VI

GRENDEL, HEOROT AND HROTHGAR

Beowulf's heroic stature admirably suits his role as the restorer of order in the kingdom of the Danes, an order which has been almost completely destroyed by Grendel. The solitary figure of the monster, cut off from society, shunning the light of day and refusing to accept peace is the embodiment of the principle of chaos.[1] Grendel's nature, his method of attack, the consequences of his depredations - all these elements in the depiction of the monster are indications that the core of Beowulf is a dualistic cosmology: a cosmology utterly alien to the experience of the man who gave the poem its present shape.

On the face of it, Grendel's evil would seem to be that he kills the thegns of the Danish court with impunity. For this

1. As I have indicated in my chapter on Anglo-Saxon morality, I am of the opinion that Grendel's solitariness is the key to the original conception of him as chaos monster, envying the gifts of order, and hence visualised in Germanic terms of exile. In this respect W.A. Berendsohn's argument in Zur Vorgeschichte des Beowulf that the episode of the merewife is originally a separate fragment (pp.62ff.) is useful, since it postulates the separate existence of two such beings, both motivated by envy and loneliness to strike at those who enjoy social benefits. This is certainly the case in Grettissaga, where the Glamr episode and the Sandhaugar fight both contain solitary monsters. As Bonjour puts it, the poet's "depiction of Grendel as a solitary demon goes together with, and is almost as necessary a piece of characterisation as, say, his violent hatred of the music and rejoicing in the hall..." "Grendel's Dam and the Composition of Beowulf", p. 121. Bonjour discusses Berendsohn's views, but concludes, mainly on artistic and thematic grounds, that the merewife is a necessary figure in the total framework of the poem, both as an element of suspense and as "a first intimation of [Beowulf's] vulnerability." (p. 118)

reason alone he is a scourge which must be removed. But this superficial view of Grendel is at odds with the reality of the monster's impact upon Hrothgar and his folk. The slaughter of the thegns is not the primary evil which Grendel brings down upon the Danes. Indeed, the poet consistently understates this aspect of the raids on Heorot, with the exception of the murder of Hondscio. Thus, while we hear of the initial attack upon Heorot at some length, the climactic deaths are not vividly described:

gearo sona wæs
reoc ond reþe; ond on ræste genam
þritig þegna; þanon eft gewat
huþe hremig to ham faran.
(121b - 124)

It could be argued that the poet elected to avoid detailing this fight, because the murder of thirty warriors stretched credulity; it could also be that the poet made a deliberate choice of vagueness in order to keep Grendel's hideous strength shadowy and unformed in the minds of the audience. In artistic terms, either reason would be valid. However, evidence from elsewhere in the poem shows that the poet was perfectly capable of describing feats of strength which are in the realm of improbability (as in the Breca episode)[1] or in which physical combat is described in

1. F.C. Robinson has argued that this, and other episodes involving Beowulf, are not evidence for his superhuman nature. See "Elements of the Marvellous in the Characterization of Beowulf". Contrary views are those of Martin Puhvel, "The Swimming Prowess of Beowulf" who argues that Beowulf's feats <u>are</u> superhuman and derived from Celtic "hyperbole"; see, also by Puhvel, "<u>Beowulf</u> and Celtic Underwater Adventure"; also Peter A. Jorgensen, "Beowulf's Swimming-Match with Breca".

lavish detail (the dragon episode). The death of Hondscio is elaborately described, and it is plain that the awesome power of Grendel loses nothing in the telling:

> ...slat unwearnum
> bat banlocan blod edrum dranc
> synsnædum swealh; sona hæfde
> unlyfigendes eal gefeormod
> fet ond folma...
> (741b - 745a)

We need to look elsewhere for an explanation of the manner in which Grendel's earlier attacks on Heorot are handled. The answer lies in the fact that his murders are peripheral to the real issue of Grendel's evil in the poem, and therefore the poet minimised the accounts of the deaths of Hrothgar's folk.

The entire Grendel episode hinges upon the struggle for Heorot, a struggle in which an enemy of the established order strives to undo it. It is for this reason that Beowulf announces upon arrival that he has come, not to avenge the lost men, but to restore the hall to its rightful occupants, to purge and cleanse the hall of the evil which has polluted it:

> "nu ic þus feorran com
> þæt ic mote ana ond minra eorla gedryht
> þæs heardra heap Heorot fælsian." (430b - 432)

Beowulf's boast correctly focusses our attention on the real evil, on the hall's corruption, rather than on the killings. He has no duty to avenge the killings of Hrothgar's folk anyway, so that this would probably not come into his boast: but more importantly, Beowulf perceives that it is the degradation of Heorot which is the real issue.

The hall is the centre of Danish society, and the symbol of Hrothgar's rule:

> The building of Heorot is the climax of Hrothgar's career, a turning point from his years of active military conquest to a phase of stability and cultural leadership...[Heorot] will be a widely visible centre of protection, solidarity, reciprocity and celebration.[1]

This point is crucial to an understanding of the question of evil throughout Beowulf : Hrothgar, Beowulf and Grendel all regard the hall as the key to Danish society.[2]

As I have pointed out, Beowulf comes to the king with an offer to cleanse the hall - he sees the cause of the king's suffering principally as the loss of his right to occupy his own hall. Hrothgar confirms this opinion:

> "Ðæt wæs ungeara, þæt ic ænigra me
> weana ne wende to widan feore
> bote gebidan, þonne blode fah
> husa selest heorodreorig stod
> wea widscofen witena gehwylcum

1. Berger and Leicester, "The Limits of Heroism in Beowulf", p. 37. For an elaboration see pp. 44ff. Rees, Celtic Heritage, p. 163, suggests that Tara in Celtic myth originally "symbolized the cosmos of the gods as opposed to the chaos of the demons", a sentiment which I think is applicable to Heorot in its wider sense as a symbol of the kingdom of Hrothgar and its (apparent) triumph over the enemies of the Danes. Both these critical views, and those of others, such as Irving's A Reading of Beowulf, pp. 88ff., relate to Mircea Eliade's theory of the "sacred centre", expounded in Patterns in Comparative Religion and Images and Symbols.
2. It is worthy of note that Anglo-Saxon law regards the king's hall or dwelling as particularly important. Aelfred 7 prescribes the death penalty for drawing sword in the king's hall (G.A., p. 52); whereas a similar offence in the hall of the archbishop draws a fine of 150 sceattas (Aelf 15, G.A. p. 58); Ine 6 and its relevant subsections likewise (G.A. pp.90ff). Aethelbert 3 doubles the fine normally paid for violence if conducted in the home of a man entertaining the king (G.A. p. 3) cf. Ael 38, 40 (G.A. pp. 70-71).

þara þe ne wendon   þæt hie wideferhþ
leoda landgeweorc   laþum beweredon
scuccum ond scinnum."
(932 - 939a)

Were these sentiments not sufficient to establish the fact that Heorot is the central symbol in the war of order and chaos, then the nature of Grendel's activities should in itself incline the reader to that view. There is no indication that Grendel, or his mother, have at any stage killed outside of Heorot, even though Grendel is called the "mære mearcstapa" (103). We are told that the rural folk have caught glimpses of the monsters (1345ff.), but we are not told that anyone was killed: indeed, the tenor of these lines suggests that they were only seen at a distance. Similarly, the lines "[Grendel] sinnihte heold / mistige moras" (161b - 162a), tell us only that fear of Grendel kept people off the moors at night.

Moreover, when after the initial raids the Danes flee Heorot, the poet depicts them as sleeping elsewhere:

þa wæs eaþfynde   þe him elles hwær
gerumlicor   ræste sohte,
bed æfter burum,   þa him gebeacnod wæs
gesægd soþlice   sweotolan tacne
healþegnes hete;   heold hyne syþþan
fyr ond fæstor   se þæm feond ætwand.
(138 - 143)

Lines 143b-144 show that the Danes were safe away from the hall. Indeed, we could not imagine that the houses of the Danes would be any more protection against Grendel's strength than the strongest building of all - Heorot. The comment that Grendel "Heorot eardode / sincfage sel sweartum nihtum". (166-167) tells us that the monster occupied the hall at times when there were no people within. We cannot believe that, if Grendel was attacking because of hunger for human flesh, he would stay in the hall rather than attacking the Danes in their homes. Heorot is the focal point of evil, and those who take themselves off at night from the haunted building are safe from that evil.

After the initial raids, the only men who we are told fall victim to Grendel are the warriors who, in their cups, have made a fatal boast to try themselves against the monster:

> Ful oft gebeotedon beore druncne
> ofer ealowæge oretmecgas,
> þæt hie in beorsele bidan woldon
> Grendles guþe mid gryrum ecga
>
> (480 - 483),

1. Stephen C. Bandy, in "Beowulf: the Defence of Heorot", argues that the drunken warriors are mentioned as a link with Judaeo-Christian injunctions against drinking (Thessalonians, Isaiah, etc.) as well as Anglo-Saxon Christian attacks on the vice, such as that of Bishop Wulfstan. As Bandy puts it: "To suppose, then, that the poet's great preoccupation with the feasting in Heorot intends only to applaud the Gemutlichkeit of jolly kinsmen is to miss the point altogether." (p. 90) He goes on to argue that the fact that the warriors go to sleep in Heorot after the feast is an indication that the poet intends us to see a reference to the works of Gregory and Augustine on the topic of spiritual blindness. I would contend that the feasting and drinking in Heorot are not handled with such irony that we could read any criticism into them - indeed, they are important set-pieces in the series of contrasts between the beauties and joys of social life and the evil which seeks to stop that life. Moreover, Bandy puts too much weight upon the sleep of the men before Grendel's attack: D.H. Reiman has shown that the motif on the unsleeping individual in the group is a very basic motif in tales drawn from the "Hand and the Child" cycle, of which Beowulf is an example. See "Folklore and Beowulf's Defence of Heorot". The "Gemutlichkeit of jolly kinsmen" is one of the prime goods of Germanic society.

Even these "beore druncne" warriors perceived that the hall was the place where Grendel would be found.

Thus, the record of Grendel's raids forces us to look to the hall and its significance in the world of Beowulf. We are forced inevitably to the conclusion that the hall has a major significance; that its loss far outweighs the loss of the warriors to Grendel; that its restoration to Hrothgar occupies Danish and Geatish minds alike in the poem.

The importance of the hall to Hrothgar is in keeping with the role of the hall throughout Germanic literature. As Ms Hume has shown[1], the hall in Old English poetry serves as a focal point of social life, being the centre for the key rituals of hringþege. Moreover, the hall is, in its symbolic function, representative of the majesty of the king and the success of the folk. In terms of Beowulf, Ms Hume accords with my view that "the hall was pictured, for poetic purposes, as a circle of light enclosed by darkness, discomfort and danger." (p. 64) Halvorsen comments that "the hall embodies all the good things of this world; it represents the principle of harmony: everything is in order".[2] The symbolic significance of the hall is also brought out in the contrasts between Heorot and the "niþsele" (1513) in which the Grendels live. Heorot is representative of all that the society of the Danes (and the Geats) value: comradeship, warmth, light, food and drink. Its ceremonial functions include

1. Katherine Hume, "The Concept of the Hall in Old English Poetry".
2. John Halvorsen, "The World of Beowulf", p. 594.

the reiteration of the bond between dryhten and gedryht, and, in the songs of the scops who come to sing there, the expression of tribal valour and the elaboration of the place of the Danish folk in the broad sweep of human history. On the other hand, Grendel's "hall" - cold, dark, cheerless, the abode of outcasts - "is anti-Heorot, and represents all those things outside of the centre. It is limitless and unknowable, like chaos..."[1]

The hall is indeed the core of Danish society on every level, and it contains that other symbol of order, the gifstol of the king. Since the gifstol and its occupant are the bonds of the comitatus society, the removal of the power of the king to adequately fulfill his function as distributer of treasure strikes at the very heart of societal order. Grendel cannot partake in the pleasures of the hringþege ceremony, but he can, and does, ensure that no-one else can. The celebrated crux of lines 168-169 is a comment upon this simple fact.[2]

The number of possible interpretations of lines 168-169,

no he þone gifstol gretan moste
maþþum for Metode, ne his myne wisse.

has been extensively discussed by both Klaeber[3] and Wrenn[4], and I

1. J. Helterman, "Beowulf : the Archetype Enters History", p. 12. Helterman discusses the archetypal meanings of the hall and the gifstol.
2. The ensuing discussion of the lines is essentially the same as, although independent of that of Golden, whose conclusions are: "the gifstol, then, is not the throne of God...but it is rather a symbol of the stability which is the most important characteristic of a lawful kingdom". John Golden, "The 'Gifstol' of Beowulf", p. 202.
3. Beowulf, pp. 134-135.
4. Beowulf (Wrenn) pp. 188-189.

do not propose to canvass these possibilities here. However, I think that one of the principal lines of argument, that is, that Grendel is somehow prevented from approaching the throne by God, needs further discussion. It is, for example, the view of Chaney[1], who discusses at some length the relationship between the Germanic king and God (whether Woden or Jehovah), and concludes that, by implication, some form of ward is placed upon the throne of Hrothgar by God. Now, it is certainly true that there was a close link between the king and the deity in the Germanic cosmos, a link which has been thoroughly discussed by a number of schola .[2] I believe that this bond is the result of the belief that the king is, in his function of lawgiver, vital to the maintenance of the worldly order, which is a part of the larger cosmic system of the gods. It is precisely this which makes Grendel's attacks on Heorot so dangerous: they throw into grave doubt the validity of Hrothgar's claim to be the guardian of the folk. To this extent I agree entirely with Chaney. However, I do not believe that we can seriously see the throne of

1. William A. Chaney, "Grendel and the Gifstol". See, by the same author for the background to his argument, The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England.
2. The general position of the king in Germanic lands seems to fit the pattern of secular and sacred responsibilities noticed by Frazer (cited in Chapter 1 of this work): for more specific discussion of the dual nature of kings, and the socio-religious functions of the king; see R.M. Estrich, "The Throne of Hrothgar"; O. Hofler, "Der Sakralcharacter das Germanischen Konigtums"; Jan de Vries, "Das Konigtum bei den Germanen"; Fritz Kern, Kingship and Law in the Middle Ages, and L. Schucking, "The Ideal of Kingship in Beowulf".

Hrothgar as somehow rendered inviolate by the monstrous invader of the hall. To do so involves us in some profound difficulties. For example, if the throne is warded from Grendel, it is the only example in the poem of a genuine miracle, leaving aside the dubious assistance rendered Beowulf in the mere, with which I shall be concerned subsequently. It is difficult to believe that, in one half-line, the poet should pass over such a display of the power of God, in fending from the throne a creature capable of wrenching the doors of the hall off their hinges, and killing thirty grown men in a few moments. Moreover, if God is so concerned for the sanctity of the king's throne, it is puzzling that he allows the king himself to suffer such bitter emotional torment for twelve years - I do not believe, as I shall elaborate shortly, that Hrothgar is such a sinner that he should suffer longer than Job.

Thus, whilst I would accept the possibility that the throne is a "precious thing" in the eyes of God, I cannot believe that this is the reason why Grendel cannot approach the throne. But the precise meaning of the phrase "maþþum for Metode" is not at all clear.

Baird[1] has argued very convincingly that the text should read "for metode": that is, that the editorial practice of Klaeber and others in invariably capitalising "metod" and its variants is questionable. Baird argues from the evidence of Beowulf 2527 and Waldere 1,34 that there is a case for the word

1. J.L. Baird, "for metode : Beowulf 169".

"metod" to be taken as "prince" or "ruler".[1] There is considerable merit in this view: not only is it eminently feasible, in terms of our general understanding of Anglo-Saxon poetic diction[2], but it removes many of the problems raised by the reading "Metode". Baird would read lines 164ff. as follows:

> He (Grendel) inhabited Heorot....he (Grendel) might not at all approach the gifstol (throne), with treasures before (in the presence of) the ruler (i.e. of the giftstool or of Heorot; i.e. Hrothgar) nor know his (Hrothgar's) love.[3]

Baird's sense that irony is evident in the passage is echoed by other critics who do not subscribe to his view.[4]

1. With support from the use of the genitive plural form in Thorpe's Aelfric's Homilies (ii, 316, 21 and 328, 32).
2. See ibid., pp. 419ff. The argument in favour of accepting what is admittedly an unusual reading of "Metode" is strengthened by the number of times in Anglo-Saxon poetry in which the same term is used to describe both earthly rulers and God. [Thus "frean" ("lord, prince") is used of mortals in Beowulf 500, 1166, 359, and 2853 and of God in lines 27 and 2794; similarly "hlaford" (Beo. 267, 2283, 2375, 2642) means "Lord" in Christ 461. Many other terms have this dual function: "cyning", "dryhten" (both very frequently); "þeoden", "fruma", "bregu", "reccend" etc. etc.] If this reading of "metod" is accepted, then the "he" of 168a could refer to Hrothgar, despite Klaeber's comment that this is "too remote to be seriously considered" (p. 134). Lines 168ff. could also be read as "[because Grendel was there] Hrothgar could not approach the throne, a precious object for the king, nor take joy of it."
3. Baird argues (p. 422) that it was equally the "giftstool" to both retainer and lord, in that the warrior would [as does Beowulf] bring any treasures he had earned in his deeds of heroism to his lord, as well as receive gifts in turn. Thus he sees an intense irony in the "healþegn" Grendel, who does not approach the gifstol with gifts for the king, having driven the king out of his own hall.
4. Klaeber points out that an emendation to "helþegnes" has been suggested (Ettmuller, Bugge, Sedgefield), but he does not accept it. (133, note to 1.142) As Dr Goldsmith puts it: "Grendel has become the 'healþegn' he desires to be, but only during the hours of darkness; it is an empty triumph, for there is no king to reward him from the gifstol" (Mode and Meaning, 109.)

To reiterate: I see no reason why God should be a part of the picture in these lines, even though we have been told that Grendel is the descendant of Cain[1], Grendel is an outsider, an exile: he can have no part in any of the ceremonies of the Danish court. (It is curious that God should be interested in protecting the symbol of a pagan kingship, moreover, if we are to believe the poet's assessment of the Danish customs at 178ff.) The throne is the symbol of the Danish kingship, and in that symbolic sense Grendel cannot "approach" it: indeed, one wonders whether he would in fact be expected to recognise it for what it was. Therefore, Grendel's presence in Heorot should not be read as a part of a war between God and the sons of Cain: it is, rather, an action in the war between the forces of order and those of chaos. Nowhere in the poem does the poet show that Grendel is the specific enemy of God, although he assures us of the fact on a number of occasions. It seems, then that the relationship between God and Grendel does not form a part of the original matter of Beowulf, but is the consequence of a Christian redaction, and one which is singularly inept in this particular instance.

1. An argument based on the fact that Grendel "Godes yrre baer" (711); see Dr Goldsmith's argument in Mode and Meaning, pp. 103ff., which concludes: "It therefore seems that the poet discloses through the image of Heorot, gold-adorned, damaged, and finally destroyed, the true nature of the spes tota of the Danes, haeþenra hyht: the spirit of Cain occupies the hall in an allegorical sense as the skulking presence of Grendel haunts it in the historical narrative" (p. 112) see also Klaeber, Introduction, p.l ; Marie P. Hamilton, "The Religious Principle", pp. 116ff. (although Ms Hamilton insists that Grendel is only figuratively of the race of Cain); Robertson, "Doctrine of Charity", pp. 184ff.; etc.

The framework of social order is expressed in the Creation Hymn, which immediately precedes the account of the attack by Grendel on Heorot; it alludes to the cosmic order in which everthing has its place and its specific function. The singer

> cwæþ þæt se Aelmihtiga eorþan worhte
> wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebugeþ,
> gesette sigehreþig sunnam ond monan
> leoman to leohte landbuendum
> ond gefrætwade folcan sceatas
> leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop
> cynna gehwylcum þara þe cwice hwyrfaþ.
> (92 - 98)

The relevance of this song to Heorot is summed up in Mircea Eliade's comments: "The creation of the world is the exemplar for all constructions. Every new town, every new house that is built, imitates afresh, and in a sense repeats, the creation of the world....Just as the town is always an imago mundi; the house is a microcosm."[1] However, I am not convinced that Grendel reacts to this specifically, but rather to the noise of the merry-making in the hall, which reminds him of all he has not. Cherniss believes:

> Grendel's reaction to this joyous song helps to define him as an evil creature... [one can] assume that Grendel's anger is directed specifically at the Christian content of the Creation song, an assumption supported somewhat by the description of his descent from Cain in the succeeding lines.[2]

1. Patterns in Comparative Religion p. 379, cited by Irving, op. cit., p. 89.
2. M.D. Cherniss, Ingeld and Christ, p. 138. Cherniss's assumption that Beowulf is a Christian poem is implicit in the sub-title of this work: "Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry", although he challenges many allegorical readings of the poem.

Grendel is at war with the Danes, not because he resents their Christianity, or the content of the Creation song, but because the society of the Danes is an intolerable reminder of his own state. Pace Betty Cox, his envy of the Danes is not a sure sign that he is demonic[1]; it is the consequence of a perfectly comprehended rage at the contrast between the Danes and his own respective states. As I have shown, in my discussion of the moral evils attendant upon the exilic state, Grendel is in a desperate position, despite the company of his mother, who shares but does not alleviate his misery. Grendel's envy of the Danes is no more demonic than the envy of Deor for his rival, or the Seafarer for the secure life of the townsmen. There is nothing either abnormal or evil in the desire of these Germanic figures to share in the benefits of society.

It is the sound of merriment in the hall which first draws Grendel's attention to the Danes. That the Creation song should be described as forming part of the general noise of the Danes is no surprise: Heorot, the creation of the Danes, is part of a larger structure, the universe of created things, and this is how the Danes see it. Hrothgar's hall is the symbol of an ordered, secure society - it celebrates the triumph of the Danish folk over the chaos of the political world, as the shaping of the

1. Betty S. Cox, The Cruces of Beowulf, links Grendel's envy of the Danes with the envy of Satan for man (pp. 90ff.). Together with this characteristic: "Other[s]...[malice, greed, ferocity] form a logical part of a theologically conceived monster such as Grendel....[which] derive from the basic characteristics of Satan" (pp. 93-94). I think I have demonstrated that the wild parts of the earth were full of such beings who had neither theological birth nor any kinship with their Christian counterpart.

universe is the triumph of the creator over the primeval chaos. Even though this may well be a Christian song, the pagans also had their "Creation Hymn".[1]

Thus, when Grendel bursts into the hall at the commencement of his reign of terror, he does so, not because he has been sent by God as a reminder to Hrothgar to avoid complacency, nor as a punishment for the Danes' paganism: he is no Christian symbol. His rage is as much the consequence of wyrd as the appearance of the dragon over the hall of Beowulf (see below). It is the outcome of his deformed inheritance, together with the success of Hrothgar in maintaining his kingdom against the enemies which threatened it. Both Grendel and his mother are actors in the drama of the mythic confrontation of order and chaos,but to the Anglo-Saxon audience, the monsters are not mythical. Hrothgar, a real king, is an emblem of order: his victories have brought stability, growth and prosperity to the Danes. Grendel is the embodiment of chaos, standing outside in the darkness, his shadowy bulk the very essence of the unnatural,

1. See ibid., pp. 97ff., where Ms Cox argues that the Creation hymn and Grendel's response link him with Lucifer's lament for the lost light and song of Heaven in Genesis B (255-6) and Christ and Satan (84-86; 137-139; 140-144; 151-155). It does not seem remarkable that two Germanic exiles should lament the same things. David M. Gaunt "The Creation Theme in Epic Poetry" pp. 213-220, shows that the creation song is a motif in other than Christian literature.

the weird, the chaotic. The Creation hymn is a particularly apt catalyst for the rage of chaos at the ascendancy of order.[1]

When he seizes Heorot, Grendel throws the society of the Danes into chaos. Every institution of the folk is powerless to drive out the evil which Grendel represents : he will take no wergeld[2] (although, of course, he has no right to any); the warriors are powerless against him; neither the wisdom of the Danish councillors nor the pagan deities avail Hrothgar. And in all of this, it is upon the effect of Grendel on the king that the poet focusses, for if the hall is the symbol of Danish splendour, the king is the personification of it. So it is that we see the king as the principal victim of the anger of Grendel. In lines 144ff., the poet stresses this by pointing out that everyone knew that "Grendel wan / hwile wiþ Hroþgar" (151b - 152a), causing the "wine Scyldinga weana gehwelcne / sidra sorga". (148 - 149b).

1. I am, however, mindful of the arguments of Blackburn that the Creation hymn is a Christian interpolation ("The Christian Colouring of Beowulf") Blackburn suggests that lines 90b - 101; 107 - 110; 104b -106 and 111 - 114 can, if re-arranged into that order, be read as a consecutive account of the Christian Creation myth until the account of Cain's descendants. If this is the case, then my argument that the Creation passage is apt still stands, for it shows that the poet saw a need to explain the apparent cosmic significance of Grendel, which he proceeded to do in Christian terms. My basic view is that Grendel reacts to the general sounds of happiness emanating from Heorot, rather than to any specific sentiments expressed in the songs. On the "interpolations", see H.M. Chadwick, The Heroic Age, pp. 50ff.
2. Cf. the same dilemma in Gripisspa, 46; Guþrunarkviþa II, 20; Guþrunarhvot 12; Atlamal in Groenlenzko 72, 101; and Helgakviþa Hundingsbana 12. These references are cited in Margaret Arent, "The Heroic Pattern", pp. 231ff.

Although the poet goes on to state that the monster would have peace with none of the Danes, and that he schemed against "duguþe ond geogoþe" (160b) the central figure is always Hrothgar : "Þæt wæs wræc micel wine Scyldinga / modes brecþa." (170-171a). In the interview with Beowulf, the king expresses the sense of shame and humiliation which Grendel has imposed upon him in intensely personal terms - note the use of the first person in:

> Sorh is me to secganne on sefan minum
> gumena ængum, hwæt me Grendel hafaþ
> hynþo on Heorote mid his heteþancum,
> færniþa gefremed; is min fletwerod,
> wigheap gewanod; hie wyrd forsweop
> on Grendles gryre.
>
> (473 - 478a)

Every reference to the king as protector of the Danes carries, then, an inbuilt irony, for clearly the king is not capable of affording such protection, epithets ("folces hyrde", "eodur Scyldinga") notwithstanding. But at no point in the poem does the poet make any specific attack upon Hrothgar's kingship: indeed, it is plain that the monster which has descended upon the Danes is more than a match for any normal man, Hrothgar included. Moreover, the poet often points out that Hrothgar is not held in any less respect because of what is something beyond his control. For example, when, after the death of Grendel, Beowulf's praises are being sung, we are told: "No hie huru winedrihten wiht ne logon / glædne Hroþgar, ac þæt wæs god cyning" (862-863). This should serve to remind us that the king is held in high esteem: it requires a depth of irony which is almost beyond fathoming to read into the description of Hrothgar throughout the poem any semblance of criticism. Yet Dr Goldsmith asserts that it is Hrothgar's fault; that the evil which has come upon the Danes is a timely reminder from God that Hrothgar is imperfect: "When Hrothgar, who had thought himself more than a match for any enemy, had learnt humility, God sent him Beowulf as his deliverer."[1]

But Hrothgar's conclusion to his homiletic remarks to Beowulf does not contain an admission of pride, or of Hrothgar's need of humility. What the aged king says, in fact, is that he had believed that all his enemies had been vanquished, and that his realm was therefore secure. His error, for that is all that it is, lay in his failure to anticipate attack from another quarter - within the realm itself, from the mere of the monsters. There does not seem to be very much beyond normal satisfaction in this achievement of peace on the part of Hrothgar. Nor does the king say that Grendel was seen by him as a punishment for his pride. Hrothgar's account of his reversal follows his admonition to Beowulf to avoid complacency, which is not the same as pride.

However, in terms of the general tenor of Hrothgar's sermon, Dr Goldsmith's argument is feasible: outside of this sermon there is no support at all for the view that Grendel is sent as a punishment from God. I believe that the sermon is evidence of the complete failure of the *Beowulf* poet to submerge

1. "The Choice in *Beowulf*", p. 64; but cf. Raymond P. Tripp, Jr.: "the *Beowulf* poet has only good to say about Hrothgar and Heorot. That his good may not have been good enough is another question. Within the context of the poem, hall and builder are offered as emblems of an ancient excellence." "The Exemplary Role of Heorot and Hrothgar", p. 129.

the pagan material, with which he was working, in Christian dogma. The sermon is an attempt to place in a Christian perspective the eruption of evil in a Christian society, the classic pattern of punishment for guilt being used. But the failure lies in the fact that Hrothgar has no real guilt for which to pay. The rest of the poem emphatically asserts that Hrothgar was a good king; it also shows that Grendel is operating from an entirely selfish set of motives, which have absolutely nothing to do with the nature of the king. Grendel is not sent by God to attack Heorot, except in the mind of the poet who had to find some reason for the reversal of fortunes of an apparently model lord.

It is clear that the mind which composed Hrothgar's sermon had very little conception of the dualistic cosmology which lay behind the story of Grendel and the king. Yet the poem contains numerous items of evidence for this dualism. Thus, whilst at no point does the poem explicitly tell the audience that Grendel is a force of chaos, there is far more implicit evidence for such a view than for a Christian interpretation of the demon or the cause of his advent in society.

Part of this implicit evidence is the failure of the poet to clarify the figure of the monster/demon. As we have seen, the demons of Christian mythology were very clearly defined at an early stage of the development of the creed. Certainly, by the time of the conversion of the English, the theology of angels and devils was dogma, and in terms of that dogma, there was simply no way in which the figures of Grendel and his dam could be made to fit the pattern of demons which the church had laid down. Demons are incorporeal: Grendel and his mother are flesh and blood. Demons function on the spiritual plane in all but the most rare accounts: the monsters are given no such spiritual dimensions, but are firmly rooted in the physical plane. Demons are immortal: the Grendels mortal; and so on. In virtually every respect, there is no connection between the figures of the Grendel pair and the orthodox Christian demons.

In view of this fact, it is surprising that critics have persisted in treating the monsters as demons. Nevertheless, a number of critics have attempted to argue that they are. For example, Peltola argues:

> From Grendel's eyes "there came a horrible light most like flame"...the flames of fire are usually associated with Hell in Anglo-Saxon poetry....Grendel is also referred to by epithets which were established expressions for the devil, such as "feond mancynnes" (164, 1276) and "ealdgewinna" (1776) cf. Latin "hostis humanis generis" and "hostis antiquus". At Grendel's death he is received into Hell.[1]

There are serious objections to this argument, not the least being the tenuous link between the light of Grendel's eyes and the fires of Hell. Peltola's favoured reading of "onfeng" ("received", 852) is not convincing: it implies a homecoming, in

1. N. Peltola, "Grendel's Descent from Cain Reconsidered", p. 289. Cf. the description of the "Lancashire skriker" in Spence, British Mythology: "A story is told of this Lancashire fiend following a young man on the banks of the Hodder. He heard a sepulchral howl, but could see nothing. Suddenly, he was confronted by the skriker, whose terrible eyes gleamed with supernatural fire. He struck at it, but his arm passed through its body." (p. 92)

Peltola's sense, but elsewhere, as in line 740, it clearly means "seized" or "clutched", implying violence.

As for the terms used to describe the monster, it can be shown that similar terms are frequently used for creatures of evil without the implication that they are demons. Thus in Daniel the Babylonians are called "ge deoflu" (750); in Andreas the human Mermedonians are "wærlogan " (71), and "deofles þegnas" (43); "Godes andsaca" is applied to Pharoah in odus (503), to damned sinners in Christ and Satan (268) and Christ (1593). The much abused Mermedonians are "andsacan" in Andreas (1148 and 1459). Arguments from these epithets are two edged: all that can be said with confidence is that the Beowulf poet saw some connection between Grendel and other agents of Satanic evil.

This is the argument of Marie Hamilton, who also refers to the epithets applied to Grendel, but concludes:

> ...the Satanic epithets for the Scandinavian water-monsters need not be taken too literally; for Lucifer and his followers, whether apostate angels or reprobate mortals, are described in much the same language by Old English and later medieval writers. The convention...makes little or no distinction between earthly and otherworld servants of the Fiend.....[1]

However, Ms Hamilton's conclusion to this argument departs from my view:

> Thus are there but two societies of souls in all the Universe....in the life temporal Grendel is but a cannibalistic monster in the likeness of man, a stranger to grace...yet in the mind of the poet, his folklore giants, like those in Genesis, seem to have become associated with "the whole company of the damned", the Body of Satan. One is tempted to surmise

1. Marie Hamilton, op. cit., p. 123.

> that the author of Beowulf...envisioned the race of Cain in its timeless as well as its transitory state, and thus, as by a bold metaphor, conceived of Grendel and his dam as already denizens of Hell.[1]

The difficulty with this view is that wherever in Anglo-Saxon poetry outside of Beowulf spiritual evil is evident, it is invariably associated with Satan. All of the figures mentioned above, in reference to the terms relating them to the demons, are closely associated with either the figure of Satan, as in Mermedonia and the damned souls, or with his urgings. Thus the link between spiritual evil manifested in immoral behaviour is invariably made with Satan. This is because, as I have shown, there was no room for evil in God's cosmos which did not proceed from either the weakness of human will or the urgings of the fiend. Yet the Grendel pair, and the dragon, are not servants of Satan.

Characteristic of the process whereby critics have arrived at the conclusion that Grendel is diabolical in nature is that of Delasanta and Slevin:

> Whereas the dragon is referred to only as a beast, a humanly imaginable entity exactly fifty feet long who fights in daylight for Beowulf and others to see, Grendel's appearance and his parentage are shrouded in almost diabolical mystery. His image is a shadow of death in the darkness........this air of mystery which pervades both our image of Grendel and our understanding of what, exactly, he is gives the entire

1. Ibid., p. 124. This view stems from the Augustinian view adopted by Ms Hamilton, namely that of the "two cities". There is considerable merit in the observation of Charles Donahue that: "The good characters in Beowulf...belong rather to what we would call a "third city", a city which without supernatural hope fights a brave and losing fight against the forces of evil". "Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good", pp. 265 - 266.

> section dealing with Beowulf's slaying of him and his mother an un-natural, and indeed something of a supra-natural or diabolical cast. One would expect a man to slay a dragon, but only a god can slay his own adversary, the "hellegæst" [my emphasis].[1]

This argument is important to subsequent remarks made by the authors which attempt to link events in Beowulf with events in the life of Christ. The ultimate sentence quoted above, with its suggestion that Grendel is the Adversary in the Christian sense, is arrived at without reference to Grendel's mortality. The argument, as the reader will perceive, slides from an adjectival use of the word "diabolical" which is apparently figurative, to a second use of the adjective as a gloss for "supra-natural": the picturing of Grendel as diabolical has depended upon this very tenuous, and ultimately circular, argument. And what is the meaning of the final sentence? We must only assume that Grendel somehow figures the Devil himself, struggling against the individual will for mastery of the soul: but as Beowulf is not his target, then presumably Hrothgar is a type of Christ.

The truth is that Grendel and his dam are the causes of moral evil: there is no link between them and Satan. Nevertheless, Malmberg argues:

> The terminology applied to Grendel thus establishes a good case for regarding him as a manifestation of the devil. This theory rests on the assumption that there was Christian poetry in existence at the time Beowulf was composed.[2]

1. R. Delasanta and J. Slevin, "Beowulf and the Hypostatic Union", p. 413.
2. Lars Malmberg, "Grendel and the Devil" p. 243.

Kiessling attempts to show that the terms "mære" (103) and "se mæra" (762) establish Grendel as a demon through links with the lamia and the incubus of Judaeo-Christian tradition: however, since he also points out that similar monsters exist in Germanic and Scandinavian traditions independent of Christianity, his argument is not convincing. Moreover, one of his major arguments, that the incubus (= "mære", hence "nightmare") crushes its victims ignores the sexual connotations of that crushing, as well as the more significant fact that Grendel rends his foes rather than crushing them.

Dr Goldsmith has been one of the most articulate exponents of an allegorical interpretation of Beowulf, and hence of Grendel:

> Once we have entertained this though [i.e. that the dragon in Beowulf figures Satan] we can see that the apparently dual nature of the Grendel kin, who appear as giant humans and demons, and the dual nature of their lair, as haunted mere and as hell, bear out the supposition that Beowulf's monster-fights are imagined on some level other than the simply historical....[1]

Dr Goldsmith implies in this statement that there are deeper resonances to the poem than would be the case if the story were "simply historical", yet such a view does not necessitate a Christian interpretation of the poem. Moreover, I have shown that there is no firm foundation for a link between Grendel's mere and Hell; indeed, Dr Goldsmith herself cast doubts on the demonic nature of Grendel and his mother in an earlier study, in

1. From "Allegorical, Typological or Neither?", p. 290.

which she argued that "if Grendel is a fleshly creature, as the whole story of the fight indicates, he cannot literally be a devil".[1]

That there are deeper meanings to the poem I would not deny: but I maintain that they spring, not from Christian motifs, but from the ancient, pagan belief that all history was the record of the conflict of order and chaos. This does not mean that Grendel is an allegorical figure, representing the impersonal forces of chaos: he is, in his own right, the product of chaos. Certainly, his attack upon Heorot and Hrothgar is impersonal - they are the emblems of order, against which he is opposed by his nature as an embodiment of the chaotic principle. He is to be understood, in his origins in the folktales of the North, as one of those events in the course of human history, like (but not) disease or war or storm, which rupture the delicate fabric of order until some more potent force intervenes to drive them off.

1. The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf, p. 106. The same need to find deeper significance in the poem, which has driven critics to look for symbolism (Christian or otherwise) is succinctly expressed by Irving (op. cit., 83), who remarks at the beginning of his discussion of Grendel, "Cain begat the race of Grendel, and Grendel begat the race of scholars who speculate as to what his significance might be. It would be convenient to conclude that Grendel and his mother are nothing but predatory trolls, taken for granted in those days as the normal hazards of boggy regions and no more symbolic than a pair of man-eating tigers...But Grendel and his mother loom too large for that". Irving proceeds to discuss Beowulf and Grendel in terms of the order/chaos dualism which I am pursuing here, but abandons it because he views the evil of Grendel in "dimensions cosmic or universal or metaphysical". I would argue that all three levels are part of the order-chaos dualism.

The view is summarised by Tolkien:

> ...Grendel remains primarily an ogre, a physical monster, whose main function is hostility to humanity (and its frail efforts at order and art upon earth)...and although he, as ogre, has kinship with devils, and is doomed when slain to be numbered among the evil spirits, he is not when wrestling with Beowulf a materialized apparition of soul-destroying evil....the distinction between a devilish ogre, and a devil revealing himself in ogre-form - between a monster, devouring the body and bringing temporal death, that is inhabited by an accursed spirit, and a spirit of evil aiming ultimately at the soul and bringing eternal death (even though he takes a form of visible horror, that may bring and suffer physical pain) - is a real and important one....Grendel does not vanish into the pit when grappled.[1]

Tolkien's argument lends weight to my view that Grendel's evil is moral. Ruth Mellinkoff has also argued that we cannot view the evil of Grendel and his mother in spiritual terms:

> While they incorporate a spirit of evil, Grendel and his mother are not primarily evil spirits. Hence their identification as evil or demon spirits by some interpreters falls short of the mark. They are not demons or devils in the unsubstantial, immaterial sense, but rather are solid, tangible creatures.[2]

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics", p. 91.
2. Ruth Mellinkoff, "Cain's Monstrous Progeny in Beowulf": Part One, p. 131. In Part Two, Ms Mellinkoff discusses such examples as Og, the king of Bashaw who was killed by Moses (Numbers 21, 33-55) to establish the belief that some giants lived on after the deluge. Most of her examples are drawn from Jewish literature. She concludes that the survival of the giants and hence Grendel could only result from "rejecting or misunderstanding or ignoring or forgetting or not knowing traditional exegesis and favouring an interpretation more extravagantly fanciful" (p. 196). See the following note.

The poet of Beowulf knew this: therefore he resorted to the myth of the descendants of Cain, a myth which was thoroughly discredited by theologians[1] yet which served - to some extent - his purposes here. His difficulty was that there was no other way in which he could explain the figure of Grendel. The wealth of evidence from folklore attesting to the belief in monsters of the Grendel type cannot be ignored: the poet could not sweep away these deeply entrenched beliefs by converting the monsters into hellish figures. Not only that, but all the activities of Grendel and his mother are evil only in the moral dimension: there was no way in which the Christian poet could establish that the evil brought about by Grendel was connected to guilt or to the soul at all.

1. It is not to the point to detail the processes whereby the Cain legend came to form part of Beowulf: the matter has been extensively studied by others, notably Mellinkoff (which see below); O.F. Emerson, "Legends of Cain"; R. Kaske, "Beowulf and the Book of Enoch", pp. 421-431; and N. Peltola, "Grendel's Descent from Cain Re-Considered". On the fusion of the rabbinical and Christian traditions which gave birth to the presence in Christian literature of the "semen Cain", see Danielou, Jewish Christianity, passim; R.H. Charles, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament, ii, pp. 163ff; J. Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, pp. 31ff., and D.S. Russell, The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, pp. 50ff. Briefly, the theological problem is that the giants should have died with the Deluge, along with all other wicked things. That they did not do so implied that they had a spiritual existence, which enabled them to survive the loss of their carnal beings. Since Cain was not a demon, his "gigantic" offspring could not have acquired an independent demonic spirituality: thus their spirit personae must have come from elsewhere - hence the myth of the Watchers of Enoch. Modern Catholic views, as expressed in commentary on the Bible, maintain that the "children of God" were not the angelic Watchers, but the sons of Seth, who maintained the laws of God; Cain's line is a troubled one, but it is not composed of quasi-demonic giants.

Even where the opportunity presents itself, in lines 175ff., in which the prayers of the Danes to the pagan deities are concerned, there is no mention of the link between pagan practice and the devil, a link which we have seen throughout our discussion of the Anglo-Saxon view of spiritual evil. It is inconceivable that the poet would not have at least referred to this link if he felt that Grendel's purpose was to lead the Danes into spiritual evil.

Grendel's dam is also very much a chaos figure, even though the personification of the moral evil she represents has rendered her more human than her son. Unlike the demons of the pit, she has a blood-relationship with her companion, a kinship which is naturally understood by the poet as a sufficient motive for revenge; her reclamation of the arm of her son is part of the depiction of her as grieving mother.

This personification does not, however, ameliorate the evil which she represents, for, even if she has only struck once - and that in revenge - she remains a potential threat to Danish society so long as she is alive. This is, of course, the reason for Beowulf's sense of urgency in going forth to attack her in her lair. And, whilst she is not as powerful as her son, again part of the realisation process behind the personification of both monsters, she is more than a match for any normal man, and very nearly more than a match for Beowulf. This apparent discrepancy is, I believe, the consequence of the fact that the fight takes place in her lair, where she is strengthened by the ambient evil of the mere. It is a commonplace of folklore that monsters are stronger on their home ground.

Despite her lesser stature, then, Grendel's mother is as much a threat to Danish society as was her son, and the remarks I have made concerning his function in the moral framework of the poem apply equally to her.

There are, however, two aspects of the description of Beowulf's fight with the mere-woman which require further comment: these are the giant sword which the hero finds in the cave and the light which seems to appear with her death.

The sword found in the dwelling of the monsters is described in lines 1557 - 1562:

> Geseah þa on searwum sigeeadig bil
> ealdsweord eotenisc ecgum þyhtig
> wigena weorþmynd; þæt wæs wæpna cyst -
> buton hit wæs mare þonne ænig mon oþer
> to beadulace ætberan meahte,
> god ond geatolic, giganta geweorc.

Critics have found in this description evidence for the link with the giants of Cain's kin, a view somewhat supported by the subsequent elaboration of description when Beowulf gives the hilt to Hrothgar.It is golden,"gylden hilt" (1677), the handiwork of the marvellous smiths of the ancient giants (1681):

> ... on þæm wæs or writen
> fyrnegewinnes, syþþan flod ofsloh,
> gifen geotende giganta cyn...
> swa wæs on þæm scennum sciran goldes
> þurh runstafas rihte gemearcod,
> geseted ond gesæd hwam þæt sweord geworht
> irena cyst ærest wære
> wreoþenhilt ond wyrmfah.
>
> (1688b - 1698a)

There is much about this sword which remains unknown, and which the critics have tended to overlook.

What was the sword doing in the lair? We are, I think, correct in assuming that neither Grendel nor his mother used the sword as a weapon : Grendel uses his talons and muscular power to slay, and the only item about him which suggests technology is the dragon-skin pouch he wears. Grendel's mother uses her knife in an attempt to finish off the hero - an approporate weapon for a woman who lacks the strength to wield a full-sized sword, although Guthrun wields a sword at need.[1] It seems to form part of a hoard (1557ff., 1612ff.) similar to the dragon-hoard of Part II, but this curious hoard is not given the importance of the dragon's wealth. The presence of treasures in the lair of the monsters suggests that it is a very old habitation for not only are the weapons there of great age (arguing from the giant sword), but it would seem, if the argument from silence may be permitted, that neither of the monsters are collectors of treasure. That is, the gear strewn around the dwelling is not the monster's, but the relics of beings which earlier inhabited the den. This, of course, suits the Christian poet's purpose, since he has linked the monsters with the ancient race of Cain: the embellishments on the sword depict the struggle of the giants

1. Atlamal in Groenlenzko, 47, 5 - 48, 10; Atlakviþa 42, 1-4. The seax of line 1545 is clearly a type of dagger, "intended for thrusting rather than hewing...it clearly was useful for hand-to-hand combat", Caroline Brady, "Weapons in Beowulf", pp. 93 - 94.

with God (1687ff.). Thus the hoard is, implicitly, the wealth accumulated by successive generations of monsters, all of the lineage of Cain : a lineage which goes back to antediluvian times. It is clear, however, that the poet of Beowulf inherited the tradition of the giant sword in the folk-lore matter of Beowulf.[1] It is ironic that, in Christianizing the story engraved upon the hilt which Hrothgar views, the poet's thesis that Grendel and his mother are of the race of Cain should collapse in ruins.

We have been told that Grendel is of the race of Cain (106-107), a race which includes the other monsters of folk-lore (110ff.) who fought against God in the past. The conflict was ended by the flood, implicitly in lines 110ff., (where the use of past tense and the general sense of the passage suggest completed action) explicitly in lines 1692ff. If these beings were destroyed in the flood, what are Grendel and his mother doing haunting Denmark?

The only way out of this dilemma was that of Enoch, with his theory of the Watchers, whose disembodied spirits live on in the world (see above, Chapter One). But every piece of evidence which has been given about the nature of the demons of the mere is that they are mortal, corporeal beings. They simply cannot be the spirits of the deceased Watchers.

1. Chambers, "Beowulf's Fight with Grendel", p. 94: "in many folk-tale versions [of the subterranean fight] emphasis is laid upon a wonderful sword, which is hanging on the wall of the underground dwelling into which the hero penetrates. Cf. H.L. Rogers: "The magic sword hanging on the wall must have been in the poet's source", "Beowulf's Three Great Fights", p. 347.

Moreover, the detail of the melting blade can be adduced as further evidence that the monsters are not of the race of giants except in the confused account proffered by the Christian redactor of the matter of Beowulf. It is inconceivable that the giants, whose internecine wars were common knowledge[1] should have made a sword which was only good for one blow, which melted away as soon as it was steeped in giant blood. The truth is that the original story of the melting blade was intended to show that even the mighty work of the giants was less than perfect when used against the alien beings in the mere ("ættren ellorgæst", 1617a). Critics have overlooked this point. Rogers suggests that the weapon is linked with Tubalcain, a link which, by implication would throw doubts upon the nature of the sword, associating it with the evil of Cain's clan[2], Dr Goldsmith

1. e.g. Eusebius' account, cited by Dr Goldsmith, Mode and Meaning, pp. 107 - 108.
2. Rogers, op. cit., pp. 247 - 248: "the good sword of tradition is converted into a "giganta geweorc".

describes the sword as having an aura of "malevolent antiquity".[1]

These arguments ignore two vital facts. When Beowulf grasps the sword, we are told that it was "wæpna cyst" (1559), "god ond geatolic" (1562). These are hardly the epithets applicable to an evil weapon. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine that Beowulf would bring to Hrothgar the hilt of a "malevolent" sword, even if it had been rendered useless by the loss of its blade. On the contrary, Beowulf brings the hilt to Hrothgar because it is a "good" sword, fashioned by marvellous craftsmen; its virtue has been attested by its penetration of the otherwise invulnerable hide of Grendel and his dam. Neither Beowulf nor Hrothgar handle the sword-hilt with suspicion - rather, their attitudes are of wonder and admiration.

1. Mode and Meaning, p. 89. This "aura" is adduced from the "serpentine patterning and runic letters" on the hilt. Both of these are, in fact, extremely common devices in Anglo-Saxon art of the period - runes being used often by weapon makers as signatures, and the intertwined lines of serpent figures are found in illuminations as well as ornaments. This is hardly evidence of evil. Moreover, if, as Dr Goldsmith says "at its centre is the engraved picture of God's retribution on the giants in the days of Noah" (a detail not as clear in the text, which suggests that it is the "beginning" ["or" 1688] of this struggle which is shown) then it is surprising that a giant of Cain's kin should have celebrated in his sword-decoration the defeat of his folk. Earlier in her argument, Dr Goldsmith has said: "as a symbol of the prowess of the giants, its wasting away in the corrosive blood of the slain Grendel kin has an obvious significance..." which she does not supply. The symbolic end of giant warfare with the death of the last of the tribe? A comment on the ineffectiveness of giant weaponry in dealing with the monsters? We are, however, agreed that the sword is "for the audience a symbol of the enduring cosmic war in which Beowulf's contests are brief incidents" - except that the contestants are different. Caroline Brady, op. cit., p. 103, sees this incident as a vivid image of the evil of Grendel: "We can...envision the fine steely iron melting into hoar-frosty splinters in the demonic blood hotter than the hellfire..." See also S.C. Hawkes and R.I. Page, "Swords and Runes".

Thus, the matter of the magic sword of Grendel's lair is a small, yet significant piece of evidence for the pagan world-view of the original matter of Beowulf: the corrosive blood of the Grendel kin is part of the "otherworld" nature of these beings, a nature which includes glowing eyes and phenomenal strength - and not one of these characteristics is exclusively or inarguably Christian.

The melting of the sword introduces a further aspect of the order/chaos motif, although in this case the poet has handled the material with more skill. It leads to an analogy with the melting of ice in Spring:

> ...hit eal gemealt   ise gelicost,
> þonne forstes bend   Fæder onlæteþ
> onwindeþ wælrapas,   se geweald hafaþ
> sæla ond mæla;   þæt is soþ Metod.
>
> (1608 - 1611)

The imagery of the melting ice leads naturally into the praise of the power of God, and it is particularly appropriate at this point for the poet to assert the powers of Good, following the evil miracles which have preceded. But the melting of the sword also foreshadows the purification of the mere:

> wæron yþgebland   eal gefælsod,
> eacne eardas,   þa se ellorgast
> oflet lifdagas   ond þæs lænan gesceaft.
>
> (1620 - 1622)

Thus the poet implies that God has had a hand in the purification of the mere. But, as I showed in a preceding chapter ("Landscape of Chaos") this purification is, in fact, a motif of the order/chaos literature, based on the assumption that the power of chaos in the dweller within a landscape spreads out to corrupt the very nature of the things around. It is not entirely impossible that this is also behind the sudden appearance of the light in the cave (1570ff.), although not too much should be made of this, since we have been expressly told in lines 1516ff. that the cave was lit by firelight. It is likely that the poet needed at this point to remind the audience that there was light in the cave, since at line 1572 Beowulf moves off into the cave to seize the giant sword.[1] It could be argued that this "new" light is, because like the sun, not the same as firelight, but at 1517 the light of the fire is "blacne leoman beorhte scinan". Wright suggests this light is somehow evil, by linking it with the light over the lake and the light of Grendel's eyes, but he clearly reads both mentions of the light as being concerned with the fire: "....the circumstances of the narrative require that he shall be able to look around...it is a fiery light that shines forth, revealing <u>first one monster of darkness, then the other</u>".[2]

1. Martin Puhvel, in "The Deicidal Otherworld Weapon", notes a number of cases in which swords give off a brilliant light and others which are used against their owners. He also argues that the light of 1570ff. is not external to the cave, hence must come from the sword: "the simile describing the phenomenon of light seems far too intense to be intended to convey nothing more than the ephemeral glitter of flashing steel (p. 216n.). The only weakness with this is that the hero fails to make any mention of what would be a rather astonishing event.
2. Wright, "Good and Evil", p. 260, my emphasis. Klaeber's note to 1516 (p. 186) mentions that light beneath the ground is a folklore motif, though he inserts the comment that light is also found in Hell. However, as I have shown, only rarely does Hellfire illuminate - note how in Bede's vision of Drihthelm, light is provided by the added detail of the fireballs erupting from the pit, not by the specific fire of Hell. The literary need to provide some sort of illumination for a hero in a dark place is common to all descent tales, pagan or Christian, and can hardly be adduced as evidence of common origin, which I think is Klaeber's insinuation.

The light of the cave has been used, however, as evidence of the essentially Christian nature of the poem: "...at the moment of victory a beam of preternatural light penetrates the dismal scene beneath the waters and brightens it (1570-72) cf. Isaiah 4 : 2; Luke 1 : 78ff."[1]

This forms part of Cabaniss' argument that Beowulf is to be identified with Christ, but I am not convinced that the light is either a "beam" or "preternatural". Similarly, Cabaniss argues that Beowulf's ascent to the light and the melting of the sword is "a suggestion of winter's end and spring's burgeoning as Beowulf comes up in triumph....one of the most ancient of Easter themes".[2] This is a very dangerous argument, since it is hardly a specific Christian image that the god returning to Earth brings Spring, as in the Persephone-type myth, a myth to which Christianity attached itself by scheduling its festival at the same time as the pagan Spring rituals.

Thus, the main episodes of Part I of Beowulf, which revolve around the hero's two combats with monsters, can be seen as part of an ancient conflict between the powers of good and evil[3]: but these are respectively order and chaos, not Christ and Satan. The critical views which would allegorise this aspect

1. Cabaniss, op. cit., p. 196.
2. Loc. cit., and cf. p. 200, where Beowulf has "a triumphant emergence into joyous springtime". I can find no specific evidence of Spring in the lines following the description of the melting of the sword.
3. The significance of which, in terms of the pagan cosmology which is the foundation of the poem, is a refutation of the sentiments of Klaeber who has argued that these combats are "mere fabulous adventures so much inferior to the splendid heroic setting" (p. li). It is hard to imagine what could be more splendid or heroic than single-handed defence of all that is good in society against the fearsome powers of chaos.

of Beowulf's activities into a version of Christ's descent into Hell are very wide of the mark, except in so far as the Christian myth is a version of an older tale. With this pagan reading of the poem's essential cosmology, much of the apparent difficulty in *Beowulf* is resolved: the problems which remain are the result of the poet's inability to comprehend, or unwillingness to admit, the non-Christian matter which he had to hand.

As we shall see, the same can be said of the matter of Beowulf and his fatal fight with the dragon, to which we now turn.

VII

THE SERPENT OF CHAOS

In his discussion of dragons, Conway remarks:

> [The dragon] is ideal of all that is hard, obstructive, perilous, loathsome, horrible in nature: every detail of him has been seen through and vanquished by man, here or there, but in selection and combination they rise again as principles, and conspire to form one great generalisation of the forms of Pain - the sum of every creature's worst.[1]

Conway is referring to the malevolent Western breed of the dragon, which, unlike its Oriental counterpart, brings nothing but ill to mankind. It is the enduring symbol of chaos throughout the literature of the Western world, the archetype of all those forces which rise to challenge the order of man and god. It has been traced to the earliest literatures of man[2], so that the dragon and the hero of Beowulf have a pedigree which may be seen as continuous, from Leviathan and Python to Fafnir, through a host of mythic confrontations with the dragon-slayer.

1. M.D. Conway, Demonology and Devil-lore, i, p. 383.
2. I have not thought it necessary here to draw out the discussion of the historical development of the figure of the dragon. See, inter alia: Fontenrose, Python; M. Smith, The Dragon; NCE Vol. viii, p. 683, "Leviathan"; A.K. Brown, "The Firedrake in Beowulf"; W.W. Lawrence, "The Dragon and its Lair in Beowulf", who summarises the lineage of dragons, "they were clearly as prolific as jack-rabbits, and they ran off into strange breeds" (549); Margaret Goldsmith discusses the Leviathan/Satan figure and its development in The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf, pp. 125ff; Lewis Spence, Minor Traditions in British Mythology, pp. 120ff. describes folk beliefs in dragons in the British Isles; K.M. Briggs (ed.), A Dictionary of British Folktales, i, b, pp. 159ff.

As Conway suggests, it is a particularly appropriate symbol for chaos and evil - its serpentine form imbues it with the deep-rooted fear all serpents evoke; its proverbial ferocity, its armour and its mobility make it almost impossible to quell; its war with man is eternal.

The evil reputation of the dragon brought about the association of its appearances with impending disaster. Spence points out that "most British dragon stories allude to conditions of famine and drought which follow naturally upon the visitation of such monsters."[1] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 793 tells how the people of Northumbria saw dragons in the air, and of the misfortunes which followed hard on the heels of these portents.[2]

The dragon in Beowulf is a particularly fine specimen, and the picture of his qualities which can be pieced together from a number of comments shows the supra-natural nature of genus draco. He is, in the normal course of events, immortal: Wiglaf believes he should have been left in his lair: "þær he longe wæs [three hundred years] / wicum wunian oþ woruldende" (3082-3083).

1. Op. cit., p. 129. Cf. the dragon of the Bulgarian folktale tradition, which under the name of Lamja or Chala "ist ein Wesen, das Hagel, Gewitter, Sturm, Durre, Unfruchtbarbeit uber die Saaten bringt..." Ute Dukova, "Das Bild des Drachen im bulgarischen Marchen", p. 243.
2. A.K. Brown, op. cit., pp. 450ff., suggests plausibly that there is a link between the portentous quality of meteors and comets and the folk belief in dragons, and that the passage of meteors may well have been reported as the flight of dragons. On the origin of dragon myths, see Jacqueline Simpson, "Fifty British Dragon Tales", p. 83.

Despite his size, "fiftiges fotgemearces", he is an agile flyer, "lyftfloga" (2315). Apart from a vulnerable underbelly, he is heavily armoured, so that Naegling, Beowulf's well-tried sword, shatters, (2680), at the second blow. His aggressive weapons consist of his flame "wælfyre " (2582) hot enough to melt the iron shield which Beowulf had expressly made for the fight (2337ff., 2672ff.); as well as his flame, he carries a virulent poison in his fangs (2711ff.). He is a match for any hero of myth.

Dragons were more than myths, however. There is ample testimony to the fact that they were, in the popular fancy, alive and well in the mundane earth: visits of these beings to England are recorded quite frequently; St. Osythes was raided in 1170, Bromfield in 1344, Chipping Norton in 1349: a late visit was made by a dragon to St. Leonard's Forest in 1614.[1] It could be argued that a dragon still lives in Loch Ness, given that there was a strong Celtic tradition that the _peist_ or _beist_ which infested the Scottish lochs was of reptilian or draconian form.[2]

1. Lewis Spence, _op. cit._, p. 120ff.
2. See _Mythology of All Races_, iii, pp. 129ff. Cu Chulainn contributed to the destruction of these beings by killing the lake serpent in the _Feast of Bricrui_, but the saints were particularly active in the slaughter of dragons. For Samson's exploits see A.K. Brown, _op. cit._, pp. 443ff.; Conway, _op. cit._, p. 403: "Christianity did not fail to avail itself of the dragon-slayer's prestige...St. Michael, St. Andrew, St. Margaret and many others were pictured subduing or treading on Dragons." The serpents generally fared ill at the hands of Christian saints, especially the hermits, who encountered them in vast numbers.

(Most of these were destroyed by Celtic saints in imitation of St. Patrick or St. Samson). But there was a lively belief in the existence of dragons, a belief which Christian missionaries had to overcome as best they could: "Too firmly believed in to be removable as unchristian, the trolls and the firedrakes were a menace to the missionary unless he could provide them with a biblical basis...."[1]

The Christian method was to absorb the dragon into Cl istian iconography to show that the figure of the dragon was a carnal manifestation of Satan. The details of this manifestation vary, as DuBois has shown, according to the contexts of the passages in which the dragon occurs in Biblical literature.[2] Similar conclusions may be drawn from the study of Wild.[3] The original impetus behind the dragon motif in Christian literature is, as Lundberg's study of baptism indicates[4] the result of the acquisition by Judaeo-Christian myth of mythical material dealing with Belial/Leviathan: beings whose original domains in the waters of chaos were transformed into the rule of the waters of death.

The dragon of Christian literature is always emblematic of either Satan (as in the legend of St. Margaret) or of a particular sin or vice. These dragons are, as Dr Goldsmith points out, confined, at least up to the time of Beowulf, to saint's lives stemming from the Mediterranean areas. Dr Goldsmith comments, in a note to Wild's study:

1. Whallon, "The Christianity of Beowulf", p. 92.
2. A.E. DuBois, "The Dragon in Beowulf - Symbol or Image?"
3. F. Wild, Drachen im Beowulf und andere Drachen.
4. P. Lundberg, La typologie baptismale dans l'Ancienne Eglise.

> His researches show a rather surprising absence of dragons from religious art before the period of the Benedictine revival. I am unable to account for this, but it is matched by a similar sparsity of religious dragons in vernacular poetry. The ninth-century decline in Latin studies had something to do with it?[1]

I would suggest that the reason is altogether different from that tentatively put by Dr Goldsmith. It seems to me that the reason behind the absence of "religious" dragons is that the "non-religious" dragons of the poetry draw from an entirely different tradition of dragons than the Christian type of the Mediterranean; that the dragon encountered by Beowulf has a common origin with the Midgard serpent, Fafnir, and the dragons of Norway, which later appear in no less than forty variants of the dragon-slayer tale.[2] These creatures spring from the same Aryan figure as the dragon Leviathan, but continued to grow unchecked by the belief in Christian cosmology that all evil was from Satan. Like the Northern beasts, the dragon of *Beowulf* is evil in its own way.

Further evidence of this is that, in *Christ and Satan*, Hell is guarded by dragons, "hate on reþre" (98) whose function is to keep the demons in. Satan has no power over them, nor can

1. *Mode and Meaning*, p. 131.
2. Reidar Christiansen, *Studies in Irish and Scandinavian Folktales*, pp. 34ff. The author notes that in Norway, the dragons "specialized as guardians of treasure" (p. 52) Tolkien's observation that there are only two significant dragons in the North (Fafnir and the bane of Beowulf) is part of his argument in "The Monsters and the Critics" for a reappraisal of the "matter" of *Beowulf*. (59), and does not imply that there are *no other* dragons. On the other hand, Stjerna has argued that the absence of winged dragons in Scandinavian art before 900, and their subsequent frequency, means that they come from an Anglo-Saxon tradition. See *Essays on Beowulf*, pp. 25-39.

he claim any allegiance from them. If the dragons were the product of the same cosmology as the dragons of the saint's tales, then this passage in the poem would make absolutely no sense, although it is remotely feasible that the dragons are allegorical for Satan's own sins, which keep him captive. This solution is not, however, as attractive, nor as logical, as the more obvious suggestion that the dragons in the poem are not of Satan.

What I would suggest, then, is that the Anglo-Saxon poets did not incorporate religious dragons into their poetry because the dragon was the subject of a deep-rooted folk belief, so firmly entrenched that they could not be readily dismissed as imaginary, or even demonic. This is clearly seen in the way in which the dragons of the Chronicle entry for 793 remain simply dragons. That repository of conventional wisdom, the Maxims, list the dragon in the barrow as a commonplace, as natural as the fish in the water or the bear on the heath. (26ff.)[1]

1. In The Fight at Finnsburh, the fiery light of the dragon is considered, and discarded, along with other natural phenomena (dawn, firelight), as the source of the gleam outside the hall (3ff.). Such a reference again indicates how common the belief in dragons was. Dr Goldsmith has considered these references, but apart from noting that they are evidently different from Mediterranean dragons (127-128), she reaches no conclusion apart from the observation "I believe that the [Beowulf] dragon has been modified so as to become a more potent symbol of spiritual evil, as it already was a symbol of moral evil" (129). Her argument for the spiritual evil of the dragon is drawn from Patristic and Mediterranean examples.

Since the belief in dragons was so fundamental, it would seem that early vernacular writers did not depict dragons as agents of Satan because everyone knew that they weren't. The belief was instead allowed to wither on the vine and only gradually did the dragon-slaying saint replace the dragon-slaying hero.

Support for this view is provided by Bolton, who, in discussing the serpent-lore of Alcuin, writes:

> Alcuin's snakes, and notably his snakes symbolic of heresy, are markedly like the dragon of Beowulf, probably, but not certainly because they are based on similar mythological models: they live in earth-caves, come out to renew their pestilential war with mankind, kill with fire and poison, attack out of malice, are the vectors of death, recall Satan and the serpent of Eden, and so forth. They and the Beowulf dragon are brothers under the scales. Yet the similarities fall short of directing us to equate the dragon of Beowulf with Satan, sin, death, temptation; for one thing, the devil used the snake in Eden *quasi organo*, while the Beowulf dragon has his own malice, his own discrete sensibility.[1]

Bolton's account of the distinction between Satanic snakes and dragons could be amplified by the observation that the motives of the two beings are quite distinct. As we have seen, Satanic evil is almost invariably a personal attack upon the soul of man: although the result of his domination over a folk, such as the Mermedonians, may result in a social evil, the society of the Mermedonians remains ordered and structured. But the dragon has

1. W.F. Bolton, Alcuin and Beowulf, p. 86. I would also modify Bolton's statement, and say that the original mythological "model" for both serpent and dragon was one and the same, the Leviathan/Ahi/Python being, deriving from a common Indo-European source. This is the view propounded by Fontenrose in Python.

no desire to corrupt the individual, to lead the weak off to Hell; nor does the dragon rebel against a Celestial king. The dragon exists independently of the society of man, Devil, and God and his entrance into human society is marked by the destruction of the symbols of unity, in exactly the same manner attempted by Grendel. Beowulf's hall burns, that symbol of tribal unity as vital to the Geats as was Heorot to the Danes:

Ða wæs Biowulfe broga gecyþed
snude to soþe, þæt his sylfes ham
bolda selest brynewylmum mealt,
gifstol Geata. Ðæt þam godan wæs
hreow on hreþre, hygesorga mæst.
(2324 - 2328)

Unlike Grendel, however, the dragon attacks the hall as part of the general assault upon the Geats: the dragon operates as an impersonal destructive force, like the drought, famines and storms which it once personified. This destruction is aimed at man in general. The dragon neither knows nor cares about the precise identity of the thief who pilfered from his hoard, and thus "Even more than Grendel, the dragon is described as a social threat : "Wæs se fruma egeslic / leoda on lande" (2309b - 2310a)"[1]

From the dragon there is no escape, as there was from the monster, (in the sense that the latter, as I have shown, was interested only in Heorot) and it is clear that Beowulf must act instantly against the serpent: its powers of destruction are so enormous that it is impossible for Geatish society to continue under that threat. For this reason alone, it is difficult to see

1. R.L. Kindrick, "Germanic _Sapientia_", p. 5.

how the dragon could be viewed as a personal threat to Beowulf alone, a view taken by a number of critics who read the dragon as a symbol of Christian vice, or the Satan-Leviathan. A.K. Brown, for example, says:

> The hero's death is in fact the point at which the very complex elements present in the dragon fight meet and fuse or cross, including the vengeance upon a portent, with the portended disaster as a result; the treasure ransomed by a life; the strength that overreaches its weapons; and even the impossibility of the victory gained over Leviathan, a victory which in one way must typify Christ's defeating Satan and ransacking Hell for its treasure of righteous souls, in another way shows forth the exercise of virtues that can prevail for salvation, and on the highest level must stand for the drawing of death's sting, and the final defeat of the grave.[1]

Whilst it may be true that the myth of Christ's victory over Leviathan could carry the allegorical significance designated by Brown, it is difficult to see how Beowulf's fight has the same significance. It is not clear what Brown means by "the impossibility of the victory gained over Leviathan", but if he means that it is impossible to defeat Leviathan unless the hero _is_ Christ, then he should explain the very dead dragon at the end of the poem. If, however, he intends us to understand that Beowulf achieves the impossible, and that this dragon is Leviathan (a view supported by his subsequent identification of the two[2]), then it is by no means clear that Beowulf achieves the stated consequences of that victory. The treasure of the dragon vanishes in the pyre; Beowulf dies, and no mention is made of his

1. _Op. cit._, p. 454.
2. "...the figure of the diminished Leviathan lying stripped of all its natural and supernatural distinctions." (p. 456)

salvation; and his barrow is, in fact, remarkably clear evidence of the victory of the grave.

Beowulf's fight with the dragon is not a parallel of Christ's struggle with Leviathan in Hell for the souls of the faithful, except on the most fundamental level. Beowulf's death is a contradiction of such an interpretation, but the nature of the contest, the nature of the hero and the consequences of the death of the dragon are all entirely different.

Beowulf is no Christ. Although he functions in the dragon fight as the champion of the Geats, his motives are not entirely selfless. He is still motivated by the love of fame which has carried him through so many struggles, and he also intends, as a result of defeating the dragon, to enrich the Geats with the gold (2535ff.). Thus, whilst the prime motive of the hero is the redemption of the Geats from the peril of the dragon, this is alloyed with other motives, which, although not particularly sinful, are not the motives of Christ: "The poet...is not implying that his hero, a perfect man under the ealde riht is a perfect Christian. [His desire for treasure, fame, the barrow] are innocent sentiments, but not the thoughts of a Christian saint in his last moments."[1]

It is because Beowulf is a warrior-king that he must fight the dragon; because he is a Germanic hero he wants to, as he wanted to fight Grendel.

1. Charles Donahue, "Potlatch and Charity", p. 33.

Beowulf's desire for the treasure has been linked with the dragon's similar desire, and both have been seen as emblems of *cupiditas*. For example, Margaret Goldsmith, in her discussion of the hero, makes an allusion to Adam and his sons, who "exchanged eternal life for brief possession of earthly goods"[1] as parallels to Beowulf. Her general belief seems to be that there is at least "a strong hint that cupidity might have led [Beowulf] into the dragon's power. Wiglaf's words...reinforce the impression that Beowulf had been enticed from his proper duty when he gave his life for the gold."[2]

There are difficulties with this view. Beowulf's desire for the gold of the hoard is very much *sotto voce*, in terms of his stated objectives: the paramount aim, as he puts it, is to gain more renown. As for the dragon, whilst it is true that it makes a good symbol of *cupiditas*, I believe that this is not the poet's purpose in describing the dragon in *Beowulf*. Draconian greed is, we should recall, so well-known that it is a commonplace: in *Maxims II*, it appears in concert with the fact that fish live in water and kings distribute rings (26bff.). What this implies for the dragon of *Beowulf* is not that the beast is a symbol of greed, but that it is behaving precisely the way it should. There is no particularly Christian message in this behaviour at all. The desire of the king to gain

1. *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf*, p. 239.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 230.

the gold is only reprehensible in a Christian context. In the pagan Germanic context, in which it is the king's function to enrich his people, Beowulf's desire to gain the gold is completely normal, perfectly proper. He is no Heremod: we cannot imagine that our hero would, like the dragon, hoard up this treasure and deny it to others. Rather, as he is an exemplary king, we would expect that the dragon-hoard would be distributed amongst the warriors of the gedryht. Although this never takes place, because of the death of the king, there is no reason to doubt that this was Beowulf's intention. We have to take at face value his dying words:

> Nu ic on maþma hord mine bebohte
> frode feorhlege, fremmaþ gena
> leoda þearfe; ne mæg ic her leng wesan.
> (2799 - 2801)

I see no reason to doubt that Beowulf believes that the bargain he has struck is good. This is not the view of Dr Goldsmith, who says "this is the very antithesis of the Christian exchange of worldly worth for everlasting life, memorably expressed in Paulinus of Nola's poem Verbum Crucis".[1] Whilst one is tempted to point out that the Beowulf poet was not Paulinus of Nola, the real problem with these sentiments is that they are founded upon the assumption that Beowulf is wrong in his satisfaction with the bargain. Surely the point is that, as I have said earlier, Beowulf is an old man, who knows that death must soon come. He

1. Ibid., p. 239.

sees the dragon-fight as an honourable undertaking: if he loses, he goes down fighting; if he wins, his personal renown and his folk are likewise enriched. In reality, Beowulf stands to lose nothing, especially as he considers, like all heroes, that his life is not as valuable as his reputation. This belief is only wrong in the respect that his death leads to the onset of chaos amongst the Geats : but, as we have been constantly reminded in the second part of the poem, the Geatish kingdom is heading for chaos anyway. And Beowulf is not immortal:

> Old age has come, and death is near at hand from the start. No longer does the hero leave home to fight the good fight in other lands. He stands strictly on the defensive. He is sad at heart; his breast surges with dark thoughts. But there is one thought which he does not have. It does not occur to him to give up. Great though the odds against him, he takes the field and fights to the last. In this world defeat and death are sure to come in the end. The hero is he who, like Beowulf, faces the worst without flinching and dies that others may live [1]

If the dragon has any larger significance in the poem, it is because like the other forces of chaos - plague, pestilence, drought, flood - it operates also as an agent of Fate. Fate rules all men, and controls the destiny of the earth.[2] Nowhere is this power more manifest in Beowulf than in the long string of circumstances which leads up to the death of the hero and the destruction of the Geats. The seeds of this fate were sown

1. Kemp Malone, "Beowulf", p. 172. These comments, with their final emphasis upon the altruistic nature of the hero, should not be interpreted as an echo of Christian sentiments alone: the redemptive hero is a widespread motif, and includes dragon-killers like Thor.
2. The attempt to subsume wyrd in the general function of God is a notable failure in this poem: note in 2290ff. that "God will protect the undoomed man if He wills" - as he is "undoomed" (unfæge) he hardly needs protection.

hundreds of years before, in the burial of the treasure by the last survivor, or perhaps even further back, in the events which led to the destruction of his folk,

Ealle hie deaþ fornam
ærran mælum, ond se an þa gen
leoda duguþe, se þær lengest hwearf,
weard winegeomor wende þæs ylcan
(2236b - 2239)

So it is that the dragon comes to the barrow and takes up residence; and although it does so three hundred years before the events which unfold in Beowulf, the fate of the Geats and their king has already been sealed. At the right time the thief will come and rifle the hoard, the dragon will be aroused, and Beowulf will die along with the dragon.

The inexorable logic of the processes of wyrd dominates the thinking of the poet in the second part of the poem, not only in the specific references to the operations of fate, but in the manner in which every agent in the final battle in constrained to act as he does. This is as true for the dragon as it is for the king. The dragon is a compulsive guardian of treasure:

se þe byrnende biorgas seceþ,
nacod niþdraca, nihtes fleogeþ
fyre befangen; hyne foldbuend
swiþe ondrædaþ. He gesecean sceall
hord on hrusan, þær he hæþen gold
waraþ wintrum frod; ne byþ him wihte þy sel. (2272 - 2277)

The gnomic quality of these utterances is obvious. The dragon has no motivation for its actions other than the compulsion of its essential nature.In this it is as bound by fate as is the hero.

As the poem draws to its climax, the references to fate increase in frequency. The thief who brings the cup to Beowulf is "unfæge" (2291), otherwise the dragon would have devoured him. In a passage which foreshadows the outcome of the impending conflict, we are told that both the king and the dragon are doomed (2341ff.), and

[Beowulf] wæs geomor sefa,
wæfre ond wælfus, wyrd ungemete neah,
se þone gomelan gretan sceolde,
secean sawle hord, sundur gedælan
lif wiþ lice; no þon lange wæs
feorh æþelinges flæsce bewunden.
(2419b - 2424)

Beowulf perceives that Fate is against him intuitively; his boast before the fight is curiously subdued and hesitant, and he looks to "wyrd...metod manna gehwæs"[1] to settle the fight (2526- 2527) as he did not do against Grendel, where his faith in his own _mægen_ was undiminished.

The emphasis upon the compulsion of _wyrd_ continues. Beowulf's luck has left him, and now he is entirely in the power of arbitrary doom. It is the first time that _wyrd_ has not granted him victory (2573ff.), and he is now brought back to the lot of the common man, whose fate it is to "alætan lændagas" (2591).[2] Even his famous sword is destined to fail him, "Him þæt gifeþe ne wæs / þæt him irenna ecge mihton / helpan æt hilde" (2682-2684) - again the result of the essential nature of

1. Klaeber capitalizes "Metod", but this is unnecessary here: see above,pp.240ff.
2. Cf. Stanley Greenfield,"Poetic Art and Epic Quality in _Beowulf_",p.216:"Wyrd will no longer grant Beowulf unalloyed victory when he fights the dragon - because the doom of the Geats is nigh."

the two adversaries, for Beowulf's strength tries every weapon, and the dragon is armoured.

The pattern of fate in which the fight is but the culmination is made even more explicit. It is the fate of the Geats that Beowulf has no heirs to inherit either his armour (2729ff.) or the kingdom, and as the recapitulation of the history of the Geats shows, another aspect of this fate is the store of hatred which the Geats have built up amongst their neighbours.

In the context of the tapestry of fate which is the second part of Beowulf, then, the dragon is particularly appropriate. Caught up itself in the toils of fate, the symbol of the chaos which is ever-present within the ordered cosmos becomes the tool of the power which rules both order and chaos. It is precisely because the pattern of fate is woven hundreds of years in the past that Beowulf cannot be blamed in any way for the events which follow his death, and although he is pictured brooding over the possibility that he has offended God (2327ff.), nowhere in the poem does the poet specifically confirm this. The mechanism whereby the fate is worked out is the curse on the treasure, a curse which Beowulf has no control over; nor ultimately does he bear any responsibility for its invocation.

The dragon, therefore, is actually an impersonal force in the poem, functioning as a tool of fate. Yet critics who have pursued this line have sometimes argued that the dragon is not of necessity evil. This is the line taken by Gang:

> If the poet had regarded the dragon as evil he would have probably told us so quite clearly and repeatedly; and if he had seen in Beowulf's fight against him any reflection of the Twilight of the Gods, or as a symbol of the fight between the powers of good and evil he would probably not have been above dropping a hint...there is no suggestion that the dragon is anything but a mere participant in a tragedy that started many ages before - before even the gold was buried.[1]

The weakness with this argument is that it does not follow that, because the dragon is itself the victim of Fate, it is morally neutral. Indeed, although the epithets applied to the dragon do not carry the moral condemnation of those which are given Grendel or his dam, they are still indicative of the poet's view that dragons were evil. The difference is that the evil of the dragon is impersonal in its effects, so that while the poet arguably sees some measure of spiritual evil in Grendel, the evil of the dragon, as an agent of chaos, is no whit the less.

Thus, most of the epithets which are applied to the dragon contain elements which accentuate its hostility and hatred to man. It is the "ealdorgewinna" (2903); the "attorsceaþan" (2839) and "þeodsceaþa" (2688); the "atol inwitgæst" (2670) and "niþgæst" (2699). Even terms applied to its behaviour are qualified with adjectives denoting its evil nature, as "laþ lyftfloga" (2315). There should be no doubt but that the dragon is an ancient and hated enemy of humanity; however, its enmity

1. T.M. Gang, "Approaches to Beowulf", p. 7. These comments are directed specifically to the sentiments of Tolkien: "the conception (of the dragon)...approaches draconitas (dragon-ness) rather than draco (dragon): a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life), and of the undiscriminating cruelty of fortune that distinguishes not good or bad (the evil aspect of all life)". "Monsters and Critics", p. 66.

has no direct connection with that of Satan: "No single phrase or descriptive epithet applied to the fire-drake can be tortured into any connection with devils, or creatures of evil in the Christian sense."[1]

Gang is only partly right in suggesting that the struggle between hero and dragon is not a fight between good and evil - in the spiritual sense, this is true. For though the dragon can kill the man, he cannot do any violence to his soul. But as an emblem of the struggle between moral good, the order and peace of Geatish society, and moral evil, the chaos brought about by the eruption of the dragon's wrath, then good and evil are on the centre of the stage. A force of nature may not be evil, but its consequences may be manifestly so.

Gang implies that the dragon is not evil, "a mere participant", in the death of Beowulf. A similar view is propounded by Rogers, at least tacitly, when he writes:

> Grendel was God's foe; the Dragon is not, even though he may have been "the recognized symbol of the arch-fiend" in ecclesiastical tradition. The Dragon's rage is not unjust, for he was provoked by theft from the hoard. The poet did perhaps make the Dragon into Beowulf's final and inevitable foe....[2]

1. O.F. Emerson, "Legends of Cain", cited by Bonjour in "Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant", p. 305.
2. H.L. Rogers, p. 354. The citation is from Klaeber's Beowulf, p. 1. Rogers refers to Gang in his remarks about the "justice" of the dragon's rage. Lawrence also is heading towards a sympathetic view of the dragon when he calls it "a more genial adversary". "The Dragon", op. cit., p. 208.

Firstly, there is no "perhaps" about the fact that the dragon is the final foe of the hero; but the main implication of this passage is that the dragon is somehow justified in its attacks upon the Geats because it has been robbed. This, apparently, makes the dragon less evil. I do not think that the poet could have intended any sympathy whatsoever for the dragon because it was "robbed": the only traces of sympathy for the dragon accrue to it through its association with the Germanic heroic qualities of valour and prowess in battle; and these are faint traces indeed.[1]

The question of the justice of the dragon's rage is admirably argued by Adrien Bonjour:

> ...there is a singularly striking disproportion here between offence and retribution, between the casual stealth [sic] of a precious cup in Dragonland, and the havoc wrought by the raging monster, applying indiscriminate scorched-earth tactics to the four corners of Geatland. Surely Grendel's dam, who had as good a cause for revenge as ever a monster dreamed of, exacted a derisive toll in comparison with the dragon's.[2]

After a discussion of the epithets "þeodsceaþa" and "leodsceaþa" and their significance to our view of the dragon, he

1. I would suggest faint resonances, at least of admiration, in such passages as: "þa wæs þeodsceaþa þriddan siþe / frecne fyrdraca fæhþa gemyndig / ræsde on þone rofan þa him rum ageald / hat ond heaþogrim..." (2688 - 2691). There may be some sympathy in lines 3040ff.

2. Adrien Bonjour, "Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant", pp. 309-310.

concludes: "Does this not suggest forces of evil beyond the realm of purely human strife, beyond the evil worked by man?"[1] Sympathy for the dragon is misplaced: it hardly seems likely to have been deliberately evoked by the poet.

The view that the dragon is an emblem of chaos removes another difficulty in a reading of Beowulf. Mitchell expresses the problem as follows:

> We can scarcely assume that God's strength was inadequate to defeat the dragon. We are then left to think that God has deserted Beowulf because Beowulf has fallen off from the high standards of his youth, and that therefore the poem contains some criticism of him.[2]

The criticism is taken up by Dr Goldsmith, who sees the death of the hero as a consequence of his arrogant self-reliance:

> It is thus reasonable to regard Beowulf as a just man who has fought the good fight during his lifetime, but who is in the end brought to death by the flaws in his human nature, the legacy of Adam's sin, in trying to fight the dragon alone.[3]

1. Loc. cit. At this point Bonjour goes on to argue that the dragon's behaviour "does not bear witness to the unleashing of an entirely impersonal force of evil, reminiscent of a disease: such attitude on the contrary, might better be explained on the assumption that the dragon already bore a latent grudge against mankind". (310). I think it is a matter of semantics: Bonjour calls the dragon the enemy of mankind, and hence personal; I would argue that the hostility for the whole human race manifested by the dragon is quintessentially impersonal, precisely as smallpox or bubonic plague could be called impersonal, in the overview; if not for the suffering victim, for whom all pain is personal. In the same way all the forces of chaos are impersonal in intention, if personal in effect.
2. Bruce Mitchell, "Until the Dragon Comes...", p. 130.
3. Mode and Meaning, p. 239. Dr Goldsmith's view of the outcome of the fight is predicated by her view of the dragon as: "[an] embodiment of evil forces which beset a man, tempting and testing him, proving or destroying him.....Beowulf's dragon is compounded of Leviathan and Mammon, the powers which govern the proud and the cupidinous." (144)

For both critics, the problem posed by the death of Beowulf is the absence of Divine intervention in the struggle against the dragon, intervention which is seen as present in his two previous fights, notably in lines 696ff. for the Grendel fight, and 1550ff. for the struggle beneath the mere.

I think that the most attractive answer to this problem lies in Klaeber's observation that the second part of the poem is derived from a different source to that of the first. In the second part, he observes that:

> ...all the episodes are drawn from Geatish tradition and show a curiously distinct historical air. A deeper gloom pervades all of the second part, fitly foreshadowing the hero's death and foreboding, we may fancy, the downfall of the Geat power. The moralizing tendency is allowed full sway and increases inordinately towards the end.[1]

Klaeber's thesis is particularly apposite to my view that the dragon figure in Beowulf has remained essentially free of Christian modification. It remains the figure of chaos, emanating from a non-Christian view of the universe; a view which was behind the matter of the second part of the poem.

Dr Goldsmith has argued that the poet did not need to make the connection between dragon and devil because the dragon was so well known in patristic writings available to the English. Typical of the tenor of her argument is her belief that:

1. Beowulf,pp. cv-cvi. It is worthy of note that the moralising to which Klaeber refers is, to my mind, even less Christian in tone than that of the first part (the Christianity of which is still hotly debated). The moralising is connected with two principal themes, wyrd and the feud. Neither of these themes is peculiarly Christian in tone, and suggest rather the conventional concerns of paganism.

> The large feature of his flaming breath (cf. Gregory's Moralia on Job), the cryptic statement that he will "strew gold beneath him like mire" (cf. Job 41: 21) and various small points in description and behaviour, link Beowulf's dragon with Leviathan. None is conclusive in itself: it is only in the context of the spiritual war that they take on significance, in telling the hearers that the dragon, like the giants, has a diabolical nature. (143)

I have already shown, in discussing Grendel, that in fact that being does not have a "diabolical nature", although there has perhaps been an attempt by the poet to render his chaos-demons into the kin of the demons of a Christian cosmos. It seems to me to stretch credulity to the limits to argue that the figure of the Satanic demon was less familiar to the Anglo-Saxon audience than the dragon figure[1] if we recall the extensive demonology of the Church which was available to the Anglo-Saxons, both in the vernacular and in Latin. If the poet had need to attempt the Christianisation of Grendel and his dam, it seems to me obvious that he should have done the same to the dragon.

To return to the theory that Beowulf's defeat is caused by his unspecified sin against God, or the "ealde riht": I believe that the failure is only in the minds of the critics. Beowulf comports himself with the dignity and propriety which has signalled his role as the true Germanic hero. There is no criticism in the poem of his relationship with God at all: indeed, that relationship is only very sketchily developed throughout the bulk of the poem - not once does Beowulf pray. If

1. Especially in view of Dr Goldsmith's own observation (p. 131) that there is such a paucity of draconian iconography in art and vernacular verse "before the Benedictine revival".

there is any criticism of Beowulf, it comes from Wiglaf, who suggests that Beowulf acted wrongly in stirring up the dragon - a curious passage (3079ff.), which implies, fairly optimistically, that the dragon would not have re-emerged from the den, having worked off his rage. If Beowulf dies as the consequence of sin, then it is a sin which is not made explicit at any point in the poem : and we know from other evidence within the poem that the poet is not reticent in spelling out examples of moral evil amongst the characters who populate the poem - people like Heremod, Unferth[1] and the proud but deadly Thryth. That he should remain conspicuously silent on the matter of Beowulf's moral or spiritual failing is, I believe, to be taken at face value.

Brown also sees Beowulf's defeat as the consequence of the hero's failure, although his argument is that Beowulf's fault is trust in his own strength:

> The danger into which the pagan hero is thrown because of his false sword and almost equally inadequate self-designed shield will stand perfectly for the failure of moral self-sufficiency, figured as the right arm or hand [dextera] of one's own strength (Job 40: 9, 14) and as the breastplate of righteousness (Eph 6: 15) when what is needed instead to prevail is the sword of the Spirit and the shield of the faith in the struggle against princes and powers, against the universal rulers of this darkness, against spiritual things of evil in the heavens (Eph 6: 12), against all the fiery missiles of the Evil One (Eph 6: 16).[2]

1. It is my view that Unferth is a figure of evil because of his kin-slaying, which acts as a contrast to Beowulf's moral rectitude. See G. Hughes, "Beowulf, Unferth and Hrunting"; J. Rosier, "Design for Treachery", sees Unferth as an internal menace to Heorot paralleling the external threat of the Grendels.
2. A.K. Brown, op. cit., p. 445.

This argument hinges upon the allegorical view of the dragon fight, and is founded upon the same assumptions as Dr Goldsmith's: that is, that the dragon was an appropriate symbol for the Anglo-Saxon audience. I have already argued that it is unlikely that it was such a symbol, a view also held by Bonjour: "To the average [Anglo-Saxon], a dragon was no figment but a monster real enough and, as such, not normally expected to take on a symbolical significance."[1]

More importantly, Brown's argument makes the link of the dragon with Satan ("the Evil One") unquestionable: I have already shown that, in Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry, the evil which is Satan's work in this world is, with very rare exceptions, spiritual. Even in these exceptional cases (such as the attacks upon Sts. Anthony and Guthlac), the attackers are explicitly described as demonic, and their assaults fail. That they fail is, of course, the consequence of the faith of the saints: but as the attacks upon Beowulf of both Grendel and his mother fail, we are invited to assume that Beowulf was somehow protected against these beings. I would suggest that, if we are to read all of Beowulf as a Christian allegory, then we need to show that Beowulf possesses a faith in God when he kills the monster, that he does not possess in his encounter with the dragon; or that the monsters of the mere are somehow not symbols of "spiritual things of evil".

1. "Monsters Crouching and Critics Rampant", p. 306. Bonjour's remarks are evidently directed to the use of symbolism in works not specifically Christian: after all, the Lamb was a widespread Christian symbol for gentleness and pacificism, and hence also for Christ. But his remarks seem to hold true for the animals of secular poetry.

In all three encounters, Beowulf depends upon his own strength ("the right arm or hand") and courage ("the breastplate of righteousness"). Moreover, whilst I would agree that the monsters of the mere are not symbols of "spiritual evil", I have shown that they represent a potent moral evil, as does the dragon. And finally, I can find no suggestion in the poem that the hero has slipped from Grace between his advent to the throne and his fight with the dragon. Certainly, in the spiritual war, the "sword of the spirit" and the "shield of faith" are the essential armament - this is what Guthlac bore into his spiritual battle. But Beowulf has already conquered twice, apparently without this equipment, and his previous successes are cogent arguments that the hero was appropriately armed. The reality is that wyrd was with him in his first encounters, but for the last encounter he was "fæge".

The dragon is not a symbol of spiritual evil, and indeed it is to be doubted whether in Beowulf it bears any Christian significance at all. Therefore, I agree with those critics who have argued that the dragon is a symbol of moral evil, representing a number of particular aspects of that evil. Sisam expresses this view:

> Before Beowulf knew why the Dragon was devastating Geatland, he supposed it was a punishment sent by God for some wrong he had done unwittingly (2329ff.); in other words, he regarded the dragon as one of those natural forces - flood, tempest, fire - which from time to time wake and rage to destroy men and their works.[1]

1. Kenneth Sisam, "Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon", p. 133.

DuBois sees the foes of Beowulf as symbols of weakness in the societies in which they appear:

> The dragon story seems to me to be a variation upon the Grendel story, both signifying trouble from internal weaknesses, but the weaknesses seem to me different and to issue from different causes - the dragon was not kin to Cain or sent or allowed by God.[1]

The inherent difficulties in a Christian allegorisation of the dragon are manifest. The point is that such a reading is essentially unnecessary. The dragon is a real creature, as real as any of the forces of chaos in the Anglo-Saxon world : powers of evil which are latent in society, and which can erupt at any time. It is, I feel, particularly appropriate that the specific awakening of this evil is the theft of the cup from the dragon's underground lair. The emergence of the dragon from its lair reinforces its original chthonic nature; moreover, gold is also an age-old motif in the struggle between order and chaos, as the catalyst for the conflict of those forces. When we recall the number of stories in which the quest for gold (the Apples of the Hesperides, the Golden Fleece, the Hoard of the Niebelungs) invokes some form of chaos, either in the awakening of war or the chthonic guardian of the treasure, then it is apparent that early myths contain a lively appreciation of the disruptive effects upon society of wealth: reinforced by the association of the chthonic deities (e.g. Pluto) with the riches of the earth.

1. A.E. DuBois, "The Dragon in Beowulf", p. 822. DuBois goes on to make an oblique suggestion that the dragon is the symbol of civil war.

But at the level of the literal meaning of Beowulf, the dragon is a natural force, like the fire which it brings, and the wind upon which it rides. The symbolism in the poem is inherent in the poet's belief that the dragon was not merely an appropriate way of representing the destructive forces latent in society, but a being as real as the hostile armies mustering beyond the border.

CONCLUSION

The distinction between the central theme of Beowulf and the themes of Anglo-Saxon Christian poetry may be summed up in the words of Spivack:

> The affairs of men and nations, of war and empire; actions associated with honor, patriotism, ambition, familial piety, personal affection; every hope and fear brought on by the vicissitudes of this world - all these, from the uncompromising viewpoint of militant Christianity, were products of the vanity and blindness of paganism. History was still a record of war, of defeat or victory, of valor or cowardice or their consequences - but it was a different history and a different wa: "wars most peaceful, waged for the very peace of the soul" in which "the struggles of the athletes of piety" gained "trophies won from demons, and victories against unseen adversaries, and the crowns at the end of all."[1]

Beowulf differs so radically from the rest of Anglo-Saxon poetry because it is not the product of a Christian mind. The view of evil in the poem is that of a metaphysical dualism, in which man struggles to preserve order in the face of the hostile powers of chaos. The virtues of Beowulf are precisely those which Spivack suggests were viewed by Christians as the products of "the vanity and blindness of paganism". Beowulf is a hero because he achieves success against monstrous enemies which threaten society as a whole. The salvation of his own soul is neither relevant, nor considered by poet or hero.

1. Bernard Spivack, Shakespeare and the Allegory of Evil, p. 76. Spivack is quoting the Church historian Eusebius.

This view of Beowulf has, as we have seen, been tentatively advanced by several scholars, but none have taken the order-chaos theme to its logical conclusion. In a recent essay, Oetgen has gone so far as to suggest that the theme is perfectly compatible with Christian thought:

> It was an otherworldly order, however, which writers from Paul through Augustine and Gregory the Great to Bede preached, so the pagan view that chaos would ultimately prevail on earth was not necessarily antithetical to the faith of the Christian society of Anglo-Saxon England....For the Anglo-Saxons Christian order was otherworldly....[1]

However, as I have shown, the creatures of chaos in Beowulf are not, in any way, compatible with Christian doctrine. Moreover, I am not convinced by Oetgen's bald assertion that "Christian order was otherworldly". It seems to me beyond dispute that Anglo-Saxon Christian literature dealt with a concept of the world in which all aspects of life were firmly ordered and regulated by the Omnipotent. Even Satanic evil was limited by the Word of God. Thus Beowulf, which proposes a triumph of the forces of chaos, in fact contradicts Oetgen's claim that it "in no way denies the validity of Christian orthodoxy".[2] It is profoundly unorthodox, but was not intended to comment upon Christian doctrine, and remains quintessentially pagan.

1. Jerome Oetgen, "Order and Chaos in the World of Beowulf", pp.134-135.
2. Ibid., p. 152.

It is not possible to argue that the *Beowulf*-poet was unacquainted with Christianity. But it is safe to conclude that the story of *Beowulf* had its genesis in pre-Christian times, and that the Christianity of *Beowulf* is, as Blackburn suggested, a "colouring", the result of the working-over by a Christian poet of a well-known pagan heroic tale.

We can, with difficulty, conceive of a Christian writer who, in the same work, completely fails to mention Christ and constructs an elaborate Christian allegory. But no allegorical reading of *Beowulf* has convinced me that the poem has an allegorical dimension at all. Yet if the work is Christian, and not allegorical, why is Christ - or any doctrine drawn from the New Testament - conspicuously absent? I propose that the answer to this dilemma lies in the oral-composition theory.

It seems to me probable that the written poem was dictated by a *scop*, who, though Christian, was a layman who was not in any sense sophisticated in terms of doctrine. Bound by the inherited shape of his tale, the *scop* could not drastically revise the theme of the poem, but he could, and did, modify the role of God in the poem to assert his Christian faith. The scribe in this scenario would have been in no position, in terms of time, to modify the work much beyond the changes wrought by the *scop*. This is, of course, a very tentative hypothesis, but it offers a possibility of resolving the difficulties caused by the fusion of pagan and Christian ideas in the poem.

For it is undeniable that the theme of Beowulf is not Christian. The simple fact is that no Christian writer of the first millenium would have ignored - could have ignored - the dogma of evil which it was heresy to deny.In that dogma, evil is the result of the weakness of mankind, the overpowering demands of the flesh, upon which Satan preys. Yet this evil is overcome by the steadfastness of the individual in his faith, and it is limited by the power of God Almighty, against which no power can stand. Compared to this, the evil forces at large in the Beowulf cosmos are the product of a mind which saw the struggle of good and evil as the consequences of a cosmic dualism. In the thirteenth century, the Albigensian heretics were ruthlessly hunted down for proposing a form of dualism: could a Christian of the eighth or ninth centuries have composed a work in which the monstrous forces of chaos could destroy man and his works while God watched without intervening on behalf of the faithful?

Where is Satan, who haunted the Anglo-Saxon Christian imagination? He is not Grendel, nor his dam, nor yet the dragon in the barrow. These beings spring fully-fledged from pagan folklore, and owe nothing to the Prince of Darkness.

Where are Heaven and Hell? There is no heaven in Beowulf, and Grendel's mere, the landscape of chaos, is a focal point of evil, not a place of punishment for sins.

And where is Christ, whose death on the Cross was the remedy for all the evil in the world? He is not Beowulf, although both are redeemers. Beowulf is a pagan hero, probably the last of the line of those great warriors who risked all for the sake of his personal fame and the order of his world.

Let us read Beowulf on its own, thoroughly pagan, terms. Thus we may avoid the charge laid by Jerome against Origen who:

> ...so allegorizes Paradise as to destroy historical truth, understanding angels instead of trees, heavenly virtues instead of rivers, and he overthrows all that is contained in the history of Paradise by his figurative interpretation.[1]

1. In J. Stevenson (ed.), Creeds, Councils and Controversies, p. 174.

ABBREVIATIONS AND CONTRACTIONS (ii)

ASE	Anglo-Saxon England
CL	Comparative Literature
EETS	Early English Text Society
ELH	Journal of English Literary History
ES	English Studies
Fab	Fabula
Folk	Folklore
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
JAF	Journal of American Folklore
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
Med Aev	Medium Aevum
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
MLR	Modern Language Review
MP	Modern Philology
Neo	Neophilologus
NM	Neuphilologische Mitteilungen
NQ	Notes and Queries
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ	Philological Quarterly
RES o.s; n.s.,	Review of English Studies, old series; new series
Spec	Speculum
TLS	Times Literary Supplement
Trad	Tradition
UTQ	University of Toronto Quarterly

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