.

Though he is a guest of Hroðgar's hall, Grendel will not accept the gifts which might be offered in exchange for his end to war. The feud which he carries on cannot be settled by means typical of a *dryht* society. He

> *sibbe ne wolde*
> *wið manna hwone mægenes Deniga,*
> *feorhbealo feorran, fea þingian,*
> *ne þær nænig witena wenan þorfte*
> *beorhtre bote to banan folmum*
> [would have no peace
> with any man of the Danish host,
> nor remove the life-bale, settle it with riches:
> none of the counsellors there needed to expect
> splendid compensation at the hands of the slayer,
> 154b-158b].

The typical means of ending blood feuds do not work against Grendel. His evil will not allow for a human solution; he will not seek or gain gifts from the Danes. While Beowulf is justly rewarded for his warring (Hroðgar *heaþoræsas geald / mearum ond madmum, swa hy næfre man lyhð, / se þe secgan wile soð æfter rihte* [repaid the battle-rushes with such horses and treasure that one will never find fault with them who speaks truth according to what is right, 1047b-1049b] and Hygelac *est geteah / meara ond maðma* [gave the gift of horse and treasure, 2165b-2166a] as a reward to Beowulf for the Danish expedition), Grendel is the recipient of no such treasure. *No*

he þone gifstol gretan moste, / maþðum for Metode, ne his myne wisse [He could not approach the gift-throne, the treasure, because of the lord; he knew not his love, 168a-169b].[14] He is left out of the gift-giving that should accompany dryht life. This exclusion from the common practice removes Grendel from the normal parameters of thanehood. He is an evil retainer who *wið rihte wan* [fought against right, 144b] and as such is not entitled to the rewards of a loyal follower. In betraying the code of thanehood, Grendel is a foil to the hero. He *Heorot eardode, / sincfage sel sweartum nihtum* [inhabited Heorot, the treasure-decorated hall, in the dark night, 166b-167b] as a parody of the hero's bright occupation of it during the day, and it is this nightly abuse of the thane privilege that denies him the reward enjoyed by Beowulf.

Even in their ancestry Grendel and the hero are of

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[14]There is certain confusion among editors and critics as to e precise meaning behind this passage. See Klaeber, 134; Brodeur, 0-05; and Goldsmith, 109. Klaeber's reading figures God as the rd whom Grendel cannot greet because neither one loves the other. odeur and Goldsmith, though, assume that it is Hroðgar who cannot ach towards God's throne because of his excessive pride, ldsmith venturing further that he does not know God's love aking *ne his mynne wisse* refer to the Danish king). I have timated here the use of *metode* in an earthly context counter to aeber's capitalization. In any event, the ambiguity of this ssage lends credence to the examination of the poet's refined use metaphorical and polysemous language. Grendel is thus a parodic ane of Hroðgar and God. See also Marie Padgett Hamilton, "The ligious Principle of *Beowulf*," PMLA XLI (June, 1946) Rpt. in An thology of *Beowulf* Criticism, ed. Lewis Nicholson (Notre Dame: iversity of Notre Dame Press, 1963) 105-35; Lee, 185-86; and vid Williams, Cain and *Beowulf*: A Study in Secular Allegory oronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982) 45.

separate worlds. Beowulf's life and fame are not defined only by his membership in Hygelac's dryht. The Geat's family history is an important part of his character. Thus he introduces himself to Denmark by his paternity:

> *"We synt gumcynnes Geata leode*
> *ond Higelaces heorðgeneatas.*
> *Wæs min fæder folcum gecyþed,*
> *æþele ordfruma, Ecgþeow haten"*
> ["We are men of the Geatish nation
> and Hygelac's hearth-companions.
> My father, that noble leader
> known to the people, was called Ecgðeow"
> 260a-263b].

The categorization of thanes, indeed of human beings in general, in *Beowulf* is accomplished through a careful delineation of race and heritage. The determination of nationality and of descent is carried out almost immediately upon introduction of individuals, and it is often through familial ties that people are identified. Beowulf's paternity, then, is of utmost importance. It is through parentage that his and other characters' personalities are defined; his ancestry situates him in the *dryht*. Grendel, though, has no such distinction. His heritage is for the most part unknown. He is given an ancestry of sorts: from Cain *woc fela / geosceaftgasta; wæs þæra Grendel sum* [woke many fate-sent demons; Grendel was one of those, 1265b-1266b]. There is a sense, then, of Grendel's ultimate origins. Such a notion corresponds to the human delineation of nationality; as Beowulf is a Geat, so is Grendel a Cainite. This, however, is

the end of the similarity. While the hero is endowed with a particular history and genealogy, Grendel is given no such family-tree. He is truly *deogol dædhata* [a secret persecutor, 275a] because of his almost miraculous appearance. His mother's existence is overlooked upon his introduction. Indeed it is ignored until well after Grendel is dead. This ignorance of parentage is counter to the convention established by the poet for the other characters, and though there is a later introduction of a mother, Grendel's paternity is never known (is possibly unknowable since men *no...fæder cunnon, / hwæþer him ænig wæs ær acenned* [knew of no father whether any was ere begotten for him, 1355b-1356b]). Thus, the monster is removed from the typical society of thanes. He takes on the appearance of a retainer in the Danish court. However his identification is a parodic one. His lack of familial ties and the secrecy of his origin counter the strong bonds of community, family and geography which are evident in the descriptions of the human beings in *Beowulf*.

Grendel's thanehood is thus ironic. While Beowulf displays and performs the proper customs and duties of a retainer to his lord, Grendel ignores the essential obligations of his role. Opposed to Beowulf's magnanimity and good-will are Grendel's rage and violence. Grendel decimates the very *dryht* to which he belongs as a metaphorical thane of Hroðgar. This display of internal strife, of a society falling

under its own evil weight, prompts a comparison of Grendel with other similarly evil and vindictive retainers. It is as a metaphorical depiction of Unferð and Hroðulf that Grendel's anthropomorphization is most important to the meaning of *Beowulf*; as an evil and usurping thane, Grendel brings to Heorot an exaggerated form of the evil which invests it in the actions of Unferð and Hroþulf. He is a monstrous counterpart to their human sin.

The similar descriptions of these characters makes a comparison inevitable and imperative. With Unferð the poet creates a human analogue of Grendel. The emotions, actions and descriptions of the two characters highlight Grendel's identity as the parodic thane who juxtaposes Beowulf's ideal retainership. The carefully selected and corresponding words and events in the depictions of each evil thane underscore their similarity and intimate the anthropomorphization of the monster as well as the inhumanity of terrible sin. Grendel's descent from Cain and his war against the Danes mimic Unferð's own fratricide and his aid in the future downfall of Heorot and destruction of Hroðgar's lineage. Both figures are members of the *dryht* which they will ultimately seek to destroy. Unferð, *æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga* [sat at the foot of the lord of the Scyldings, 500, 1166a] in a place of presumed honour as Hroðgar's advisor and *þyle* [spokesman,

1165b].[15] So too is Grendel an inhabitant of Heorot. As a *healðegn* [hall-thane, 142], he is symbolically at the command and in the proximity of Hroðgar as well.

Unferð's very name reminds the audience of Grendel's position at Heorot. "The name *Unferð*, i.e., more properly, *Unfrið*, [means] 'mar-peace.'"[16] This condition is mimicked by the actions of both characters. Unferð occasions discord by his intimated future struggle against the Scylding dynasty. *He his magum nære / arfæst æt ecga gelacum* [he was not honour-fast to his kinsman at sword-play, 1167b-1168a].[17] Grendel

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[15]The meaning of *þyle* is difficult to pinpoint. Klaeber notes ny connotations such as "sage, orator, poet of note, storiologer, major domus, or the king's right hand man" (149). rton Bloomfield, "*Beowulf* and Christian Allegory: An terpretation of Unferð," Traditio VII, (1949-1951): 410-15, rpt. Anthology, 155-64 offers a meaning more akin to priest. He utions that "the obscurity of the word *thyle*, however, prevents from pushing this interpretation too far" (163). His intimation at the Dane's occupation as a pagan priest would validate the ristian Beowulf's disparagement of the heathen Unferð seems to me o strict an attempt to transform the poem into a religious legory.

[16]Klaeber, 148.

[17]There are many critics, however, who apologize for Unferð. sam feels "there is no evidence that he had the part of a traitor evil counsellor" (41). Kroll, too, is hesitant to proclaim his llainy, seeing instead his ability to learn political prudence id generosity (127-28). Perhaps the most intriguing case, though, s Bonjour's. (See Adrien Bonjour, The Digressions in *Beowulf*,)xford: Medium Aevum Monograph 5, 1950) and Twelve *Beowulf* Papers)40-1960 With Additional Comments (Neuchatel: La Faculté des ettres, 1962).) In his early study, Bonjour thought that the *þyle* as "a distinguished and glorious thane" and "that the attempts to epresent Unferð in a way as the villain of the piece are wide of ne mark" (Digressions, 19, 20). Yet, his opinion was swayed years ater by the barrage of criticism concerning his contention: "My

too comes to disrupt Heorot's harmony. The Scyldings *dreamum lifdon, / eadiglice, oð ðæt* [lived in joy, blessed, until, 99b-100b] he arrives to mar the hall's peace. The very existence of an Unferð, a mar-peace, concretizes the strife under which Heorot struggles. Hroðgar's *þyle* anthropomorphizes the evil which Grendel embodies. His name and nature prove the existence of such evil on a human level. Grendel, on a monstrous level, is allusive of Unferð's evil. He takes the sins of mankind and distorts them, makes them more horrific. This intensification of crime serves as an exaggerated counterpoint to the hero's magnanimity and courage. Beowulf is aggrandized by the poor thanehood of Unferð and his metaphorical twin, Grendel.

Beowulf's disparagement of Unferð as a fratricide is another link between the Dane and Grendel. As the monster is descended from Cain, so too Unferð *broðrum to banan wurde* [became his brothers' slayer, 587]. As a fratricide Unferð becomes the progeny of Cain as well, and thus a metaphorical

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tempted rehabilitation of Unferð, indeed, proved to be too rash
assault on traditional positions, and I deem it high time to
oceed to a tactical retreat" (Papers, 129). This realization
eems to me a wise one given Unferð's cowardly nature and
tagonism to the hero. I must side with Brodeur in thinking "that
best he played the mischief-maker or evil counsellor; at worst
may have had a more active role in Hrothulf's insurrection and
e killing of Hrethric," (153). Whether or not the interpretation
Unferð as a traitor is historically accurate, there is enough
idence in the poem to suggest that he has the potential to betray
s dryht.

relative of Grendel himself.[18] Their crime is one against human law and especially counter to *dryht* custom which holds fraternal loyalty as one of its most esteemed tenets. By violating the law of the community, Grendel and Unferð show the extent of their alienation from the proper customs and duties of the thane figure in Anglo-Saxon society. Their disregard for familial and social relationships removes them from the realm of the hero and his analogues (Hroðgar, Hygelac and others who respect the bonds of kinship and camaraderie). By creating Unferð as a fratricidal mirror of Grendel, the poet intimates the proximity of monstrousness to the failure to comply with social rules and obligations. Duty to family and dryht are of the utmost importance in Anglo-Saxon society. Through their slaughter of kin, Grendel and Unferð betray the laws of the dryht and inadvertently expose their poor thanehood.

Unferð's connection to Grendel brings inhuman sin into a human context. It is supposed that he *in helle scealt / werhõo dreogan* [shall suffer damnation in hell, 588b-589a] for his crimes. Grendel too is a denizen of hell, *feond on helle* [a fiend from hell, 101b]. Thus, the natural and the supernatural are brought into alignment. The punishment for

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[18]I understand Grendel's slaughter of men to be a metaphorical ratricide. Though technically unrelated to the men he kills, his escendence from Cain makes him at least peripherally related to umanity.

the crime is attached to human as well as inhuman perpetrators, and Unferð's ultimate fate is witnessed in Grendel's demise. At the monster's death *him hel onfeng* [hell took him, 852b]. It is through the actions and fate of the monstrous thane that those of the human one are predetermined. Grendel murders his fellow thanes in Heorot and suffers for it, and a similar fate awaits the human thane who kills his kin and taunts his lord's saviour.[19] Thus, Grendel is a metaphorical double of Unferð. Both characters function as injunctions against improper human conduct. They represent the failure of retainers to respect and obey the rules of thanehood.

The treachery of thanes is evident in Hroþulf's actions also. Though his deceit and usurpation of Hroðgar's throne are distant at the time of the events in Part I, indications of the future battle between retainer and king are hinted: *Heorot innan wæs / feondum afylled; nalles facenstafas / Þeod-Scyldingas þenden fremedon* [Heorot within was filled with friends; the Scylding-people did not work treachery then, 1017b-1019b (emphasis mine)]. Such an implication of betrayal involves Hroþulf in a metaphorical connection with Grendel. The traitorous nephew of Hroðgar is as much negligent of the

[19]The verbal defeat of Unferð by Beowulf is itself reminiscent : the victory which the hero wins against Grendel, if only in the ıct that both of Beowulf's foes fight against righteousness and ıffer humiliation for it.

rules of the dryht as the monster himself.

These allusions between human and inhuman characters demonstrate the presence of evil in a human context. Grendel is a metaphor of human evil in a concentrated form. His crimes are at once more shocking than those of the human traitors and more brutal. The allusive nature of the language of the poem, however, creates links among characters. By the common use of epithets and through metaphor, the poet intimates a relationship between the monster and the human figures of sin. By exaggerating sin outside a strictly human context, and at the same time, relating the exaggeration to human characters, *Beowulf* serves to prove the danger of such action by human beings.

Grendel is thus a cautionary figure. Through the comparison of the monster to human types (be they foils or analogues), the poet exposes the presence of evil in humanity, countering it with the righteousness of the hero. Grendel is a metaphor of bad thanehood, of disobedience to the dryht society. His existence as the parodic thane brings evil into a human context. The horrific deeds which he performs serve as warnings to the audience to be aware of evil and to act virtuously. In countering each duty and trait of thanehood, the monster emphasizes their importance; virtue is championed by Grendel's negation of it.

CHAPTER III: THE GRENDEL DAM, *IDES AGLÆCWIF*

Grendel's Dam,[1] too, plays an important role in the presentation of human nature in *Beowulf*. The poet creates her as an ambiguous character, blurring the lines of strict and monosemous interpretation. Through the complex use of allusive language which creates links between words, phrases, ideas and figures in *Beowulf*, the importance of this once despised and ignored monster is underlined.[2] By concentrating on the connections which are forged through the language, her importance as a symbol of humanity gone wrong is discovered.

The monster's existence as a model of poor and perverted queenship is made visible by the poet's use of metaphor in which the monstrous and the human mix. Neither aspect of the Dam's character is given preference over the other. Indeed, they are simultaneously developed through the language of the poem; the seemingly incongruous marriage of human with inhuman is made possible through metaphor. By

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[1]Though this epithet for the female monster is a Middle English ıtrusion, the connotations offered by an anglicization of the ·ench *dame* [lady] have, I think, an important place in this study : the female monster. The term is well suited to describe a ıaracter who exists as a parody of nobility.

[2]Grendel's Mother has been overlooked by much of the *Beowulf* ;iticism, as Atkinson points out: "She is the least discussed of ıe poem's monsters (Tolkien's great essay, for example, ignores ɜr)" (Grendel-Kin, 61). Yet, ironically, Atkinson himself affords ɜr only the slightest consideration in his paper.

linking the horrific and the human, the poet displays [illegible] of a woman failing to fulfil her function as peace-weaver. The monstrous parody which Grendel's Mother represents is made possible through her dual existence. She is at once a figure of monstrous anger and violence whose ravaging of Heorot is an inhuman tragedy, and a mother whose love for her child provokes understandable revenge against the Danes. She is able to function as a totem of evil queenship by this very tension between human and monster, existing as the epitome of the perverted human peace-weaver while retaining her function as monstrous avenger and murderess. This incongruity is made possible by the subtle allusions which the poet weaves into the fabric of the poem. By creating suggestive metaphorical connections between Grendel's Mother and other figures in the poem, *Beowulf's* language allows her a polysemous existence.

As does Grendel, his mother has many physical qualities and anomalies which separate her from humanity. However, it is difficult to determine exactly what it is that she resembles. As *feorhgeniðlan* [the life-enemy, 1540], she is a foe to all things living, taking her hatred beyond the level of human conception. Her anger and enmity are all-encompassing; nothing can escape her wrath.[3] In addition to this qualitative

[3]This totality of anger makes Grendel's Mother analogous to the [illegible]ragon whose hatred of the Geats prompts his desire for total [illegible]estruction.

description of her anger, the epithet also has a quantitative function. As well as being an enemy of life, she is also an enemy for life. The compound allows for the scope and intensity of her wrath. This multiple meaning proves the importance of metaphorical language to the poem. Though her emotions are human ones, their severity is beyond human scope. She exaggerates evil beyond a human context.

She is thus associated with the other life-foes of the poem, notably the scavenging creatures of Germanic lore who scour the battle-field for carrion. Grendel's Mother is explicitly linked to these animals as *seo brimwylf* [the sea-wolf, 1506a, 1599a]. Though the figures of the eagle, raven and wolf do not play as much a part in *Beowulf* as in other Old English texts, their inclusion in the poem is evident enough to determine their function as the harbingers of violence and death.[4] By metaphorically equating Grendel's Mother with one of these creatures, the poet sets her in opposition to the human warriors whose deaths occasion the congregation of scavenging animals. The fact that her actions befit these carrion creatures of Anglo-Saxon and Norse myth also adds to her monstrousness. Grendel's Dam preys upon humanity after battle. She enters Heorot the evening after Beowulf's defeat

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[4]However, the use of the wolf figure in positive human terms (i.e. Beowulf, Wulf Wonreding, Wulfgar) offsets the negative readings. The poet's use of allusive language thus allows ambiguity where none seemingly exists.

of Grendel and carries off Æschere, becoming herself a scavenger living off the remains of humanity, though her prey is still alive when she seizes it. She is *heorogifre* [fiercely ravenous, 1498a], leaving Heorot *æse wlanc.../ fylle gefægnod* [proud of the carcass, rejoicing in the feast, 1332a-1333a]. This gorging on the bodies of the human dead is another factor alienating her from inclusion in the society of mankind.

Her monstrous existence is not defined simply by an allusion to wolves, however. It is the pairing of opposites within the compound itself which makes the term an important one. Not only is Grendel's Mother a wolf, she is a wolf of the sea. This equation of land creature with ocean setting makes her more fantastical and horrifying. There is a tension created between the two elements of this compound, a tension which is transferred to her by her existence as such. The incongruity of her metaphorical identity as a wolf of the sea is itself enough to alienate Grendel's Mother from a connection with humanity.

The connection with wolves is important also in light of another factor of the Grendel-Kin's existence. *Hie.../ warigeað wulfhleopu* [They guarded the wolf-slopes, 1357b-1358a]. Thus, not only do the monsters resemble the carrion creatures of folklore in deed, but also emulate them in geography. By inhabiting the same space as the wolves themselves, Grendel and his Mother are taken out of a

geographical proximity to mankind; the haunts of wolves are far removed (psychologically) from the place of human beings. More importantly, it is not simply that the monsters occupy the same space as the wolves, but rather that they guard and protect this space. This implies an active acceptance of responsibility by Grendel's Mother to defend the regions of monsters hostile to man. By protecting as well as inhabiting such a space, she is willingly cut off from the human community.

Seemingly impossibly, though, the connection to wolves is also a means to maintaining an identity between humanity and Grendel's Mother. By calling her *brimwylf* the poet keeps his allusions in the realm of known and knowable creatures. Though the idea of a sea-wolf is necessarily foreign to human experience, mankind has enough contact with wolves for their existence not to seem fantastic. However, the epithets which characterize Grendel's Dam are not kept within such a realm. She is *ellorgast* [the alien spirit, 1621b (emphasis mine)]. This alienation comes from her existence as a monster outside even animal allusion. She is *grundwyrgenne* [the depth-monster, 1518b], *atol* [the horrid one, 1332a]. These identities give little tangible information. Indeed their purpose is rather to keep any concrete identity from her. The malignity of her existence is emphasized without any characteristics being applied to it. Her evil thus becomes as

mysterious as her son's. Though the terms are descriptive in a fundamental way (*i.e.* they add information to what she might be), they do not go far to identifying her in relation to known creatures. It is precisely because her evil is *atol* [horrible, 1502a] that she is foreign to humanity. In using generic terms of horror to describe Grendel's Dam, the poet makes her evil and her existence one of necessarily foreign and mysterious origins. This nondescriptness makes her *ælwiht* [a strange monster, 1500a (emphasis mine)].

Yet, an identification as monster is not the only one which is made of Grendel's Mother by the poet. The carefully chosen metaphorical language which is used of her proves the poet's desire to give her an ambiguous existence. While she maintains a monstrous side, Grendel's Dam is also humanized. Indeed, with her introduction, it is the human functions which she is to fulfil that are emphasized. At an even more fundamental level, her very appearance seems anthropomorphic; she is said to have a humanoid, if not human, shape. *Þæs þe hie gewislicost gewitan meahton* [as far as they might clearly know, 1350], Grendel's Mother is *idese onlicnes* [the likeness of a woman, 1351a]. Even her use of weapons in the battle against Beowulf moves her closer to the human conception of a warrior; while Grendel *wæpna ne recceð* [cares not for weapons, 434b], his mother uses them against her foe. She straddles Beowulf and attempts to stab him with her knife. This use of

human methods of combat includes her in the human warrior culture.[5] That she should need aid in the fight is in keeping with her female human status: *wæs se gryre læssa / efne swa micle, swa bið mægþa cræft, / wiggryre wifes be wæpnedmen* [her attack was less horrible by only as much as a maiden's strength, a wife's war-terror, is less than a weaponed man's, 1282b-1284b].[6] This statement is an important clue to identifying her. The appositive style of these lines sets Grendel's Mother in a human context. She is identified with war and with femininity; the roles which she plays as mother and queen begin here.

Her function is more clearly defined than that of her son whose evil is unknown and thus more horrendous. Just as her appearance is humanly conceived, at least in part, so is her action partly humanly justified. With her very introduction, she is categorized as a more human foe than Grendel, taking on the roles of *wrecend* [avenger, 1256b],

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[5]However, it must be noted that, as was the case with Grendel, e Dam is immune to human swords (1522a-1524a) and is therefore stanced somewhat from humanity.

[6]Jane Chance, "Grendel's Mother as Epic Anti-Type of the Virgin id Queen," Woman as Hero in Old English Literature (Syracuse: racuse University Press, 1986) 95-108, rpt. in Interpretations, 1-63 misinterprets this phrase, saying that the Dam "is weaker an a man" (251). Such a misreading is dangerous and odd, given at Beowulf seems to have a more difficult time in defeating her an in dispatching Grendel.

modor [mother, 1258b], *ides* [lady[7], 1259a]. From the beginning, the Dam's presence in the poem is more anthropomorphic than her son's; fully half of the epithets describing her at her introduction into the poem (1255a-1282a) are in reference to her role as mother.

Her anthropomorphization is accomplished through the allusions which are made between her and the other characters in *Beowulf*. As *ides aglæcwif* [lady monster-wife, 1259a], Grendel's Mother mediates the human and the monstrous, becoming the meeting ground of opposites. The bond between the human and the inhuman is forged by metaphor. Simply in the names which are attributed to her she is included in human life: she is *merewif mihtig* [the mighty mere-wife, 1519a] (though she is surely *wif unhyre* [an unpleasant wife, 2120b]).[8] At least linguistically, then, Grendel's Mother is included in a human context. As a figure of motherhood and

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[7]I follow the trend of various editors and critics in this anslation of *ides*. Chance notes that "as we have seen in other terary works and as it is also used in *Beowulf*, [it] normally notes 'lady' and connotes either a queen or a woman of high cial rank" (251). Klaeber also offers a translation of 'lady' 63).

[8]There are a few plausible definitions for *wif*. Joseph Bosworth d T. Northcote Toller, An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary (Oxford: Oxford iversity Press, 1882) posit "a woman, a female person", "a being the form of a woman", "a married woman, a wife", "a woman who s been married and lost her husband (by death or divorce)", "a male" (1217-18). Klaeber offers another possibility of "lady", nnoting, I think, a sense of nobility and not mere femininity 23). For the sake of simplicity I translate it as "wife", though e entire lexical range is encompassed by Grendel's Mother.

nobility, she carries on the functions which are given to the other women in the poem.

It is as mother, avenger and lady that Grendel's Dam enters human society most easily. While her physical shape and her use of human weapons denote a certain kinship with the other characters in the poem, her true importance to the work is as a representation of the queen-function. Through the allusive language of the poem, Grendel's Dam becomes linked to the other figures of vengeance, maternity and nobility. She emulates the actions and portrays the traits of various other figures of both sexes in the poem.

In her function as avenger, Grendel's Mother is allusive of *Beowulf*'s hero. In killing Æschere, *wif unhyre / hyre bearn gewræc* [the unpleasant wife avenged her son, 2120b-1221a]. Similarly, Beowulf repaid the death of Hondscio through the monsters' deaths: *"ic ðæt eall gewræc, / swa begylpan ne þearf Grendles maga / ænig ofer eorðan uhthelm þone"* ["I avenged all that, so that none of Grendel's kin over the earth need boast of the night-clash," 2005a-2007b]. The reason for Grendel's mother venturing to Heorot matches Beowulf's own reason for killing her and her son.[9] Indeed, all Beowulf's battles are sparked by revenge of one sort or

[9]The revenge motif, of course, also links Grendel's Dam and owulf to the dragon whose main purpose in waging war is to avenge s plundered hoard.

another; the war with Grendel is waged as a retaliation for the killing of Hondscio, the slaughter of the Dam is a vicarious revenge for Hroðgar of Æschere's death, and the deadly fight versus the dragon is inspired by Beowulf's desire to avenge its decimation of Geatland, to stop its destruction, and to gain its treasure for his people. Thus her motivation of revenge is reasonable and human. Her act is one of human emotion, comprehensible to human standards. While the dragon's whole-scale destruction is excessive, her commitment to Germanic feud justice is in line with the other figures in the poem who respond thus to the murder of kin. Indeed, the monstrosity of her act surely stems from her inability or unwillingness to settle the feud in a more socially responsible way (through *wergild*) not from the simple desire for or exaction of vengeance. The metaphorical link which is forged between the hero and the monster in terms of their existence as avengers serves to humanize Grendel's mother.[10]

It is not merely in her actions that Grendel's Dam is metaphorical of Beowulf. In an episode remarkably similar to the conflation of Beowulf and Grendel during their own battle,

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[10]Such a reading counters Irving's understanding of Grendel's ɔther as an even less human monster than her son. He feels that ɨspite her motive of revenge, "she is certainly not endowed with ɯman attributes in other ways," (114). Also, his statement that ɨe is little referred to by epithet is misleading. Though she is ɨss often named than her son, the majority of words describing her ɔnnote a kinship with humanity (e.g. *wif* [wife, 2120b], *ides* .ady, 1351a], *secg* [man-creature, 1379a]).

the fight which pits the Mother against the hero forces the two into a union of physical proportions.[11] Both combatants make similar attempts to dispatch their opponent: Beowulf and the Dam make forays with edged weapons, to no avail. Beowulf *mægenræs forgeaf / hildebille* [gave a great thrust to his war-sword, 1519b-1520a] but *onfand, / þæt se beadoleoma bitan nolde, / aldre sceþðan* [found that the battle-light would not bite, harm her life, 1522b-1524a]. Grendel's Mother, too, attempts a stabbing with little better result:

> *Ofsæt þa þone selegyst, ond hyre seax geteah*
> *brad ond brunecg; wolde hire bearn wrecan,*
> *angan eaferan. Him on eaxle læg*
> *breostnet broden; þæt gebearh feore,*
> *wið ord ond wið ecge ingang forstod*
> [She then sat upon the hall-guest and drew her knife
> broad and brown-edged, would avenge her child,
> her only offspring. On his shoulder lay
> a braided breast-net; that protected his life,
> withstood the entry of point and of edge, 1545a-1549b].

This mirroring of fighting style is reinforced by the opponents' subsequent tries at crushing each other in deadly bear hugs. Grendel's Mother initiates her attack against Beowulf thus: *grap þa togeanes, guðrinc gefeng / atolan*

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[11]Chance offers an interesting, though I think somewhat ductive and dangerous, interpretation of their fight as a pseudo-xual encounter, Grendel's Mother attempting to penetrate Beowulf th a knife (258-59). I worry that the implications of a sexually eudian reading of the text might make the poem more laughable an laudable, especially given the general lack of Freudian cues thin the text. John M. Hill, "Revenge and Superego Mastery in *owulf*," Assays 5 (1989): 3-36 and Earl (100-88) do psychoanalytic udies. However, they are more concerned with psycho-social and ader response themes than with psycho-sexual ones.

clommum; no þy ær in gescod / halan lice [she groped towards the warrior then, gripped him in a terrible clasp; yet not by that did she harm his hale body, 1501a-1503a]. Beowulf, his broken and useless sword discarded, also *strenge getruwode, / mundgripe mægenes* [trusted his strength, his mighty hand-grip, 1533b-1534a]. Yet, his grip, too, is insufficient to end the fray and Grendel's Mother *him eft hraþe andlean forgeald* [quickly gave him a hand-reward, 1541] for his efforts. This similarity of battle styles equates the monstrous with the human; neither opponent is possessed of greater weapons or greater strength. Indeed, it is only the will of God which allows Beowulf to triumph. The equality of the two combatants is an important factor in their metaphorical linkage in the poem. Both their actions and their methods are analogous.

At one point, even, their personal distinctness is lost. During the recapitulation in Geatland of the Danish adventure, Beowulf recounts the fight with Grendel's Mother *þær unc hwile wæs hand gemæne* [where for a time was a hand common to us, 2137]. Through the handclasp, their physical identity blurs. The shared hand forces Beowulf and Grendel's Dam into a relationship of identity not simply of proximity.[12] The fight conflates the two in physical as well as in

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[12]The importance of hands in connection with the two is evident so in the single epithet which they share. As *handbona* [hand-ayers, 1330b, 2502a], the link of human physical characteristics emphasized.

metaphorical terms. By sharing a physical identity, each becomes interchangeable with the other for the moment. The similarity of their deeds, techniques, and persons has an anthropomorphizing effect on the monstrous mother, making her into an analogue of the human warrior and avenger.

This depiction of Grendel's Dam also puts her into a metaphorical relationship with Hroðgar. Both figures have been deprived of their kin through violent feuding which engenders sorrow and anger. The Danish king and his troop suffer *yrmðe to aldre* [endless misery, 2005a] at the hands of Grendel. Similarly, after the retaliatory attack by Beowulf which ends the monster's life, his mother is *yrmþe gemunde* [mindful of misery, 1259b]. Both the king and the monster-mother are abject and wretched survivors mourning the deaths of their relatives. The avenging aspect of their relationship comes with their mutual inability to ignore feuding and retribution. Neither will brook the insult which the deaths of Æschere and Grendel engender. Because of their inability to deny vengeance, *cearu wæs geniwod* [care was renewed, 1303b] in Heorot. It must be noted that it is not simply the monstrous revenge of Grendel's Mother which is a disheartening and upsetting renewal of violence. The human element in the equation is given a similar blame for the continuation of strife. Both Grendel's Mother and Hroðgar are responsible for the war at hand. As well, both are equally punished by its

outcome. *Ne wæs þæt gewrixle til, / þæt hie on ba healfa bicgan scoldon / freonda feorum!* [It was not a good exchange that they on both sides should pay with friends' lives! 1304b-1306a]. The war which is waged between these two tribes is one mutually created and mutually destructive. Grendel's mother, in her wish to revenge her lost son, is akin to Hroðgar using Beowulf to avenge his lost retainer. The misery which both characters feel at their loss forges a bond of emotion between them.

Beyond their shared revenge wishes, Grendel's Dam and Hroðgar are analogous in terms of their function also. The command of a hall is a duty common to both characters. However, the example which is presented in the form of the Dam is a negative and parodic one. Hers is a mock kingship opposed to Hroðgar's own benevolent and auspicious reign.[13] She is *huses hyrd* [the house-guard, 1666a], *grundhyrde* [the deep-guard, 2136b]. Her task is thus the protection of her hall and home. Hroðgar too is a protector, *folces hyrde* [a

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[13]Brodeur (204-05) and Goldsmith "The Christian Perspective in *owulf*," Comparative Literature 14 (1962): 74-75 dissent, thinking at Hroðgar himself is culpable for the attacks because of his ide, the Grendel-Kin thus becoming a form of divine retribution r sin. Such a claim seems to me unsupported by their translation 168-169. Sisam and Earl agree with me that Hroðgar's downfall not due to arrogance. Sisam feels that "Hroðgar is not just the thetic figure of a king incapable through old age of protecting s people: he is a famous hero, still great because of his wisdom d goodness" (78). Earl concurs "that Hroðgar is a good king--so ere is little sense that Grendel is his punishment for anything cept being human and old" (75).

folk-guard, 610a]. Yet, Grendel's Mother perverts the duty which a hall-guardian should fulfil. Instead of maintaining the well-being of her dryht through magnanimity and friendship, the Dam would rather sever all ties with the outside world. The etiquette which is accorded Beowulf at Heorot (though after some wariness on the part of the defensive coast-guard (251-253)) is nowhere witnessed in his descent into the Mere. Grendel's Mother foregoes pleasantries, and in a mockery of courtesy the monster *ofsæt þa þone selegyst* [then sat upon the hall-guest, 1545a]. This function of kingship (albeit parodic) is important in its metaphorical linkage of Grendel's Dam to Hroðgar. More importantly, however, it serves as a reminder of her other parodic identification, namely that of lady. The necessarily masculine characteristics which she displays in her battle with Beowulf in her underwater hall alienate her from the noble feminine virtues displayed by the other female characters in the poem. The male role of guardianship and vengeance which she shares with Beowulf and Hroðgar segregates the Dam from society with the other women whose roles clearly define the proper conduct of Anglo-Saxon women. Indeed, underlining the disparity between feminine and masculine (and Grendel's Mother's ignorance of such a disparity), masculine pronouns are at times used in reference to her (1260a, 1392b,

1394b, 1497b).[14] The male traits with which she is imbued and the masculine terms applied to her make her a parodic woman. The conflation of the sexes which occurs in the Dam denies her the claim of proper womanhood.

Yet, though her character is often shaded by masculine traits, her feminine side is no less evident or important. In her function as mother and lady, Grendel's Dam serves as an analogue and counterpoint to the other female characters in the poem. Through her, the duties and obligations of Anglo-Saxon women are defined by negation. The traits of loyalty and peace-weaving are important to the conception of the Anglo-Saxon woman, especially the royal woman, and it is just these traits which Grendel's Mother upsets in her war against Heorot and her battle in the Mere with Beowulf. Yet, she is at once a symbol of the human womanhood embodied by the other females in *Beowulf*. The links which are set up between her and the human queens serve to include her in a human society and thus include her evil in it also. By making Grendel's Dam analogous to the other women through the intricate use of metaphorical language, the poet intimates the presence of evil in humankind. Grendel's Mother becomes both foil and mirror of Anglo-Saxon womanhood.

As with the other females in *Beowulf*, she is classified

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[14]Chance (251) and Klaeber (180) also note this discrepancy.

by her existence as a peace-weaver. It is the function of women in this poem and in Anglo-Saxon society to end feuds by uniting tribes. These unions are developed through the courtesy shown to foreign nations in cup-bearing ceremonies and elaborate feasts and through the marriage of tribe members and their inter-tribal offspring. The Dam's example is a curious one. At once, she provides a positive pattern of womanhood and a negative one. As is the case with the other monsters, her characterization is complex, involving the mirroring and parodying of her human equivalents. As a positive example her proximity to humanity is underscored, and so the evil which she perpetrates as a parody of queenship is included in a human context. Associations are set up between her and the other women of *Beowulf* whom she both resembles and contradicts in terms of their existence as mothers, cup-bearers and peace-weavers.

In her capacity as a mother, she is allusive of Hildeburh and Wealhðeow who present respectively the loyalty of a mother to her offspring and the sorrow of a mother deprived of her child. These two characteristics of defense and mourning are integral to Grendel's Mother's portrayal. Indeed, the very structure of the episodes involving these characters indicates the link which is forged among them. They are presented by the poet in immediate succession. The tale of Hildeburh's loss (1071a-1124b) is followed one hundred

lines later by Wealhðeow's plea to Beowulf to defend her sons (1226b-1231b) which occurs a mere twenty-five lines prior to the entrance of the abject Dam (1255b). This simple apposition is enough to create a bond of thematic importance among the women. The introduction of Grendel's Mother following so closely after the presentation of the human mothers adds to the monster a hint of humanity. Her emotions and actions are partly validated by the maternal feelings of the human women.

Apposition is not the sole means by which the poet is able to link the stories and characters of Hildeburh and Grendel's Mother. The allusive language which describes the two also serves as a connection between them. The woman of the Finn episode is characterized by her sense of loss. Though *heo ær mæste heold / worolde wynne* [she had earlier held the most of the world's joy, 1079b-1080a], Hildeburh is now childless (and brotherless), *beloren leofum* [deprived of loved ones, 1073a], after the feud between the Finns and Danes. Grendel's mother too loses her son to war: (*he æt wige gecrang / ealdres scyldig* [he fell at war, having forfeited life, 1337b-1338a]). Similarly, both women are fated to be bereft of their kin. *Hoces dohtor / meotodsceaft bemearn* [Hoc's daughter mourned the destiny-decree, 1076b-1077a] which forced the deaths of her son and brother. Fate, embodied here in Christian terms as God, is also responsible for Grendel's own death. It is because Beowulf *him to Anwaldan are gelyfde*

[entrusted himself to God, 1272] that the foe is dispatched. The mothers of the slain are forced to accept the results of battle and the edicts of fate. However, despite their inability to stop the events and their forced acceptance of them, both mothers refuse to let the deaths pass lightly. Both Hildeburh and Grendel's Mother grieve their loss. The Finnish queen mourns *morþorbealo maga* [the baleful murder of kinsmen, 1079a] through keening: *ides gnornode, / geomrode giddum* [the lady lamented, mourned with songs, 1117b-1118a]. Grendel's mother too is *yrmþe gemunde* [mindful of misery, 1259b], taking *sorhfulne sið* [a sorrowful journey, 1278a] to the site of her son's fatal feud.

Yet this metaphorical identification is not unbreakable. The Dam remains a parody of the human mothers of *Beowulf*. Despite the horror of her loss, Hildeburh is mindful of the conventions by which Anglo-Saxon society operates. The role of peace-pledge is the most important underlying function of a female. Hildeburh upholds this role by ignoring the violent means through which she could avenge her son's and brother's deaths. In spite of her loss, Hildeburh does not break the peace pledge between the Danes and Finns of which she is a symbol. Though *ne huru Hildeburh herian þorfte / Eotena treowe* [Hildeburh indeed need not praise the truth of

the Jutes, 1071a-1072a],[15] she herself remains true to the accord which she represents.

Grendel's Dam can claim no such abstention. Disregarding her role as maternal peace-weaver, she attempts to avenge the crime committed against her family. She refuses to work for tolerance between herself and the Danes, provoking further wrath and enmity. The motherhood which she embodies is one of intolerance and unwavering dedication to revenge. Yet there is some evidence that her revenge is sanctioned, at least by the other characters in the poem. In rallying Hroðgar after Æschere's death, Beowulf's advises that *selre bið æghwæm, / þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne* [it is better for everyone that he avenge his friend than mourn much, 1384b-1385b]. This admonishment of inactive weeping is a vocal call for vengeance. Grendel's Mother follows this advice; Beowulf's words defend her choice in avenging Grendel's death. Yet it must be understood that her vengeance carries Grendel's Dam beyond the scope of female action and maternal love. The connection forged between Beowulf, Hroðgar

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[15]Some critics and editors prefer to read *Eotena* with a lower se "e" thus forcing a translation as "giants". (See Bandy, 236; hn Leyerle, "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*," University of ronto Quarterly 37 (1967): 10; Mellinkoff, 184; Goldsmith, Mode 0.) I translate it as "Jutes" for the sake of simplicity in owing the feud of the Frisians (Jutes) and the Danes. However, translation here of giants for Jutes would lend an interesting lusion to the Grendel-Kin who are themselves giants. Such an terpretation increases Hildeburh's metaphorical identity as endel's Mother.

and Grendel's Mother by the call to vengeance helps to introduce another distortion of character which she represents in the poem. The warrior mentality which the Dam exhibits is directly opposed to the generosity and kindness which are the watermarks of proper queenship.

It is as such a figure of perversion in *Beowulf* that Grendel's Mother is an ironic depiction of the role which Wealhðeow and Hygd play in their respective king's courts. These two women fulfil their potential as peace-weavers by creating bonds of friendship between their tribes and visiting peoples as well as by maintaining positive relationships among the men of their own societies. Hroðgar's wife embodies the function of peace-pledge. Indeed, her very name is an indication of the merger of two tribes. Her existence as "foreign captive" is an important verbal reminder of the hoped-for union of tribes.[16] She is always *cynna gemyndig* [mindful of customs, 613b], greeting those around her in an order befitting social etiquette: she

> *ful gesealde*
> *ærest East-Dena eþelwearde,*

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[16]There is an ominous undercurrent to her name, however, which ght blunt her existence as a peace-pledge. If she is truly a r-spoil, the peace-weaving of marriage is undermined. Indeed, aeber's possible translation of *þeow* as "carried off in war" ows her to be anything but a pledge for peace, at least insofar s her marriage is concerned (440). However, in her actions alhþeow is the consummate peace-weaver. The ambiguity which lies hind her name and character makes her again a close relative of e poem's monsters.

bæd hine bliðne æt þære beorþege,
leodum leofne
[proffered the cup
first to the land-guardian of the East-Danes,
bade him be happy at the beer-taking,
beloved of the people, 615b-618a].

Duty to her lord is Wealhþeow's primary concern. As the queen, it is her obligation to underline his authority and his supremacy in the community. By recognizing him first, she shows to the other men in the hall a rightful respect of her king. *Ymbeode þa ides Helminga / duguþe ond geogoþe dæl æghwylcne, / sincfato sealde* [The woman of the Helmings then went round to each retainer, veteran and youth, offered the precious vessel, 620a-622a]. Her courtesy is exhibited and the social hierarchy of the Danish dryht is maintained by her systematic offer of the ale-cup. Finally, *sæl alamp, / þæt hio Beowulfe, beaghroden cwen / mode geþungen medoful æthær* [the time came that she, the woman of the Helmings, excellent in mind, bore the mead-cup to Beowulf, 622b-624b]. Wealhþeow is ever mindful of civility and respect both to her own tribe and to Beowulf's. Her methodical passing of the cup establishes a Danish hierarchy while at once creating a union of Danes and Geats. While preference is shown to the reigning king, the shared cup of mead connotes the joint importance of the two peoples at the feast.

Grendel's Mother has no such knowledge of courtesy. While Wealhþeow gives Beowulf great treasures and great shows

of respect, the monster-queen seeks only to rid her hall of *se gist* [the stranger, 1522b]. Upon his descent into the Mere, Beowulf is welcomed not with a shared ale-cup but *laþan fingrum* [with hateful fingers, 1505b]. The Dam's court, where friendship is allowed no space, is a parody of Heorot. It is *niðsele* [a hostile hall, 1513b] echoing the enmity which its queen holds for her *selegyst* [hall-guest, 1545a]. While Wealhþeow repays Beowulf's aid with *þeodgestreona* [people-treasure, 1218a] and Hygd also is magnanimous in her gift giving (*Næs hio hnah swa þeah, / ne to gneað gifa Geata leodum / maþmgestreona* [she was not lowly, nor too grudging of gifts, of wealthy treasures, to the people of the Geats, 1929b-1931a]), Grendel's Mother instead *andlean forgeald / grimman grapum* [gave him a reward with grim claws, 1541b-1542a]. The union of host and guest which is accomplished through the cup-bearing and treasure-giving of the queens in Heorot and Geatland is parodied in Grendel's Dam's welcome by violence and hatred. The pledges of peace made by Wealhþeow and Hygd maintain the system of respect and courtesy which Grendel's Mother tries to destroy in her function as queen.

It is this parodic role of queenship which makes Grendel's Dam analogous to Modþryð.[17] She brings the monster's

[17]Admittedly, the careers of these two figures do not match rfectly. Modþryð's eventual moderation runs counter to Grendel's ther's unresolved violence against the Danes. However, Klaeber's ntion of the suggestion by Imelmann to read 1931b as *mod ðryþ o*

evil into a human context. By aligning the two figures through a metaphorical identity, the poet displays the presence of evil in humanity. As the violent and vengeful queen, Grendel's Mother plays out the same role which Modþryð acts in a human society.

Given the similarity of their descriptions, a comparison of the two queen figures is compelling and important. Modþryð is a human counterpart to Grendel's Mother, their shared characteristics of violence and vengefulness segregating them from the other queens of the poem. The two are examples of what a queen should not be or do. Though she is later *fremu folces cwen* [a good queen of the folk, 1932a], early in her life *Modþryðo wæg /...firen' ondrysne* [Modþryð carried on a terrible crime 1931b-1932a]. Grendel's mother, too, performs *fyrendæda* [crimes, 1669b]. Contrary to the perceived functions of a queen as peace-weaver, these females twist *wælbende.../ handgewriþene* [hand-woven death-bonds, 1936a-1937a], Grendel's Mother, figuratively, by perpetuating the enmity between Heorot and the Grendel-Kin, and Modþryð, literally, by commissioning garrotes to be made for her ill-fated suitors. Their tyrannical use of power is in direct contrast to the relative powerlessness of the other queen-

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g [Ðryð always waged in her mind] lends a layer of similarity to ıe two women (though in the end I must agree with Klaeber that ıis "fails to give complete satisfaction; for it is doubtful if ılways' corresponds with the facts of the story" (199)).

figures in *Beowulf*. Hildeburh, Hygd and Wealhþeow have little strength of their own. They rely on their verbal skill and etiquette to convince their respective lords to carry out their plans.[18] Modþryð and the Grendel Dam, however, have their own innate strength. Indeed, Modþryð's very name is an indication of her (and the monster's) character. She is "strong-minded," to an extent, untameable (prior to her marriage). The Dam, too, is indomitable. Such unyieldingness is a danger in the figure of the peace-weaver whose task it is to forge compromise and unity. Neither Grendel's Mother nor Modþryð seeks compromise. Their strong-mindedness denies the possibility of union.

Such depredations as these women commit are counter to the obligations and duties of a lady.

> *Ne bið swylc cwenlic þeaw*
> *idese to efnanne, þeah ðe hio ænlicu sy,*
> *þætte freoðuwebbe feores onsæce*
> ..... *leofne mannan*
> [such is not a queen-like custom
> for a lady to perform though she be peerless,
> that a peace-weaver deprive a beloved man
> ... of his life, 1940b-1943b].

They exist more as peace-destroyers than peace-pledges (though the former is later checked by her husband). As visions of poor queenship in *Beowulf*, they are warnings against the

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[18]Wealhþeow prays for Beowulf to watch out for her sons and so urges Hroþulf to remember the love which has been bestowed on him in Heorot (1226ff, 1180ff). Hildeburh must rely on ngest for a retributive attack against the Finns for the death of r son.

potential of violence and vengefulness which can override the fulfilment of queenly duty and the adherence to virtue. Their metaphorical identification with one another, while subtle, is important to the elision of evil with humanity in the poem. These two perverted queens offer a darkly ironic mirror of the examples provided by the other human ladies. As a metaphorical echo of Grendel's Mother, Modþryð brings the sin of poor queenhood into a human context. With her inclusion, the deeds of the Dam are made more insidious and horrifying.

The associations of Grendel's Mother with the other, human, characters in *Beowulf* achieve importance through the poet's subtle use of metaphor. The allusions which are formed by the language of the poem demonstrate the links between human and inhuman. The similarities between Grendel's Mother and the human females establish sin as a human as well as inhuman act. Evil is thus not simply an idea external to mankind. Rather, human beings themselves become responsible for evil and its consequences. Grendel's Mother is a magnified projection of human evil, though a magnification not segregated from a human context. By linking her to the human figures, the poet intimates the potential of humanity to commit such crimes. Like her son before her, she is a monitory figure. Her example of queenship shows the danger of denying social rules and values. She ignores the duties required of queenship and necessary for the proper functioning

of a dryht. This ignorance leads to the death of her community. Her death at Beowulf's hands marks the end of the monstrous society of the mere.

CHAPTER IV: THE DRAGON, *HORDWEARD*

The metaphorical significance with which the other monsters are imbued is evident also in the dragon. He "is the last and the most controversial of [the] monster-symbols, and the ultimate meaning of the poem rests heavily on him."[1] More than being simply an elemental creature, the worm, through the concentrated allusive language, is linked closely to humanity. Of course, the subtlety of these allusions does not force comparison; identities are hinted not stated. Thus, the dragon remains a monstrous fire-breathing worm even while being a part of the human community. Through apposition, allusion and repetition, the poet creates a field of interpretive categories for him. He is identified on a human level as a symbol of both bad and good kingship. "The dragon as hoard-guardian is a good king's nightmare, an avenger, both greedy and vindictive, who would destroy everything and everyone."[2] Yet, at once, the dragon is symbolically involved in the good rule fostered by the hero. Strict identification and unilateral metaphorical linkage are denied by the multiple

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[1]Earl, 76. His assessment is essentially correct. However, I think the controversy exists only for those readers and critics who do not allow the dragon the breadth of metaphorical significance which it truly possesses.

[2]John M. Hill, "Revenge and Superego Mastery in *Beowulf*" Assays 5 (1989): 25.

implicit meanings of the words of the poem. Through this attention to language, the dragon's importance as an analogue and mockery of human standards of kingship is accomplished. The poem's metaphors make the creature a catalyst in describing human evil and make him also a strong ward against it; he encourages virtue by being such a horrific example of its absence.

On a literal level, the worm is more easily defined and characterized than the Grendel-Kin. That dragons were a common enough creature (at least in the Anglo-Saxon imagination) is evidenced in the mention of them in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.[3] Through such references, the *Beowulf* worm attains a position closer to human knowledge than do Grendel and his Mother; his simple categorization as *nacod niðdraca* [a naked hostile dragon, 2273a], imbues the monster with a certain degree of folkloric realism. Yet, even in this seemingly more realizable characterization there are elements which exceed human imagining. The creature's physical attributes are difficult to determine given the various epithets used of him. At once, he exists both as *draca* [a

[3]See The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, trans. and ed., G. N. Garmonsway (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1953) 55. Dorothy Whitelock, The Audience of *Beowulf* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951) 73-77 offers etiological evidence of the Anglo-Saxon belief in monsters. Of course, the true existence of dragons need not be argued here. Indeed, it is irrelevant to the poem. The fact that Anglo-Saxon records give them realism is enough to imply that the audience of *Beowulf* would understand them and believe in them.

dragon, 2211b] and as *wyrme* [a worm, a serpent, 2307a]. Certainly, the latter description is synonymous with the former, to an extent. However, there is a semantic difference between them, as is exposed by the monster's methods of travel. He moves both by flying (he is *lyftfloga* [an air-flier, 2315a], *widfloga* [a wide-flier, 2830a], *guðfloga* [a war-flier, 2528b], *uhtfloga* [a night-flier, 2760a]), and by *scriðan* [gliding, slithering, 2569b]. These two motions are distinct from one another. Yet, their conflation in the dragon is distinctive of the poem's polysemous language. The serpentine slithering and the flight typical of dragons endow the monster with ambiguity. Though the two figures of the worm and the drake are cognate, they are enough removed from one another semantically that their unification in the form of the *Beowulf* dragon gives him a plurality of identity.

The monster's character is further clouded by the often mystifying adjectives which the poet uses to describe him. Such epithets as *hringboga* [the ring-creature, 2561] suggest some kind of ring imagery but also deny concrete definition. The intricate and multiple resonances of rings as armour, treasure, and snake-like coils create ambiguity.[4] Defining the dragon by such a nebulous and changing allusion imprints

[4]There is a case to be made that the very structure of *Beowulf* itself is another instance of the ring motif. See John Niles, "Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*," PMLA 94 (October 1979) 924-35.

that nebulousness on the creature himself; his specificity as a dragon is lost. The monster is made more foreign to human understanding by the ambiguity of this description and by the sense of it; the ring allusion removes the creature from a living, natural context, given the inanimateness of the other rings in the poem. Being *gryrefahne* [the glistening one, 2576b] also makes the dragon's existence a mysterious one. The adjective *fag* [variegated, decorated, shining][5] (as distinct from *fah* [hostile]) is also a method of obscuring the dragon. The list of decorated or shining objects in the poem is extensive. In addition to the monster, *fag* is used of helms, Heorot, gold, treasure, streets, swords, sarks, and saddles. Such multiple usage makes the term ambiguous which in turn makes the objects so described ambiguous as well. The repeated though varied use of adjectives such as these forces a profusion of identities on to the dragon. Even the fact that *hringboga* and *gryrefahne* are synecdoche is notable. The concentration on specific elements of the dragon tends to ignore his wholeness. Specific identity is sacrificed in the face of the generalities of coils and shininess. This divisive approach to characterization keeps the dragon in a position of relative mystery.

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[5]Klaeber, 327. He posits "blood-stained" as another possible meaning, adding a further element to the dragon's identity; the intimation of malice and bloodshed is important to the figure who causes the hero's death.

The most important characteristic of the dragon, and that which removes him farthest from an association with or admittance to humanity is his ability to belch flame. The very fact that he can *gledum spiwan* [spew fire, 2312b] is ominous given the sinister quality which fire possesses in the human communities throughout the poem. The link of flame to the drake makes him allusive of the human suffering and death often characterized or signalled by fire. The funeral pyres which burn in *Beowulf* are instances of human anguish. Much as the worm's *byrneleoma stod / eldum on andan* [fire-light arose to the horror of men, 2313b-2314a], so too Beowulf's bier sparks lamentation: it is *swogende leg / wope bewunden* [a roaring fire mixed with weeping, 3145b-3146a]. The *wælfyre* [murderous fire, 2582a] which the dragon blasts at Geatland is metaphorically that same blaze which comes from the raging *wælfyra* [slaughter-fires, pyres, 1119b] of the Finnsburh Episode. The sense of rapacity and doom associated with fire in *Beowulf* is embodied in the dragon. Heorot *heaðowylma bad, / laðan liges* [awaited the hostile flames, hateful fire, 82b-83a] which would signal its destruction. Similarly, the Geatish court is set upon by an incarnation of flame, *ligdraca* [a fire-dragon, 2333a]; in its avaricious destructiveness, the dragon is a metaphorical personification of the power of fire. Just as *no ðær aht cwices / lað lyftfloga læfan wolde* [the loathsome air-flier would not leave there aught living, 2314b-

2315a], so too fire is *gæsta gifrost* [the greediest of spirits, 1123a]. The dragon even looks like flame: he is *fyrwylmum fah* [decorated with fire-surges, 2671a]. The metaphorical identity of the dragon with fire sets the monster apart from humanity in two aspects. First, the beast's very capacity for breathing flame is beyond human ability; his fiery outbursts are monstrous because they are impossible for humans to emulate. Second, given its ability, the negative connotations attached to fire in the poem transfer to the dragon. Throughout the poem, fire is characterized as a bane to the life and happiness of mankind. As the living manifestation of flame, the dragon too fulfils such a role.

The monster is, however, given many and opposed identifications. He cannot be identified exclusively as a dragon, a worm, or an incarnation of fire. This elusiveness of character makes him a close semantic relative of the Grendel-Kin who are also left ambiguously characterized. Such an association is underscored by the poet's repeated use of *aglæca* to describe the various monsters. As *aglæcean* [a monster, 2520a], the dragon is linked to Grendel and his mother and so forces the dragon into an antithetical existence to mankind.[6]

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[6]Of course the important polysemous connotations of *aglæca* make the dragon allusive of the human figures of the poem, much as the phrase worked for the Grendel-Kin. See 39-41 above.

The deeds as well as the figure of the creature are exaggerated beyond human bounds. The dragon's violence against Geatland, while explainable, is excessive. It is this excessiveness which makes it incomprehensible to human understanding. The exaction of wholesale revenge dehumanizes the monster; his human attributes are masked by his dedication to war. It is through the modification of epithets that this change occurs. With the introduction of the revenge motif, the dragon's description becomes more monstrous. He loses his human qualities as he concentrates on battle:

> *hordweard onbad*
> *earfoðlice, oð ðæt æfen cwom;*
> *wæs ða gebolgen beorges hyrde,*
> *wolde se laða lige forgyldan*
> *drincfæt dyre. Þa wæs dæg sceacen*
> *wyrme on willan no on wealle læng*
> *bidan wolde, ac mid bæle for,*
> *fyre gefysed*
> [the hoard-guard waited
> with difficulty, until evening came;
> the barrow's warden was then bulging,
> would requite the dear drink-cup
> with hateful fire. Then day was gone,
> to the delight of the worm; he would not at all
> wait long on the wall, but went with flame,
> made eager by fire, 2302b-2309a (emphasis mine)].

With the onset on his revenge against the thief and his tribe, the dragon becomes more and more animalistic. The creature disregards his task as the protector of treasure in favour of vengeful wrath. The epithets become less concerned with human duties than with monstrous deeds. As *hordweard*, the dragon is

included in the society of the other, human, treasure-protectors of the poem: Hroðgar and Beowulf are also *hordweardas* [hoard-guards, 1047a, 1852a]. However, with the beginning of his war, the dragon moves away from an association with the humans of *Beowulf*. As *beorges hyrde*, he retains the function of warden. However, the allusion to human guardianship is denied by the object he protects. Barrows are associated almost exclusively with the dragon in the poem. Indeed, there are only two barrows in *Beowulf* at all, the dragon's hoard and Beowulf's burial mound.[7] This exclusivity alienates the dragon from human society. The creature protects a structure which for the most part is excluded from a human context. Finally, with the start of the dragon's fiery razing of Geatland, his identity even as a guardian is lost; he is now an inhuman *wyrme*.

The dehumanizing which is accomplished through the process of revenge is linked closely to another process, time. It is with the passing of day into night that the dragon's animal side waxes. During the day, the dragon fulfils the human function of protector. However, with the end of the day comes the end of the dragon's humanity. Such a nocturnal display of enmity links the worm to the poem's other monsters

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[7]I follow Klaeber (305) in thinking *beorge* in 211a and *beorgas* in 222b to be references to cliffs or headlands and not to barrows as I am discussing them here, despite the use of the same word.

who also perform their wicked deeds under cover of night. As Grendel *sinnihte heold / mistige moras* [held the misty moors in the endless night, 161b-162a], so too *ongan / deorcum nihtum draca ricsian* [the dragon began to rule in dark nights, 2210b-2211b]. Not only are his depredations performed at night, but the creature himself is linked to the darkness which masks his work; he is *eald uhtsceaða* [an old night-enemy, 2271a], *eald uhtfloga* [an old night-flier, 2760a]. The worm is an intrusion of darkness on humanity (much as Grendel himself was). His terror is a black mark on the community of the Geats, a dark evil descending on their *beorht hofu* [bright houses, 2313a]. As the figure of darkness, the dragon is a personification of the unknown which lies beyond human understanding.[8]

Time is also an important alienating factor for the dragon in terms of the length of his reign. While the human rulers of the poem have reigns of normal length, the dragon commands his barrow for an inhuman number of years. Beowulf guards Geatland *fiftig wintra* [for fifty winters, 2209a] much as Hroðgar governed *hund missera* [a hundred half-years,

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[8]Typically of *Beowulf*, however, there is a link of the dragon to the human figures in this aspect of his character as well. Like the monster, Beowulf, too, *nihtweorce gefeh* [rejoiced in night-work, 827b] in the fight with Grendel, and he earlier *slog / niceras nihtes* [slew nickers by night, 422b-423a]. Thus, the imagery of night is not confined solely to the monsters.

1769b].[9] The worm, on the other hand, maintains his rule for an inhumanly long *þreo hund wintra* [three hundred winters, 2278b].

The monster's distance from mankind is evident on a geographical level, as well. To be sure, his hoard is in close proximity to humanity; the thane[10] who finds the cup quickly returns with it to Beowulf. Yet, as is the mere, so too is the dragon's barrow far removed from human understanding. It lies on *heaum hæþe* [the high heath, 2212a], its entrance hidden: *stig under læg / eldum uncuð* [a path lay under it unknown to men 2213b-2214a]. Thus, while the spatial

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[9]Interestingly, Grendel's Dam commands her underwater hall for the same *hund missera* [hundred half-years, 1498b], creating another link between *Beowulf*'s monsters and humans.

[10]The faulty manuscript allows for several interpolations of this word by editors. Klaeber seems convinced that the missing letters would form *þ(eow)* [slave, 2223b], the sense of the episode (2221-2405) thus being: "a slave, a fugitive from justice, stole a costly vessel from the dragon's hoard, and upon presenting it to his master--one of Beowulf's men--obtained his pardon...The vessel was then sent to Beowulf himself" (208). He questions Lawrence's emendation of the word to *þ(egn)* [thane], asking "why should that person [then] be called a 'captive,' as Lawrence translates *hæft* 2408?" (See William W. Lawrence "The Dragon and his Lair in *Beowulf*," PMLA XXXIII (1918): 551-52.) I tend toward Lawrence's notion first because I am unconvinced that a slave could regain trust or gain a pardon by means of treasure-giving; such a function falls to the retainers and lords of a *dryht* society. Also, *hæft* echoes Grendel's existence as *helle hæfton* [hell's captive, 788a]. If this is a metaphor of Grendel's propensity towards sin (*i.e.* Grendel is enslaved by sin), could the unnamed man's epithet function similarly? I must also disagree with Klaeber on the identity of the man's lord, who, it seems fairly obvious, is Beowulf himself given that *him to bearme cwom / maðþumfæt mære þurh ðæs meldan hond* [the famous treasure-cup came into his possession from the finder's hand, 2404b-2405b (emphasis mine)].

distance is relatively short, there is a metaphorical distance denying the dragon a position in the human world. Humanity is his *bigfolc* [neighbouring tribe, 2220a], connoting a particular resemblance or proximity certainly, but also emphasizing the literal and figurative distance between himself and mankind.

It is the dragon's existence as *ðeodsceaða* [the people-foe, 2278a], though, which most succinctly distances him from humanity; his identity as an enemy of mankind presupposes him to be outside of it. Also, this epithet recalls Grendel's existence as *leodsceaðan* [the people-foe, 2093b]. The repetition of such similar compounds provokes comparison of the two creatures. The earlier descriptions of Grendel's alienation from mankind are echoed in the dragon. Such figurative language and its repetition creates allusions to one monster in the other. The dragon now adopts Grendel's former role as an antagonist to human good.

Yet, the delicate use of metaphor allows for conflicting identities to exist simultaneously. Thus, while the dragon represents inhuman, monstrous evil and exists as a creature removed from the human species, he is also a symbolic representation of humanity. The poet's careful apposition of descriptions creates a dual identity as human and monster. Though he is the *ligdraca* [the fire dragon, 2333a] who burns Geatland, it is because he is a protector, *beorges hyrde* [the

barrow's warden, 2304b], that the dragon *wolde...forgylden / drincfæt dyre* [would requite the drink-cup, 2305a-2306a]. The creature is given human and monstrous characteristics which do not negate each other. The proximity of human and bestial epithets forges a bond between the two; the violent revenge which the dragon perpetrates is a human evil as much as it is an inhuman one. Even as it gives him a monstrous identity, the *kent heiti, ðeodsceaða*, gives human identity to the dragon by the apposition of its opposed components. The very proximity of human to monster in this one word blurs the line of distinction between them.

It is the link of the dragon to treasure, however, which most obviously symbolizes him as human. The monster is included in human society by its existence as the guardian of treasure, the hoard itself becoming a metaphor of the human *dryht*. Like the humans in the poem, the dragon is concerned with rings and treasure, and as its guardian he enters the society of human kings. The creature's possession and protection of the hoard link him also to a historical humanity. Much as the Last Survivor thought *þæt he lytel fæc longgestreona / brucan moste* [that he might a little while enjoy the long-accumulated treasure, 2240a-2241a], so, too, the dragon *hordwynne fond* [found hoard-joy, 2270b]. He is heir to the treasure, becoming through his acceptance of the guard-duty a descendent of the lost tribe. Moreover, the

creature metaphorically becomes the Last Survivor. He continues the dead man's duty as *weard* [guardian, 2239a], replacing the former *hringa hyrde* [herder of rings, 2245a] literally, in his guardianship of the treasure, and figuratively, in his serpentine form (his body being not unlike hoarded rings: *se wyrm gebeah / snude tosomne* [the worm coiled quickly together, 2567b-2568a]). The dragon takes over the Last Survivor's hoard, becoming first a symbolic thane and then king of this treasure hall.[11] As a descendent in duty of the former treasure-guardian, the dragon enters the human realm.

In addition to its position within a human *dryht*, the dragon is anthropomorphized by its metaphorical association with Beowulf. Through allusive language and appositive style, the two become analogues. As happens with the other monsters, there develops an affinity between the hero and the dragon. Both figures share an identity as warrior-kings: Beowulf is *guðkyning* [a war-king, 2335b], his opponent, *guðfreca* [a warrior, 2414a], *guðflogan* [a war-flier, 2528a]. Unlike the contests with Grendel and his Mother, the participants here share an active desire for the struggle. The dragon is *gearo* [ready, 2414a] for war. Beowulf, too, is eager for the fight:

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[11]As a visitor to Beowulf's hall also, the dragon becomes a thane of sorts, albeit an evil, perverse one: he is *atol inwitgæst* [the terrible malice-guest, 2670a], *niðgæst* [the hostile guest, 2699a].

no he him þa sæcce ondred, / ne him þæs wyrmes wig for wiht dyde [not at all did he dread the battle, nor a whit considered the worm's war, 2347b-2348b]. Neither one is hesitant to perform the task before him, nor is either attack gratuitous; the dragon's revenge (though excessive) is typical of justice in the world of the Germanic *dryht*. Beowulf's fight, too, is defensible; he must avenge the destruction of his hall.[12]

Their mirrored dedication to the fight is evident throughout Part II. The hero will let nothing keep him from the fray; he is willing, even, to don armour against this foe in order to exact revenge for the burnt hall. Though he earlier refused *sweord bere oþðe sidne scyld* [to bear a sword or a large shield, 437] against Grendel, Beowulf knows that victory against the dragon can come only with the aid of weapons:

> *"nolde ic sweord beran,*
> *wæpen to wyrme, gif ic wiste hu*
> *wið ðam aglæcean elles meahte*
> *gylpe wiðgripan, swa ic gio wið Grendle dyde;*
> *ac ic ðær heaðufyres hates wene,*

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[12]Certain critics have noted that Beowulf's desire to fight for the hoard shows him to be avaricious. (See Goldsmith, Mode, 227-8; Atkinson, Dragon, 6; Earl, 76.) I agree that the treasure is a primary reason for his battle: he states his desire for the gold repeatedly (2509, 2535, 2747, 2799). However, he is attempting to gain it for his people (2797), and thus I cannot see that his reasoning is faulty or damning. Irving agrees: "That anything remotely resembling 'greed' should be attributed to him for expressing this sentiment shows a misunderstanding of the fundamental concepts of the poem" (208).

oreðes ond attres; forðon ic me on hafu
bord ond byrnan"
["I would not bear a sword,
a weapon, to the worm, if I knew
how else according to my boast I might
grapple with the monster, as I formerly did against
Grendel;
but there I expect hot battle-fires,
breath and poison; therefore I have on me
board and byrnie," 2518b-2524a].[13]

This eagerness for the battle is mirrored in the dragon's repetitive feints toward Beowulf. While the tripartite structure of the other struggles in the poem is implied, with the fight against the dragon, the poet clearly delineates the three forays. As the poet makes plain, after the narrative interruption of Wiglaf's introduction and disparagement of the cowardly thanes, the fight begins again: *æfter ðam wordum wyrm yrre cwom, / atol inwitgæst oðre siðe* [after the words the angry worm, the terrible malicious guest, came another time, 2669a-2670b]. The dragon's severity is underlined by his eagerness to rejoin the fray and, after another interruption, the struggle is again renewed by the monster: *þa wæs þeodsceaða þriddan siðe, / frecne fyrdraca fæhða gemyndig, /*

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[13]This indicates to me an active denial of the pride and arrogance which other critics would attribute to the hero (see note 13 above). While he earlier scorned weapons against Grendel (a seeming indication of his arrogance), here the necessity of saving his kingdom forces Beowulf to use all means possible to defeat the dragon without thought of personal gain or fame. Beowulf's first concern is the defense and revenge of his people. His seemingly arrogant desire to gain fame appears to me to be based (too heavily) on the final lines of the poem. It is the Geats, note, and not Beowulf who claim him to be *lofgeornost* [most fame-eager, 3182b].

ræsde on ðone rofan [then for a third time the people-foe, the horrible fire-drake, was reminded of the feud, rushed in at the renowned one, 2688a-2690a]. This repetition is important as an indictor of both the dragon's intent and intensity. Through the numerical reminder of the creature's attacks, his strength and stubbornness are proven. As well, the syntax displays that the monster is active in pursuing the fight.

The mutual decision to enter into the battle creates metaphorical links between Beowulf and the dragon, links furthered by the language used of them during the fight itself. As Beowulf and the dragon enter into combat, their characters elide. Through the use of single epithets to designate both characters, they become almost mirrors of one another: *æghwæðrum wæs / bealohycgendra broga fram oðrum* [when they intended battle, each was a horror to the other, 2564b-2565b]. Though they are foes, there are more commonalities between them than there are differences. *Næs ða long to ðon, / þæt ða aglæcean hy eft gemetton* [it was not long then that they met each other again, wretched warriors, 2591b-2592b]. By this statement the two are doubly bonded. First, as referents of the plural epithet, they must both be wretched warriors. More subtly, the inclusion in a single word makes them one. Their identities are collapsed into the figure of the warrior. This is emphasized by the surrounding clause; Beowulf and the dragon meet each other not simply on

the battle field but also in the very language of the poem.

This connection is evident also in their mortality. From the outset of the battle, the poet makes clear the fate which each combatant must face. With the instigation of the dragon's vengeful wrath against Geatland there is an intimation of the impending doom which awaits Beowulf: *wæs se fruma egeslic / leodum on lande, swa hyt lungre wearð / on hyra sincgifan sare geendod* [the beginning was terrible for the people of the land, as the ending was quickly to be sore for their treasure-giver, 2309b-2311b]. The dragon's fate is to be similar: *sceolde lændaga / æþeling ærgod ende gebidan, / worulde lifes, ond se wyrm somod* [the prince good of old was to experience the end of his loaned days, life in the world, and the worm together with him, 2341b-2343b]. The two foes share a similar destiny. *Þone leofestan lifes æt ende / bleate gebæran. Bona swylce læg, / egeslic eorðdraca ealdre bereafod* [The most beloved man, his life at an end, fared pitiably. The slayer likewise lay dead, the terrible earth-dragon bereft of life, 2823a-2825b]; *hæfde æghwæðer ende gefered / lænan lifes* [each had reached the end of his loaned life, 2844a-2845a].

Even after their deaths, the enemies maintain a close metaphorical existence. Not only do they lie in state side by side (*dryhten Geata deaðbedde fæst, / wunað wælreste wyrmes dædum; / him on efn ligeð ealdorgewinna / sexbennum seoc* [the

lord of the Geats is fast on his death-bed, occupies the slaughter-couch through the worm's deeds; beside him lies the life-enemy, sick with dagger-wounds, 2901a-2904a]), but also both are accorded similar respect. Wiglaf *healdeð... heafodwearde / leofes ond laðes* [holds head-watch over friend and foe, 2909a-2910a]. The dragon and Beowulf occupy a similar semantic position here. The monster's death, as a corollary to Beowulf's, occasions a similar show of honour and solemnity. Through the honour shown to the Geats' dead foe, the dragon is given a metaphorical place within the community. Through the peculiar power of poetic thought, the monstrous would-be destroyer of Beowulf's *dryht* is also identified with its kingly champion and protector.

It is this identity as king, both ideal and perverse, which is the most important element in the dragon's metaphorical anthropomorphization. The dragon, as hoard-guardian, is the thesis and antithesis of the poem's hero. Like Beowulf, he is eager for the hoard. "It is the desire to keep and the desire to gain the treasure in which man and monster become intertwined;" kingship is at the root of both characters' actions.[14] The monster's metaphorical affiliation with Beowulf begins with the creature's very introduction into

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[14]Bernard F. Huppé, "Nature in *Beowulf* and *Roland*," Approaches to Nature in the Middle Ages (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1982) 20.

the poem:

> *Beowulfe brade rice*
> *on hand gehwearf; he geheold tela*
> *fiftig wintra --wæs ða frod cyning,*
> *eald eþelweard--, oð ðæt an ongan*
> *deorcum nihtum draca ricsian*
> [the broad kingdom passed
> into Beowulf's hands; he held it well
> fifty winters --was a wise king,
> an old home-guard--, until one, a dragon,
> began to rule in the dark nights, 2207a-2211b].

As its possession of the Last Survivor's hoard involved it in a human context, the dragon's rule of Geatland places it in a system of human kingship. The dragon comes to embody the duties which Beowulf performs as a righteous king.[15] As *hordweard*, the dragon mirrors Beowulf's role as *eþelweard*. The image of kingship passes freely from Beowulf to the dragon. The duty of protection and guardianship is intrinsic to both, though the objects of their protection differ; Beowulf is *folces hyrde* [the protector of the folk, 2644b] while the dragon is *frætwa hyrde* [the protector of treasure, 3133b]. Similarly, both rule their community until the introduction of a mortal enemy. Beowulf *geheold tela* [held well 2208b] his kingdom until the dragon began his terror.

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[15]Of course, this passage also intimates the dragon's later violence. The beginning of the dragon's reign is worded identically to Grendel's usurpation of Hroðgar's power (100). See Irving (31-42) for a detailed study of these and other instances of the *oð* and *oðþæt* formulas.

So, too, the dragon *heold on hrusan hordærna sum* [held his hoard-house in the earth, 2279] before he was *sare gesceod* [sorely injured, 2222b], *besyred wurde / þeofes cræfte* [was tricked by the thief's craft, 2218b-2219a]. As a persecuted ruler, the dragon is metaphorical of Beowulf (and of Hroðgar, also, who *heold ginne rice* [held the gem-rich kingdom, 466] and with his *drihtguman dreamum lifdon, / eadiglice, oð ðæt an ongan / fyrene fremman* [warriors lived in joy, happily, until one began to perform wicked deeds, 99a-101a]). Like the Dane and the Geat, the dragon is a usurped king. The monster rules his *dryhtsele* [dryht-hall, 2320a] as Beowulf commands his *biorsele* [beer-hall, 2635a] and Hroðgar, his *beahsele* [ring-hall, 1177a] until treachery destroys their peace.

The depiction of the dragon's kingship is underscored by the descriptions of his treasure. As *wyrmhord* [the worm-hoard, 2221b], the treasure is explicitly given to the dragon. The hoard is comparable to the *dryht* which Beowulf possesses. The rings, gems and treasures which the dragon protects are metaphorical thanes whom the creature rules.[16] The hoard is

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[16]The once useful gear protected the lord of the treasure like living retainers, but now *ne mæg byrnan hring / æfter wigfruman wide feran, / hæleðum be healfe* [the ring-byrnie may not widely fare on the war chief beside the heroes, 2260b-2262a] and *seo herepad, sio æt hilde gebad / ofer borda gebræc bite irena, / brosnað æfter beorne* [the war-coat, which lived through the bite of iron after the crashing of boards at battle, decays after its man, 2258a-2260a].

rightfully the property of the dragon. He is the creature fated to find and protect it: *he gesecean sceall / hord on hrusan, þær he hæðen gold / warað* [he must seek the hoard in the ground where he will guard heathen gold, 2275b-2277a]. Therefore, his wrath, too, is defensible: as protector of the treasure, the monster is vindicated in its war against the thief. The dragon seeks out the intruder: *stearcheort onfand / feondes fotlast* [the stout-heart found the fiend's foot-track, 2288b-2289a]. This retributive search mirrors Beowulf's own search for the dragon. He too is a *stearcheort* (2552a) seeking a *feond* (2706a). It is this role as treasure-keeper, then, which makes the dragon a metaphor of Beowulf.

However, the importance of the treasure to the dragon diminishes after the theft. *In ðam eorðhuse ærgestreona* [the ancient treasures in the earth-house, 2232] are of little importance after his war has begun. No longer is his lair primarily a hoard. It is now just *eorðsele* [an earth-hall, 2410a], *hlæw under hrusan* [a cave under the ground, 2411a], *beorge* [a barrow, 2529a], and the monster's earlier function as guardian is overtaken by his present condition as destroyer and avenger.

The poem's metaphorical language, then, creates the monster as a metaphor of vindictive and destructive kingship

also. Protection gives way to destruction, though even in this identity the dragon is anthropomorphized: *se gæst ongan gledum spiwan, / beorht hofu bærnan,-- byrneleoma stod / eldum to andan* [the guest began to spew fire, to burn the bright houses,-- the fire-light arose to the horror of men, 2312a-2314a]. Evil is kept in a human realm despite the fantastic fiery breath. As a guest in the hall of men, the dragon itself is humanized. Yet, the violence of his attack beggars human understanding. The men are horrified not simply by the means of his vengeance, but by its degree. The motive and method of his *nearofages nið* [maliciously cruel hostility, 2317a] are obscured by its sheer violence. The dragon becomes even a nightmarish metaphor of revenge itself, sparking rage and retribution in the people around him. The dragon's war evokes vengeance from Beowulf; he *forgrunden* [consumed, 2335a] Geatland, as rage and revenge consume its king. Retribution infuses Beowulf and *Wedera þioden wræce leornode* [the Weder's chief devised a revenge for him, 2336]. Yet, though involved in these vengeful acts, Beowulf's actions do not preclude proper rule. The ideal of kingship is gauged by the justice which a lord exacts and expects and by his care in assuring the continued existence of the *dryht*. As *sincgifa* [the treasure-giver, 2311a] and *frod folces weard* [the wise

guardian of the folk, 2513a], Beowulf is a righteous lord. The dragon's divergence from this model creates him as a metaphorical foil of the hero. His commitment to violence and revenge opposes him to the necessity which marks Beowulf's battle. The dragon's war is extreme. *No ðær aht cwices / lað lyftfloga læfan wolde* [The loathsome air-flier would not leave there anything living, 2314b-2315b]. Though the theft of the cup requires retribution, the dragon's excess epitomizes bad kingship. The monster ignores the laws by which his vengeance might be effected. The fact that the worm brings retribution to the entire country of Geatland proves his unfitness to rule. He ignores the laws of society by which even kings are bound.

The monster's hoarding of treasure is also counter to proper rule. "The natural function of his monstrous terror is to find and avariciously keep earthly treasure."[17] Unlike Beowulf who *maðmas geaf* [gave treasures, 2640b] to his warriors, the dragon selfishly hoards them. His kingdom stagnates because he buries and hoards the treasure which should be the life-blood of his *dryht*. Counter to Beowulf's generosity, the dragon is a parody of proper kingship, and as such is metaphorical of Heremod.

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[17]Huppé, 19.

The similar language used to describe both monster and evil king warrants and compels comparison. The poet's careful use of epithets and phrases invokes memories of Heremod in the story of the dragon. The dragon's twin evils of greed and violence repeat Heremod's own. Both figures are filled with anger and violence; the human king is *bolgenmod* [bulging-minded, 1713a], the dragon *gebolgen wæs* [was bulging, 2220b] at the theft of the cup. Indeed, the Danish king's very existence as *Heremod* [battle-mind, 901a] is echoed in the dragon: *þa wæs beorges weard /...on hreoum mode* [then was the barrow's warden in a fierce mind, 2580a-2581b]. Though the two words *here* and *hreoh* are distinct etymologically, their simple aural similarity forces a connection. The king's fierceness is reborn in the monster. Klaeber notes that

> the main point of the story...is that Heremod was a strong, valiant hero, pre-eminent among his fellows, giving promise of a brilliant career, but subsequently proved a bad ruler, cruel and stingy, and...ended miserably.[18]

Heremod might have been good. *Hwæþere him on ferhþe greow / breosthord blodreow; nallas beagas geaf* [However, his spirit grew blood-thirsty in his breast-hoard; he gave no rings at all, 1718b-1719b]. Such is true of the dragon, as well. As the guardian of the barrow, he has the potential to rule

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[18]Klaeber, 162.

correctly. However, the hoarding of the treasure denies this potential. Heremod, "as a[n]...allegorical personification setting forth the dangers of *here-mod*, i.e. 'warlike disposition,'" performs a similar task to the dragon's in the poem.[19] Both figures become injunctions against improper rule and immoral action.

As *ealdorgewinna* [the life-enemy, 2903b], the dragon mirrors Heremod's existence as *aldorceare* [a life-care, 906b] to his people. Violent and avaricious rulers, both Heremod and the dragon represent evils against the livelihood of the *dryht* system. Certainly, there is no explicit comparison of these two figures in the poem. The poet's skill with language creates a metaphorical identity which is strong yet subtle. Hroðgar's injunction to Beowulf, *Ðu þe lær be þon, / gumcyste ongit!* [Teach yourself by that, understand munificence! 1722b-1723a], is only silently echoed by the dragon and its polysemous identity. No concrete comparison is drawn between these two figures of bad kingship. The allusion exists due to the texture of the words and not to concrete comparison.

The metaphorical language of *Beowulf* allows the dragon

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[19]Klaeber, 162. He notes and counters this idea of Müllenhof's, thinking Heremod instead "to be a definite figure in Danish historical-legendary tradition" (162). Regardless of a possibly historical existence, Heremod's allegorical identity is still an important element in his characterization. It is because of his actions and attitudes and not his literal, historical existence that he is a worthy example for Hroðgar and the poet to cite.

several identities in the poem. At once he is humanized into a society of treasure guarding, reduced to supernatural and horrific violence and revenge, allegorized as an example of bad kingship, and linked closely to other examples of such poor conduct. The poet takes care to introduce elements of heroic and human tendencies in the creature which carry him beyond a mere fantastical appearance.

Through the use of implicit metaphor, repetition and aural manipulation of language, the poet provides a panoply of identities which the dragon assumes in the poem. Certainly, these guises are not exclusive of one another. The dragon is not human then inhuman, not Beowulf then Heremod. Rather, the poet layers these categories. "The mystery of the dragon is complex."[20] The identity of the dragon is never labelled distinctly. Each of its metaphorical roles must be maintained during any examination of the dragon's place in the myth of *Beowulf*. The dragon's entry into the poem furthers *Beowulf*'s agenda of didacticism. He gives meaning to the hero's standards by his rejection of them. "The *Beowulf* dragon was a worthy adversary."[21] His poor kingship and his narrow-minded pursuit of greed and revenge provide a warning to the hero in his old age which the story of Heremod provided in his

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[20]Huppé, 19.

[21]Marie Nelson, "*Beowulf*, ll. 2824b-2845a," Explicator 43 (1985):7.

youth. In the dragon, Beowulf battles the potential of all kings to degenerate into tyranny. He defeats the potential human violence and avariciousness which appear in a concretized form in the dragon.

CONCLUSION

As with any piece of metaphorical literature, in *Beowulf* "we must surrender precision for flexibility."[1] This surrender, though, is far from a retreat from rigorous analysis of the poem. Indeed, the flexibility required of critics and scholars is an important tool in understanding the continued importance of the poem to English studies. The once solely historical significance thought to be available through the poem has vanished. It now stands on its own artistic merit and not simply on its existence as a window onto Anglo-Saxon culture and ritual. The search for historical antecedents or analogues of the characters has been eclipsed by the examination of these characters themselves.

It is with this renewed interest in the poem itself that the monsters have flourished in criticism. What were once thought to be "a sad mistake," an intrusion of fantasy into an otherwise realistic document, are now viewed as integral elements of the poem.[2] The dragon and the Grendel-Kin are championed as thematically important elements of the narrative. There are, of course, as many opinions of the poem's themes as there are critics to expound them. Yet while

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[1]Frye, 56.

[2]Tolkien, 22.

this wealth and diversity would at first appear to stretch and distort the monsters' characterizations beyond conceivable bounds, such is not the case. The very texture of the poem itself, the metaphorical quality which pervades its language, allows this divergent criticism to occur simultaneously without lessening the creatures' significance. The allusive wording employed by the poet gives them a semantic freedom, offering possible not concrete identities. This use of implicit metaphor creates fields of meaning in the words with which he describes the monsters. Interpreting their significance becomes a matter of recognizing the multiple layers which form them. In order to view their importance to the poem, each allusion must be allowed to function. In this way, the various strains of criticism regarding the monsters gel into a cohesive whole (though seemingly unwittingly). Through the connections which are forged, they become metaphors. The allusive web of language allows them a flexibility which modern, descriptive language would deny. Through the implicit identifications at which the poet hints but does not state, they encompass human and monstrous, physical and spiritual constructions. The Grendel-Kin and the worm exist as manifestations of both humanity and inhumanity. This dual characterization makes them instrumental in *Beowulf*'s examination of good and evil in the human world. Through their horrendous subhuman actions and affiliation with

the poem's human figures, the three creatures become the poet's main tool in describing the delicate balance of good and evil in the world and indeed in humanity itself. The monsters come to symbolize the sin which is potential in mankind.

Human existence as it is presented in *Beowulf* is one primarily of virtue. The human figures in the poem, for the most part, demonstrate the correct actions and attitudes required of people for the maintenance of a healthy society. Beowulf, Hroðgar, Wiglaf, and Wealhðeow, to name only the most prominent, are examples of human morality. They are mindful of morality and the social duty incumbent upon their respective positions in the Anglo-Saxon *dryht*. The Danish and Geatish kings understand and perform their social tasks, being always magnanimous and loyal. Their balance of power with wisdom allows the society to function properly; the laws they impose on the hall they obey themselves, providing leadership not simply in title but by example also. This model of positive human behaviour is important to the societies of the poem and the poet. Indeed, it is significant for the continued health of the community of any reader. The actions of these men are presented as a model of behaviour for human kings and human commoners inside and outside the poem. Their behaviour is commendable in all human beings regardless of status or society. The example which they provide reaches beyond an

Anglo-Saxon cultural milieu to encompass all human societies.

The same might be said of the depiction of human queenship and thanehood in *Beowulf* as well. The figures of Wealhðeow, Wiglaf and the young Beowulf serve as reminders of peace-weaving and loyalty. Such a strengthening of tribal and intertribal ties through marriage and camaraderie becomes an important indicator of what human beings should strive to fulfil. By providing positive examples of these offices, they become moral yardsticks for the audience, offering examples of the respect, honour, friendship and fraternal allegiance which are necessary in the health of any human society. As with the models of virtuous kingship, the standards which they represent are not confined simply to the roles they hold in a *dryht*-hall world. The traits of loyalty, and respect and harmony are important to any and all members of human society of the Anglo-Saxon era or any other.

It is against such a depiction of human action and behaviour that the monsters are set. Through the poem's allusive language, they become metaphorical humans. The links created between these creatures and the human figures help to mark the monsters as parodic mirrors of the functions normally played by the members of a *dryht*. Grendel, his Mother, and the dragon become perverted ideals of the thane, queen and king. Their metaphorical inclusion in humanity adds a taint of sin to the virtuous conception of human nature presented by

the other figures. They prove the presence of evil in humanity, horrifically mocking the goodness of the hero and his fellows.

Their horror is evident in their beings and their behaviour. They perform evil on a scale almost beyond human comprehension. Grendel's mindless attacks on Heorot and the dragon's desire for Geatland's utter destruction surpass human standards of evil set out in the poem. The three exaggerate the evil potential of mankind, taking sin to a superhuman level. This embellishment is important in depicting the horror of ignoring social duty and virtue. By overstating the extent of evil in humanity through the monsters, the poet more easily impresses upon his audience the danger of human immorality. The monsters do not become inhuman because of the extent of their crimes; rather they make the commission of such crimes equatable with inhumanity. By negating good, the three prove its importance to human existence.

As an ironic thane, Grendel despises and denies the brotherhood and love which are an integral part of human life. Like Unferð, he is a figure of hatred in the midst of camaraderie. The metaphorical link of the monster to this human thane demonstrates the existence of Grendel's evil in human form. The two become mirrors of each other, the monster's destruction of Heorot's joy foreshadowing Unferð's later destruction of the hall itself. The monstrous thane

disregards the essence of community and so disregards the essential duty of thanehood to bolster that friendship through loyalty to the *dryht*-lord. Counter to the honourable and loyal thanes of the poem, Grendel champions disorder and treachery.

His Mother, too, is a figure of perversion. Her parody of the role of queen sets her in opposition to those human noble-women found in the poem. Instead of being a peace-pledge between her kind and the Danes as an Anglo-Saxon woman was hoped to be, she is a weaver of enmity. She brings the tribes together through bonds of war and death, ignoring the shows of respect which a figure of her status should demonstrate. Her unwavering desire for revenge mocks the stoic acceptance of fate by the other female characters. While Hildeburh and Wealhðeow act out of courtesy, the Dam seeks only to avenge the injuries committed against her. She, as does Modþryð, ignores the tenets of her queenly position, forsaking respect and social and moral etiquette in favour of personal vengeance.

This single-minded pursuit of vindication marks the dragon's existence also. His desire for revenge at the cost of his realm represents him as an example of evil kingship. Unlike Beowulf and Hroðgar, whose attention is focused on the maintenance of a healthy dryht through wise and moderate rule, the worm ignores the duties which kingship should instill. He scorns restraint and forgoes generosity in favour of

avaricious hoarding. His war against Geatland is terrible in its totality. Like Heremod, the drake is a violent and greedy king whose personal satisfaction outweighs his obligation to the kingdom.

The dual characterization of these creatures as monsters and humans is vital. The poet's attention to this simultaneous identification through metaphor allows the realization of human evil in *Beowulf*. It is because the Grendel-Kin and the dragon are both inhuman and human that their existence as models of sin is possible. The horrible extent of their crimes is reified in their horrific appearance; as monsters themselves, they make monstrous the deeds they perform. Their link to humanity, however, makes these actions human ones as well. Thus they exaggerate evil beyond a human level in the poem while at once warning of its presence in humanity. Their multiple characterization is imperative to their existence as warnings against evil. They must be human, to display the existence of sin in humanity, and monstrous, to appal the audience into refusing their paradigm.

The social, moral and individual duties which the monsters of *Beowulf* deny and contradict in their roles as parodic queen, king and thane are exactly those traits which are necessary for the healthy survival of a human community. Through the admirable model of virtue presented by the various

human figures and the moralizing epigrams found in the work, the poet emphasizes the importance of proper human conduct and an adherence to morality. The monsters, by negation of these precepts, also serve as examples of human good. They warn against the ignorance of virtue by proving the horror of such negligence; the traits of respect, loyalty, friendship, moderation and generosity, the cornerstones of civilized human existence, are conspicuous in their absence from these creatures. The roles which they assume in a human community are dependent upon these traits, though the importance of them is hardly confined to an Anglo-Saxon context. Indeed, the virtues which are championed in *Beowulf* are universal in their relevance. Honour, respect and wisdom are vital features of any human society. Thus, the importance of the poem and its polysemous monsters is one not confined to a dead civilization. The behaviour and conduct which the poet stresses is vital is as important to present day culture as it was to the Anglo-Saxon community. It is this continued relevance to human existence which allows *Beowulf* its esteemed and enduring place in English literature. The monsters are still portentous figures auguring the presence of evil in humanity and suggesting an adherence to virtue by themselves denying it.

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