

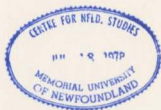
A READING OF BEOWULF

L.D. WHALEN, B.A. (Hons.), M.A.





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L.D. Whalen, B.A. (Hons.), M.A.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English  
Memorial University of Newfoundland  
September, 1989

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ISBN 0-315-65318-3

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ABSTRACT

Beowulf is a study of survival: the survival of the individual, of the race, of the species, and of the human spirit as a transcendent form of the will to continuance and renewal. Because consciousness is integral to human survival, Beowulf must also be a study of human consciousness in conflict with conscious and unconscious forces that threaten its being, as well as in faithful obedience to those forces that promote its potential for becoming.

The dynamic of Beowulf contains the interaction of consciousness with a projection, upon the 'real' world, of forms perhaps inherent in the structure of the human psyche. The power of the conscious mind to repress the contents of the unconscious, forcing them 'underground' or 'underwater,' and the perceived necessity of its doing so, creates the tension that gives rise to the inter-psychic dialectic. The religious tensions of the poem derive from conflicting ideologies, including the subliminal influence of 'pagan' or 'high pagan' (i.e., gnostic) thought. The ideal product of this tension is its resolution through the recreation or transformation of both the individual entity and collective consciousness into a form that transcends apparent limitations, so that the objectives of survival can continue to be met. The real product is the poem itself, as a work of art.

The patterns of behaviour, both actual and symbolic, by which the necessary adaptations, or transformations, of basic

nature are effected, are the materials of this poem. Everything in Beowulf is, from this perspective, symbolic, from the archetypal forms which manifest themselves as patterns or projections of being and action, to the landscape, which impresses itself upon the reader as both an introjection of objective reality and as a projection of subjective perception, to the structures of human consciousness, to the characters encountered by the heroic protagonist.

The eponymous hero is both an archetypal form of consciousness (where he is seen as the agent of the ego) and unconsciousness (where he is understood to be an agent of the 'self'). His primary function is to act for 'good' in opposition to the forces for 'evil' represented by the two monsters and the dragon, who stand for the dangerous and destructive elements of the three primary instincts that form the unifying thematic principle for the discussion: aggression, sexuality, and transformation (or the so-called "religious instinct"). These instinctual occupations, the modes of action in which the hero, Beowulf, like every human being, engages, have psychic as well as physical manifestations and goals. The psychic goal is individuation, or the process of becoming a fully 'realized' individual. The evolutionary stages of the hero represent the development of the individual's consciousness, which must include awareness of his or her own strengths and weaknesses, so that the transformative requirements of individuation may be met.



The whole of Beowulf can be seen as the enactment of the process of individuation. Beowulf, the hero, is, in this analysis, the 'individuant,' who confronts in the monsters and dragon the archetypal projections of his own unconscious, which may, through the structural and formal elements of the poem, be discovered as a driving force, or will, directing the three instincts described by C.G. Jung: the aggressive, the sexual and the religious. The antagonists, in their respective forms as Grendel, the Merewife and the Wyrn, represent the repressed elements of these three primary instincts; Beowulf's battles represent the battles between consciousness and the destructive elements of both the personal and the collective unconscious. The Wyrn, in its aspect of Draca, also stands for the final transformative principle and process that underlies all developmental change.

Apart from its representation of the individual psyche, and in keeping with both the mythopoeic intention of epic poetry and the collective nature of oral poetry, Beowulf also reflects this civilization's evolving humanity, its society, its systems and its psyche, and is, in this sense, a reflection of the collective consciousness and unconsciousness of a human species defined in relation to environmental conditions of seasonal change that includes, in a psychologically significant way, the elemental conditions of ice and snow.

Because the poem is considered to be 'about' the process of psycho-genetic development in the human individual and species,

the pattern of discussion is determined by the elements basic to that process: birth, growth, death and transformation. The special temporal and transcendental function of the hero will be discussed throughout with reference to these thematic factors.

### Acknowledgements

In addition to thanks due to Memorial University of Newfoundland and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for financial assistance during the completion of this dissertation, I would also like to thank: Dr. Mary Ann Ferguson of the University of Massachusetts for her encouragement to continue my study of Beowulf; Dr. G.O. Roberts for his painstaking criticism and helpful instruction over the course of many years; Dr. Peter Harris of the Department of Philosophy for reading Chapters 1, 4, and 5 and offering many constructive suggestions for their improvement; Dr. Helen Peters, who read Chapter 3 and was generous with information and support; Dr. John Leyerle of the University of Toronto for entertaining discussion of the problems and possibilities of Chapter 3; Dr. Patrick O'Flaherty for his friendship and encouragement; Mrs. Cathy Murphy of the English Department; Dr. Richard Ilgner of the Department of German and Russian; Lecturers at the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Oxford; Staff at the Bodleian Library at Oxford and the British Library, London; anonymous public lecturers at the British Museum; and all the scholars whose ideas, explorations and research have illuminated the poem.

Most of all, I wish to express my deep appreciation to Dr. George Story, who has provided an academic climate of freedom and excellence in which to complete my work.

### Abbreviations

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
| <u>CW</u>   | <u>The Collected Works of C.G. Jung</u>                           |
| <u>EB</u>   | <u>Encyclopaedia Britannica</u>                                   |
| <u>ELH</u>  | <u>Journal of English Literary History</u>                        |
| <u>EMS</u>  | <u>Encyclopaedia of Magic and Superstition</u>                    |
| <u>OCCL</u> | <u>Oxford Companion to Classical Literature</u>                   |
| <u>OED</u>  | <u>Oxford English Dictionary</u>                                  |
| <u>OEN</u>  | <u>Old English Newsletter</u>                                     |
| <u>PMLA</u> | <u>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</u> |

## A Reading of BEOWULF

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"Life is a battle, it always has been  
and always will be, and if it were not so,  
existence would soon come to an end."  
Carl Gustav Jung

## Introduction

In keeping with the mythopoeic intention of epic poetry, Beowulf attempts to reflect the hero's evolving humanity and his civilization (its society, its systems and its psyche) and to give expression both to facts of matter (the so-called 'objective' facts as determined by history and science) and to facts of mind (the subjective truths which make themselves known to each individual independent of objective reality, but which are, nevertheless, affirmed by intersubjective experience). Like all products of the human mind in its creative or intuitive function, Beowulf represents the interaction of consciousness with a projection, upon the 'real' world, of forms perhaps inherent in the structure of the human psyche. The power of the conscious mind to repress the contents of the unconscious, forcing them 'underground' or 'underwater,' and the perceived necessity of its doing so, creates the tension that gives rise to the inter-psychic dialectic.

The adaptation of consciousness to its environment is important to the underlying common psychic goal of the collective unconscious, for only by adaptation can the individual, or the race, survive. Beowulf is above all a study in survival: the survival of the individual, of the race, of the species, and of the human spirit as a transcendent form of the will to continuance and renewal. Because consciousness is integral to human survival, Beowulf must also be a study of human



consciousness in conflict with those forces that threaten its being, as well as in faithful obedience to those that promote its potential for becoming.

The patterns of behaviour, both actual and symbolic, by which the necessary adaptations, or transformations, of basic nature are effected, are the materials of this poem. These patterns may themselves be archetypal, in that they may have been set down prior to consciousness by the unconscious. The psychic patterns are projected onto appropriate situations and symbols in the objective world, these symbols become agents acting in a myth that expresses the psychic drama, and these myths are physically re-enacted in some form, whether ritual, natural or artistic, in such a way that the creative and recreative requirements of human being are satisfied. This process has been part of the human condition since pre-history. Primitive peoples enacted imitative rites that served to complete the transition from unconscious mind to conscious "actualization" (The Collected Works of C.G. Jung 12: 129-30); as society advanced, religious ritual served the same function; and as it secularized, the religious experience was transformed or transferred to the artistic sphere, so that what was once religious ritual became drama, as tragoedia, the "goat song" of Dionysian worship, became tragedy. The epic is a form of tragedy.

The epic structure of Beowulf demands the expansion and inclusiveness that establishes it as a vehicle for the representation of humanity's greatest thoughts and actions. As

the psyche, in its power to introject and interpret the objective world and to project its inner reality upon the world of nature, may be said to comprise all that man can know of himself and his world, the epic poem, "a handbook on the continuing struggle towards ego-consciousness" (Foley 1977: 135), may be said to contain all its composer consciously and unconsciously knows of human reality. In Beowulf, reality is represented (as, in fact, it must inevitably be in the world of human perception) by symbols, and everything in the poem is, in this sense, symbolic, from the archetypal forms which manifest themselves as patterns of action, to the landscape, which impresses itself upon the reader as both an introjection of objective reality and as a projection of subjective perception, to the structures of human consciousness represented by Heorot, to the real and symbolic characters encountered by the heroic protagonist.

The evolutionary stages of the hero represent the development of the individual's ego-consciousness, which must include awareness of his or her own strengths and weaknesses. That is a basic premise of this thesis, which will attempt to follow Beowulf through the patterns and activities by which he (as "the individual") comes to terms with himself as a human being, utilizing and transcending his instinctual nature in the final spiritual realization of both conscious and unconscious aims.

The whole of Beowulf can be seen as the enactment of this process. Beowulf, the hero, confronts in the monsters and dragon the archetypal projections of his own unconscious, conceived as a

driving force, or will, directing the three main instincts identified and described by the Swiss psychoanalytical theorist, C.G. Jung: the aggressive, the sexual and the religious. The monsters represent, first of all, the repressed elements of these primary instincts; Beowulf's battles represent the battles between consciousness and the destructive elements of the unconscious.

#### **Structural Organization: the Three Instincts Theory and Binary Opposition in Beowulf**

Beowulf is a representation of individual and collective man in the psycho-physical world. Its three-fold structure (the three battles with three supernatural antagonists) parallels in theme and symbology the struggle of the human individual and society to reconcile this apparently ambivalent condition of human being. The structure of Beowulf is temptingly paralleled by the structure of C.G. Jung's theory of the three human instincts -- aggression, sexuality and religion -- and I have happily succumbed to the temptation of this congruency in constructing the framework of the dissertation.

Tolkien, who advocates a "binary" structural interpretation of Beowulf, and Leyerle, who points to the circularity of the "interlace" structure of the poem may both be 'right' if the poem's paradoxes are considered to represent the transformative process, which may be understood in terms of Jung's explication of the process of enantiodromia, in which the binary opposites

move towards and away from one another. The symbol for infinity --  $\infty$  -- is a visual aid to this understanding; the poem's epic simile puts the dynamic in tactile, physical form. The co-existent forms of youth and age at the beginning and at the end of the poem (Beowulf and Hrothgar; Wiglaf and Beowulf) emphasize the thematic bi-polarity and psychological simultaneity; the wyrmhord symbolically contains the same dynamic possibility. The 'twins effect' (produced by the parallel of Beowulf and Breca) locates the binary in the temporal, physical world; while the circle (suggested by the magic circle in which the treasure is bewunden and the circle made by the warriors as they ride around Beowulf's barrow) stresses the abstract, or metaphysical. It is a part of the poem's intention to represent both worlds, to show them as inter-related, not mutually exclusive. The binary opposites of life and death are interwoven in the poem with the circular motif of transformation by means of the seasonal metaphor expanded in the epic simile.

A trinitarian, Augustinian structural motif of Beowulf, most obvious in the three battles with the three supernatural antagonists, also appears in the poem's three dimensions, which may be compared to the three levels on which human psychic activity takes place -- in the conscious or inter-subjective world of society (Heorot, where Beowulf battles Grendel); in the 'underworld' of the unconscious (the underwater cave, where Beowulf struggles with Grendel's mother); and in a supra-conscious realm of awareness that provides the crucible for

transformation (Earnanaes, the battlefield on which Beowulf meets the Dragon). This last field of action may be compared to Jung's "middle ground," which may be understood in terms of the Anglo-Saxon middangeard, the human world of precarious balance between absolutely antipathetic contraries, which may itself be compared to Midgard, the Norse human world, located in or on a thin membrane between the extremities of fire and ice that comprise the Norse universe. This study also wishes to point to a four-fold, quaternary pattern implicit on the battlefield at Earnanaes and in the ubiquitous seasonal metaphor (which, although it only appears once, underlies all dimensions of the poem). All of these numerological elements had meaning in both gnostic ('high pagan') and Christian theosophy, and it might be possible to contend that the poet intended that meaning to be implicit in the components of the poem.

Because the poem, from the point of view of this reading, is considered to be 'about' the process of psychogenetic development in the human individual and species, the pattern of discussion is determined by the elements basic to that process: birth, growth, death and transformation.

Birth, or 'genesis,' relates to the origins of the poem, its protagonist, and the individuals or society that produced them. Chapter I, "The Genesis of the Hero," will discuss these elements and identify the hero as an archetypal form of consciousness (where the hero is seen as the agent of the ego) and unconsciousness (where he is understood to be an agent of the

'self'). His primary function is understood to be to act for 'good' in opposition to the forces for 'evil,' thus introducing the factor of morality into subsequent discussion. Symbolic representations of the duality that arises out of such a fundamental split in conscious perception abound in the many binary oppositions of Beowulf, but are most clearly polarized in two major symbols: the great hall, Heorot, which symbolizes the material world constructed by consciousness, and the fyr on flode, "fire on the water" of the dreadful mere, which is a major symbol of the whole psyche, containing in structurally authentic proportions the 'fire of consciousness' and the 'water of unconsciousness' and representing in its totality the poet's structural preoccupation with 'binary opposites' or antinomies, a recurring motif of the poem. A further literary element to be considered in this chapter is the word lofgeornost, "most eager for praise," which will be discussed with reference to the concept of the libido, out of which, it is contended, arise the three primary growth instincts that form the unifying thematic principle for the following chapters on aggression, sexuality and religion in Beowulf. These instinctual occupations are the modes of action in which the hero, Beowulf, like every human being, engages. The special temporal and transcendental function of the hero will be discussed throughout with reference to these thematic factors.

Chapter II, "The Angenga and Aggression in Beowulf," will focus upon Beowulf's first great battle with the angenga, "the

aggressor" (Trautmann), Grendel, who is seen as the personification of negative aggression, action for evil rather than good, the archetypal Shadow of the warrior ethos. In this connection, morality is considered to arise from the biological necessity to justify or control the aggressive drive.

Chapter III, "The Merewif and Sexuality in Beowulf," considers Beowulf's second battle, with the monstrous mother of Grendel, to be the enactment of confrontation with the archetypal female principle. Male and female images in warrior society are discussed in terms that understand both to be constructs of the masculine mind. The Merewife is interpreted as an archetypal entity, the Great Mother, focus of the Oedipal conflict, and the battle interpreted as a sexual encounter. The hero's accomplishment (or failure) is examined with reference to the position of women in the warrior world and the image of the woman mourner in Beowulf.

In Chapter IV, "The Wyrm and Religion in Beowulf," the third and final supernatural battle of Beowulf with the fire dragon is interpreted to represent the ego's final confrontation with the manifest reality of death, the knowledge of which is said to have forced the emergence of a peculiarly human 'instinct,' or function, the so-called "religious instinct" (Jung). The religious element of the poem is seen as multi-perspective because of the exigencies of the oral tradition, which reflects above all a collective process, but an attempt is made in this chapter to identify the authorial voice. The religious quest,

seen as a journey in search of psychic unity (individuation) is considered in terms of its implications for the society of Beowulf, with the collectivity of the religious experience emphasized. The religious function as, essentially, a transformative one, underlying all discussion of symbols of good and evil in Beowulf, anticipates the preoccupations of the final chapter.

Chapter V, "Patterns and Symbols of Transformation in Beowulf," constitutes an attempt to make sense of the transcendent transformative processes previously discussed in their temporal phases. It proceeds from the point of view of the evolutionary necessity of psychological adaptation and psychic individuation and focuses particularly upon the transformations of the hero in both the individual and the collective psyche. Discussion is pursued with reference to the psycho-physical positioning of Beowulf at Earnaness, the "middle ground" of conflict between Beowulf and the dragon, which constitutes the meeting of the opposites on the final battlefield and culminates in the achievement of a symbolic transcendence; the function of symbol formation is explored with reference to the primary symbols of binary opposites in the poem: fire and water; gold and iron; light and darkness; and protagonist and antagonist. The exploration ends with a consideration of the tension maintained in the poem in relation to the possibility for immortality as opposed to the prospect of annihilation, and the necessity to



maintain faith as a principle of survival in the war between hope and despair.

### **The Critical Perspective**

The writings of the Swiss psychoanalytical theorist, C.G. Jung, as well as his foremost interpreter in the field of literary studies, Maud Bodkin, are basic to the perspective advanced in this dissertation, as are the writings of St. Paul, to whom both Jung and the Beowulf poet fundamentally referred. The study hopes to provide, not so much a unique insight into the materials of the manuscript, as a synthesis, through application of an eclectic perspective to the collective materials of the poem, that expressess something of the Northern Germanic consciousness, a consciousness defined in relation to a landscape of ice and snow, as illuminated in this surviving work from the first millennium A.D. and as reflected in a second millennium descendant.

From a critical perspective, one of the most liberating aspects of working with Beowulf is the fact that both the manuscript and the language are archaic and must therefore be decoded. As Kevin Kiernan points out in Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript (1981), there are many emendations, erasures and even completely illegible words in the Cotton Vitellius MS, and these ambiguities have necessarily opened the way to various, often radically contradictory interpretations of lines and meanings. This fact greatly adds to a feature of the poem that particularly

interests me, its collectivity. I assume, for the purposes of this dissertation, that Beowulf is not, and cannot be, the work of only one mind, although it is still possible within the framework of this analysis to imagine (as I do) that the original composition was the work of one individual. When I say 'composition,' I am thinking in a structural sense: the decision to tell this particular story in this particular order, including certain elements -- such as, for example, the symbols and the digressions -- for a particular artistic purpose.

Despite the intriguing possibilities of Kiernan's revolutionary hypothesis, which has the poet as the writer, there is sufficient argument for an earlier dating to permit the more conventional assumption that the manuscript was copied by two scribes from a much earlier source. The (perhaps) original manuscript might have provided problems for its scribes similar to those experienced by analysts attempting to identify the true nature of our own source. What Kiernan considers authorial emendations may simply be second thoughts on the part of the scribes, or attempts to fill in some blanks from memory. In any case, I do not share these textual concerns; for my purposes, the fact that so many individuals had a hand in Beowulf, changing, erasing, emending, transliterating, translating, interpreting and analysing, only makes the document with which this dissertation is engaged more universal, more representative, more a reflection of man qua man, than the work of any one individual, however gifted, could possibly be. The Beowulf considered here, whether

in facsimile, transliteration, edition or translation (poetic or prosaic) is, not so simply, a composite of collective minds spanning a period of at least fifteen hundred years.

The argument of this thesis does not so much depend upon the dating of the poem as upon its form, structure and symbolic content. Etymological interpretations offered are, for this reason, rather more naturalist than conventional and may outrage the strict sensibilities of the true philologist. Indeed, I cannot claim to be a 'true' anything, except, perhaps, a true eclectic.

While the principles and perspectives applied to this reading of Beowulf are eclectic, however, they are not random. The mode of analysis evolved out of an interest in comparative mythology and Jungian psychology, which seemed to offer a systematic method of approaching some of the meanings of a poem dealing not only with a mythic or legendary hero but also with the concerns and condition of man-in-the-world. Needless to say, these basic 'frames' proved to be motifs in a complex pattern that, as John Leyerle has suggestively noted in "The Interlace Structure of Beowulf," parallels the interlace pattern of Anglo-Saxon art. Connective links with such frames of interpretation as philosophy and physics, anthropology and archaeology, seem natural to any study of the epic, whether primary or secondary. Major difficulty has been met in trying to separate out those strands, and I am not at all sure that this has been done. On

the other hand, neither am I certain that this was entirely desirable.

Another basic premise of this analysis contends that there are contexts in which it is not necessary (and may be counter-productive) to limit philological discussion to those formal relationships between words which either can be, or have been established, and one of the most important of these contexts is the study of, or response to poetry, where echoes and phonetic or allophonetic associations are part of the meaning of the poem.

The poet Spenser, writing his medieval-Renaissance epic, The Faerie Queen, used words in what analysts call a 'naturalist' mode; he created and recreated his vocabulary from this perspective, bringing words together in new formations and relationships that extended their old meanings, overturned their current meanings and created new meanings. Spenser would not have seen this process as artificial; in fact, quite the opposite. He seems to have believed that words had original meanings, real meanings perhaps in the manner of Plato's forms, that needed to be "retrieved" in order for truth and moral balance to be restored. K.K. Ruthven wrote of Spenser's etymology that the poet used words in such a way as to indicate his deliberate intent: "To retrieve the etymons would be to repair the original bond between words and things" (Ruthven 506). Spenser applied this precept to personal names as well, intuiting that names not only have intrinsic meaning but are "prognosticatory" (Ruthven 507), that is, that they can cause a person to become a certain

kind of character as well as reflect that person's nature. This intuition is of great importance to the study of Beowulf, because the names all have particular meaning (as, indeed, names do in popular culture today; they are often not chosen lightly by people naming their progeny or even their pets, and the progeny, at least, once apprised of it, in many cases internalize the contents of the meaning and often assume, or adopt, the explicit characteristic). This understanding of the nature and meaning of words and their effect upon conscious understanding and behaviour was one of Spenser's great contributions to the English language and psyche.

One can, perhaps, assume that the poet of Beowulf was not a lexicographer or a linguist, although he may have been, like Spenser, an etymologist. Perhaps one can (perhaps one must) assume that a poem, particularly a poem such as Beowulf, which has no identifiable author and not even a certainly identifiable time and place, is an entirely independent entity, containing its own intrinsic, arcane, necessarily artificial internal logic and meaning, which, far from being unrelated to its language, is absolutely bound up and contained within that language. In this sense, as in a more objective, semiotic sense, words are symbols, and open to expansion of meaning.

For reasons not unconnected to this critical hypothesis, some readers might find in this dissertation an objectionable tendency to reification, to treating the poem as a real entity, the hero as a real being, the *Wieland* as a real world, the ideas as real

facts. Immersion in the imaginary world of the poem, which seems a desirable effect of a work of art on its perceiver, is, nevertheless, defensible as a function of the religious/artistic instinct, which permits and, indeed, encourages, such reification in the creation and concretization of religious symbols.

This perspective has another effect, and that is to demand speculation. In certain parts of this thesis, I am dealing with an attempted approach which must, by the very nature of the subject be in part speculative, not demonstrable in the terms of traditional, conventional, historical criticism. Such elements as the 'digression' on Gnosticism (Chapter 4) are offered as heuristic devices which might perhaps prove helpful in approaching some of the deeper meanings of the poem, and are hopefully justified by the fact that digressions are at least in the spirit of the poem from a formal standpoint.

In literary criticism, as with all 'scientific' or systematic structures, the language and patterns perceived represent entirely the sense that inter-subjective consciousness has managed to make out of what must ultimately be acknowledged as a product of conscious and unconscious processes. The work of art is transcendent in that it opens the "doors of perception" onto worlds and states of being which may exist outside the borders of temporal conscious awareness, by recreating symbolic objects and processes in a form in which consciousness may participate without needing to be fully cognizant of either the methods or the ultimate purpose. It is partially for this reason

that the true creative work, whether that work is a poem, such as Beowulf, or a life, such as the variously recorded and imagined life of Christ, exercises a compelling power over the minds and hearts of all who contemplate it.

# 1 THE GENESIS OF THE HERO

## "Beowulf is min nama"

The eponymous hero of the Old English Beowulf used his own name only twice in the course of the poem: before his initial meeting with Hrothgar, king of the Scyldings (343) and before his final meeting with death (2807). In both cases, the effect is to highlight an essentially subconscious intent, to impart a sense of the hero's keen awareness of his individuality, his uniqueness as an atheling aergod, "outstanding lord" (2343) and to signal his determination to affirm and retain his identity up to -- and even, as symbolized by the pagan immortality of his beorg, "barrow," beyond -- death. In this endeavor, as in his words, Beowulf displayed his defining self-awareness and revealed an ontological integrity that enabled him to act in and for his world. Above all, he displayed his pride, a fundamental quality of the heroic figure.

Pride, the ego's weapon and curse in an incomprehensible cosmos that might seem to negate human self-affirmation and deny any sense of meaning and value, is the quality that enables Beowulf to stand uppriht, "upright (2092), to claim the rewards



of his success and accept the responsibilities of his failure, to identify his being with the being of God and to define himself, in action and reflection, as a hero. At the same time, as Hrothgar warned Beowulf, this essential heroic quality is most vulnerable to extreme expression, or perversion, and can easily become ofermod or oferhygd, "arrogance" or hubris. It can then lead to the downfall of the hero.

Heroes, tragic or triumphant, are the personification of man's highest possibilities in a world seen as a battleground, and as every battleground demands its own kind of heroism, the figure of the hero is determined by, and undergoes change and development in response to, his interaction with the objective world. Nevertheless, there are certain universal constants that mythology, legend and history have entrenched in the collective mind of humanity as intrinsic to the heroic figure.

The myth of the hero, like that of the gods, is integral to the psycho-history of any civilization. Leaving aside the argument that the gods themselves may have evolved out of myths of more ancient heroes (in a pattern to be suggested in Chapter IV), the heroes of primary epics such as The Iliad and The Odyssey, and, perhaps, Beowulf as well, can be thought to have arisen through the collective activities of several outstanding men of the same 'type,' men who displayed qualities of character and prowess particularly valued by the societies that produced them. Stories of heroic exploits performed by several such individuals might, over the course of time, collect around the

name of one particular man, and in this sense the hero is both an individual and a collective entity.

The heroic field of action, like that of the non-heroic, has three main levels: the physical, the social, and the psychic. The first realm consists in the hero's action itself, and its material result. The second level, the human milieu in which the action takes place, is often the cause of the action or materially influences its outcome and its interpretation, and yet this realm in many ways serves a symbolic function, permitting the individual to act out the deeper reality intuited to lie below the surface of conscious awareness, in the unconscious, psychic dimension, which Jung has defined most poetically as "an acting and suffering subject with an inner drama that primitive man rediscovers by way of analogy in the processes of nature both great and small" (1939: 56). The hero may be unaware of these psychic processes; nevertheless, his pattern of action derives from, and uncovers, the unconscious part of his being, and to the extent that this is the case, this behaviour is predetermined, imprinted upon the heroic individual as a cumulative, archetypal pattern that is his by destiny.

### The Hero Motif

The first dimension in which the hero is defined is the physical world, or the world of action, and in this realm his primary function is salvation, both individual and collective. On the one hand, he enacts the pattern of behaviour necessary to secure salvation, whether physical or mystical, in the personal sphere; on the other, he enacts this role on behalf of his society, in the physical and the metaphysical realms. His evolutionary or transformative stages represent stages in the development of ego-consciousness, which strives for awareness and control of its own strengths and weaknesses in order to advance development, not only for himself but, as Beowulf says, for minum leodum, "my people," the nation or race. This implies that the hero has the power to change some fundamental aspect of physical or psychic reality, a basic premise of this thesis, which will attempt to follow Beowulf through some of the patterns and activities by means of which he, as an archetypal hero, comes to terms with himself as a human being, utilizes and transcends his lower, instinctual nature in the final spiritual realization of both conscious and unconscious aims, and transmits this bio-psychic knowledge to others of his race so that the transformative requirements of psychic and cultural evolution might be fulfilled. Needless to say, the quest for collective advancement or individual completion in a form Jung has termed the "self" (1939: 96) is not undertaken by every individual, for

the strife is, as the assaults of Grendel were said to have been, to strang/ lað ond longsum, "too strong, hateful and long-lasting" (133-34).

In psychological terms, the hero is "an archetype of the personal ego in its struggle for maturity and individuation" (Henderson 110). He enacts cycles of behaviour that are themselves archetypal, in that they institute processes necessary to the realization of basic psychic goals; yet, these goals alter in both definition and direction in accordance with the needs of his society and his essential self as the heroic protagonist approaches a final resolution. The mature stage of the archetype, called the "old wise man" (Fordham 60), is attained after a lifetime of activity which, in essential detail, follows a well-documented pattern.

The pattern of the hero motif as it occurs throughout literature and mythology has been shown by Joseph L. Henderson to contain certain physical or 'factual' features common to all human cultural traditions. These include: the humble or miraculous birth; the possession of superhuman strength; a rise to a position of power or prominence; a pride that becomes hubris; and, finally, a fall, through either betrayal or sacrifice, resulting in his death (110). To this list may be added the hero's defining willingness to risk his personal security in battle with the forces of evil.

Ample evidence of Beowulf's traditional or mythic status as a hero is provided in the epic poem. His questionable origins,

as the son of a king's daughter and an outlaw in a foreign land (459-64) and his undistinguished youth (2183b-88a) are mentioned particularly, while Hrothgar's none-too-subtle reminder of his father's debt (470-72) reinforces the impression that Beowulf, like King Alfred, who was said to suffer constantly from fear of his own shortcomings and from "physical disorders of a gross kind" (Brooke 104), had certain inherent disadvantages to overcome. That he nevertheless had certain advantages is also made clear, though, unlike Alfred, his obvious talents lay more in the physical than the mental exercise. His early display of strength and prowess in the contest with Breca and his established reputation as moncynnes magesen strengest/on þæm dæge þisses lifes, "the strongest man in might at that time in this world" (196-97), attest to Beowulf's superhuman strength. By this, he rose to a position of prominence as athane of Higelac, distinguished himself in battle against the Grendel kin and later, on his own merits, achieved his society's highest position as king of the Geats. His pride is revealed not only in his self-affirmation, but also in his boasting, his willingness to challenge any adversary, his devastating defence of his reputation against the charges of Unferth, as well as in his refusal to back down from his final battle with the fyrgwyrn; this pride became hubris with his killing of Daeghrefn, or Dayraven. His final self-sacrifice for minum leodum "my people" (2797, 2804) -- after betrayal by his closest thanes -- led to

his exemplary death in conflict with an archetypal form of evil and to a fame that has lasted for fifteen hundred years.

### Heroic Action in the Warrior World

A primary form of action undertaken by the hero, apart from the life cycle which is his by destiny, is a type of experience known as the rebirth pattern. The rebirth pattern, or, as Maud Bodkin, affirming the experiential nature of archetypes, has termed it, the "Rebirth Archetype" (1934: 61; 241) may be repeated several times, either actually or symbolically, throughout the heroic lifetime. The major functional and situational motif of psyche, this pattern involves the heroic protagonist in a process of katabasis, a descent into the 'underworld' of the unconscious (such as that undertaken by Hercules), most vividly represented in Beowulf by the hero's descent into the dismal mere. The process includes such motifs as: a sense of tension or suspension between opposites, as suggested by the juxtaposition of fire and water which recurs throughout the poem (most dramatically in the description of the fyr on flode, "fire on the water" of the mere itself); the sacrifice of an animal (and Beowulf does kill one of the serpents before entering the lake); a meeting with dangerous animals (represented by the nicoras) which may symbolize the animal instincts of the human unconscious; and an eventual breakthrough,

a victory that signifies a conquest of the dark powers within and outside the mind.

Characterized by the descent-ascent motif, with its psychological implication of this conquest, the rebirth pattern is thought to lead to a transformation in the psyche of the protagonist, in which certain apparently paradoxical and irreconcilable elements are experientially resolved on a symbolic level that is accessible to conscious or subconscious apprehension. The serpents that attack Beowulf in the water; the fire which burns on the surface and in the depths; the cave, in which the mythic battle takes place; and the cross, which suggests itself as the magic sword with which Beowulf finally prevailed, are all early symbols of psychic transformation. The magic sword can also represent the power of the unknown force conceived as the soul, by which the human being is perceived to be empowered and raised above and beyond animal nature.

A passage through or over water is another recurring element of the rebirth archetype that appears in Beowulf's journey to the Merewife's cave. The classic representation of this archetypal pattern is the thematic image in the story of Jonah and the whale, in which Leviathan's belly may be seen as an underwater cavern. The Aeneid, too, represents the underworld as a subterranean cave reached by means of water, the four rivers of hell; in the Odyssey, there is one river, the Styx. In the approach to this realm of experience, the slaying of a beast (perhaps symbolizing the animal identification of human nature)

is required. Both Odysseus and Aeneas had to sacrifice an animal before they could enter the underworld (Odyssey 11, Aeneid 6). In Beowulf, this ritual sacrifice was also performed by the hero (1432b-36), providing the essential 'religious' element.

These symbolic activities are then followed by a confrontation and an ascent which, according to Jung, indicates a transcendence to a higher level of awareness and, ultimately, a transformation from one stage of being to another (CW 18: 483-84).

These are the elements which, because they are universally present in so many different mythologies, are not determined by a personal or changing consciousness and may be said to arise from another, more 'permanent' basis, the collective unconscious, to form a prototype of the hero as a particular form of psychic being and action that derives from the matrix of the unconscious.

Apart from its existence in archetypal form as the manifestation of unconscious psychic activity, the figure of the hero as saviour exists on the conscious level as a product of society and the conscious mind. The hero, in this sense, is one who rises in answer to a conscious social need or desire for salvation. The need to be saved is intrinsic to the vulnerable condition of humanity, and Beowulf is a hero in legend primarily because he was one who could save other men when they could not save themselves. The saviour rescues men from death and the fear of death by facing it with body and mind (soul) and, in some physical and metaphysical way, foiling it. His importance to his



society thus takes on a religious significance (see Chapter IV). The hero, although acting primarily for good as defined by his society, must, in a final phase, transcend his society and act for the deepest good within himself and in this way be a lesson to his world.

### **Beowulf's Social Milieu**

Beowulf was a hero to his society because he consciously and consistently fulfilled and surpassed conventional social expectations of the heroic figure, and these expectations were affirmed by his ego, the centre of his own field of consciousness, in accordance with the ideals of the Germanic society he represents. It is necessary to make this race distinction because, although Western man's collective idea of a hero is intrinsically the same, certain phylogenetic attributes differ. The great heroes of classical mythology are as different in some ways as they are alike in others, for reasons which derive from the types of societies that produced them as well as from the minds of their creators and the artistic forms through which they receive their being. The superconsciously dutiful virtues of Aeneas may be said to differ from the cool obsessions of Odysseus as the values of Imperial Rome differed from those of Ancient Greece, as Virgil differed from Homer and, it might be said, as the secondary epic differs from the primary epic in both

form and content. Aeneas may be said to be more the creation of Virgil than of the Volksgeist not only because of Virgil's conscious, 'artificial' reconstruction of Greek myth but also because a single author is presumed for the literary epic, while more than one author may (some might say must) be presumed for the primary epic. In the case of Beowulf, it is possible to make a case for the poem as both a primary and a secondary epic; to presume an older version, either oral or written; to postulate the imposition of a later, didactic Christian consciousness upon older material; and to propose the possibility of scribal interpolation upon an original primary or secondary epic poem. Without being too much distracted by this line of inquiry, it is suggested that a synthesis is possible which would reflect the collective nature of both oral and written epic poetry by asserting, well within conventional lines, that Beowulf, in the form that we have it, is a primary epic in the sense that it draws upon existing folk materials from divergent sources, but that a single, Christian author may be deduced from the organic integrity of the poem, which exhibits consistent and cumulative patterns or motifs of Christian metaphor, imagery and symbolism. Didactic scribal interpolations remain a possibility within the literary scope of the manuscript, and this possibility, like its origins in the oral folk tradition, adds to the collective appeal of the poem, which may then be felt to represent not only collective consciousness and unconsciousness in the oral formulae but also a collective superconsciousness in the didactic

overtones. In keeping with collective scholarly opinion on the tradition of the poem, it is contended that the environment into which Beowulf was projected displayed manifestations of the Christo-heroic Weltanschauung and, as the major heroic figure of his milieu, he incorporates elements of the Teutonic hero with qualities of heroism exemplified by Christ and His followers. Despite Bernard Huppé's contention that "Beowulf is a hero who lacks Christ and reveals that the heroic in itself is empty" (1975: 23), it seems rather that Beowulf exemplifies the heroic qualities of Christ and demonstrates the way in which these qualities are within the potential of every human being, pagan or Christian.

Conceived in the mater natura of Germanic consciousness, the Anglo-Saxon tribes inherited their ideals of heroism through their stories and songs and perhaps, as well, through genetic information imprinted upon their race memory or collective unconscious.<sup>1</sup> An actual genealogical connection was established in Asser's Life of King Alfred [not, as Christopher Brooke (1963) points out, that this connection was remotely authentic (16) but it at least illustrates the desire on the part of the West Saxons

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of bio-psychic transmission of knowledge does not seem to have been entirely inconceivable to the Anglo-Saxons, some of whom may have been familiar with Augustine's tract, De Trinitate, in which he contemplated the nature of mind and, echoing Plato, suggested that the mind may "know some most excellent end, viz, its own security and transcendence by some hidden remembrance which has not abandoned it, though it has gone far onward and cannot attain to that same end unless it know itself" (137). A fine structuralist statement, as well, if anachronism may be excused as a function of synchronicity.

to trace their racial heritage through the Germanic -- and Hebraic -- line] from Alfred back through many of the heroes that figure in Beowulf, including Ingeld (Beowulf's contemporary and the husband of Freawaru in the poem), Brond (ancestor of the Brondings), Finn (husband of the tragic Hildeburh), Geat (from whom Beowulf's people took their name), and even Beaw, thought to be the mysterious Beowulf of the Scyldings who appears at the beginning of the poem (18, 53) to confuse undergraduates, as well as "Sceldwea" (Brooke 75), who may have been the Scyld of Beowulf, and the violent Heremod, subject of Hrothgar's moral monologue. From either the conscious or unconscious perspective, an Anglo-Saxon epic poem about a Scandinavian hero, far from representing the imposition of an alien culture upon a conquered people, proves faithful to the racial origins of the people who formed its audience and documents the interlaced history, legend and cultural evolution of the Viking and Anglo-Saxon peoples. In doing this it fulfils a basic function of epic poetry, which is to record the historical and psychic development of the nation out of which it emerges.

The Anglo-Saxon language and culture had reached a penultimate stage in the time the extant manuscript of Beowulf is thought to have been written, if it is accepted as dating from the eleventh century after the flowering of Anglo-Saxon culture under the auspices of Alfred the Great. The ultimate moment arrived with the coming of the Normans and the Battle of Hastings in A.D. 1066, when the Armageddon the Anglo-Saxons had been

expecting since the turn of the first millennium (Wilson 1980: 41) effectively occurred, at least in a linguistic and, therefore, from a semiotic point of view, a psychic sense. The small body of Old English literature that remains of what R.M. Wilson (1952) projects to have been a substantial volume of written texts is our only real entrance to the artistic and intellectual attainments of a society that, for all intents and purposes, is now extinct. From these materials, it is possible to draw conclusions about the social structures, relationships and, most importantly, the spirit of the time, the place, and the people. This study does not intend to break new ground in this area; its aim is to focus upon the archetypal patterns and processes of ontogenetic and phylogenetic evolution contained in the epic poem as a record of, in John M. Foley's phrase, "the continuing process of ego-development" (1977: 35). However, one hypothesis advanced by Jung in one of his famous 'throwaway lines' that seems relevant to this process is his statement that, in contrast to today's largely desymbolized society, "Alfred the Great lived the symbolic life about two-thirds of the time."

The society depicted in Beowulf, as well as the earlier Germanic society which gave rise to the idea of Beowulf as an archetypal hero and the Anglo-Saxon society that continued to celebrate his heroism, did engage in naturally symbolic behaviour, the meaning and importance of which was probably neither questioned nor analyzed. The manner in which their myths

and legends were related, chanted, as they were, by scopas in a social setting, ensured a collectivity of experience that validated communal ideals and allowed for an almost direct expression of unconscious ideas. When the poem finally made the transition from the oral to the written tradition, the basic symbolic material and some of the oral formulae were doubtless already established. In Beowulf and its Analogues (1968), Garmonsway and Simpson have shown that Beowulf as a heroic figure had a basis in tradition and that the Grendel monster fights were known to the audience of Beowulf. The dragon is, of course, a universal archetype, and its manifestation in Beowulf is sufficiently allusive to permit identification with the Scandinavian Fafnir, the Midgard serpent of Norse mythology or even, perhaps, the prototype of St. George's arch-foe, which harks back to the serpent in the Garden of Eden. These tales might originally have been told separately, the unification of theme provided by the writer, who may or may not have been the first to integrate the Christian motif, first noted by the transcriber, Thorkelin (Haarder 14), into the poem.

It is clear from such speculation and from the diversity of academic scholarship centered upon the poem that the origins -- linguistic, psychic or poetic -- of Beowulf continue to be problematic, and not least among the problems are the basic questions of time and place. Traditionally, with reference to C.L. Wrenn's edition of the poem, to Colin Chase's anthology, The Dating of Beowulf, and to the Roberts translation (1984), I have

accepted Beowulf as an eighth century Anglo-Saxon poem about sixth century Scandinavia copied in the early eleventh century by two monks in a West Saxon monastery. This statement is not intending to overlook possibilities that the work was originally written earlier, or later (Kiernan 1981), at Aldfrith's court (Cook 343) or the court of Cnut the Great (Kiernan 63), or was copied at Ethelred's insistence (Wrenn 15) or was from the oral tradition (everyone) or was an original written composition, or an anthology (Magoun 1958: 100) that it was originally one poem, or two (Kiernan 171) or three (Brodeur 3)...the speculation continues to be as spirited as any assailed by Professor Tolkien in his refreshing (though maligned) defence of the manuscript as deriving its true value from its physical existence as a piece of poetry (273).

I stand with Professor Tolkien; to say it is poetry is perhaps enough -- the objective then might be to understand its poetic design, rather than to chase after 'real world' co-ordinates. This is not to suggest that Beowulf should be viewed independently of its milieu, but merely that it may be so viewed without invalidating any other viewpoint. However, it is certainly true that any discussion of society in the context of Beowulf must acknowledge the difference between the world of the poem and the world of the poet, as well as between Beowulf's world and the Iron Age world it was patterned upon because, as Lascelles Abercrombie has said, "an epic is not even a re-creation of old things, but altogether a new creation... in terms

of old things" (16). Beowulf's world was not the real Viking world, but a reconstruction of what the poet imagined or had heard that world was like. Beowulf's world is contained, as far as we know, in the 3182 lines of his epic. On the other hand, to understand where Beowulf himself came from, we must look at the poet and his society, for, although Abercrombie maintained that "poetry is the work of poets, not of peoples or communities," and "artistic creation can never be anything but the production of an individual mind" (22), it seems possible that Beowulf breaks out of this limitation to some extent. This possibility is arguable by virtue of the possibility that the manuscript was copied, perhaps many times over, by religious men gifted, perhaps, with a flair for Anglo-Saxon verse, who may have been inclined to add something of their own to it; as well as by the oral formulae, which the poet inherited from his tradition and which reflects a particular mind, not his own, entirely, but having become his own through affirmation; and, finally, by the transliterators, who were forced to reconstruct words and passages obliterated, ironically enough, by the poem's own defining elements, fire and water. In this sense, the world contained in the text of Beowulf necessarily includes the Anglo-Saxon consciousness of the poet, which may be seen as the product of transformations in the consciousness of the Teutonic haeled whose actions form the subject matter of the poem; and it also has its own, almost independent being as an entity capable of being affected by the actions and consciousness of others. The



hero, Beowulf, therefore represents the heroic manifestation of the Germanic collective consciousness as well as a projection of the poet's own conscious and unconscious ideals, and it is in this mode that the psychic level of action in Beowulf is interpreted.

### **The Hero's Psychic Battlefield**

Perhaps because the dialectic of opposing philosophical perspectives provides both movement and continuity in cultural development, the imagined society depicted in Beowulf may have seemed to the society of the poet as the poet's own society is imagined by those who study it today -- in many ways extremely 'primitive,' but with certain universal constants having to do with the basic nature of our human being and our world. In the poem itself, these truths are uncovered through the actions of the hero, Beowulf, in his existential poetic function as the archetypal hero of both his own, and the poet's, time.

The archetype is a psychic entity that has evolved out of "numberless experiences of the same type" (Bodkin 1934: 1) and the hero is an archetype of the collective unconscious. To the extent that the idea of the hero as a possible form of psychophysical being and action inhabits the unconscious of all men and women, the possibility of heroic action may seem attainable by all individuals. It therefore exists in the personal unconscious

as an ideal to which all might aspire. When this ideal form of human being is consciously sought by a person of outstanding physical and mental capacities, the archetypal hero may be realized (i.e. 'made real') in action, and this, perhaps, is the dynamic that may have produced the man or men who gave rise to the myth of Beowulf.

To identify Beowulf as an archetypal hero is to recognize that he acts on both the conscious and the unconscious planes. On both levels, his action requires an objective, as well as an opposing force or forces. These conditions of conflict can easily be seen to be met in the universe of consciousness through the opposition of objective beings; but in order to represent conflict in the unconscious realm it becomes necessary to postulate the existence of inner entities with which the heroic spirit and consciousness may interact. These entities are the archetypes of the collective unconscious, consisting in impulses, desires, urges, ideas and, in their more malevolent form, obsessions or compulsions to which the human consciousness must respond and over which it must often gain control in order to proceed creatively, rather than destructively, with the life cycle. Symbols, "the living facts of life" (CW 18: 249), are a way of representing these drives or ideas, which cannot by any other means be assimilated by the conscious mind; but these entities are also forms of possible being, capable of becoming real, objective beings through action: when an unconscious will to hatred and destruction is expressed, for example, the human

being could become a terrorist, a Grendel, just as the expression of an unconscious will to love and creativity might give rise to a Christ or a Beowulf.

The function of myth, the "primordial language natural to the unconscious psychic processes" (CW 12: 25), may be to present to the conscious mind symbolic patterns and projections which, though antecedent to consciousness, must nevertheless be assimilated by it in order for individuation, the unconscious psychological goal of the individual, to take place. The taboos of primitive cultures and the rituals of religious ones serve to give symbolic expression to many of the urges of the unconscious, without the necessity of conscious understanding or assent. It seems that, as long as the unconscious drama can unfold in symbolic action, the integrity of the psychic organism is protected and society, or the social organism, is not threatened.

Recognizing the dual nature of the human world, the interdependence of its conscious and unconscious realities, and translating his ancestor, Goethe, Jung has said "All that is outside is also inside," (1972: 35) and there is a sense, suggested by this statement and by a view of the epic as "a form of art continually responding to the needs of man's developing consciousness" (Bodkin 241), in which the poem, Beowulf, stands for the dual nature of the whole man. Everything in the poem, from the supernatural forms and real people Beowulf meets to the landscape and elemental conditions in which he moves, represents a part of the psychic universe that corresponds to the physical

universe in which he lives; these elements combine to form the totality of Beowulf's psycho-physical being as it interacts with the material universe.

The universe is perceived by human beings through a process of development and self-definition to be subjective and inter-subjective, or collective, but it is also demonstrably objective in that other entities, whether material or spiritual, are understood to exist with or without a necessary connection to the subject. Man's own individual being is similarly understood to be objective in that man has a body that exists in this world of matter and of other entities. In Pauline theology, to which, it is my contention, both Jung and the Beowulf poet fundamentally refer, this subject-object relationship extends to the inner man as well. St. Paul's understanding of human being centers upon the idea that man has a relationship not only to other men and to a transcendental entity called God, but also to himself. He is both subject and object of his own existence and can, therefore, act upon himself, either to abuse or to master himself. For Paul, the importance of consciousness in human destiny seems to derive from the existential possibilities of this choice: man can choose to be at one with himself (and therefore, it seems, with God) by mastering his more purely animal nature; or he can choose to be estranged from himself and from God, and therefore in a state of "sin," which he describes as, effectively, a state of psychological duality:

Now it is no more I that do it,  
but sin that dwelleth in me (Rom.7: 17).

In Paul's theology, the notion of the "divided self" and the idea of an "authentic self" (Macquarrie 104) are connected with man's potential for immortality. That Anglo-Saxons were concerned with problems of duality similar to those implied in Paul's distinctions is evident from such Old English works as Soul and Body II, where the duality is explicit, morbid in content, and obsessed with asceticism to the point of irrationality. The experiential fact of psychic duality (or even, perhaps, multiplicity) is reflected in the Anglo-Saxon language by the compound word modsefa; both elements of this word may mean "mind, heart, spirit, understanding," but the compound suggests that these components are co-existent and not identical with one another. The battle between reason and feeling portrayed in the Scyldings' reversion to idolatry in a time of great stress is exquisitely presented in a single phrase by means of this compound word:

helle gemundon/in modsefan (179-80)

they remembered hell in the thoughts of their hearts<sup>2</sup>

Roberts has translated modsefa here with appropriate biblical overtones as "the thoughts of their hearts" (180), suggesting awareness of the mind's capacity to experience itself as comprising distinct and often conflicting faculties.

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations are my own. Other sources have been used in cases where the translator's reading reinforces my argument and in cases where an original translation did not seem called for, in part to indicate the foundation of my own rewordings.

This internal conflict is intrinsic to man and seems to arise in any situation where instinct clashes with consciousness, since human consciousness seems impelled to interpret its instinctual feelings and relate them to some cause, either natural or supernatural. The poet's judicious references to the emotions of joy and sorrow indicate this process, since both joy and sorrow are reflective emotional responses to events over which the individual often has no direct control. In Beowulf, sorh is geniwod, "sorrow is renewed" (1322) and gamen eft astah, "joy resurged" (1160) in response to the situations (either of danger or security) in which the Scyldings found themselves.

The OE verb sorgian, "to sorrow" is cognate with the Mn German besorgen (Holthausen) which has been adopted by the philosopher Heidegger to identify a particular state of being in which there is perceived to be a necessary involvement between man and his world. Besorgen actually means "to care for" or "to be concerned," and in actuality man's relationship with the world is one of concern; as John Macquarrie contends, it cannot be otherwise (38). That this concern is most often experienced as anxiety is implicit in the etymology of the word, especially in its OE meaning, "sorrow." The Beowulf poet's contrasting use of both sorh, "sorrow" and gamen, "joy" bears this out. While there are many instances of sorh in Beowulf, there are few of gamen, and all but one of those that do occur are negative, denoting a lack of joy (2263, 2459), an end to it, as nu . . . herewisa hleahtor alegeð, / gamen ond gleodream, "now the war-lord has laid

aside his laughter, his joy and mirth" (3021 and cf. 1775) or a perversion of it (at least from the human perspective) as in the dire threat of Ongentheow to slaughter the Geats and hang them on the gallows-tree [fuglum] to gamene, "as joy (game) for the birds" (2941). Dream, as well, is used equally to denote joy [as when it describes the revelry in Heorot (88, 497)] and the lack of it [as when Grendel is described as dreamum bedaeled, "deprived of joys" (721, 1275)]. Apart from contributing to the tragic overtone of the poem as a whole, this pattern indicates a perception of man's condition as a "being-in-the-world" (Macquarrie 38), a world in which there exists something that threatens his being. What that 'something' might be, and how it might best be overcome, has long been the subject of intense contemplation on the part of poets, priests and philosophers, each in different ways. The author of Beowulf (who might conceivably have been all three) brought to his task a strong unconscious factor, manifest in the archetypal forms that people his poem; they, in turn, speak with an integrity that triumphs over the attempt of consciousness to manipulate them, demonstrating how it is possible for the individual psyche to interact with, and to 'act' upon, itself from a position of conscious choice established by the ego, which may be viewed as another archetypal fragment of the divided psyche.

The ego as a psychic entity, or archetype, is "the subject of all personal acts of consciousness" (Jung 1958: 1-2) which, tending to see itself as the controlling faculty because of its

rational function, logically wills its own supremacy. While other unconscious elements of the psyche may act to subvert the ego, the hero is not in conflict with the will of this conscious entity to repress, control or direct the expression of unconscious drives. On the contrary, it is a factor in the development of heroic pride that the hero brings the unconscious power of his archetype to bear in the service of conscious ideals and values, which may help to explain why Beowulf is in no doubt that his judgement of good and evil is a true one, at least not in the early part of his life. The phenomenology of the hero reveals that he is, however, willing to risk the negation of both ego and consciousness by the unconscious in pursuit of certain conjoint goals that his ego has affirmed, for he continually enters psychic (and physical) situations that endanger the whole organism, as Beowulf does when, diving into the water of the mere, he delves into a region of the psyche in which the conscious mind must be either extinguished or transformed.

### **Images of the Whole Psyche in Beowulf**

The dreadful mere of Beowulf is a symbolic representation or image of the dynamic psychic structure that incorporates both conscious and unconscious archetypal forms and processes. In the first element of the last word of the poem, lofgeornost, "most eager for praise," there is an etymological link to the term



libido, used by psychoanalysts to represent the kind of energy that drives this complex psycho-physical organism. In the Twins motif that occurs in mythic, legendary and historical form in the poem, there may be found one of the major conundrums of its unique conscious preoccupation.

In its depiction of the formidable wasteland lake, home of the archetypal monsters who threaten the established structures of consciousness symbolized by Heorot, Beowulf contains a dramatic image of the psychic structure and processes. Apart from the suggestive elements of the mere's physical form, the relationship between the disparate components of the psyche is dynamically represented in the action itself, which takes place on all three of the instinctual levels identified by Jung: the aggressive, the sexual and the religious.<sup>3</sup> Because the episode centers upon conflict with a female monster, the sexual element is implicit, but so, too, are elements of the aggressive and the religious instincts: all three come together in a moment of psychic energy generated by the hero as "the personification of the libido" (Jung 1919: 106).

Jung's explication of the concept and etymology of the libido (1919) suggests that libidinal power incorporates the three basic instinctual drives in a way that permits the

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<sup>3</sup> My research has uncovered no mention of Beowulf in Jung's voluminous writings. His only reference to Anglo-Saxon times, as far as I can determine, was a throwaway line to the effect that "Alfred the Great lived the symbolic life about two-thirds of the time" (see Chapter 4).

ascendancy of one without a necessary eclipse of the others. The word libido, in his etymological analysis (1919: 76), has elements of the aggressive drive, the will to action, in its meaning, which may be associated with the Latin verb, libet (mihi), "I will; it pleases me." The sexual content of the word (which has come to have a general sexual meaning in everyday language) derives from the desire and urgency implicit in the Latin and its Sanskrit cognate, lubhyati, which Jung translates as "to experience violent longing." The religious implication is uppermost in the Gothic relative, lubains, "hope," and liufs, "love," as well as in the Old High German libo, "love" and loh, "praise." The Anglo-Saxon compound word lofgeornost, "most eager for praise," is clearly related to this series; the element lof, as Klaeber indicates in his Glossary, is cognate with the German loh, while the remaining element, geornost, "most desirous" seems to epitomize the 'yearning' of the life force (libido) for continuance and renewal, if only in the minds and hearts of others.

The final description of Beowulf and the final word of the poem, lofgeornost subsumes the three instinctual elements of his heroic nature, which combine to form a totality of energy and will that may be reduced, as the concept of the libido may be reduced, to a prevailing will to live. Beginning with the instinct for self-preservation and combining with the sometimes contradictory instinct for preservation of the species [a dichotomy that is resolved in nature by the recognition that the

continuous life impulse actually attains the recreation and thus the survival of the whole species by the preservation of the individual (Jung 1919: 80)], in its initial formulation the psychic energy of the libido is expressed as "I will," and is manifest as a driving urge to creation. However, with reference to the future, a time concept of which only the human being, so far as we know, is cognizant, the prevailing force of individual will is understood by consciousness to be limited, and will must be transmuted into desire, so that "I will" becomes "I wish." As consciousness has imbued man with a sense of the future, a corresponding awareness of his own powerlessness in relation to that future, and a certain knowledge of death, it seems that it has also (through its prototype in the unconscious) forced the emergence of a third instinctual drive that reflects this primary preoccupation: the religious instinct, which consists primarily of an innate tendency to sublimate, or transform, the energy of the libido onto the symbolic level, a level that is accessible to consciousness and acceptable to it. This transformative function is performed by the hero, who, in his unconscious phase symbolizing the energy of the libido, effects the transformation and 'salvation' of the whole psychic organism through his interaction with the powers of both consciousness and the unconscious. This is what effectively occurs when Beowulf dives into the dreadful mere.

The threatening lake, with its nipwundor, "terrible wonder" of fyr on flode, "fire on the water" (1365-66), economically

symbolizes the whole psyche: water is one of the most common and universal symbols of the unconscious, while the element of fire, both at the surface and in the depths of the underwater cave, symbolizes the power of the conscious mind. A "terrible wonder" indeed is this fire of consciousness. The burning on the surface of the lake is an image of the questioning intellect, that Promethean architect of its own destruction, which, in its consuming quest for knowledge, carries with it the terror that inevitably attends its concomitant awareness of limitation and vulnerability. This is the image that St. John the Divine equates with hell in his apocalyptic vision of the "lake of sulphurous fire," and it may seem that Western consciousness is intimately bound up with the notion and material possibility of hell, when hell is conceived as the result of humanity's conscious attempt to control the environment, including even the unconscious forces of nature. This cautionary eschatological metaphor may be viewed as a projection of physical and psychological 'fact.'

The tension and suspension of opposites contained in the image of fyr on flode very effectively represents the apparently irreconcilable conflict between consciousness and the unconscious, promoting a symbolic apprehension of the psychological duality that may be said to stimulate the process of self-discovery. While Klaeber dismisses the phenomenal source of this image as "nothing but the will-o'-the-wisp," he does record that the image itself has powerful associations in

"Oriental, as well as Christian accounts of hell" (183-84). He also notes the possibility of its association with St. Elmo's fire, a phenomenon that occurs during storms at sea, which strongly recommends itself as an evocative and relevant image of psychological duality.

The phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire was said in ancient times to be the manifestation of Castor and Pollux, the Dioscurian Twins, themselves symbols of this duality. Elsewhere, Klaeber meticulously notes that Neidner compared the relationship of Beowulf and Breca to that of Castor and Pollux, and also that Breca's name was interpreted to mean "stormy sea" (147 n.2). Since the mere was also described by the poet as gedrefed, "troubled" or "stormy" (1417), a parallel is defensible.

The metaphorical introjection of the physical phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire relates to the idea of paradox as both a philosophical question and a mystical truth. A fascination with paradox underlies St. John's Gospel, which, Raymond C. Sutherland suggests, possibly provided a model for Parts I and II of Beowulf. Sutherland sees Beowulf's descent into the mere as standing for the Pauline (Rom. 6:3) idea of "baptism into Christ's death" (31), a notion which supports the present contention that this descent was the prelude to a rebirth ritual. John's preoccupation with light/dark symbolism and imagery reflects his awareness of the problem of dualism as central to human existence, and it is in the spirit of this awareness that the relationship of Beowulf and Breca, like that of Hengest and

Horsa and Herebeald and Hathcyn (two other pairs of binary opposites in the legendary or quasi-historical dimension of the poem), may be compared to that of Castor and Pollux. Hengest and Horsa, Brian D. Joseph points out, were divine twin heroes of Indo-European myth (177-82) while Herebeald and Hathcyn were brothers linked by a tragic fate in the same way as were the Norse gods Balder and Hodur (see Chapter V). In the Germania, Tacitus equates the gods of the Narhvali with Castor and Pollux: "That expresses the character of the gods," he writes, "but their name is Alci. There are no images, there is no trace of foreign cult, but they are certainly worshipped as young men and as brothers" (Mattingly trans. 136). The over-riding common element of these inseparable pairs seems to be their containment of opposition, which makes them a powerful image for the projection of philosophical or psychological duality.

In analyzing the substance of psychological duality, Jung refers to the "double identity" of the Dioscuri to illustrate the relationship between the mortal man and the "hidden immortal" within (1972: 55-65). This statement could be extended to include the idea that mortal man is a conscious being, aware of his mortality, whereas the "hidden immortal" may be imagined as an unconscious entity that seeks conscious expression. Relativity theory throws some new light upon this old mythological construct as well as its psychological interpretation with its observation of the "twins effect" (Davies 121), or the "twins paradox" (Hawking 33), the most

famous paradox of modern physics. Interpretation of this phenomenon employs observation of space, time and motion to explain the fact that if one of two twins went into outer space, he would be younger than his brother when he came back home because all his systemic functions (heartbeat, blood flow, brainwaves, etc) would slow down during the trip. Stephen Hawking, who notes that this same effect would operate on a barely perceptible level if one twin lived on a mountaintop and the other at sea-level, explains that this is a paradox "only if one has the idea of absolute time at the back of one's mind," but "in the theory of relativity there is no unique absolute time" (33). Structuralist critics would see this information as affording scientific validation of the mythic 'knowledge' implicit in the Dioscurian myth itself, which deals with concepts of time and immortality, questions that consistently recur not only in Beowulf but in the larger body of Old English poetry. The problem of time and change or "mutability" (Roberts iii) will be discussed in Chapter V at (much!) greater length, but is introduced here in connection with the notions of mortality and immortality raised by comparison of Beowulf and Breca to Castor and Pollux, the archetype of this duality. The relationship between Beowulf and Breca (which, by association with the myth of the Dioscuri, presents in dramatic form the unconscious knowledge of man's relativity to space and time and his potential for immortality) deals with the impact of this unconscious knowledge

upon consciousness by introducing the question of choice as crucial and elementary to man's existential condition.

One mortal, the other immortal, Castor and Pollux were twin brothers whose fidelity to one another led to their dual apotheoses as the protectors of seamen (Harvey 143). The manifestation of their power was said to be the phenomenon of St. Elmo's fire, which sailors often viewed as a guide, thinking it indicated the safety of inhabited shores. As might be expected, following the firelight often led to their destruction.

With due respect to Klaeber, this study wishes to support Neidner's comparison of Beowulf and Breca to Castor and Pollux, and contends that this comparison is strengthened by the fact that both pairs earned their fame in connection with the sea, and is enhanced by the image of St. Elmo's fire evoked by the fyr on flode of Grendel's pool.

In "Beowulf and the Psychohistory of Anglo-Saxon Culture," Foley interprets the Breca episode in Jungian terms as a representation of the ego's process of liberating itself from the "uroboros" (139), a suggestive argument in view of the action of the last battle, where the image of the snake predominates. Foley's discussion of the fight with Grendel as a preliminary step in the resolution of the Oedipal conflict (135-38) allows insight into the nature of both the "stormy sea" and the "terrible mere," and of Beowulf's ultimate purpose in testing these dangerous waters. It will later be contended that Beowulf (partially) resolves the Oedipal conflict in his battle at the



bottom of the mere (see Chapter III); for present purposes it will perhaps suffice to say that both bodies of water symbolize the unconscious medium of psychic experience. The fact that the swimming match took place on the surface of the water indicates that this particular experience, which is here interpreted as a representation of the ego's experience of dualism as intrinsic to its nature, is one that is primarily conscious, but further suggests that this awareness itself derives from an unconscious knowledge of wholeness that not only makes such duality difficult to accept, but also makes it seem, somehow, an illusion. When the ego is faced with the possibility of illusion, or delusion, a course of action may no longer seem intrinsically 'right' or safe. The conscious mind is then in a position of uncertainty, the nature of which may be compared to the uncertainty experienced by sailors who see the light of St. Elmo's fire upon the stormy sea. Whether or not to trust the judgement of consciousness becomes a question of choice, either existential or pragmatic.

Of special interest here is the fact that, according to Beowulf's story (542-44), a particular aspect of the exploit was his decision to stay with Breca, just as Pollux would not accept immortality if Castor had to die. Because the question of choice is a particular problem of consciousness, it seems fitting, from the point of view of this analysis, that the first important situation of choice into which Beowulf was thrown should include

the mythic aspect provided by the Twins motif, which exemplifies the problem of psychological and metaphysical duality.

From the moral polarities of good and evil explored in the hero's conflict with the monsters, through the question of truth and falsehood (or illusion) which emerges from Beowulf's argument with Unferth on the true nature of his contest with Breca, to the possibilities of freedom and enslavement discussed obliquely at the end of the poem, and including the physical and metaphysical antinomies of light/darkness (in the Merewife's cave) and, of course, life/death (a prevailing theme), it does seem that, as Sutherland contends on other grounds, the Beowulf poet is preoccupied with the same concepts contrasted by St. John. As hero, and thus, "the embodiment of the active principle" (Irving 98), Beowulf must be concerned with these ideas, for they may all be possibilities of action and decision, gaining their true meaning from the moral questions of human existence. By suggesting the double or opposing possibilities of human action, the Beowulf poet indicates two of the most important functions of consciousness: the ability to distinguish between the 'right' and the 'wrong' forms of action, and the responsibility of choosing between them. The image of St. Elmo's fire adds the essential, existential problems of illusion, delusion, or deception to the Beowulf poet's representation of the functioning of consciousness.

His sense of 'right' is a powerful psychic element in the total presence of the Geat hero. An intrinsic sense of right and

wrong is of immeasurable value to anyone placed in a position of existential choice, particularly when that person is of heroic proportions, since the primary function of the hero, in both the conscious and unconscious realms, is to act for 'good.' It is through its definitive choice of good that the ego creates (or recreates) itself in the image of its highest ideals, which, as the small fire burning in the grundwyrge's cave signifies, are seminally present in the matrix of the unconscious.

It is significant that Beowulf was only once in doubt about his moral invincibility, at the very end of his long life:

|                    |                                   |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
|                    | ƿaet ƿam godan waes               |
| hreow on hreðre,   | hygesorga maest;                  |
| wende se wisa,     | ƿaet he Wealdende                 |
| ofer ealde riht    | ecean Dryhtne                     |
| bitre gebulge;     | breost innan weoll                |
| ƿeostrum geƿoncum, | swa him geƿywe ne waes (2327-32). |

That was grief to the spirit of the good man,  
the greatest of soul-sorrows; the wise man  
thought that he had bitterly angered the Ruler,  
the eternal Lord, had gone against the ancient  
laws; his breast surged within him with dark  
thoughts, which was not usual for him.

It is also significant that this moment of doubt foreshadowed his death, because the hero, in pursuit of good, inevitably places himself in situations that could lead to his death. The hero motif includes his exemplary death as an essential element; its importance is equal to that of his life. It has been theorized that confrontation with this final fact of life has been both the effect and the cause of the developing consciousness, and particularly of the development of the religious instinct. In this confrontation, Beowulf, as hero,

acts as an agent of the religious instinct, and is considered a religious figure.

### **The Hero as a Religious Figure**

The purpose of the religious figure in any society is related to the fears and anxieties that the particular society experiences, either individually or collectively. The religious figure is a product of these fears in that such a person responds to the need for relief from fear and anxiety felt not only by himself or herself, but by every member of the human community in which he or she lives. The nature of the authentic personal religious experience, typified by the experience of Saul on the road to Damascus, is transformative and seems to take place in both consciousness and the unconscious: the person at times is overcome by the irrational or unconscious element of mind, but manages to interact on the conscious level with the symbolic content of the experience and bring this content to the social level in a more or less productive way, by explaining, rationalizing or enacting it. From a twentieth century medical standpoint, such a person might be said to be psychotic, perhaps schizophrenic, since the psychic activity bears little discernible relation to action in the mundane sphere. However, this type of action has in earlier societies (as reflected in the OE saelig, MnE "silly," which meant "blessed") been deemed to

have had significance, and is often of a psychically healing nature (equally often, of course, as the symbol of St. Elmo's fire and the activity of Jonestown warns, it can be horrendously destructive). Whether helpful or harmful, however, the pattern of the religious figure's psychic experience may actually have an internal logic that might be described as 'intuitive.'

Ritual derives from the re-enactment of such symbolic patterns precisely because they do serve the purpose of allaying the anxieties not only of the original participant but also of those to whom the symbolic pattern, though not experienced at first hand, nevertheless has meaning. The religious figure in this context is one who can impart this meaning to others, and thus draw them into a psychic enclosure from which fear has been excluded. The image of Christ as the Good Shepherd epitomizes this function; other social structures -- nations, states, even perhaps social classes -- may be built upon its foundations.

Like Christ the Good Shepherd, Beowulf was "the protector of his people," but unlike Christ, the power of the "bee-wolf" to protect was physical as well as psychic and, although he maintained peace during his reign, his dominant image in the poem is not pastoral but warlike. As long as Beowulf lived, his prowess as a warrior provided physical security for his people; when he died, their fears resurged. These fears were rational, deriving from the warrior society in which they lived. That the only practical protection in a warrior world can be provided by a leader who is stronger than all possible opponents may seem as

true today as it did a thousand years ago, and the intense fear and anxiety that would naturally arise on the death of such a leader is expressed in Beowulf by the lamentations and predictions of doom that followed the death of the Geat hero. Not for them the consolation of Christian salvation, even though, in the final lines of the poem, the Christian message is implicit.

The identification of Beowulf with Jesus Christ, though strongly implied in the poem, is not overt. The most obvious indication that there was any comparability in the mind of the poet or the scribes, if not his own people or the audience, is contained in his eulogy, where he is described as manna mildust ond mon(ðw)aerust, "the most generous<sup>4</sup> and gentle of men" (3181), the first adjective carrying a Christian connotation in our own time and the latter seeming more appropriately descriptive of Jesus and only relatively appropriate for his own society's concept of Beowulf. This apparent transformation of Beowulf's reputation (for we've been hearing about the ferocious battles, and might expect his eulogy to reflect this aspect of his fame) took place after he was burned, a symbolic process to be discussed in Chapter V, and because the original manuscript is torn and faded at this point, it might be that these words

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<sup>4</sup> I owe this interpretation of mildust to Marijane Osborn, who disputes Klaeber's gloss, "mild, or kind." The quality of generosity was an aspect of Beowulf's heroic persona, and it was also an aspect of Christ, whose pierced hands were seen as symbolic of his inability to withhold anything from those in need.

themselves were the reconstruction of a later mind inclined to see Beowulf in this light (which is perfectly acceptable given the collective nature of the text). Yet, in patterns of symbolic behavior it seems clear that, modeled on the idea of Christ or not, Beowulf was a religious figure of some type and was perhaps, originally, a shaman.

The ubiquitous shaman, a primitive priest, was the focal personality of early tribal culture, particularly, according to Weston LaBarre, of those cultures in a state of danger or trauma, when a supernatural solution may have seemed more necessary -- and more practical -- than a natural or political one (42-43). Some of the features of shamanism that seem appropriate in considering the socio-religious identity of Beowulf are his attributes of supernatural strength and prowess, his possession of magic in the form of the sword found in the Merewife's cave, his oedipal katabasis in the Merewife battle, and his undeniable position as the focus of the adoration and security of his people. More esoteric, and at the same time, more fundamental, is his seeming lack of a particularly masculine sexuality, a quality he shares with Christ.

Beowulf's (and Christ's) apparent asexuality is related to the fact that they neither married nor had children, which factor suggests a symbolic deflection of earlier forms of sexual ambiguity experienced by or attributed to the religious figure. In earlier cultures, asexuality, bisexuality, and transvestitism were particular aspects of the shaman (LaBarre 315-16): Tacitus

records that, in the worship of the Narhavalí, a Germanic tribe, "the presiding priest dresses like a woman" (Mattingly trans. 136); Tiresias was said to have lived for a time as a woman (Harvey 431); and the story that presents Heracles as being forced to wear women's clothes and do women's work (Harvey 202) suggests that this ancient hero might have been a primitive lion -- or bear -- shaman. As has conventionally been recognized ever since the work of Panzer, Beowulf may also be linked to the old bear-gods. His name, his hypothesized country of origin (some think Gotland, where the bear was a prominent totemic animal if the British Museum collection is any indication), his physical attributes of a bear-like grip and his prodigious feats of swimming support this theory. If Beowulf was originally a shaman or cult hero, this would explain the oral transmission of his story through many generations of Germanic culture, as well as the necessity of syncretizing him with the hero of the Christian cult that eventually dominated the religious consciousness of the Germanic tribes.

The Roman Heracles, the Germanic Beowulf (and, for purposes of comparison, the Greek Dionysus, whose symbol was the goat) might originally have been the great hunters who killed and consumed the most important parts of these revered animals (revered because either feared or desired or both -- both being the most powerful form). Through this process, the animals' mana would be transferred to the hunters who, in discharging their ceremonial duties of butchering and distributing the meat,



acquired the status of shaman and thus ritually undertook the mystical journeys into the spirit world that, according to LaBarre (299-391), were part and parcel of this social role. The process, which might be initiated by drugs, courted through extraordinary or extreme physical conditions, precipitated by personal trauma or sought through meditation, would take the shaman onto a different plane of experience, raised above the general pattern of experience to a status approaching that of a supernatural being, god or spirit. Endowed with superior physical ability, cast in the social role of shaman or "Master of Animals" (LaBarre 388) and displaying real or feigned evidence of supra-natural experience or insight, the man/woman would then perhaps be accepted as the incorporation of the animal spirit, and a transformation of religious symbology effected. Questions about the 'real' paternity of the person might be raised (perhaps in response to the kind of doubts discussed in Chapter III) and answered by providing the original animal deity itself as father (a detail later to be suppressed as the society advanced in social awareness). By such means, the devotion originally accorded the spirit of the desired animal would be transferred to the human being and a myth created around this person. The ultimate transference would occur after he or she was dead, when the community could worship the spirit alone, the ultimate reification. If, as Beowulf's might have been, the death was in some way perceived to be a sacrificial one -- perhaps the hunter was killed by the hunted, or the cherished person sacrificed to

appease an angry god -- then it represents the closing of the circle of religious authenticity: the dead hero-shaman has died, as Beowulf said, for minum leodum, "for my people" (2729) and this constitutes a final justification of the religious significance of his actions, when religion is understood to have as its primary objective the good of the group, and when that good is, in a final phase, interpreted as survival.

The objective of survival in a total sense can only be imagined to be achieved through the agency of the religious instinct, which affirms the possibility of continuance and renewal in defiance of the manifest 'fact' of mortality. In this sense, the religious instinct may be seen as the psychic counterpart of the sexual instinct. As the sexual function is to ensure the continuation of the physical components of the human body, the religious function is to ensure the psychic continuity of the human spirit; the integral relationship of both these instincts is reflected in the essential likeness of the goals, for both seek unity with another entity, seeing this transforming unity as a form of immortality. Yet, just as the achievement of such unity implies a kind of death to individual being, the "little death" of sexual climax or the final death of the individual, the overall psychic goal of individuation requires a death of the ego, which is limited to notions of time and place that do not exist in the unconscious realm. Ultimately, also, it requires the death of the body, which is, obviously, physically limited.

### The Many Deaths of the Hero

In psychological terms, the necessary death of the hero implies more than the realistic, physical fact of death; it signifies, in transitional stages, the effective death of certain elements of the psyche in the fuller realization of being and, in a final phase, the death of the individual ego in the full realization of total being, the "authentic" or "essential self." The final goal of heroic action on the psychic plane is understood by this study to be to effect the actualization of this hypothetical entity, identified by Jung (who was perhaps inspired by St. Paul's teaching of the "spiritual body") as a state of completion and unity of being which comprises, in perfect balance, all elements of the psychical and the physical. Existing both a priori and a posteriori in relation to consciousness, the "self" is both the source and goal of conscious awareness, the beginning and the end of being; whether described in Christian metaphor as the "kingdom of God" that is within every man, in alchemical terminology as "the Christ in every man" (CW 18: 280) or in psychological terms as a psychic entity or archetype in the divided psyche of man, the self is identified as the archtypal form of psychic wholeness -- the "Father," as it were, of the ego (Jung 1958: 221). Described by Jung as "a psychic totality and at the same time a centre, neither of which coincides with the ego, but includes it, just as a larger circle encloses a smaller one" (1972: 76), the self,

symbolized in Beowulf by the treasure hord, is the "treasure hard to attain" (CW 12: 322) for which the hero ultimately sacrifices his life.

Comparing the dynamics of the ego to the self with that of the Son to the Father, Jung contends that the sacrifice of the Son is the final, necessary archetypal pattern that must be enacted before the attainment of that total awareness which releases the individual from the limitations of his physical being (1958: 221). In portraying Beowulf as Christ-like in his essential nature and in the pattern of symbolic action that he follows, the poet also suggests that certain patterns express fundamental psychic processes; the effect is to indicate that the archetypal form of the hero, of which Christ was the apotheosis, is within the psychic potential of every man, pagan or Christian.

The desire for what might be called 'resolution in God,' enacted by the hero as the agent of the religious drive, is affirmed by the heroic ego which at both the transitional and the final stages of its development must find the courage to face death.

Although the death of the individual ego is what the unconscious most desires, it is also what consciousness most fears, and as Beowulf nears his final, inevitable confrontation, his desire to live is plain; he has experienced what he calls lifwyn(n), "the joy of life" (2097) and has no desire to relinquish it. In the same way, the ego has no desire to

relinquish its differentiation and individuality, the awareness that sets it apart from all of creation as Beowulf's heroic qualities set him above and apart from other men. His impulse to resist, to defy the possibility to the very end, however werigmod, "weary of soul" (1543) he might be, is the result of pride, but it is a pride which has been effective in preserving life, not destroying it. The hero's pride is, therefore, a creative force, to the extent that it permits the possibility of an alternative. As Beowulf put it:

Wyrd oft nereð  
 unfægne eorl, þonne his ellen deað! (572-73)  
 'Fate often saves  
 A warrior from his fate when his courage is strong.'  
 (Roberts trans.)

An ironic, paradoxical statement of heroic necessity, this saying has been interpreted by Andreas Haarder to indicate Beowulf's understanding of the heroic dynamic whereby, "through action man will confirm his own life. If he does not act he has alienated himself and his fate will have changed into inescapable doom" (239). The responsibility to act and the power to do so have, however, been imposed upon the hero by a power outside his control and so, ultimately, has the outcome of his action (or non-action) and this awareness lends irony to Beowulf's words.

Beowulf's paradoxical observation of necessary contingency, which seems more bemused than didactic, opens up a whole area of unknowing that challenges the security of rational deduction, yet offers it that element of hope which is its inspiration; for it cannot be denied that consciousness has its limitations, and it

cannot be denied that hope often ends in despair. The tenuous thread by which hope is maintained depends entirely upon the strength of the ego, which is maintained by the slender skein of its own self-affirmation.

The necessity of continuous self-affirmation, when placed in opposition to the self-actualization which has been suggested by Freud and Jung as the unconscious goal of all psychic activity, poses a metaphysical conundrum that is basic to the urgent question of man's temporal existence, one that suggests something about the tension of the inter-psychic dialectic and the impact of this tension upon the aggressive instinct that gives rise to action in the world. The question has been posed by Ernest Becker in religious terms as: "How does one lean on God and give over everything to Him, and still stand on his own feet as a passionate human being?" (259).

The answer, if there is an answer, may have been provided by Beowulf himself, who reserved the right to act but dedicated his action to God, in the exercise of an affirmative self-confidence that provides the only alternative to failure of nerve. One must either act or succumb. It becomes a matter of pride.

His pride, a consistent element of Beowulf's character, contributes to his conscious development as a heroic figure. Pride is necessary to maintain "ego supremacy" (Jung 1972: 66), which is itself necessary to prevail over the forces for chaos that threaten the ordered world of man; and Beowulf is, first of all, a man, who knows he must be the best man he can be, simply

because he is the best there is. Nor is his pride vain or unfounded. His feeling of invincibility has been supported by his extraordinary strength and physical prowess, but, far from feeling that he was, in himself, a superior being, Beowulf seems always aware that his power comes from another, more powerful being, to whom he refers after all his battles:

ic hine ne mihte,      þa Metod nolde,  
ganges getwaeman,    no ic him þaes georne aetfealh,  
feorhgeniðlan;                      (967-69)

Because the Creator did not will it, I could not prevent  
My deadly foe from going, no matter how zealously I  
clung to him;                      (Roberts trans.)

   aetrihte waes  
guð getwaefed,      nymðe mec God scylde.  
Ne meahte aet hilde      mid Hruntinge  
wiht gewyrcaþ,      þeah þæt waepen duge;  
ac me geuðe      ylða Waldend,  
þæt ic on wage geseah      wlitig hangian  
ealdsweard eacen      - oftost wisode  
winigea leasum -,      þæt ic ðy waepne gebraed.  
   (1657-64)

I'd have been dead at once,  
And the fight finished, the she-devil victorious,  
If our Father in Heaven had not helped me.

Hrunting,  
Unferth's noble weapon, could do nothing,  
Nor could I, until the Ruler of the world  
Showed me, hanging shining and beautiful  
On a wall, a mighty sword - so God  
Gives guidance to those who can find it from no-one  
Else. I used the weapon he had offered me...  
   (Raffel trans.)

Ic ðara fraetwa      Frean ealles ðanc,  
Wuldurcyninge      wordum secge,  
ecum Dryhtne,      þe ic her on starie,  
þaes ðe ic moste      minum leodum  
aer swyldaegge      swylc gestrynan. (2794-98)

I wish to put in words my thanks  
to the King of Glory, the Giver of All,  
the Lord of Eternity, for these treasures that I see,

that I should have been able to acquire for my people  
before my death-day an endowment such as this.  
(Alexander trans.)

Beowulf's identification of God as the 'real' source of his physical strength and psychic power is a conjoint effort of consciousness and the unconscious. Awareness of the power of God and of its corresponding presence within himself in the form of a semi-conscious psychic entity identified by the Anglo-Saxons as the soul, is symbolized by Beowulf's sudden vision of the mystical sword, god ond geatolic, "good and majestic" (1562) that hung on the wall of the underwater cave, the setting of his first full ritual of rebirth.

### **An Early Rebirth Archetype**

In the psychic underworld of the mere, Beowulf both consciously and unconsciously affirmed the archetypal source of his heroic energy by seizing the 'magical' sword, which fulfills the didactic, as well as the mystical and energetic, criteria of an appropriate soul symbol. In its original form, the sword evokes the Crucifix: the blade represents the active power of the soul, and the "didactic hilt" (Lee 206), which was all that remained for Beowulf to take with him in his return to the conscious world, tells a tale of primordial evil and of the Flood that drowned it in unconsciousness, but did not destroy it. The



reality of evil is dramatically revealed in the awful, destructive power of Grendel's "demon blood" to melt the mighty sword blade in hildegicelum, "icicles of war " (1606). The images of blood and war associate this particular evil with man, and with Beowulf himself, because although the hero has rejected evil and battles against it, thereby detaching himself from it, as Beowulf expressly does when he terms himself unsynnigne, "sinless" (2089), in an existential sense evil is not external to the whole man: it derives from him as a possible form of action. Beowulf's final doubts, which surface through his memories of Daeghrefn, acknowledge this factor and remind us once again of the dualistic element of this Old English poem.

Awareness of the "binary pattern of mutual opposition" (Hawkes 88), besides its presence in Beowulf from the binary structure of the Anglo-Saxon verse line (observed by Wrenn 75) and its relation to the two-part structure of the poem<sup>5</sup> [whether employing the down-to-earth structural interpretation of youth/age noted by Tolkien or so esoteric an analysis as the "hypostatic union" theory explored by Delasanta and Slevin (1968: 409-16)] to the many paradoxes, symbolic forms and patterns to be found throughout the poem, is reflected in many mythologies, which link the hero with the archetypal form of evil, the dragon or snake,

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, the structural interpretation offered in this thesis is essentially three-part, following the three battles and the 'three instincts theory' of Jung, but that does not preclude a synchronous two-part structure -- or even a four-or-five part. The whole poem can include them all, just as, as Jung says of the self, a "larger circle encloses a smaller one" (1972:76).

not merely by virtue of their opposition but integrally. In Scandinavian myth, for instance, the hero, Ormr, whose name, cognate with the Old English wyrn, means "snake" in modern Norwegian (Ross 1958), is described as having "snake's eyes" because he is partially a snake himself (CW 5: 382) while in other traditions the souls of heroes often take the form of snakes after death (CW 18: 22). The link between the hero and the dragon, or snake, is made in Greek myth, too. Cecrops, founder of Athens, was man above, snake below; and, in the story of Cadmus and the founding of Thebes, the nobility were said to have sprung up from the sowing of dragon teeth, hence their name, Spartoi, which means "sown men" (QCD). This pattern seems to indicate an intrinsic connection between the hero and his counterpart. On the conscious level, however, this connection has been repressed or severed, so that the two are seen as separate and opposing entities.

Because the forms of good and evil represented by the hero and the dragon, or monster, are defined, or 'illuminated' by the conscious mind, it may be that this polarity is meaningful primarily in relation to conscious objectives. Nevertheless, while it may be true that a concept of morality is inoperative on the unconscious level, the unconscious itself, as depicted in symbolic form by the dreadful mere, is, in itself, neither immoral (it may be absolutely moral in a final sense) nor is it hostile to conscious awareness. Although it contains much that threatens, many nicras "sea monsters" (1427), it contains the

four elemental conditions necessary for animate being as well: eordan, "earth" (1532); air, as there is no water in the Merewife's cave (1512b-16a); water; and fyrleoht, "firelight" (1516), the symbol not only of consciousness itself but also, in the Bible, of God, who in the Old Testament is identified with the fire of the burning bush and in the New Testament with the Light in the East of (and) the Nativity star. In his battle with a form that has been identified by his society as evil, Beowulf, the heroic agent of the ego, is aided by this burning firelight, by which he can distinguish the shapes of the darkness and evil he must fight against. It is the firelight that enables him to perceive the grace of God, materialized as the magic sword that enables him to overcome the monstrous daimon. However, just as fire, gaesta gifrost, "greediest of spirits" (1123) empowers and yet consumes man, so consciousness, greedy for power, impels man to postulate ultimate and absolute Being, and yet bears the burden of epistemological choice that proposes to him the opposite and equal possibility of annihilation -- nothingness.

The prospect of annihilation does not daunt the hero. As Beowulf dove under the surface of conscious awareness into the depths of the chthonic unconscious, in search of the "sea-mother" and a pattern of rebirth that would free him from the destructive power of his own obsessions, nalles for ealdre mearn, "no whit did he feel anxious for his life" [(1443) Hall trans.]. His faith in the psychic integrity of his conscious mind is affirmed when, even in those regions of the psyche where consciousness may

be extinguished, he comes upon its chthonic counterpart, the blacne leoman beorhte scinan, "the brilliant light brightly shining" (1519), the prototype of consciousness that exists in the capacious unconscious of the Merewife's cave. The subsequent battle and the new, more brilliant flaming of the firelight when Beowulf has finally triumphed are symbolic of the process of enlightenment and psychic rebirth. The pattern signifies the experience of contact with the limitless force of the unconscious through which the heroic ego realizes its own limitations and affirms a greater Being, reflected in the depths of its own being, which it knows to be the prototype of itself and which it must call good (god). The hero, in consciously choosing good, recreates himself in the image of that good, the ultimate form of which he calls God.

The nature and power of Beowulf's God is seen to be triumphant in the metaphor of melting ice that controls the poem's epic simile:

|                     |                      |                     |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| aefter heaposwate   | hildeigicelum,       | þa þæt sweord ongan |
| wigbil wanian;      | þæt waes wundra sum, |                     |
| þæt hit eal gemealt | ise gelicost,        |                     |
| donne forstes bend  | Faeder onlaeted,     |                     |
| onwindeð waelrapas, | se geweald hafað     |                     |
| saela ond maela;    | þæt is soð Metod.    | (1607-11)           |

Then that sword,  
That blade of war began to disappear in icicles  
Because of Grenedel's blood. That was indeed a marvel,  
That it all melted just like the ice  
When the Father unfastens the bonds of frost,  
Unclassps the fetters of streams. He has control over  
The times and the seasons. He is the true Creator.  
(Roberts trans.)

While the power of evil is indicated by the fact that Grendel's blood could melt the sword blade, this power is immediately compared by the poet to the power of God, and is seen to be subsumed within God's control. If evil has any power, it is power seen in an Augustinian frame, as a negation or privation, although active. The melting of the sword blade in hildegicelum also has a positive aspect that counters the negating power of evil, suggesting that evil, too, is somehow under God's control: what is lost of the sword is the destructible and corruptible element, the iron blade; what remains is the inscribed hilt of precious metal and jewels. This separation prefigures the "rusted gold" of the wyrmhord (2221), and the separation of lif wið līce, "life from body" (2423; note also 733 and cf. 2571, 2743) that occurs upon the deaths of both Beowulf and the Wyrm. It suggests, in its total impact, the Christian notion of the purification of the archetypal entity identified as the 'soul.' To Christian Anglo-Saxons, purification of the soul was perceived as necessary for transcendence, and the melting of the sword blade may be said to symbolize this process. The melting also effects a transformation of basic symbology, in that the decorated and inscribed hilt that remains is the product of creative activity, the art that evolved out of religious ideas.

The quest of the hero for individuation is, therefore, essentially a religious quest, and in recognition of this the hero has been interpreted by Maud Bodkin to stand for man's sense

of self in relation (and opposition) to "God, Fate, and the Devil" (1934: 49). There is a sense in which this description stands as a touchstone for all the feelings, impressions and ideas that combine to create the heroic protagonist of Beowulf, who, in accordance with the psychic goal of individuation served by all three primary instincts, is impelled by the religious instinct to go through what Jung calls a "living process of the unconscious in the form of the drama of repentance, sacrifice, and redemption" (1976: par. 82). Once this drama has been enacted symbolically and thereby experienced psychically, an archetype of psychic wholeness, "the Self," is said to become manifest (Jung 1962: 323).

In relation to the essentially psychic material that this study contends comprises Beowulf as a mental universe, the hero, Beowulf, stands finally for man's awareness of himself as a center. His activities represent the struggle of consciousness to comprehend and to overcome (by domination and/or acceptance) the seemingly alien forces within his own nature. His journey to the real center of his being (whether envisioned in Jungian terms as the archetypal subjective Self, or in terms of the subject-object relationship of man and God, the reunification of man and nature, an ultimate return to unconsciousness, or attainment of a higher, absolute Consciousness) requires integration of the disparate and opposing forces of conscious and unconscious mind with the apparent fact of objective reality. The human being's goal of final union with the Other inside and outside his being

is the 'real' subject of this poem as, perhaps, it is of every great epic work.

At the end of the beginning of his struggle for autonomy and integrity in a world in which his being is contingent, not just upon the movement of uncontrollable external forces but also upon his ability to control forces within himself, Beowulf is left with the sword hilt as a symbol of his achievement of a preliminary stage of psychic victory, an early rebirth. The sword remnant, with the runic message imprinted upon it, stands as an example and a lesson to his society. If his perception of the sword can also be said to be symbolic of Beowulf's awareness of the existence of his own soul, then his consequent action may be interpreted as arising from his realization that his soul, allied to consciousness and activated by heroic energy, must effect the will of its archetypal God. In the free but necessarily committed agency of this will to gōd, Beowulf will fulfill his temporal and transcendental purpose as hero.

## 2 THE ANGENGA AND AGGRESSION IN BEOWULF

### Heroic Action in the Warrior World

Beowulf's first great battle is with the angenga, "the aggressor,"<sup>1</sup> Grendel, who personifies and embodies violent action for 'evil,' rather than 'good,' and dramatizes man's struggle with the negative elements of his own aggressive instinct, perhaps the most elementary of libidinal forces. That aggression is a primary drive, that it can be expressed in both positive and negative ways, and that morality may be said to arise from the biological necessity to justify or control the aggressive drive are fundamental tenets of the following discussion, which will focus upon the Grendel fight and attempt some analysis of the way in which Beowulf and his society controlled, and in some ways transformed the expression of this basic instinct, so that society could continue and advance.

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<sup>1</sup> Following Trautmann (cited in Klaeber's glossary), I interpret this word without the diacritic, as angenga, meaning "one who goes against; aggressor," rather than with the diacritic, as āngenga, which allows the more commonly used translation, "one who walks alone; solitary one." Although both are plausible translations, the former best supports this reading.



Using the same logic by which a child identifies pain with the frustration of his primary desires (Bettleheim 68), the metaphysical concept of evil may be primitively defined as anything that threatens the life and safety of an individual or his society. For this reason, Grendel is considered the embodiment of evil, and is so identified in the poem by such epithets as manscadda, "the evil destroyer" (712, 737) and manfordaedly, "the evil-doer" (563). It is worth noting, however, that although the other monstrous forms in Beowulf, the Merewife and the Wyrn, are also called manscaddas (1339, 2514), only Grendel is identified as a manfordaedly, with its connotation of the deeds that result from action. Grendel is also the daedhata, "one who shows his hatred by deeds" (275), an epithet that identifies him most particularly with negative expression of the aggressive instinct.

Although his folkloric antecedents are undetermined, Grendel could have both natural and 'supernatural' (whether psychic or religious) origins. Because he on weres waestnum wraeclastas trad/naefne he waes mara bonne aenig man oðer, "trode the paths of an exile in the shape of a man -- except that he was bigger than any other man" (1352-53) he could have been a more primitive form of man -- perhaps homo erectus -- the memory of whom might remain in the collective unconscious, or simply a human outcast by society because of his size -- a kind of Andre the Giant of the Dark Ages, though without that media star's fortunate placing in time and space; his hostility to Heorot and its occupants

would be understandable in this light. Time and human nature would turn such a person into a 'bogeyman,' and this might account for the notions of black magic that attach to him (his ability to cast a spell on all weapons, for example) and his penchant for eating human flesh. The imaginative influence of Christian allegory on such a figure of superstition would naturally refer to Cain, outcast of God, and a knowledgeable religious thinker might also have known of the gnostic heretical sect, the Cainites, or Kenites, who, as Hans Jonas records, caused an ecclesiastical furor in the early centuries A.D. by sanctifying the first murderer. This sect was outlawed by the early Church and subsequently repressed (95), the ultimate fate of Grendel.

In the poem, Grendel's biblical genealogy is quite specific. He is in Caines cynne, "of the kin of Cain"(107). Proscribed by God for a crime committed by his ancestor Cain, just as humanity was proscribed because of the sin of Adam and Eve, Grendel is a terrible and yet pitiable creature, a composite of inferior attributes whose only power lies in the uninhibited expression of his aggressive drive. In fighting Grendel, Beowulf is fighting against the uncontrolled, unconscionable expression of this violent instinct.

The approach of Grendel, under cover of night and while the warriors are sleeping, signifies the "return of the repressed" (Rycroft 33), an involuntary irruption into consciousness of unacceptable derivatives of the primary aggressive impulse. An

archetype of the primitive, uncontrolled and instinctual man, Grendel represents all those animal instincts repressed by consciousness in the process of civilization. The transformative achievement of the hero, at this stage of his development, is related to his conquering, in the form of Grendel, the dark side, or, in Jungian terms, the "shadow" of his own aggressive nature, which may be explored through analysis of Grendel as the personification of negative aggression.

The noun "aggression," derived from the Latin verb ad-gradior: "I step towards," is defined as "an act of beginning a quarrel or war," while the adjective "aggressive" is more broadly defined as "forceful, self-assertive" (OED). This latter definition seems to express the fundamental nature of the aggressive drive as the instinctual energy directed towards ensuring the expansion, as well as the survival, of the individual organism; however, the universal tendency to equate aggression with hatred and destruction is a revealing footnote to the historical pattern that has resulted from the unchecked expression of the aggressive instinct -- a thematic pattern intrinsic to the digressions in Beowulf. The OE raeg seems related to the MnE "aggression" in sound and substance, as well as in its meaning, "rush," or "race," which gives an emotional extension to the Latin root, ad-gradior. Using this word in combination with such prefixes as gud-, heado-, hilde-, hond-, and wael-, the poet of Beowulf has produced a variety of impressions of life in the midst of what, for the Anglo-Saxons,

was a central social reality: war, "the original or oldest law" (Feuerbach 21).

As the "heroic embodiment of the active principle" (Irving 98), Beowulf wages war on both a social and a personal battlefield to effect good; but, although the hero by definition initiates action for the cause of good as opposed to evil, it is dominant societal ideology that, to a very great extent, determines the nature of that good. Beowulf was a hero to his society not just because he had the active desire and the power to accomplish good, but also because he did not, at least in his youth, doubt his society's designation of value, a designation that had evolved out of the urgent necessities of its own continuance and renewal.

The heroic ideal and code depicted in Beowulf evolved out of, and acted upon, a Northern consciousness, a racial psyche in which the rigours of environment play a necessarily prominent role, underlining and sometimes defining its interpretation of objective reality. The pagan Germanic psyche, deriving, like its progenitor Ymir, from the ice-fields of Northern Europe, was emotionally compatible with the Christian psyche deriving from the deserts of the Middle East (a compatibility emphasized in Asser's genealogy of King Alfred, which has him descend from the Norse kings all the way back through Odin to Adam) perhaps because, in essence, both evolved out of a response to extreme landscapes where vulnerability to an often pitiless landscape was a constant factor of human existence.

Since man in the harsh Northern climate could not survive alone (much is made of the 'outlaw' theme in Icelandic literature for this reason), the hero's commitment to his society was a strongly reinforced element of his makeup, and this commitment is evident in Beowulf. The structures set up by his society for its own protection and continuation were upheld, in form as well as in function, by common assent. This might be one reason why Hrothgar's worthiness was never questioned, even though he failed to fulfill his own function as king and, in fact, showed a cowardice Beowulf rebuked after the death of Aeschere and would later tacitly condemn by his own actions in old age.

Yet, although Hrothgar was never criticized by either his own people or the poet, neither was he a true hero, for it is not heroic merely to serve as a figure-head or to rest on one's laurels. Such a role is passive, upholding the past, perhaps, but not creating a future. Hrothgar's action (or non-action) has been ably defended by J.R.R. Tolkien in his famous paper "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (pub. 1936) and it might indeed be argued with compassionate conviction that Hrothgar's response was a natural result of his old age; but it should be noted that Beowulf, in his old age, did not shrink from the spectre of death, but looked to the future and envisioned his actions as a projection, into future time, of the highest ideals of the society he represented. His aggressive energies were dedicated to effecting the survival of society; he acted on behalf of those who could not act effectively; he acted to

fulfill their hopes. This, as he himself told Wealhtheow, was the purpose for which he came to Heorot:

'Ic þæt hogode      þa ic on holm gestah,  
 saebat gesaet      mid minra secga gedriht,  
 þæt ic anunga      eowra leoda  
 willan geworhte      oþþe on wael crunge  
 feondgrapum faest...'      (632-36)

I made up my mind, when I put out to sea,  
 set out in my ship with my company of men,  
 that I would completely fulfill the desires  
 of your people or fall in battle, fast in  
 the clutches of the enemy.

Wealhtheow, like the other women in the poem, does not appear to have been governed by the heroic code that guided the actions of men in the world of Beowulf. The kind of aggression demonstrated by women in this world will be discussed in Chapter III -- although it is likely that, in earlier Germanic times, when women fought alongside the men in battle and may reasonably be thought to have been their equal in the overt desire to dispatch the enemy to a bloody perdition, a separate discussion of female aggression might have seemed less appropriate than it does today, when the idea of a woman who is willing, or, indeed, eager to fight may seem somewhat more negative and less admirable. In the time of Boadicea, during the first century A.D., as Tacitus has recorded in an inflammatory speech he attributed in his Annals to this famous Briton, the British were "used to women commanders in war" (Grant trans. 320), and the glorious doomed queen did not flinch at even the most cruel treatment of her enemies, to the universal admiration of friend

and foe. Nevertheless, the tendency to view female aggression as intrinsically negative, or more negative than that of the male, was well underway by the time Beowulf was written; this is well displayed in the poem by the portraits of Grendel's mother and of Modthryth, who represent the absolute and the temporal expressions of female aggression in a society for which such aggression was perhaps more feared than outmoded (see Chapter III). The fashion of the later Anglo-Saxon aristocratic ladies to wear their fingernails shaped like eagles' claws might have had its origins in practical necessity, but the mere fact that their hands remained in this condition of predatory perfection indicates that they were no longer used for pugilistic purposes. Whether fashionable or functional, however, the hand is perhaps the best symbol of the aggressive instinct of man (and woman), because, as the distinguishing mark of the highest forms of animal life, the hand seems to represent a major biological triumph over the natural environment in its power to manipulate and change the material world.

Beowulf's hands were an important aspect of his heroic presence; he was renowned for the strength of his mundgripe, "handgrip" (380). His trust in his "handgrip" indicates his determination, as well as his ability, to "take matters into his own hands" -- in other words, to pursue an active, rather than a passive course in dealing with life situations, whether physical or psychic. This is in keeping with his heroic nature and destiny, because, whether the field of action is psychic or

physical, the hero's primary function is to act (Bodkin 244) and, indeed, he only exists in the active sphere. Potential alone is not enough, as the aging Beowulf well knew. Only in action may ideas cross the bridge provided by words and become objective reality. As the Danish coastguard simply but profoundly stated:

|                  |                            |
|------------------|----------------------------|
|                  | 'AEghwæpres sceal          |
| scearp scyldwiga | gescad witan,              |
| worda ond worca, | se þe wel penceð. (287-89) |

A wise warrior, one who thinks clearly, must know the difference between words and deeds.

However, one of the first things that the poet acknowledges in Beowulf is the limitation of human knowledge. Men ne cunnon, "men do not know," he writes in propria persona,<sup>2</sup> hwa þaem hlaeste onfeng, "who received that cargo" (52) when Scyld's funeral barge was set adrift, or hwyder helrunan hwyrftum scriþab, "where the mysterious demons go in their wanderings" (163). The Danes, terrified into making nameless sacrifices to heathen gods, did not know the nature of Metod (180) and nobody could comprehend Wyrð (1233).

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<sup>2</sup> Aristotle has instructed that the poet should not obtrude in propria persona, and, in defence of our poet, it might be that he does not, in effect, really do this, but rather speaks in the character of the scop who may be imagined to relate the poem in the mead-hall. The audience is an unseen, but definitely not unfelt part of the dramatic action. Our sense of the poet as a character in his own poem is enhanced by the use of such familiar (in the sense of informal) expressions as mine gefraegn, "I have heard tell" (cf. 776, 837, 1955, 2685, 2837) and hyrde ic þæt, "I have heard that..." (cf. 62, 2163, 2172), which suggest a dramatic exchange external to the poem. This technique, which would probably be common in an oral poem, would be added for effect, and possibly metre, in a written one. It allows the poet to get away with editorializing once in a while without disturbing the mimesis.



The problems associated with the irrefutable limitations of consciousness, or knowledge, are compounded by a corresponding sense of powerlessness and an awareness of danger. Even the gods themselves were powerless in the Norse world. They could be out-fought, out-magicked and out-witted, and they were mortal into the bargain. Most of them, including the wisest, Odin, and the mightiest, Thor, died in the Battle of Ragnarok. The reality of human limitation in relation to more powerful objective forces is acknowledged by the Norse mythological dynamic, while this same reality is defied in the Christian vision, and some of the tension in Beowulf derives from this contradiction, which is emphasized by the terror of Grendel.

#### Grendles gryre

Because consciousness functions in terms of time, and can project itself imaginatively into future time, this 'not knowing,' a consistent theme of Beowulf from the destination of Scyld's funeral ship at the opening of the poem to the destiny of the Geat nation at the end, causes an anxiety that is in direct proportion to the certain knowledge that consciousness soon acquires of both danger and death. The tendency of consciousness to fear anything it cannot control or comprehend (implicit in its psychic impulse to encompass the totality of its world) is amplified when that consciousness exists in a world of time and

of other entities, because the ego is aware of the possibility of injury (evil) deriving from them; for while man does not know, he is yet capable of projecting possibilities for good and evil, and his response to the possibility of evil is fear.

The phenomenon of fear, its recognition of something in the world that is harmful to mankind, demands a rationale from a theology that stresses the egocentric notion that the world was made by God for man's enjoyment (Gen. 1:27-28). This question is raised by the poet in his motivational and structural linking of Grendel with the scop's Song of Creation. Explicitly stated in the Song is the idea that God created everything for the use of man, even appointing the sun and moon for the specific purpose of providing leoman to leohte landbuendum, "lights for the light of land-dwellers " (95). Immediately following this assertion, in response, perhaps in refutation, Grendel emerged from the darkness that is the inevitable concomitant of light to enact the evil that is the inevitable concomitant of good.

As the embodiment of fear, and again as the object of fear, Grendel reveals the precarious condition of man as an ontological being, and explores man's awareness of his own power to do harm as well as the possibility of some incomprehensible danger to his psychic and organic integrity.

Fearing is, essentially, the discovery of something as terrible in a world which is "understood a priori to be such that out of it something terrible may appear" (Macquarrie 36); and the phenomenological fact is that man is situated in a world where

his being is threatened. Whether the threat is as external and immediate as the presence of Grendel, or as intimate and remote as the inevitability of his own death, man is faced with the unavoidable "facticity" (Macquarrie 78) of injury, pain, destruction, annihilation. The living agent of these abstractions, Grendel was seen by the warriors of Heorot to be the incarnation of their worst fears. He could, in this sense, be compared to the contemporary figure of the terrorist, who exploits the principles of fear to demoralize and defeat those who have no defences against him.

The poet's technique in his description of Grendel's approach to Heorot utilizes the essential characteristics of fear. The three amplifications of the approach: Com on wanre niht..., "he came in the black night" (702); þa com of more..., "then he came from the marsh" (710); Com þa to reced..., "then he came to the hall" (720), in addition to generating suspense, disclose in their effectiveness the nature of fear, which, John Macquarrie says, exists in the dual aspect of its potentiality (it is time-related, not yet present, but approaching) and its uncertainty (it may not strike at me, it may pass by, or choose some other), both of which produce a state of powerlessness that seems integral to the existential condition of man (36).

It is aggression that saves man from the crippling effects of this sense of powerlessness by impelling him to act; it is aggression that imparts to him his sense of autonomy, however limited this proves to be; it is aggression that opens to him the

doors of possibility and ultimately forces him to create himself by action, rather than simply unfold or recoil in response to external stimuli.

The dynamic set in motion in the conscious realm by the exercise of the aggressive instinct may be either positive or negative, creative or destructive. Thus, man may use it to expand his area of control and to create a center of order out of chaos, as Hrothgar intended in the building of Heorot, or he may use it to radically limit the expansion of others and to effect discord, which leads to the resurgence of chaos, as Unferth attempted in his quarrel with Beowulf and as Grendel intended in his raids upon Heorot. An important function of consciousness is therefore to control the blind expression of this instinct (CW 8:171) and thus to impose order upon the chaos that results from the indiscriminate expression of the active principle.

From their complex and highly patterned art, it may be deduced that the Anglo-Saxons valued order and desired to create and recreate it in their world. An understanding of the complexity of inter-related systems is revealed particularly in the interlace pattern, shown by John Leyrerle to exist in Beowulf as well as in other Anglo-Saxon art forms (1). One objective in the creation of order is the control of chaos, which is perceived in Christian myth (with reference to the Deep of Genesis, out of which God created the ordered universe) and in Norse (with reference to Ginnungagap, that vast chasm where fire and ice fuse to engender life) as well as in the mythic landscape of Beowulf

(where it is represented by the "borderland" haunt of Grendel, which is being increasingly limited by the encroachment of men, and the psychic effect of Unferth, against which Beowulf has developed certain oratorical skills) as antithetical and yet antecedent to divine order. The hero, Beowulf, is committed to preserving order, restoring, or creating it. Nevertheless, by virtue of the same principle that preserves life by destroying life, the hero is placed in a position in which he must act destructively. This is why his definitive milieu is the battleground.

The continuing reality of Beowulf is war, whether that war is between nations, between individuals, or between the warring components of the individual psyche, and Beowulf's battle with Grendel takes place on all three fields of action.

### **The Shadow of Aggression in Warrior Society**

As the shadow cast by the conscious mind of Beowulf, Grendel contains the hidden, repressed, unfavourable or malevolent aspects of Beowulf's own personality. He personifies the inferior man that Beowulf has repressed in the construction of his public face. On this level, Grendel belongs to Beowulf's personal unconscious. However, Grendel, the deorc deapscua, "the dark shadow of death" (160) is not just the projection of the dark side of Beowulf. He is also an archetype of the collective

unconscious, personifying the negative aggression of the evolving warrior race.

The court of Heorot, viewed as the natural and social body of man, and its symbolic animal, the hart, are considered in the context of the theme of aggression to represent the historical effects of institutionalized aggression, the acceptable form of aggressive action that derived from the Viking (and the Anglo-Saxon) tribal identification with nature, implied in the importance accorded such animals as the bear (the animal associated with Beowulf himself), the hart (symbol of the Scylding tribe), the boar (whose images the Geats wore on their helmets) the eagle and the raven. The necessity and inevitability of Unferth, "unpeace," or "disorder" in this, as in any ordered system, introduces the entropic component into discussion, and the factors of accident, antforce and 'sin' remain integral.

That this earlier society did attempt to control its aggression is evident in its systems of taboo (which seem to have included cannibalism, explored with reference to Grendel; fratricide, which is explicit in the stories of Cain, Unferth and Hathcyn, and implicit in association with the Norse Hodur; and internecine violence, explicit in the story of Hrothulf and implicit in the story of Hildeburh). Its laws, particularly the legal concept of wergild, "man-price," seem to reflect an institutionalized attempt to alleviate the blood guilt that permeated all individuals in the warrior society. Its attempts

to ritualize aggressive action through games (such as Beowulf's swimming match with Breca) and diplomacy (such as his 'flyting' match with Unferth), indicate a psychological approach to the problem, as does the maðel, "formal speech," and the formality of the "guest-host relationship" delineated by John Leyerle (1967); all are ways that the society of the poem's world attempted to prevent the devastating effects of negative aggression by developing rituals and relationships to deflect its violent expression. These methods were also necessary and employed in the real world that gave rise to the ethos of the poem, because, whatever may be said about the nature of man qua man, it can confidently be asserted that Beowulf's Germanic ancestors were, to employ the poet's own penchant for litotes, not a peaceful people.

Perhaps the prevailing characteristic of the Germanic tribes noted by Tacitus during his travels of the first century A.D. was their almost childish love of battle. "The Germans have no taste for peace," he wrote in the Germania (Mattingly trans. 112); and he added, "Long, I pray, may the Germans persist, if not in loving us, at least in hating one another" (128). Such disunion was not to provide the Roman Empire with immunity, however. In the fourth century, about one hundred years before Beowulf's uncle, Higelac, is said to have lived, his ancestors, the Huns, intensified their centuries-old raids upon the Empire. These Teutonic invaders adopted an "Arian Christianity" (Herrin 29) which did little to reduce their warlike proclivities. By the

end of the fifth century, this "aggressive Arian power" (Herrin 34) had sacked Rome twice (in A.D. 410 under Attila and again in 455 under Genseric) and established the words "hun" and "vandal" in the language of the Western world as symbolic of a violence and wanton destruction unparalleled in Western history until the most negative imaginable form of aggression evoked by the word associated with their twentieth century Aryan descendants, the Nazis. None of the tribes of Beowulf displayed such extreme violence (although occasionally a violent, or berserk, ruler would emerge, as in the case of Heremod) but a natural disposition to warlike behaviour was nevertheless common to both the Scandinavian and the Anglo-Saxon tribes, which had their origins in the same genetic and cultural stock once dedicated to the worship of Odin, the god of war. As has been suggested earlier, however, the Anglo-Saxons were a warrior society by environmental necessity as much as by nature, and the same may be said of the Scandinavian tribes of Beowulf.

In any potentially hostile environment, phenomenological evidence alone forces man to recognize the fact that his power is severely limited and that he depends upon others for his survival. Tribal society operates from this awareness, which is reflected in the dangers associated with being an outlaw in such a world. At the same time, like the desert tribes of Judeo-Christian tradition, who also lived in a land unsuited to agriculture, Northern man lived by killing. Without the instinct to kill, a fundamental expression of the aggressive drive, the



feasting that occupied so central a position in the social milieu of Beowulf would be non-existent, as would that society itself, for Heorot could not have been built if Hrothgar had not been given heresped, "success in war" (64-68). To these Norse warriors, who at an early point in their violent history comprised both men and women, 'heaven' was a constant round of feasting and fighting in the great superlunary hall of Valhalla.

The dictates of survival in a climate that could not sustain a totally agricultural society suggest that, of L.S.B. Leakey's two hypothesized hominid forms, the vegetarian and the carnivore, the one most fitted for survival would have been the carnivore (Johanson and Edey 100) who necessarily killed and ate the flesh of animals and, conceivably, of other humans. With this in mind, it is significant that Grendel was both a primitive human and a cannibal, and that his ancestor was Cain, the archaic biblical symbol of the activation of homicidal, or, in Konrad Lorenz's term, "interspecific" aggression. The implications of interspecific aggression in warrior society may be said to parallel those identified by Lorenz as intrinsic to any animal species particularly disposed to aggressive behaviour: the danger exists that they will kill one another off to the point of species or racial annihilation (17-22).

The most important tools of such men would most likely be weapons, and this fact is reflected in the importance and awe accorded their legendary Iron Age smith, Weland, as opposed to the semi-ridiculous aspect of the corresponding figure,

Hephaestus, in the distant and idealized Age of Gold. Weapons tend to impart a feeling of power that contradicts the sense of limitation and constraint imposed by the natural world; and out of this contradiction a fundamental tension might take root in the psyche that may be expressed biologically as that engendered when the zoological organism is faced with a primary survival choice of "fight" or "flight" (Lorenz 21-22). Lorenz associates both these impulses with fear, but this discussion wishes to link the "fight" impulse, symbolized in Beowulf by the wild boar whose image the Geats wore on their helmets, to the aggressive instinct, and to associate the "flight" impulse, symbolized by the hart of Heorot, with the psychological process of transformation, which is the ultimate effect of the religious instinct. It can be seen that the natures of these two tribes did, indeed, parallel their totems -- the Geats faced out confrontation (though it must be said that, except for Beowulf and, later, Wiglaf, they all held back in the end), while the Scyldings' first impulse was to run in fear at the terror of Grendel, and to seek solace and solution in the worship of their primitive gods.

However, empowered above his natural physical capacities by control of a weapon, even an escapist or pacifist might overcome the instinctive desire to run from a more powerful opponent, either human or animal, as the Scyldings might have done if weapons had not been useless against Grendel (801-03); the alternative course of action then would logically be to stand and

fight. This, in fact, was the predominant and affirmed choice of Beowulf's society. As the pattern of vengeance in Beowulf indicates, feuds and murders were inevitable in such a society, and its history naturally reflected this fact. Lorenz's research implies, however, that this same instinctive tension in equally matched antagonists in certain animal species ultimately resulted in a transformation of the aggressive instinct into a pattern of ritual behaviour that had the effect of deflecting the initial aggression and preventing the fight to the death that, unchecked, would have led to the destruction of the strongest members of the species and, ultimately, the species itself. In the human world, such deflection is evident in games and diplomacy, both employed by Beowulf's society. However, the necessity of maintaining 'equal strength' is intrinsic to the dynamic of this safeguard; it is out of such awareness that the pragmatic rationale for arms build-up in the 'superpowers' of twentieth century global society includes this requirement, which is also a factor to be considered in Beowulf's battle with Grendel, since both antagonists were equally matched in their physical, if not their psychic, powers. It is in the application of those powers that they fundamentally differ, and the poet wants to establish that, given two combatants of equal strength, another factor operates to influence the outcome of a conflict -- the moral factor. Indeed, although Grendel's power was not inconsiderable (even after his death, his blood could melt iron), Beowulf trusted to his moral advantage, affirming the power of good over evil in his

battle with the monster of instinct that threatened Heorot. This moral advantage is suggested by the 2:1 ratio of good to evil implied in the structure of the poem (Beowulf won two battles, was overcome once) and also in the second reference to britig, "thirty" as a measure of Beowulf's strength (cf. lines 2361-62, when he is said to swim from the land of the Frisians carrying thirty pieces of armour). A sense of moral rightness adds the psychic powers of both consciousness and the unconscious to the physical power of brute strength and is thought (in popular, or 'folk' wisdom) to give the individual fighting on the side of 'right' a distinct advantage. It is an advantage that Beowulf, certainly, counts upon, from both a religious and a social perspective; and while his sense of having divine guidance is duly recorded, the poet does not overlook the importance of the social conventions in establishing this sense of right action. It was this, as much as its practical necessity, that made the heroic code so important.

### Ritual Behaviour and the Heroic Code

Beowulf was an outstanding hero to a warrior society in which the word for "hero" (haele) was a synonym for "man." In his world, the possibility for heroic action was available to every man; its definition of heroism reflected the exigencies of its precarious social condition. "Courage, loyalty, memorable and honourable behaviour" (Wilson 1980: 44) were the required attributes of these haeled, whose existential choice was often limited, as Jean Paul Sartre's Iron in the Soul has suggested all man's choices ultimately may be, to how they were going to face death. A final rallying-call of these hero-men, uttered by the old retainer, Byrhtowld, as he urged his doomed comrades on in The Battle of Maldon, went:

'Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þa cenre,  
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure maegen lytlað (312-13).

Thought must be firmer, heart must be braver,  
courage must be greater, as our strength grows  
less (Hamer trans.).

These words poignantly reflect the "courage of despair" (Hall trans. 100) that characterized the ideal of heroism to which Beowulf subscribed and which, in his final battle, he displayed in its most noble form; but Beowulf is more than a mere description of yet another glorious, doomed battle. It presents a "complex vision of history and society, focusing on the struggle of societies to evolve institutions and moral codes that will ensure the survival of civilization" (Williams 17). And, it

might be added, the struggle of outstanding individuals within those societies to redefine and redirect the social patterns by confrontation with those elements perceived, consciously or unconsciously, to represent a threat to their world. Against these forces it is necessary to wage war.

Given the established fact of violence in the milieu of Beowulf and the necessity of interacting within its context, and adding to it the drunkenness hinted at by the poet in his frequent mention of the ealu and beor that played so central a role in the festivities of these warrior men, the fragility of their social order is not surprising. It would be more surprising if they had managed to live in peace and harmony. Nevertheless, while the world of the poem does include wars, vendettas, blood guilt, vengeance and violence as a way of life for the Viking tribes, and even the later, more peaceful Anglo-Saxon audience themselves were prone to hitting one another over the head with a depressing regularity, it could not be said that they did not have standards of acceptable behaviour.

The heroic code was a definite code of conduct which is so clearly delineated in Beowulf that the poem itself might have served as a kind of training manual for the Germanic warrior aristocracy.

The precise relationship between a true king and his retainers is demonstrated both positively (as in the examples of Hrothgar, Higelac and Beowulf himself) and negatively (as in the

case of Heremod) to include a judicious and generous sharing of the spoils of battle in return for fidelity in both war and peace. The king was the "ring-giver" because this was, in fact, exactly what he did, distribute gold rings to his thanes; one of the tribes in Beowulf, the Hring-Denas, "Ring-Danes," were perhaps a sub-division of the mighty Scylding race particularly associated with Hrothgar in this aristocratic pact. Another of the rules of behaviour was the convention of boasting: a warrior was encouraged to boast, perhaps because he would then have to make good that boast, or be publically humiliated. Another was the absolute necessity of taking revenge, particularly for the killing of a kinsman. As Roberts says, "to get revenge is to get relief from suffering, whereas passivity crowns one sorrow with yet another sorrow" (ix). Action, not passivity, was a cardinal virtue; but action must be controlled.

Grendel stands for potential action that has been rejected by consciousness as antagonistic to its constructive aims, as Grendel was antagonistic to the great hall of the Scyldings. He unleashed upon the society of Heorot all the violence and blood lust inherent in that society itself, which had established necessary, if often ineffectual, taboos against the unrestrained exercise of the aggressive function.

Chief among these taboos was the murder of kinsmen. Descended from the fratricidal Cain, Grendel was less than human because of his ancestor's sin against human brotherhood. Nevertheless, in the human world of Beowulf, fratricide and

homicide were common crimes, for which the society paid in wars and destruction. The fact that such murder was frequently tolerated -- as in the case of Unferth -- only served to increase the collective social guilt and render the society itself morally defenceless against natural (or supernatural) repercussions.

Social systems of the warrior world would have had to take into account the practical problems, as much as the moral question, of blood guilt. The wergild, money paid to settle a blood feud, attempted to end the pattern of violence caused by a primary act of aggression. In paying Hondscioh's wergild, Hrothgar was, in a symbolic sense, atoning for the sin of Cain, and the obsession with blood guilt that permeates Beowulf is more than subliminally related to this primary fratricidal scene, which includes a justification of carnivorous man and of the aggressive instinct that ensured his survival.

In the sense that myths are "original revelations of the pre-conscious psyche" (Jung 1958: 177), the murder of Abel and the banishment of Cain, followed by the birth of Seth is a mythological pre-statement of Leakey's anthropological theory that carnivorous man effectively won the battle for survival. Cain, offering to God the fruits of his fields (Gen. 4:4) symbolizes the vegetarian, or the agricultural, society that archaeologists such as Marija Gimbutas believe pre-dated the warrior world. The rejection of this offering by God, who preferred the slaughtered lamb sacrificed by Abel, effectively justifies the ultimate evolutionary triumph of the carnivorous



hominid, because although Abel, the carnivore, died, his primal instinct to kill was validated and accepted by God. Seth would learn from this primary event that the instinct to kill was not, however, to be turned against one's fellow man, nor used for any purpose other than survival and, explicit in the idea of ritual sacrifice, the glorification of God. In denying his instinct, or repressing it, Cain lost control over it and, projected, this energetic force became a "demon crouching at the door" (Gen. 4:7, New English Bible), rising at the extreme moment to impel him to murder his brother. Possessed by this now uncontrollable drive, Cain was banished into the Land of Nod, which, in modern use, is a metaphor for sleep, that space of time in which the instincts run rampant and psychic forms enact their symbolic dramas close to the surface of conscious awareness.

While the overt pattern of blood guilt and violence lay upon the surface of awareness and was, in fact, a conscious moral question of the society reflected in Beowulf, as indicated by the poem's pre-occupation with the theme of fratricide, a much more primitive sense of blood guilt is implicit in the cannibalistic attributes of the monster, Grendel. It seems as though, although civilized man had long overcome and deeply repressed the desire for human flesh, somewhere, in the depths of the psyche, the vestigial lust remained, surfacing in myth and ritual in such forms as the ancient cannibalistic Bacchic rites and the human sacrifices of Uppsala, recorded from hearsay by Adam of Bremen [and see Frazer (132-41)]. The picture of Grendel greedily

devouring the body and blood of Hondscioh vicariously evokes this ancient blood lust; its horror and fascination seem to hold even Beowulf in thrall:

Dryðs wyrd beheold  
maeg Higelaces, hu se manscaða  
under faergripum gefaran wolde.  
Ne þaet se aglaeca yðan þohte,  
ac he gefeng hraða forman siðe  
slaependne rinc, slat unwearnum,  
bat banlocan, blod edrum dranc,  
synsnaedum swealh; sona haefde  
unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,  
fet ond folma. (736-45)

Higelac's mighty kinsman kept watching to see how the evil destroyer would proceed with his sudden grips. The monster had no thought of waiting, but quickly seized a sleeping warrior in his first attack, tore him compulsively to pieces, bit into the ribs, drank the blood from the arteries, swallowed him in huge mouthfuls; soon he had totally consumed the lifeless body, even the feet and hands.

One might well wonder, here, why Beowulf did not act immediately to save his faithful companion, Hondscioh, from this grisly fate. It seems a little heartless of him to have sacrificed one of his friends just to learn something about the monster's fighting style. Perhaps it all happened too quickly, or perhaps there is another explanation.

The apocryphal Book of Adam depicts Cain as having drunk Abel's blood after the murder, a factor that may or may not have been known to the Anglo-Saxons (Williams 16) but one which, given Grendel's descent from Cain, points to an intrinsic association of the monster's cannibalism with humanity. A further association of this saturnine scene is, of course, the Christian

ritual of Holy Communion, which symbolically enacts an archetypal pattern of repentance and redemption. During this ritual, the participant is perhaps cleansed and reassured by its implication of Christ's transformative acceptance of this unconscious cannibalistic urge and His offering of Himself as its fulfillment, both spiritually and physically:

And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is the body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.

After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye shall drink it, in remembrance of me.

(1 Cor. 11:24-25)

In a more conscious application of the same metaphor, Jung says that "if we are to develop further we have to draw to us and drink down to the very dregs what, because of our complexes, we have held at a distance" (1972: 33). Whether subconsciously, through metaphor or ritual, or on a more conscious level through experience, the individual must accept within himself the darkest aspects of his humanity. By not preventing Grendel from this full expression of his animal nature, Beowulf partakes of that nature and accepts its full implications for himself. He effectively shares in the devouring of Hondscioh, as he must, in order to assimilate and thereby conquer the enemy within.

The name "Hondscioh," which may be interpreted to mean "hand-shoe" or "glove," indicates an intimate connection of this ill-fated warrior with Beowulf, whose distinguishing physical

feature was the hand. Like a glove, Hondscioh effectively protected Beowulf from the direct, annihilating experience. When he then closes for the fight, Beowulf is in no doubt as to the identity of his adversary: Grendel is the inverse correlative of himself, both in power and in the expression of that power.

### Beowulf vs. Grendel

The differences between Beowulf and Grendel really begin with their evolutionary status. Grendel may be seen as a primitive precursor of homo sapiens, closer to homo erectus or homo habilis, whereas Beowulf was clearly intended to be a human being in the fullest sense of the term, which implies a cultural evolution as well as a physical one. The development of language is seen to be integral to this cultural evolution by recent theory, which wishes to redefine man as homo loquens (Hawkes 89) to reflect this awareness. The Beowulf poet indicates his sense of the importance of language within the context of his poetic world by the flyting match between Beowulf and Unferth and the diplomatic function of the maðel, or formal speech. It is also no coincidence that the poet's description of Grendel's antagonism immediately follows the words to the song of creation sung by the scop in Heorot.

Neither Beowulf nor Grendel was simply an unconscious biological being; any interpretation of their behaviour would

have to acknowledge that both possessed the faculty of consciousness. However, Beowulf also possessed self-consciousness, which, though it may be possessed by other animals to some degree, is a defining characteristic of homo sapiens. The capacity for reflective self-awareness enhances the instinct to act by enabling the individual to reflect upon his actions, to assess them in terms of their effectiveness and to judge them in terms of their value, and it is from this philosophical perspective, rather than from the merely biological, that the fundamental differences between Beowulf and Grendel emerge. The fight in this context effects the transformation of the aggressive instinct into morally acceptable modes of behaviour. The moral perspective is introduced by the poet in his biblical allusions, particularly to the story of Cain, Grendel's ancestor.

The Genesis myth with which the poet introduces Grendel delineates a scenario that represents man's awareness of his own evolving state of being, on both the ontogenetic and the phylogenetic levels. While people lived in Eden, that is, in that state of wholeness and purity associated with God, they were pre-conscious, knowing nothing of good or evil, nor anything of death; after the "original sin" of opposition to God's will, (perhaps psychologically referent to the state of puberty, a developmental state characterized by increased awareness and rebellion) they became uniquely human, aware of death and sorrow and divided in psyche as Adam and Eve were separated from one another and from God; with the sin of Cain there developed

awareness of a more subtle nature, capable not only of disobedience, or breaking away from God, but also of active evil, or "sin," which St. Paul depicted in Rom. 7: 15-24 as a final fragmentation of psyche, the ultimate separation from the true self and from God. It is, perhaps, ironic that every evolutionary development of consciousness is perceived in religious terms as antagonistic to God's purpose (although in Anglo-Saxon times this was an established doctrine of the Christian church) but it is at this point that the notion of free will becomes important. Free will is a necessary philosophical postulation with reference to individuation, or becoming an individual, a process imaginatively enacted in the psyche by the archetypal forms of primary conflicting ideas. Cain, himself an archetypal figure, close to the roots of consciousness, stands for one of these ideas, representing in Judeo-Christian mythology man's first deliberate act of evil, an act that marks both the power and the responsibility of the conscious mind to determine and choose between gōd, "good" and mān, "evil," or, indeed, between God and man.

This choice has a particular relevance to the theme of aggression, because it is the aggressive instinct that engages in the worldly activities of man in society. Problems of history, of morality and of volition, whether one is thinking of individual will or of intersocial objectives, derive from situations created by the exercise of the aggressive instinct:

since man must act, it seems to follow that some acts are 'right' and some are 'wrong.'

Beowulf's battle with Grendel, then, may be seen as the deployment of heroic energy in conflict with forces that threaten society, whether these forces reside within the psyche itself, are projected onto the external world as forms of action, or exist phenomenologically as constructs or entities. Beowulf takes an active position in relation to these forces, defining both them and himself in the process.

The essence of this self-definition is revealed, by Beowulf himself in his report of the battle to Higelac, to be fundamentally moral in nature:

He mec þær on innan unsynnigne,  
 dior daedfruma gedōn wolde  
 manigra sumne; hyt ne myhte swa  
 syððan ic on yrre uppriht astod (2089-92).

Therein the fierce evil-doer wanted to put me,  
 an innocent, along with many others;  
 this he could not do, after I stood upright in my  
 wrath.

The expression "to stand up" allied to the notion of "right" as in uppriht, implies the idea of right action as a possibility of choice and suggests linguistic evidence of the origins of man as a pre-sapient being -- homo erectus, the forefather of homo sapiens. The evolutionary 'decision' to "stand upright" may have been man's first choice, his first break with his primate ancestors. In standing upright, an evolutionary choice that had undeniable ramifications for man as a physical entity, homo erectus was making a decision which was radically to affect his

psychic makeup, for in 'choosing' one mode of living and being he was essentially rejecting another. The degradation of the serpent in the Garden of Eden reflects mythologically the rationalization of this initial choice. The serpent, or wyrn, in representing man's reptilian ancestors, stands for the absolutely Other, that Other rejected by man in his primal choice. This he calls evil, and to this symbol accrue all those things which his developing consciousness reveals to him as antagonistic to his purpose of survival. Good and evil may by this means be seen as the opposing possibilities of humanity's continuous, necessary choices. Acceptance or rejection of these possibilities form the means by which man defines, and perhaps thereby creates, himself.

In pitting himself against the forces of evil as defined by personal and collective consciousness, Beowulf is taking a moral stand, and it is this position, supported by his superior strength and prowess, that has established him as a heroic figure. The image of Grendel forms a powerful collective projection of the hero's antithesis, made necessary by society's collective affirmation of the idea of heroism compounded by the overt dedication of Beowulf's ego to the actualization of that idea. Much as Beowulf might wish to disassociate himself from any kinship with his first adversary and despite his concerted efforts to negate him, the hero and his antagonist are two intrinsically inseparable elements of Beowulf's whole psyche.



**The Hæle and the Sceaduqenga**

Beowulf and Grendel are symbolically linked in the same way as are Gilgamesh and his "dark brother" Enkidu of the Babylonian epic, or Taliesin and Morfran of Celtic mythology, as opposite sides of the same coin. The impeccable hero, in maintaining his heroic persona, must suppress or repress certain elements of his whole being, and these elements aggregate to an archetypal form that lurks just outside the borders of consciousness. Jung calls this entity the "shadow," which he describes as, variously, a "wild man" (like Enkidu), an "ape," or, perhaps more relevantly in view of the bear-son theories of Beowulf, a "bear" (CW 12:87).

In the heroic age of which Beowulf is an archetypal relic, the figure of the hero was the prevailing conscious ideal, and it can be seen that Beowulf consciously defined himself with reference to the heroic ethos, constructing an impressive public face, or persona, by its precepts. However, it is significant that in his youth, as lines 2183-89 indicate, Beowulf was not held in particular esteem; from this we may conclude that his mature status was as much a result of conscious application as of natural ability. He had to 'make something of himself,' and this he did. The conscious element of self-construction is well known to the image-makers of public figures in our time, but this awareness is not, of course, peculiar to the 20th century; the dichotomy between public image and private person was possibly observed even, or perhaps particularly, by the Viking or Anglo-

Saxon haele, for whom a fierce aspect, real or assumed, was not only desirable but necessary.

It is easy to see how, in youth, supported by the social convention of boasting, the validation accorded the desire for fame and glory, and his early successes, Beowulf might have believed himself everything he claimed to be; it is easy to understand how it might have been necessary for him to maintain this belief. His insistence that it should be ic...ana, "I ...alone" (431) who vanquishes the monsters, his seemingly megalomaniacal insistence upon taking apparently unnecessary risks (displayed in his determination to seek out Grendel and also in his swimming match with Breca) and his assertion that he had divine guidance and appointment might be seen in this light, though the positive effect of his self-assertion is noted. The power of his successful persona to attract the admiration and confidence of others is illustrated by the Danish coastguard's instant recognition of Beowulf's exceptional aspect, and by the willingness of his own men to follow him into danger.

Through such physical and psychic manifestations, sanctioned by the ego, Beowulf acquired a reputation for bravery and prowess, the visible attributes of a hero; these attributes he presented to the rest of the world, and perhaps to himself, as the whole of his character. But this was not the whole Beowulf. His boasting words, his reclaiming of his reputation from Unferth's charge, his professed disdain for weapons and his stated willingness to risk a ghastly death in pursuit of fame,

however glorious, were superficial, more concerned with the appearance of things than with things in themselves. Such is the preoccupation of the persona.

Best described in T.S. Eliot's phrase as a "face to meet the faces that you meet," the persona's purpose is two-fold: it first of all desires to make a specific, usually positive impression upon other people, the idea understood in the popular use of the term "image"; secondly, it acts as a more or less effective mask that conceals the individual's inner self, or soul, from others. In Four Archetypes, Jung defines the persona as "that which in reality one is not, but which oneself as well as others thinks one is" (57).

The relationship of the persona to its counterpart, the shadow, has been classically represented in R.L. Stevenson's story of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, in which an important factor in the maintenance of the persona is shown to be the activation of repression. Just as the negative qualities of the good Dr. Jekyll were forced under the surface of consciousness and emerged in the form of an evil destroyer, Mr. Hyde, so the destructive qualities of the hero, Beowulf, were repressed so that they were forced to emerge in the manscald, "evil destroyer" (712), Grendel.

Apart from the necessary bravado of his formal speeches, by which means Beowulf established a persona over which he had total control, the hero's reaction to Grendles gryre, "the terror of Grendel" (478) reveals the operation of repression in the

creation of both persona and shadow, for the development of the archetypal ideal of heroism into a viable persona required that Beowulf repress an element of human nature basic to existence and necessary to survival, i.e., the element of fear.

It is a little disconcerting to discover the extent to which the young Beowulf has repressed this normal human response if only because, if he really feels no fear, it is difficult to think of him as a hero. He becomes, instead, merely a very strong man who doesn't have the sense to realize the danger he is facing. Clearly, of course, this is not the case. Beowulf draws a very accurate, blackly humorous (if somewhat melodramatic) picture of his possible fate should he fail to overcome Grendel:

Na þu minne þearft  
hafalan hydan      ac he me habban wille  
d[r]eore fahne,      gif mec deað nimeð;  
byreð blodig wael,      byrgean þenceð,  
eteð angenga      unmunlice,  
mearcað morhopu;      no þu ymb mines ne þearft  
lices feorme      leng sorgian (445-51).

You will have no need to cover my head (in burial) if death seizes me; instead, he will carry off my corpse, dripping with blood, thinking to eat me; the aggressor will feast pitilessly, will stain the moorfastnesses; no longer need you worry about the feeding of my body.

Beowulf has a great sense of drama, but it is also all true; he is facing the grim realities. His boasting, and his black humour, constitute his attempts to distance himself from his fear and thus to gain control over it. By not acknowledging his own fear nor admitting it to conscious affirmation, by repressing it as abhorrent to a man of heroic stature, Beowulf relegated this

emotion to his shadow, Grendel, who exhibits both fear and cowardice in his encounter with the implacable hero.

Robert Louis Stevenson describes this aspect of the shadow perfectly in his deceptively ingenuous children's poem entitled, appropriately enough, "My Shadow":

He hasn't got a notion of how children ought to play  
And can only make a fool of me in every sort of way  
He stays so close beside me - he's a coward you can see  
I'd think shame to stick to nursie as that shadow sticks to me!

Although hardly displaying the endearing weaknesses of Stevenson's Shadow, Grendel was obviously terrified when the fight began in earnest, and wanted only to escape:

he on mode weard  
forht on ferde; no by aer fram meahte.  
Hyge waes him hinfus, wolde on heolster fleôn  
secan deofla gedraeg... (753-56)

He became terrified in heart and soul and yet could not escape. His mind was eager to get away; he wanted to flee to a hiding place, to seek the company of devils...

Despite his inferior qualities, or perhaps because of them, Grendel has emerged out of the borderlands of consciousness as a haunting image that evokes an undercurrent of empathy even as he terrifies.

At the height of his conflict with Beowulf, Grendel was no longer frightening but pitiable, although whether we should expect the audience of Beowulf (as opposed to the poet) to sympathize with this view on any sort of conscious level is doubtful. Far more likely, they would greet Grendel's destruction with shudders of relief as, the poet tells us, those

who suffered because of the monster felt only joy at his destruction. This, however, does not negate our sympathetic impulse; we no longer believe in the objective existence of supernatural monsters and so no longer fear them, and, as modern disgust for past atrocities such as the medieval and early modern witch crazes illustrates, the reduction of fear leads, over the course of time, to pity for the one-time object of fear. As knowledge increases, however, the thing which is feared simply changes its form. We may not fear Grendel, we might pity him; but a contemporary terrorist is another matter, though their motivation and alienation might be disturbingly similar under the gaze of eternity. The same deflection of conscious fear occurs in Beowulf, so that the fire dragon is a far more terrifying creature than Grendel, not because the supernatural held a greater power over the Anglo-Saxon than the 'modern' mind, but because the sub-human, or nearly human, figures of Grendel (and his mother) might conceivably have become assimilated into the realm of conscious understanding and thus accepted, leaving the more abstract, less comprehensible concept of evil to hover in the metaphysical realm, until it found expression in a form that could not come under the control of, nor be contained in, the conscious province. In Beowulf the symbol of absolute evil is the Wyrm, a creature that cannot be reduced to a pitiable size.

Pity and fear, Aristotle says, are the emotions generated by an apprehension of tragedy, and the relation of these emotions to experience suggests that tragedy is the natural form for the

expression of human reality. If Grendel can be seen as a tragic figure, as is possible within the context of this poem, it is natural to see him as, in some measure, human -- as, indeed, he is, because aside from his theological and sociological symbolism, Grendel represents an aspect of the psyche that is close to the experience and consciousness of every human being.

Grendel was not simply an emissary of hell, an agent of evil; as the "bearer" of God's anger he was a creature of hell, helle haefton, "hell's captive" (788), where hell is understood as that state farthest from the love and light of God. In his own pain he was driven to inflict pain upon others; hated by God, he was driven to hatred of God and His creatures (which include, by definition, himself). This may be emotionally sound not merely for Grendel, but for many of the world's alienated people, who have ample occasion to feel far from the embrace of God, victims of a cruel retribution or a cycle of crime and punishment perhaps, like that of Cain, greater than they can bear. The terrorist is not a monster, but a human being, and exists in human nature as Grendel existed in Beowulf.

S.L. Dragland has noted the integral relationship of Beowulf and Grendel in his exploration of terms common to both, and particularly notes the word aeglaeca, which he says can mean either "monster" or "hero" (617), and the poet quite specifically indicates that they are equally, if inversely, empowered by assigning numerical values to the strength of each: Beowulf is said to have the strength of thirty men in his famous hand-grip,

while Grendel, in his first raid upon Heorot, made off with thirty thanes.

Although their physical strength was equal, Beowulf and Grendel were radically opposed in the application of their powers. In choosing to trust to the power of good and acting on that faith, Beowulf validated his conscious moral sense in the exercise of his freedom of choice, which may be the fundamental responsibility attached to human power. Grendel, on the other hand, had no freedom of choice: he was in the grip of compulsion, controlled by his instincts.

The poet indicates this compulsion in his use of the passive voice to describe the obsession that controlled Grendel as he contemplated the sleeping warriors:

~~þa~~ his mod ahlog;  
 mynte þæt he gedæle,     aer þon daeg cwome,  
 atol aglaeca     anra gehwylces  
 lif wið lice,     þa him alumpen waes  
 wistfyllen wen.     (730-34)

Then his spirit laughed aloud; the horrible wretched creature thought that he would separate life from the body of every one of them before day came, for the hope of great feasting had come upon him.

The essential passivity of the phrase þa him alumpen waes/wistfyllen wen, "the hope of great feasting had come upon him" makes it possible to see Grendel as the Ophites saw Cain, as a victim, not only of his own nature, but of an unjust God who permitted that nature to exist. He was, in another sense, a mere tool, an instrument of God's will, for the poet tells us Godes yrra baer, "he carried/wore God's anger" (711) not just against



himself but against erring mankind as well, in the same way that Judas or the serpent in the Garden of Eden were instruments. Augustine's notion of evil as coming under the control of God and in the service of some ultimate good is implied here, as well as in the passage where God is referred to as Metod, "Creator" or, perhaps, "Method," a cognomen<sup>3</sup> that implies purpose:

paet waes yldum cup,  
paet hie ne moste,      pa Metod nolde,  
se s[c]ynscaþa      under sceadu bregdan (705-07)

It was well known to men that the demon foe  
could not drag them to the shades below when  
the Creator did not will it (Hall trans.).

In his role as the bearer of God's anger, Grendel is understood to have a purpose directly relevant to the whole of mankind, serving to embody man's sin and to carry with him the wages of that sin, death. The fact, as Hrothgar (or, perhaps, the scop in an aside) asserts, that God eape maeg þone dolsceaðan daeda getwaefan!, "God can easily separate the mad ravager from his deeds" (478-80) reinforces this impression. If, as this passage suggests, Grendel was subject to the will of God, and that will made use of Grendel's sub-human nature to punish mankind for whatever transcendental purpose, it hardly seems fair that he should have had to suffer doubly the harshness of God's judgement and be damned in spirit as well as in nature.

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<sup>3</sup> C.L. Wrenn notes that it was probably Caedmon who first used words like metod, frea, wuldor, dryhten and aelmihtig in a Christian sense (26).

A poignant sense of injustice pervades the poet's picture of Grendel, and the theme of John Gardner's novel, Grendel, derives from the sense of vulnerability and pain that emanates from the monster even in the throes of his fiendish violence. The poet permits a sympathetic understanding of Grendel from the very beginning, when he points out certain features of the story of Cain that seem unduly harsh, particularly his "feud" with God, asserting that Cain (or, perhaps, Grendel) ne gefeah...baere faehðe, "had no joy of that feud" (109) and recalling the curse that attached itself not only to him but to his descendants.

Because, in the Genesis myth, Cain did not die, but carried his sin and blood guilt with him outside the borders of civilized life, we infer that his descendant, Grendel, lives, moves and acts under the control, and by the permission, of God. The myth acknowledges the inevitable continuation in the human race of potentially destructive aggressive impulses: hatreds, jealousies and, especially, murderous inclinations, deriving from and perpetuating a multi-faceted pain that haunts the reader of Beowulf from the poet's insight into the cause of Grendel's agony (86-90) to the final vision of Beowulf, driorigne.../ealdres aet ende, "bleeding, and at the end of his life" (2789-90).

The story of Grendel especially is a study in the components of pain. He is described as dreamum bedaeled, "deprived of joys" (720) and dreamleas, "joyless" (1720). His pain at the obvious joy of the revellers in Heorot and his need to hurt them in turn recall, as A.D. Horgan has said, another of Cain's descendants,

Lamech (13), who killed, to avenge his own pain, "a young man to my hurt" (Gen. 4:23). The poet also vividly describes Grendel's mortal wound, a particularly gruesome one, from which he does not immediately die but escapes to suffer a slow and painful death:

|                     |                      |
|---------------------|----------------------|
|                     | Licsar gebad         |
| atol aeglaeca;      | him on eaxle wearð   |
| syndolh sweetol,    | seonowe onsprungon,  |
| burston banlocan.   | Beowulfe wearð       |
| gudhreoð gyfeþe;    | scolde Grendel þonan |
| feorhseoc fleðon    | under fenhleoðu,     |
| secean wynleas wic; | wiste þe geornor,    |
| þæt his aldres waes | ende gegongen,       |
| dogera daegrim.     | (815-23)             |

Pain shot through the body  
 Of the grisly monster: a hideous gash  
 Appeared in his shoulder, the sinews sprang apart,  
 The joints burst. Glory in battle was given to Beowulf;  
 Grendel had to flee from there  
 Mortally wounded to the cover of the fen-cliffs,  
 Had to make for his joyless den. He knew now for certain  
 That the end of his life had come,  
 The number of his days. (Roberts trans.)

And there is his scream of agony and despair which strikes fear into the hearts of the Danes:

|                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
|                   | Sweg up astag          |
| niwe geneahhe;    | Norð-Denum stod        |
| atelic egesa,     | anra gehwylcum         |
| þara þe of wealle | wop gehrydon,          |
| gryreleoð galan   | Godes andsacan,        |
| sigeleasne sang,  | sar wanigean           |
| helle hæfton.     | Heold hine faeste      |
| se þe manna waes  | maegene strengest      |
| on þaem daege     | þysses lifes. (782-90) |

Up rose an uncanny howl; dire terror seized  
 the North-Danes, each and every one of them  
 who heard, from the wall, the shrieking,  
 the adversary of God singing his terrible song,  
 his dirge of defeat, hell's captive screaming  
 his pain. He who was the very strongest man  
 at that time in this world held him fast.

Beowulf was not permitted to kill Grendel outright because þa Metod nolde, "the Creator did not will it" (967). It was enough that, in tearing off his arm, Beowulf negated Grendel's power to act against Heorot. The fact that Grendel did manage to get away, although at a terrible price, parallels the story of Cain, whom God cursed but spared. The curse was mitigated by the injunction that no man should kill him, the implicit message being that vengeance belongs to God, not man; nevertheless, the Kenites, Cain's descendants in biblical history, assumed a mandate to wreak vengeance sevenfold upon anyone who killed a member of their tribe (EB Micro 797). To institutionalize vengeance, as did the Kenites and the society of Beowulf, is to perpetuate evil as a certainty, rather than a possibility, of action. This was the intrinsic, necessary evil, resident within Heorot, that affected every person there, so that, from the very outset, Heorot was doomed. The scop's description of the hall makes this doom immediate and inescapable by foreshadowing:

|                    |                          |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
|                    | Sele hlifade             |
| heah ond horngeap; | heaðowylma bad,          |
| laðan liges;       | ne waes hit lenge þa gen |
| þæt se ecghefe     | apumsweoran              |
| aefter waelniðe    | waecnan scolde. (81-85)  |

Boldly the hall reared  
its arched gables; unkindled the torch-flame  
that turned it to ashes. The time was not yet  
when the blood-feud should bring out again  
sword-hatred in sworn kindred (Alexander trans.).

The inevitability of such a fate for Heorot seems as tied to the sin of Cain (waelnið, "murderous envy") as was the fate of

Grendel. No-one was exempt from the guilt that destroyed Heorot, neither the highest chief nor the lowest degn.

### Heorot and its Shadow of Guilt

The notions of sin and guilt seem to arise from an attempt on the part of human consciousness to assimilate the evidence of cause and effect and the reality of death into the psyche. This thematic idea in Beowulf comes to a high point in the hero's final battle with the Wyrm. At the early stage of his development represented in his battle with Grendel, guilt is introduced overtly in the case of Unferth, by implication in the case of Hrothgar, and intrinsically with reference to the entire Scylding race.

That man is sinful, that he suffers pain and death precisely because of an "original sin," is a basic tenet of Christianity, one to which the Anglo-Saxon king Alfred the Great subscribed with devout sincerity. A heroic exemplar himself, one who advanced his society in many important ways, Alfred believed that the Viking raids were a punishment for the Anglo-Saxons' spiritual transgressions. Significantly, he identified the solution to the problem of sin as education (EB 1: 259-60). If people were better educated, he reasoned, they would understand more, and be less inclined to act out of irrational impulse. Like Alfred, the Beowulf poet addressed the problem of man's

sinful nature by taking a psychological approach to the question of guilt and proposing an intellectual -- a diplomatic -- solution.

The Scylding race lived under the shadow of guilt, implicit and explicit, in the person of Unferth, whom Beowulf immediately recognized as the negative influence, not solely because of Unferth's disruptive challenge to himself. A Cain-figure, guilty of the murder of his brothers, Unferth, whose name ("un-peace") can be interpreted to mean "strife" (Sisam 41) or "nonsense" (Fred C. Robinson 43-48), personifies a kind of discord that permits the incursion of destructive forces at Heorot; as well, he stands for the potential for absolute disorder, or entropy, that exists within every ordered system.

The chaotic principle, manifest as entropy, has both physical and psychical implications. Like King Alfred, mathematicians have identified "information," or, in other words, education, as the counterfoil to entropic force (Bullock and Stallybrass 207). The Beowulf poet's implicit message, too, is that any defence against chaos must begin in the mental sphere, because he has Beowulf subdue Unferth, not with weapons or any form of physical violence, but with words.

The 'flyting' of Beowulf and Unferth was within a well-established Anglo-Saxon tradition that served to deflect the aggressive drive onto another, more socially acceptable level of expression. The matter over which Beowulf and Unferth engaged in their battle of words involves a story that illustrates another

of the ways aggression is deflected in society, because although Sisam contends that Unferth, in attempting to start a quarrel about the outcome of the swimming match between Beowulf and Breca, was really "testing" the newcomer (40-43), it could also be said that he was attempting to subvert the social value of friendly competition and striking at the heart of the strictly formal dictates of the "guest-host relationship" that John Leyerle shows as fundamental to the social control necessary to maintain order in the volatile warrior society. Beowulf rose to the challenge of Unferth's violations with a devastating counter-accusation that pulled no punches and yet did not provoke or permit counterattack. He was, in other words, a master of tough diplomacy. Unferth was the byle, the "spokesman" or "orator," of Hrothgar's court, so we may presume a certain expertise with words in his quarter (how else would he have escaped punishment for fratricide?); but he was no match for Beowulf, who perhaps had truth and the courage of his convictions on his side.

The mental capacity of Beowulf's courage is shown by Wulfgar's description of the Geat hero. He called Beowulf heardhigende, "brave minded" (394), a designation later applied by the poet to the other Geat heroes who, recovering their senses, attempted to come to Beowulf's aid in the battle with Grendel (799). Wulfgar's words remind us that the battle with Grendel was one that required strength of mind and spirit as well as of body; it was a battle of conscious mind and value against a

force that threatened to destroy the order imposed by consciousness upon the world of behaviour.

Unferth represents this negative force present within Heorot itself, and not only present, but tolerated, even given a favoured position. His taunting of Beowulf is reminiscent of Loki's constant taunting of the Gods of Asgard; both of them sought to create division for its own sake. They are pure chaotic types, as subtle in their ways as Iago was in his. Beowulf might have recognized this characteristic in Unferth instinctively, but he also had the information to back up his defence. His charge against Unferth (590-601) involved Hrothgar's courtier personally in the responsibility for Grendel's raids. Perhaps, as Beowulf asserted in lines 588-89, Unferth will suffer his personal retribution in the afterworld. However, Heorot, as a physical and a social structure, can only pay in the material world, as, indeed, it did, long after its ritual 'cleansing' by Beowulf, with the uprising of another member of the court of Heorot, Hrothgar's fraternal nephew Hrothulf, who, according to some interpretations, was to murder his kinsman, the king's son and heir, Hrethric. This, in addition to the continuing raids of Grendel, ensured the enactment of God's promise of retribution which, on the psychological level, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy set in motion by sin (the breaking of a taboo) and its natural psychological companion, guilt.



Hrothgar, ruler of the Scyldings, was also guilty, both of tolerating evil within his own court by simply being blind to its machinations and (an unstated, but dramatically implicit fact) by his failure to live up to the responsibilities of kingship, implied in his unwillingness to face Grendel. Although, as earlier observed, neither the poet nor the society of Heorot seemed to blame Hrothgar, there might be subtle ridicule implicit in the picture of Hrothgar leaving the hall to seek the comfort and security of his wife's bed (662-65) and emerging later the next morning, after the battle had been decided, from the brydbure, the "woman's apartment" (921) and maeþa hose, "in the company of maidens" (924). Although, on the surface of things, it seems perfectly acceptable for Hrothgar to <sup>sleep</sup>~~seep~~ with his wife, and female attendants could have been Wealhtheow's attendants, the ridicule might have been deserved on another level, because Hrothgar did fail to provide an example of kingly behaviour for his subjects, and, it might be contended, also shirked a duty attendant upon his high office: the duty to accept the ultimate responsibility for, and the consequences of, the actions of his people, however dire those consequences might be. And they could be very dire indeed, as Sir James Frazer indicates in The New Golden Bough. His research into the ritual of human sacrifice, which was common to many ancient civilizations, includes the information that, if the gods were angry, for whatever reason, with a particular tribe, they would be appeased only by the sacrifice of the supreme member of that tribe, or a member of his

family (173 ff.). Frazer also notes that the old Swedish kings of ancient Scandinavian tradition could reign only for a period of nine years, after which they would be put to death, unless they could find a substitute to die for them. The fateful ritual was held at Uppsala (132). So much is made of Hrothgar's great age and his lengthy term of office that, in view of this tradition, it seems possible there was some suggestion of subliminal guilt in this fact alone.

The ritual of human sacrifice was not just a pagan tradition, however. A similar concept appears in the Bible, in Yahweh's command to Abraham (Gen. 22:1-13). Yahweh, perhaps, did not really want the sacrifice, merely the proof that Abraham was willing to make it; but still, the demand was made. Technically, therefore, from both a pagan and a Christian perspective, Hrothgar should have offered himself or one of his sons as a ritual sacrifice, or at least attempted to confront Grendel himself. Yet, although the Scyldings, appealing to "heathen gods," did indeed promise sacrifices (cf. lines 175-178) the Royal Family remained safely out of harm's way, thus violating a primary, though perhaps unconscious, social and religious obligation, self-sacrifice. Which is not, ultimately, surprising, for Hrothgar, unlike Beowulf, had only inherited, not earned, his high office.

The Scylding tribe itself bore a burden of guilt that seems to go beyond mere collective social responsibility. Even the name, Scylding, though presumably derived from the tribe's

founding ancestor, Scyld Scefing, carries resonances of the OE scyld, "guilt." Because of the multivalent properties of OE words, it might be possible to contend that this was a deliberate pun, but even if the name is interpreted as "Sons of Scyld," when Scyld also means "shield," a defensive weapon with implications of institutionalized violence, it is impossible to avoid implicit associations with the pattern of guilt and retribution recurrent in the drama of mankind as both a historical and a psychic collective entity. This association is also suggested in the orthographic similarity of the OE man, which means "crime," "guilt" and "evil" and man, mon, or manna, which refer, respectively, to the individual and the whole human race. In this sense the Scyldings were Sons of Guilt, as were the Anglo-Saxons and all descendants of Adam.

Into this milieu, where everything that was fine and good was being insidiously destroyed by the undetected corruption seething within its own core as much as by the enemy outside (an enemy made necessary by its own blindness, which necessitated the projection of its faults upon the external world) Beowulf appeared as a champion, perhaps a heroic Redeemer. Like Christ, he was, as he himself maintained, unsynnig, "sinless" (2089) and this, coupled with the fact that he was not himself a Scylding, raised him above the historical pattern of guilt in which the Scyldings were enmeshed. He entered the world of Heorot as a pure source of energy, directed towards the achievement of a single commitment: the "cleansing" of Heorot, that is, its

redemption from the powers of evil, in which cause he was ready, if need be, to sacrifice himself.

### The Fate of Heorot and the Heroic Body

The world represented in Beowulf by Heorot is "the fenced-in world of man" (Haarder 340), a social and ideological construct that represents the body of consciousness, or all those structures and relationships by which the conscious mind orders and understands its world. The importance of maintaining the contours of Heorot is equal to the importance of maintaining the supremacy of consciousness itself, for outside its walls may lie the "boundless world of monstrous nothingness" (Haarder 340), the chaos that threatens its annihilation. With the incursion of Grendel who, as the archetypal shadow, is the mearcstapa, "the borderwalker" between consciousness and the unconscious, the chaotic principle crosses the border into the ordered world of the ego. This archetypal principle challenges the possessions of the ego and attempts to possess them, as Grendel attempted to hold Heorot. However, as Grendel no...þone gifstol gretan moste,/mabbum for Metode, "could not approach the gift-throne, that precious thing, because of the Lord" (168-69), the shadow's power is limited by the archetypal will to good.

Indeed, the shadow, though "potentially the most dangerous of all the archetypes," is the least powerful of all the psychic

forms, because it is closest to man's conscious understanding and can be understood in terms of man himself (Hall and Nordby 48). Although it takes a heroic ego to face up to the shadow, and although most men, upon encountering it, would run away just as the Scyldings did, confrontation with the shadow is only the first major contest on the path to individuation, a psychic process that continues throughout the physical life of the individual and leads to a resolution in which, theoretically, the psychic and physical are united in a moment of transcendence, perhaps of transmutation, such as that suggested by St. Paul in his concept of the spiritual body (I Cor. 15:44; and see Chapter V).

Both a physical and a psychic construct, Heorot stands for the physical, the material and the objective, as well as the ideological manifestation of man as a psycho-physical being. As such, Heorot is the body of man; not merely his social or his spiritual body, as Alvin Lee suggests in his interpretation of Heorot as World or Church (25-26), although that is, of course, a natural extension of meaning, but fundamentally, as his physical body, the 'dwelling place' of his spirit, or soul.

Descriptively and etymologically, this image is clear in Beowulf. Heorot is described in bodily terms when the poet speaks of Grendel's arrival at the mudā, "the mouth" (724) of the hall, and the OE synonyms for "body" are often compound forms or derivatives of words such as hama, "home" and hus, "house," as in lichoma, "body home" (3177) or banhus, "bone-house (skeleton?)"

(2508), employing a metaphor of the body as the "house" or "home" of the spirit.

The name, Heorot, "hart," is reinforced by the poet's description of it as horngeap, "horn-gabled" (82). Like the hornas in the Finnesburg fragment (1,4), the antlers of this animal, taken as trophies, adorned the walls of the meadhall. A symbol of the soul, as well as a sexual symbol, with both aggressive and passive qualities, the hart is the animal associated with the Norse patriarch, Odin (Wilson 1980: 33). Its religious significance, established by the archaeological find of the golden horns of Gallehus (Wilson 1980: 13) is introduced by the poet in his description of Grendel's pool:

|                    |                               |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| þeah þe heaðstapa  | hundrum geswenceð,            |
| heorot hornum trum | holtwudu sece,                |
| feorran geflymed,  | aer he feorh seleð,           |
| aldor on ofre,     | aer he in wille,              |
| hafelan [beorgan]; | nis þæt heoru stow! (1368-72) |

Although, harried by the hounds, the heathstalker, the hart, strong in its horns, (might) seek the forest, chased from afar he will sooner give up his life, his being, on the brink, than plunge in to save his head. That is no pleasant spot!

Enhanced by the suggestive separation of "life" and "being" from consciousness and physical safety implied here in the phrase "to save his head," the hart is a symbol of pure spirit, the soul that would sooner choose bodily annihilation than immerse itself in evil. As the hart is the symbol of Heorot, and Heorot stands for the physical and social body of man, the hall is also to be identified with the soul in the sense that Christian man defines himself as the being who has a soul. It is true that even in its

purely physical appointments, Heorot does not represent gross materiality; as a creation of the foremost artisans and craftsmen of legendary time, it represents the finest expression of communal ideals that collective man could create in conjunction with, and opposition to, the given factors of his own creature being. In an artistic sense, man creates himself out of himself, out of an awareness that his total reality is something more than he consciously knows, and out of the hope, inspired by this awareness, that his absolute being includes the possibility of perfection. The perfection of being which is conceived, in part, as immortality is symbolized by the gold adornments in Heorot. As an ideal structure, Heorot was therefore not simply man's mundane body but was, or aspired to be, his heroic body as well, embodying all that was noble and good in the heroic age, all the ideals and notions of man's self-image that evolved out of, or into, the heroic ethic. Integral to this idea was the notion of man as a tragic and heroic figure, valiantly struggling against powerful and hostile forces, doomed to inevitable destruction and death but occasionally allowed a victory that permitted him to postulate his ultimate triumph. Perhaps it is the possibility of triumph and the hope of immortality that renders the fact of death so alien to the human spirit, in the face of its inevitability for the human body.

The poet makes the final connection between Heorot and the physical body most poignantly in his description of the hall after the raids of Grendel, particularly the final raid, which is

followed by a homily on death in which the destruction and death inflicted by Grendel in Heorot is compared to the death and decay of the body itself:

Waes þæt beorhte bold      tobrocen swiðe  
 eal innweard      irenbendum faest,  
 heorras tohlidene;      hrof ana ʒanaes  
 ealles ansund,      þe se aglaeca  
 fyrendaedum fag      on fleam gewand,  
 aldres orwena.      No þæt yðe byð  
 to befléonne      - fremme se þe wille -  
 ac gesecan sceal      sawlberendra  
 nyde genyðde,      niþra bearna,  
 grundbuendra      gearwe stowe,  
 þær his lichoma      legerbedde faest  
 swefep aefter symle.      (997-1008)

That radiant house, all bound within with  
 iron bands, was very broken, the hinges  
 sprung apart; only the roof remained intact,  
 when the monster, stained with wicked deeds,  
 turned in flight, in despair of his life.  
 That is not easy to escape from - let him try  
 who will - for every man's son on this earth  
 must seek the place prepared for the bearers of  
 souls; there his body, fast in its bed of death,  
 will sleep after the banquet.

With the irenbendum, "iron bands" suggestive of the rib-cage, the whole structure carrying intimations of a coffin, and the metaphor of death as the sleep that follows the feasting of life, Heorot is a metaphor for the element of the physical body comparable to that identified by John A.T. Robinson's explication of the ogwa of St. Paul's theological construction. It is this element of the body that, even for Beowulf, must inevitably suffer final defeat at the stroke of death.



The Deorc Deapscua

Beowulf was always aware of the possibility of both death and defeat. Before his battle with Grendel, he made a speech that acknowledged this possibility even as it committed him irrevocably:

'Ic paet hogode,      þa ic on holm gestah,  
 saebat gesaet      mid minra secga gedriht,  
 paet ic anunga      eowra leoda  
 willan geworhte,      opðe on wael crunge  
 feondgrapum faest.      Ic gefremman sceal  
 eorlic ellen,      opðe endedaeg  
 on þisse meoduhealle      minne gebidan!'  
 (631-39 Zupitza)

'I was determined, when I put out to sea,  
 set out in my ship with my company of men,  
 that I would completely fulfill the wishes  
 of your people or fall in death, fast in  
 the grip of the enemy. I will show the  
 courage of a hero, or in this meadhall pass  
 my last day!'

Balanced against the uncertainty of victory, which was outside his power to predicate, is Beowulf's awareness of what possibilities lay within his power: he would win or he would die in the attempt. Either way, his heroic stature was assured, because in his world it did not matter that you won; it mattered that you fought.

This ideal represents the last stand of heroic effort in a civilization that continually faced cultural and physical extinction. There is a probability that, largely because of interspecific aggression and internecine violence, the average life-span of individuals and even communities in Anglo-Saxon

times was predictably short, and evidence indicates that the Anglo-Saxon language, religion and heroic ethic was under fatal assault from the "slow and gradual transformation" (Herrin 127) effected over the course of the sixth to the ninth centuries by the powerful influence of Roman Christianity, to say nothing of the cultural assimilation inevitably effected by successive invasions. The early Christian belief that the world was going to end in the year A.D. 1000 with the second coming of Christ (Wilson 1980: 41) doubtless had a profound emotional effect on the people (even, or perhaps especially, on the non-Christian people, who would not have had cause for rejoicing but may, nevertheless, have inherited the superstition) of the poet's society, bringing home to them not only the imminence of their own individual deaths but also the prospect of total annihilation from which even the physiological solace of genetic, or racial, continuity was withdrawn. This dark theme continues throughout Beowulf, weaving its way from the initial threat of Grendel, who tried to "diminish and destroy" (cf. 1337) the Scylding race, to the final battle with the fire dragon, when Beowulf's death rendered the Geats vulnerable to invasion leading to chaos, enslavement, dispersion and annihilation. Although he was successful in preventing the course of extinction for a time, ultimately fate would win out.

In the pagan heroic world of Beowulf, there is no philosophic acceptance of this inevitability, and no consolation. That comes only after, through the perspective of the Christian

poet. In the poem's world, resistance to the end and lamentation for the loss of greatness characterize the ideals of heroism that permitted action on behalf of individual and racial dignity in the face of death and extinction. However, while Beowulf seemed able to act without hope in his final battle, a continuing belief in the possibility of triumph enhanced his power and, in keeping with the poet's own, later, perspective, it is the Christian vision that is seen, perhaps anachronistically, to provide that element of hope necessary to sustain his spirit. Ironically, this vision was first introduced by the Christian associations of Grendel.

Grendel's role as, literally, the "hand" of death is directly linked to his irredeemable condition of sin, the legacy of his ancestor, Cain; but in his symbolic role as an element of the psyche, Grendel's power to inflict death also suggests that man contains within himself the will to die. Whether this "death-wish" is perceived to be the result of "original sin" or the psychic counterpart of the physical fact, and whether the aggressive instinct is its master or, as Melanie Klein has contended, its servant (Rycroft 27), are questions raised by considerations of Grendel's essential identity, which, since the deorc deapscua, "dark death-shadow" (160) does not accomplish the death of the hero and, in fact, dies himself, is not that of death itself, but is, simply, the fear of death.

Grappling intellectually with the fear of death, the Christian poet of Beowulf might have accepted a Johannine,

Pauline or even gnostic rationalization, encouraged by St. John's statement that fear indicates an imperfection of Christian understanding. "He who fears," said John, "is not made perfect in love" (1 John 4:19). St. Paul countered the physical fact of death with the doctrine of the spiritual body (1 Cor. 4). Meanwhile, the gnostics attempted to rationalize the problem of death by the use of paradox (which, to them, was essential to truth) and a rejection of the mundane world (Jonas 44-48). A synthesis of these perspectives produces the rationalization of death as reconcilable in a final transmutation of matter and spirit. The poet and theologian John Donne, in his own resolution through paradox, contends, "Death, thou shalt die!" Or, at least, as he willed for the readers of his sonnet, the fear thereof.

Beowulf's victory over Grendel was victory over the fear of death, and victory over some of the forces that admit death, but this was not a transcendental victory; it was personal, social and temporal. The seeds of discord and hate remained within the court of Heorot in the forms of Unferth and Hrothulf. Heorot was fated to be attacked again, this time by natural forces, and ultimately to be consumed in laðan liges, "hateful flames" (83), a fate (foreshadowing the cremation of Beowulf's corpse and the final, flaming battle of Armageddon that the Anglo-Saxons expected in the year A.D. 1000 -- 1033 at the latest) to be brought about by the unleashed aggressions -- the

transgressions -- of its human inhabitants. Indeed, Beowulf's victory was not even complete on a personal scale, since he himself continued to kill for vengeance, gold and glory. This motivation, though affirmed by the cultural mores of the milieu, might nevertheless be questioned, if only on a pre-conscious level, by the outstanding individual.

### Beowulf's Sin

As a protagonist in the warrior world and an upholder of the heroic code, it was Beowulf's clear duty to seek vengeance for hostile acts against his lord, his thanes and himself. He himself reminded Hrothgar of the practical wisdom of this duty when the old, weak king was lamenting the death of his best friend, Aeschere, and his words form a concise statement of the rationale for the ancient code of honour:

Ne sorga, snotor guma; selre bið aeghwaem  
 þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne.  
 Ure aeghwylc sceal ende gebidan  
 worolde lifes; wyrce se þe mote  
 domes aer deape; þæt bið drihtguman  
 unlifgendum aefter selest (1384-98 Dobbie 1953).

Do not sorrow, wise one. It is better for each man to avenge his friend than to mourn too much. Everyone of us in this world is going to die; let him who may strive for reputation before death; that will be best for the dead warrior, afterwards...

Other possible meanings of the word domes, here translated as "reputation," might take the reader a little closer to the

philosophical implications of Beowulf's statement of the principles by which he lives his life. These additional meanings include "free will," "choice," "option," and "law" -- all possibilities of action, so that domes derives its final definition from the kind of action that is ultimately taken, whether honourable (as Beowulf clearly intended) or, as our modern derivative, "doom," suggests, fateful. Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of whether Beowulf really needed to pursue Grendel's mother to her lair to avenge Hrothgar (that question will be raised in Chapter III) it might still be asked whether there is anything particularly honourable in seeking vengeance for any quarrel not one's own, even if this is permitted under the heroic code? Although entrenched in the social system of the heroic world, this convention might represent a perversion of the original intention of the law, extending the area of involvement, rather than acting as a deterrent or a means of relieving unhappiness.

A whole system of vengeance-for-pay could evolve out of this aspect of the heroic code, which might, in the beginning, have been intended as a practical solution to the problem of internecine violence or invasion. Beowulf himself reaped the rewards of this practice after killing Grendel's mother, which was a different sort of killing than the dispatching of Grendel himself, not in the same league at all, though both were thought to be supernatural figures. It is only the supernatural element of the conflict, in fact, that saves Beowulf from being just a

hired killer in his second battle. However, Beowulf's battles were not all of a supernatural or psychic nature. There were times, although we only hear of one of them, when he fought in the 'real' world as well, against real men; in these battles, he was not always unsynnig, "sinless," although it was not until the end of his life that he knew this. Unconscious knowledge of his own guilt surfaced as he sat alone on the hill composing his thoughts before his final battle with the fyr-wyrm. It was then that he thought about the patterns of vengeance and war that had marked his lifetime, remembering Herebeald and Hathcyn and Daeghrefn.

#### **Beowulf and Daeghrefn: "The Man He Killed"**

The battle with the Franks that ended with Beowulf's killing of Daeghrefn was cited as the cause of the Geats' past and future vulnerability by the messenger who brought the news of Beowulf's death to his people, as was the chain of events that began with the accidental killing of Herebeald and ended in a mortal feud between the Geats and the Swedes. Both patterns of action were recalled by Beowulf before he entered his final battle, suggesting he knew these events to be significant in the larger political sense; both were precipitated by action not his own, suggesting that, overtly, he felt no moral responsibility for them; both, however, share a common linguistic element in the

word hrefn, "raven" which figures in both the Frankish champion's name, Daeghrefn, "Dayraven," and the name of the place where vengeance for the death of Herebeald was partially exacted and a new feud initiated between the Geats and the Swedes, at the Battle of Ravenswood. These factors suggest a connection of which Beowulf need not have been consciously aware in order for him to begin to feel some stirrings of guilt.

Like the battle in the land of the Frisians that ended with the defeat of the Geats, the death of Higelac, and the killing of Daeghrefn, the battle of Ravenswood was fought in the Swedish homeland, when the Geats were on an "errand of arrogance" (2925). Beowulf, who always went with Higelac on his raids (cf. 2497-98), was doubtless present at the final massacre of Ongentheow and his thanes. He was certainly present in the land of the Frisians, where Daeghrefn was slaughtered in defence of his homeland; Beowulf, avenging the killing of his own proud and reckless lord, was his killer.

Higelac appears to have been a true war-lord; when Beowulf himself was king, and without making any conscious moral judgement of Higelac, he did not emulate his lord in this respect. That he judged such activity morally wrong is, however, evident from his final speech, when he cites the fact that he lived out his time as king at home, seeking "no treacherous quarrels" (2739), as reason to feel in a position of right in relation to God. It may have been through his battle with Daeghrefn that Beowulf came to this realization.



In fighting Daeghrefn, Beowulf was not pitting his superhuman strength against a supernatural, or even a natural, power of evil, but against a fellow human being who was not evil, who was, instead, as Beowulf acknowledged, aðeling on ealne, "a noble in courage" (2506). Daeghrefn was a man with whom, under different circumstances, Beowulf might have been friends, as he was with Breca. There would have been the same sense of shared existence between such men as might constitute the fulfillment of the transcendental aims of communal human being from certain (religious) perspectives. Yet Beowulf had to kill this man, because the existential position in which each was placed left him no choice: it was kill or be killed.

It is certain that, at the time of Beowulf's killing of Daeghrefn, he was in no doubt about the necessity of the act, but it is still not easy in this case to justify any sense of intrinsic rightness. If Beowulf could believe that, in killing Grendel, he was annihilating a force for evil, that is understandable, since he knew nothing of any goodness in Grendel's nature nor had he any knowledge of the creature's fundamental motivating pain. The case of the Merewife was slightly more complex: she had, after all, reasonable motivation and compels some empathy on that alone; though her threat to his life remained absolute, Beowulf did not have to seek her out any more than he had to seek out Grendel, but he may be said to have (consciously) sought both battles out of a desire to protect other people as much as out of a desire to achieve immortality in

their songs and stories. With Daeghrefn, the situation was by no means as morally defensible. The killing marked the nadir of a "falling off" in Beowulf's heroic nature. From an objective standpoint, in fact, it could be contended that it was Daeghrefn, not Beowulf, who was fighting on the side of right, since Higelac and Beowulf were invaders in the land of the Frisians on an expansionist errand of wlenco, "pride, reckless daring" (1206).

The fight in which Beowulf killed Daeghrefn was ostensibly undertaken to protect Higelac's treasure, the breostweorðung (2504), and to exact vengeance for Higelac's death, and Beowulf felt no shame for this act; on the contrary, it was a source of pride: Beowulf claimed to have slain Daeghrefn for dūgeðum, "for glory" (2501). However, whether he consciously perceived it or not, Beowulf cannot have been oblivious to the patently unheroic element of his slaughter of Daeghrefn, because after that fight he seemed to reject his own particular source of strength, the hildegrap, "battlegrip" (2507) he used to crush the Frisian hero, in favour of the sword that, as Klaeber infers, he "won" from Daeghrefn (215). It might have been at this point that he began, subconsciously and symbolically, to carry the burden of sin, to question some of the precepts of the old heroic ideal, and to doubt the validity of judging his own survival as inherently morally superior to the survival of others. His final thoughts of Daeghrefn consolidate this impression, suggesting that, although the killing was necessary, inevitable, and, by the old code, desirable, there was still something unsettling about it.

The name Daeghrefn, or Dayraven, invokes the spirit of Cain, because the raven was a symbol of Cain as well as a symbol of evil; the fact that it was also the Anglo-Saxons' tribal symbol seems to round out this symbolic movement with a sense of the guilt intrinsic to all mankind. The element "day" implies a bringing to light (i.e. consciousness) of this primary guilt, so that Daeghrefn may be seen as the experiential focus of Beowulf's subconscious awareness, first acquired through his battle with Grendel, of the evil within his own psyche. His memory of this encounter remained with him, never fully assimilated or comprehended until his dying day, when his trophy of this ignoble conquest, the sword Naegling, failed him in his time of need. In this context, Naegling acted as a symbol of Beowulf's soul, which, like the runaway slave who precipitated the Wyrms attack, was synbysig, "sin busy" (2226). The failure of Naegling serves as a reminder that, in motivation and in action, Beowulf had continued to exercise negative aggression, the crime of Grendel and his ancestor, Cain.

This ironic turn-and-turn-again is evidence of the unity of the poem's structure and further evidence of the intrinsic connection between Beowulf and his first great adversary, Grendel. Juxtaposing the supernatural and natural encounters emphasizes the complexity of the poem's understanding of the problem of aggression, which must be fought in both the inner and the outer worlds, and indicates that the victory achieved by

Beowulf in his struggle with the dark side of his own and his society's psyche was far from complete.

### **Beowulf's Heroic Achievement**

Although his killing of Grendel did not eradicate the possibility of violence or obviate the prospect of annihilation for either the Scyldings or the Geats, Beowulf did win a limited moral victory for himself and for his society. The principle of control and order has been upheld, both in society and in Beowulf's own psyche.

Whereas the rules of his early sporting contest with Breca had already been determined by the games developed by his society to counter the potentially destructive aggressions that might arise between members of the same or closely related communities, his contest with Grendel posed the problem in the more personal, less easily defined terms of controlling his own random destructive impulses, which might easily have led to initiating unnecessary warfare with unknown peoples. That he learned his lesson well is demonstrated in his final speech, when he consoled himself with the thought that he "never sought quarrels" with other nations.

His encounter with Grendel, his own negative image, showed Beowulf that he could control and conquer this inferior aspect of his being and effectively 'disarm' destructive impulses by

committing his own aggressive drive to action for the higher good.

Beowulf's trophy of his battle, the arm and claw of Grendel, acquired by the exercise of brute strength, symbolizes both the active and the destructive elements of his aggressive nature. The arm symbolizes the will to action, and Beowulf's act in tearing off Grendel's arm shows that direct confrontation, or the application of the light of consciousness to the shapes of darkness, can reduce these shapes to manageable size and deprive them of their power to act autonomously or irrationally. In establishing this possibility, Beowulf has established a conscious control over these subconscious elements and has been himself partially transformed by the assimilation of his own negative aggressive qualities, which the poet has defined and illuminated with reference to Christian ideals. The protagonist is now ready to move on in his heroic quest for immortality "on the lips of men" and "in the arms of God."

### 3 THE MEREWIF AND SEXUALITY IN BEOWULF

#### Idese Onlicnes

With the attack of the monstrous form in idese onlicnes, "the shape of a woman" (1351) that emerged from the depths of the dismal mere to wreak a primordial vengeance upon the warrior world of man, Beowulf encounters a force that has traditionally been determined to be a major threat to man's ontological integrity and a serious obstacle to his quest for immortality. In my view, the underlying theme of the second of Beowulf's epic battles is human sexuality and his pattern of activity represents confrontation with the archetypal female principle. The notions, prevailing throughout literature and myth, of energy as masculine and matter as feminine, and the process of enantiodromia (the irresistible movement of one opposite towards its counterpart) with reference to the male and female principles is intrinsic to the symbolic fire/water image of the Merewife's home, the dreadful mere, and Beowulf depicts the resolution of these antinomies, as well as the patriarchal sky/war God's subjugation of an earlier, earth/agricultural goddess, in the poem's epic

simile (1605-11). The battle, in colloquial terms, is the 'battle of the sexes.'

The sexual instinct has been very broadly defined by Jung as "all those instinctual forces which extend beyond the domain of the instinct for self-preservation" (CW 18: 429). These forces are the psychic and physical manifestations of a primordial energy that is seen in many cultures to be of an inherently sexual nature. The yin/yang principle of Chinese philosophy and Freud's early notion of the libido are philosophical and psychological formulations of the same idea. In Jung's schema, the intrinsically creative aspect of sexuality is separated from the necessarily destructive aspects of self-preservation incorporated in the idea of the aggressive instinct; nevertheless, the conflict that lies at the heart of all creativity is retained.

Like other primordial pairs of binary opposites (heat and cold, light and dark, wet and dry, consciousness and unconsciousness), the male and female principles represent the extremes of differentiation by which human comprehension experiences life. [Jung calls these "paired opposites" syzygies (1972: 10)]. All opposing principles maintain their integrity by conflict and yet, in nature, as Jung's theory of enantiodromia states, the opposites naturally seek one another; it is the conscious mind, out of its need to discriminate, which has separated them contra naturam (1939: 121).

Some Jewish and gnostic interpretations of the two creation myths in Genesis suggest that man and woman were once the same

being (Warner 22); and Norse myth contains a similar pre-consciousness in the symbiotic relationship of Frey and Fröya, the brother/sister pair who were at times manifestations of one another, suggesting that this androgynous being still lives in the psyche as an archetype of wholeness. The 'separating out' of consciousness from unconsciousness, as Eve was 'separated out' of Adam (or as a primordial one-celled creature split in two) could have left a vestigial psychic intuition of a primordial split of the original unconscious entity. Both Norse and Christian creation myth interprets this split in terms of the male and female principles, which nevertheless remain irrevocably joined by the same energy that attended their break, the energy of the life instinct or libido.

M.I. Seiden wrote that all cycles and antinomies "represent symbolically the conflict and union of the archetypal male and the archetypal female" (35). From this perspective, the relation of man and woman assumes a cosmic importance and becomes "an element where man and Daimon sport, pursue one another, and do one another good or evil" (Webster 108). More pragmatically, and less esoterically, Jung wrote, "Although man and woman unite, they nevertheless represent irreconcilable opposites which, when activated, degenerate into deadly hostility" (CW 12: 23). In the spirit of these statements, this study of Beowulf's second mythic conflict will examine the poem's representation of sexual relationships on a cosmic and an earthly battlefield, asserting that Beowulf's battle with the merewif acts out the psychic drama



of confrontation with the archetypal female principle as experienced from the perspective of the masculine mind, for it is an unavoidably relevant assumption that the author of Beowulf, whoever he might have been, monk, courtier or scop, was, first of all, a man.

Apart from the sexual overtones set by the gender of Beowulf's second antagonist, the study of Beowulf as a product of the masculine mind grows naturally out of an understanding of the epic as a poetic form that chronicles the development of male-dominated society. Acknowledging this societal fact, it would nevertheless be an error to suppose that women had little or no power in the poet's world because, as Christine Fell has conclusively shown in Women in Anglo-Saxon England (1984), the aristocratic women, at least, enjoyed both social status and economic independence which, to some analysts, is a measure of their actual power. If this factor is not clearly shown in Beowulf, it might be simply because, as Fell pointed out, heroic poetry was not susceptible to rapid change; its values and attitudes "are representative of earlier culture" (26). The same was not necessarily true of the religious beliefs expressed in the heroic mode, however, and women in Anglo-Saxon times have been shown to have been prominent and influential, not only in the religious milieu, where their position was officially secondary though their influence great, but also in the epic convention. Writing in 1898, Lina Eckenstein observed that "the desire to raise women to saintship was essentially Anglo-Saxon and was

strongest in the time which immediately followed the acceptance of Christianity" (Fell 111) and this desire is obvious in poetic works such as Elene [which, Wrenn says, shows the influence of Beowulf (27)], Juliana, and Beowulf's textual companion, Judith. Nor was the saintliness of these women qualified by Christian meekness, although it is interesting to note that they all fulfilled doctrinally acceptable sexual roles, since Helen (Elene) was a mother devoted to effecting the will of her son<sup>1</sup> (which was, significantly enough, to obtain the Cross) while the other two ladies were virgins who resisted the sexual demands of pagan males.

Juliana may be said to have offered passive resistance. A virgin who, despite the threats of her father and husband, refused to accept the conditions of her forced marriage to a pagan tyrant, she mentally withstood (without apparent difficulty) the temptation to submit tendered by Satan, exposing him in the process. She was ultimately beheaded, a symbolically appropriate fate, and thereby dispatched to a blissful union with the true object of her spiritual love.

The biblical heroine, Judith, in contrast, and in keeping with her syncretic function in heroic poetry, resisted aggressively and, in a reversal of Juliana's motif, beheaded her would-be rapist, the arch-symbol of evil, Holofernes. Smart, gleaw on

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<sup>1</sup> Irving thinks of Grendel's mother as "another female busy about the interests of her son" (1969: 144) and Haruta sees Wealhtheow as another such 'type' (11).

geðonc, "artful minded" (13) and, unfortunately for her, since it attracted the unwelcome attention of the pagan war-lord, ides aelfscinu, a "woman of elfin beauty" (14 Bradley trans.), Judith is reminiscent of Beowulf himself, particularly in his battle with the merewif, since Beowulf struck the Merewife on the neck with his sword and banhringas braec "broke the bone-rings" of that arch symbol of female sexual aggression. The differences between Beowulf and Judith are of as much interest as the similarities, and it is relevant to this inquiry that Robert Hosmer considers Beowulf to depict "a life which, though valorous, results not only in death but in social disintegration," while Judith, he says, "redefines the values of the Germanic heroic code" so as to make most of those values acceptable to the audience (OEN 20, 1986: 85).

A full comparison of the archetypal hero and the archetypal heroine of heroic society, though not within the scope of this discussion,<sup>2</sup> would have to acknowledge the validity of aggressive action in the sexual arena and deconstruct the "myth of women's sexual apathy" (Ferguson 27); but it would also have to identify the sexual sphere with perceived evil from both the male and the female perspectives. This point of view seems to have been strengthened by Christian and pagan Germanic tradition, so that the idealization of Judeo-Christian heroines like Helen, Juliana and Judith would readily be accepted by Anglo-Saxon Christians.

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<sup>2</sup> But see Jane Chance, Woman as Hero in Old English Literature, Syracuse, 1986, for one treatment of the topic.

Heroines on the grand scale of these three redoubtable ladies might have appealed to the Anglo-Saxons in combining elements of saintliness with mental strength and physical courage, and, although these poems are thought to have been written much later than Beowulf (Temple 13) it would be reasonable to suppose that such qualities were present and valued, at least to some extent, in the women of Beowulf and of the poet's society as well. A woman such as Hygd might be expected to display such strength of character, as would both Wealhtheow and her daughter, Freawaru, as well as Hildeburh, even in the midst of their most grievous personal trials. Even Modthryth, once her unfortunate disposition was altered by her marriage, could have been expected to turn her tendency to the expression of negative aggression to more constructive ends, to become, like a true convert, as powerful a force for good as she had before been for evil. Nevertheless, beneath the lip-service quite willingly paid to the aristocratic women of earlier heroic society by poets and nobles of a later, perhaps less 'heroic' age, there exists a dynamic, related to the position of women in warrior society and the devaluation of women under the orthodox Christian schema, that the poet of Beowulf records with inspired, though perhaps unconscious, accuracy. It is upon this aspect that the following discussion of the women in Beowulf wishes to focus.

### Women in the Warrior World

Doris Stenton and Christine Fell consider the social inferiority of women in England to have begun with the military society imposed by the Norman Conquest and contend that Anglo-Saxon women were "more nearly the equal of their husbands and brothers than at any period before the modern age" (Fell 13). This, apart from being suspect with reference to earlier male-female dynamics in England itself, must simply be an indicator of the low status of women throughout the successive ages of English history, because evidence from anthropology and from poetry (which may be seen as a psychic history) suggests that there was a time when women were considered, not simply equal to men politically, as Tacitus and Dio Cassius record was the case with the Britons during the time of Boadicea, but superior to them in certain fundamental ways. Nevertheless, reflecting a dynamic that gathered momentum with the advent of Christianity, the world of Beowulf has placed women in a clearly subordinate position.

The process of women's subordination to men might actually have begun in mythical, rather than in historical or legendary time. This pre-conscious time, the collective memory of which is indelibly recorded in poetic myth and symbology, began before the establishment of extended social order, and before the evolutionary development of consciousness brought the power to formulate either thoughts or questions, when biological necessity dictated 'right relationships' for homo erectus in both social

and sexual areas. Under such strictures, might was determined to be right. When homo erectus was (or became) homo habilis, the point at which the evolution of the hand conferred upon the human being the power to manipulate and change the environment (a factor represented in Beowulf, as discussed earlier, by the importance accorded Beowulf's mundgripe, "handgrip") the same biological necessity dictated which roles would be played by women and men in the work of controlling or managing the environment to the best advantage of the human species. Working partnerships and a sign, or symbolic language might have evolved during this phase, and mating might have tended to become a more permanent arrangement, to the utilitarian benefit of both male and female, as well as the offspring, who might still not have been recognized as being connected in any physical sense to the male. Altruism, a pre-conscious form of love known to exist in some animal and bird social arrangements, might have been a factor in human relationships at this stage, but this "unselfish concern for another" (OED) was most probably limited to relationships involving sexual or recognizable kinship ties (i.e., those between siblings and mother) and these ties, strengthened by transference through collective social behaviour, would carry over to form the family ties of homo sapiens, the first "knowing" or conscious man. With consciousness came wonder and, eventually, verbal language, perhaps leading, as the structuralists would have it, to homo loquens. It might be that the religious mode of awareness evolved naturally out of this combination, in conjunction

with an expansion of altruism in the male, to whose consciousness the wonder of birth might be perceived in religious terms. In those prehistoric times, as archaeology and mythology show, woman was worshipped as the embodiment of the life force. Religious iconography indicates that the female deity preceded the male in most Indo-European cultures; the Greek goddess Demeter, as well as the Sumerian Ishtar, the Celtic Epona and the Germanic Nerthus, all have origins which considerably predate their male counterparts. In those times, it appears that the female was accorded a special status, and family ties were strengthened by the introduction of this element into male-female relationships. Family ties may be said to form the basis of the tribal society that developed into larger, organized structures of alliances made through matings or marriages, and eventually into the beginnings of modern civilization.

The all-important social recognition of kinship derived, in earliest society, from the mother rather than the father, simply because it was the mother to whom the infant could be immediately perceived to be connected. Even later, when the father's role in procreation was deduced and confirmed, kinship ties were most reliably determined by the mother's line. Jewish society, while affirming a patriarchal god, recognized this factor in the matrilineal laws governing racial and religious descent, and does so to this day. Germanic society, on the other hand, recognized patrilineal kinship in its inheritance laws, but demonstrated a strong desire to control the certainty of descent in its

stringent punishment, both social and physical, for women caught in the act of adultery. Tacitus, who observed the Germanic tribes during the Roman conquests of the 1st century A.D. records:

...punishment (for an adulterous woman)...is summary and left to the husband. He shaves off his wife's hair, strips her in the presence of kinsmen, thrusts her from his house and flogs her through the whole of the village. They have, in fact, no mercy upon a woman who prostitutes her chastity (Mattingly trans. Tacitus on Britain and Germany 116).

Adulterous men were subject, in Egyptian and Roman law, to having their noses and ears cut off but this practice was performed by or through the agency of the husband upon his cuckold and not, as far as I can determine, by the wife upon an adulterous husband. John Selden reported that the practice of cutting off the noses and ears of an adulterer was adopted with a subtle refinement in 11th century Anglo-Saxon England by King Knute, who "ordered that a Wife who committed adultery should have her nose & ears cut off" [Cnut. leg: can. 50" (1682, Bk. i, ch. 12, 20) cited in Peters 118]. It is not, perhaps, surprising to learn that, as Tacitus wrote, "Adultery in that populous nation is rare in the extreme" (Mattingly 116).

In such a society, as Maud Bodkin observed of any male-dominant society, the archetypal hero image is a construct of the masculine mind (217). So, also, are the ideals of womanhood to which the actual women in that society are expected to conform.



In the heroic age of which Beowulf is a surviving relic, the warrior group was firmly established in the seat of power, both political and interpersonal. Bodkin's assessment of the dynamics of male-female relationships under such a structure notes "the 'woman ignoring' or woman belittling atmosphere of the warrior group, and of the patriarchal system it has imposed upon a conquered land" (161). Metaphorically speaking, this "conquered land" was located in the realm of sexual relationships, which at some point in pre-history underwent a radical change that Robert Graves has traced to "the revolutionary institution of fatherhood" (388).

Graves theorized that the institution of fatherhood which ultimately gave rise to the patriarchal system was a relative late-comer on the social scene, but it arrived with tremendous dramatic impact. Once it was established, the social status of women radically altered. With the knowledge of paternity, the female's mystic power was revealed to be dependent upon insemination by the male, and with this expansion of knowledge the seeds of revolution were sown, along with those of suspicion and distrust.

The importance of the swustersunu, "sister's son" relationship in Beowulf might be a vestigial remnant of the earlier time, when sibling relationships were the only truly valid ones; that this was a convention of Germanic society in the first century was noted by Tacitus, who duly recorded that "the sons of sisters are as highly honoured by their uncles as by their own fathers.

Some even go so far as to regard this tie of blood as peculiarly close and sacred..." (Mattingly 117-18).

The inclination to trust consanguinity was not always justified, as the apparently frequent incidence of fratricide indicates. However, while brothers killing brothers, either by accident or design, was a relatively common occurrence from all accounts, and is a thematic motif of Beowulf, there is no mention in the poem of brothers killing sisters or vice versa; on the contrary, a special closeness is implied and, as Tacitus indicated, the maternal-uncle/sister's-son relationship, such as that between Sigemund and Fitela and Higelac and Beowulf, was apparently sacrosanct, having perhaps evolved out of sublimated or expressed sexual desire between brother and sister.

Since sexual desire is essentially an undifferentiated function in the immature individual, it is not unusual to find that propinquity may lead to its projection upon a sibling. The expression of this desire has historically been validated in many cultures besides the Germanic, most notably the civilization of the ancient Egyptians, in which royal descent was maintained through the offspring of brothers and sisters. The brother-sister bond was also an issue in Greek culture, as evident in the relationship of Polynices and Antigone in Sophocles' play. The existence in Norse mythology of a divine brother/sister pair, Frey and Freya, indicates that early Germanic society acknowledged special relationships between brothers and sisters. In other cultures, such as those influenced by Judeo-

Christianity, in whose mythology the original siblings were both boys (and, perhaps not so co-incidentally, whose first crime was fratricide), brother-sister incest was taboo. The Anglo-Saxons might have found themselves in a somewhat awkward position in relation to this question of sexual morality when they converted to Christianity, because there is evidence in their mythology and legend that brother-sister incest was an accepted element of their collective racial heritage.

The social reality of this bonding was affirmed in Anglo-Saxon social convention as late as the 9th century to the extent that sisters were expected to place their brothers ahead of their husbands in the event of discord between the in-laws (Fell 74). Hildeburh's anguish at the death of her brother takes on an even darker intensity from this perspective, since it seems possible, within the context of the poem, that the situation in which Hildeburh found herself might have arisen through sexual jealousy on the part of her brother, Hnaef. The facts, as we have them in Beowulf, are meagre, but it seems clear that Hildeburh was a "peaceweaving" bride, married off to Finn to ensure a truce between the Scyldings and the Frisians.<sup>3</sup> This truce was broken for reasons not given in the poem, although Klaeber, in his introduction to the Finnsburg fragment, said "evidently Hildeburh is in some way connected with the hostility between her brother

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<sup>3</sup> This is what Donald K. Fry assumes in his edition of the Finnsburg Fragment and Episode (13). Fry (44-63) refers in this matter to Bonjour 159.

and her husband" (231). What we are given to understand, in Beowulf, however, is that Hildeburh "had no cause to praise the good faith of the Jutes," that her brother and son, who were both killed in battle, were her "chief joy of the world," and that after the battle was over:

|                             |                         |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Het ða Hildeburh            | aet Hnaefes ade         |
| hire selfre sunu            | sweolode befaestan,     |
| banfatu baernan,            | ond on bael don         |
| eame <sup>4</sup> on eaxle. | Ides gnornode,          |
| geomrode giddum.            | Guðrinc astah.          |
| Wand to wolcnum             | waelfyra masest,        |
| hlynode for hlawe;          | hafelan multon,         |
| bengeato burston,           | ðonne blod aetspranc,   |
| laðbite lices.              | Lig ealle forswearg,    |
| gaesta gifrost,             | para ðe þær guð fornam  |
| bega folces;                | waes hira blaed scacen. |
|                             | (1114-24 Klaeber)       |

Then Hildeburh ordered her own son  
 To be placed in the flames on Hnaf's pyre,  
 To be laid beside his uncle in the blaze,  
 The bodies to be burned. The woman lamented,  
 Sang her song of grief. The warrior soared aloft.  
 The greatest of funeral fires swirled up to the clouds,  
 Roared before the funeral mound. Heads melted,  
 Wounds, battle bites on the body, burst open,  
 As the blood spurted out. Fire, greediest of spirits,  
 Swallowed up all those of both nations  
 Whom war had taken there. Their glory had departed.  
 (Roberts)

There are many things to note for future reference in this gory but gloriously descriptive passage, including: the fact that

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<sup>4</sup> In his edition of the Episode, Donald K. Fry reads this as earme, and punctuates the phrase so as to read Earme on eaxle ides gnornode, which gives the passage quite another meaning, referring the action to the ides whom he sees as "standing alongside the pyre, either Hildeburh or perhaps a ritual mourner and mistress of ceremonies" (42).

Hildeburh is called ides, "lady" or "woman," as is, later, the merewif; the personification of fire, gaesta gifrost, "greediest of spirits," as a numen of the more immediate transformative process favoured (in imagination) by the pagan, over the slower decay of the body in the grave; the amplification of bengeato, "wounds" or "gashes" to laðan lices, "battle bites on the body," as though battle itself were an entity; and the lamenting woman's geomor gyd, her "mournful song," which precedes by generations the lament of the gecweowle, "old woman" <sup>5</sup> at the cremation of Beowulf [and "affair of modern philology" (Barney x) or not, there does seem to me an intrinsic connection between geomor and geomeowle that illuminates the status of women in the warrior society]. Of primary importance here, however, is the symbolic gesture itself; when Hildeburh placed her son beside her brother in the funeral pyre, both might be seen as sacrifices to the brief, uneasy peace that followed, but her gesture primarily affirms the bond between the maternal-uncle and sister's son that was so important an element of Germanic kinship.

The extraordinary closeness between brothers and sisters is emphasized in Beowulf not only explicitly, as in the case of Hildeburh and Hnaef, but also implicitly in the relationship of Higelac and Beowulf (since Beowulf is thought to have been the son of Higelac's sister) as well as by the allusion to Sigemund

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<sup>5</sup> There is, of course, a dispute about the reading of this word, but that will be dealt with later in the discussion.

and Fitela. Undertones of sexual bonding between brothers and sisters are suggested in the story of the legendary Sigemund and his nephew Fitela. Although no mention is made of this factor in Beowulf, perhaps for the same reasons of discreet sensibility that Roberts suggests contributed to the suppression of Beowulf's bear-ancestry (x), it was thought that Fitela was not only Sigemund's nephew but also his son by his sister, Signy (Wilson and Foote 43). Even if sexual relations between brothers and sisters were taboo and the desire repressed or sublimated, the social priority of the brother-sister kinship bond remained implicit and was explicitly extended to include the sons of the sister. This explicit extension seems to indicate a basic sexual distrust of women that might also be traced to a fundamental doubt of paternity. Under such conditions of sexual doubt, a man's desire for continuation of his blood line might conceivably have been seen to be more reliably satisfied by the sons of his sister than by his own sons, and the closest certainty a man might have of his relationship to a descendant would seem to be with his sister's son.

Thomas Garbáty concludes that this sort of preoccupation originates in "a noble, wealthy, polygynous society involving a low confidence of paternity" (233). Nobility, is, of course, relative to the society, and the society of Beowulf, however violent and volatile, was aristocratic, as, according to most scholars (e.g. Whitelock, Leyerle), was its audience; wealth they certainly had, either by inheritance or plunder; but

Garbaty's conclusion might seem to preclude the observation of Tacitus that adultery was "extremely rare" in Germanic society, unless the factors Tacitus observed arose from extreme measures to offset the sexual doubt, which is most probable. Whether such suspicion was justified in the society of Beowulf is not at issue; that the implication should stand as a tradition of the sexual and social relationships of the poem is, however, relevant.

Hrothgar's seeming preference for both Hrothulf and Beowulf over his own (and Wealhtheow's) sons, implicit in his wife's need to remind him of their rights (1167-87) might be better understood in these terms since Hrothulf was only Hrothgar's brother's son (even less certainty there) and Beowulf not related at all. It is therefore possible that Hrothgar's attitude was partially created by the subconscious assumption of sexual betrayal implicit in the sister's-son convention. This assumption touches all the women in the poem, even the most idealized.

#### **Hygd: The 'Ideal Woman' and the Anima**

Hygd, the youthful wife of Higelac, appears to be the ultimate idealization of the female in the 'real' (i.e. the 'historical' as opposed to the clearly mythic) world of Beowulf. Young, wise, accomplished (1926-27), Hygd was a paragon to whom

Beowulf owed, and paid, allegiance, long after his liege lord was dead. It was to Hygd that Beowulf gave Wealhtheow's gift, a "neck-ring" the poet compares to the Brising necklace, a very valuable treasure with a mythological history going back to Freya, or Frigg, the Norse goddess of love and death, whom the Anglo-Saxons were known to have worshipped (Fell 27-28). Although Malone contends that "these gifts hardly have much significance" (1941: 357), the transfer of such a symbolic article from Wealhtheow to Hygd via Beowulf might signify the passing from one generation to another both the perceived guilt, and the power, which affected women's status and survival in the warrior world.<sup>6</sup>

The story of Frigg, or Freya, and the Brisingamen reveals the source of woman's power and downfall in the male world to be her sexuality. As the myth goes, Freya was married to Odur, whom she passionately loved. However, this factor did not inhibit her when, one day, she happened upon some dwarves who had created, as a sexual trap for her, the most beautiful necklace she had ever seen. Its magical properties seduced her and she wanted to buy it, but the dwarves would not sell for mere gold. In order to possess the Brising necklace, she had to be herself possessed; she had to agree to "wed" (Green 85) each of them for one night.

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<sup>6</sup> But see Setsuko Haruta, "The Women in Beowulf," for an interpretation of the transfer as symbolizing "the problem which a royal mother has to face: how is she to protect her children from forthcoming disaster?" (9).



Obsessed by her passion to own the necklace, Freya instantly agreed.

Upon returning home from the exchange, she was overcome with shame, and wore the necklace only in private. However, her guilty secret was revealed to Odur by a Satanic figure of Norse mythology, Loki, who entered her room while she was sleeping and stole the necklace from around her neck, presenting it to Odur as proof of her infidelity (even a goddess cannot get away with adultery). When she awoke and discovered it was missing, she went immediately to somewhat belatedly confess and beg her husband's forgiveness, but he had gone. Going to Odin, the All-father of the Gods, Freya confessed to this patriarch and begged for help. Odin gave her permission to leave Asgard in search of Odur, and forgave her, but decreed that she should wear the necklace always, as a reminder of her sin (a motif of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, when Sir Gawain, despite the reassurances of Arthur, insisted upon wearing the girdle that reminded him of his sexual shame -- which was, in part, having 'conversation' with the wife of another man).

For many years, Freya traversed Midgard, the human world, a thin membrane bounded by the extremes of fire and ice that comprised the Norse universe, teaching men and women "the gentle ways of love" (Green 88), until she was finally reunited with her divine husband.

Another, possibly older, version of the myth has Odin himself as the outraged husband; he orders Frigga to stir up

hatred and destruction among mankind so that warriors fallen on the battlefield would rise to fight and die again and again (Crossley-Holland 1980: 65-70).

This tale of love, infidelity and violence, evoked by the allusion to the Brising necklace, served to keep alive the primary sexual guilt of women as established by a society concerned with eradicating women's sexual autonomy. This was perceived as necessary because, while the social value placed upon the uncle-nephew relationship might represent the masculine attempt to control inheritance and succession to power, or limit it to blood descendants, the swustersunu bond clearly could not be a completely satisfactory solution to the problem (since every new piece of information presents problems of assimilation) that attended man's knowledge of his own role in procreation. An ideal solution would have to provide absolute confidence of paternity; this confidence could only be assured if women's sexuality could be, in some way, controlled. A part of this control was established physically, with the particularly merciless punishments meted out to a woman and her adulterous lover; the linking of sexuality with love is a further step in this search for a final solution, effective where, given the aggressive natures of Germanic and Anglo-Saxon women, overt domination might fail. The implicit message is that, although woman is to be forgiven for her inherently amoral sexual nature, she is always to be aware of and on guard against this unacceptable tendency. Even the best of women, the paragons like

Wealhtheow and Hygd, needed to be reminded of this from time to time -- perhaps more than most, since they had the responsibility of setting an example for their lesser sisters.

Again, as half of the warriors slain in battle belonged to Freya (Crossley Holland 1980: 203) she is also a goddess of death, and embodies in her person the ambiguous connection between love and death that underlies mythology and literature. That Higelac should have been wearing this symbolic circlet in his fatal battle with the Frisians is significant in this context, because it associates Hygd, who must have given it to him as a token, with his eventual undoing; his taking it is, in a way, metaphorically suggestive of Adam's taking a bite of the apple, signifying his acceptance of Eve's guilt and his willingness to share her fate. He died during a raid, defending the spoils of battle (1202-05, 2363ff, 2501ff), a reported fact that echoes the implication of Freya's obsessive desire for the Brising treasure, i.e. that man's greed is connected to his desire to satisfy the demands of women, who provide a convenient object for the projection of this guilt-inducing trait. (If a woman desires beautiful and costly objects and a man can keep her well supplied with these things, perhaps then she will not be tempted to stray...)

Hygd's aspect of irreproachability, when seen against this backdrop of symbolism, might seem amazing, until one recalls that it is highly unlikely that this innuendo was permitted to touch her, at least on a conscious level. In an overt sense, she was a

fantasy figure, as much a creation of the men in her world out of their ideals of perfect womanhood as the other women in world of the poem were, with or without their consent, moulded along the lines of existing social precepts or constraints. Although she was not consciously manipulated to the extent of Freawaru and Hildeburh, and although her power seems to have exceeded that of Wealhtheow (for Hygd could, in fact, control the succession of her realm, as indicated by her power to offer the throne to Beowulf -- which offer might have been accompanied by herself) this power was possibly related to her desirability. She, perhaps more than anyone else, bore the burden of the projection of men's highest fantasies of women.

An ideal figure on the surface, Hygd is an archetypal form of woman, the embodiment of the anima. "A semi-conscious psychic complex having partial autonomy of function" (Fordham 54 n.2), the anima is an extremely influential projection of the feminine element of the psyche that appears frequently in literature written by men. Shelley's muse in "Alastor" or the shadowy figure of Keats' "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" are classic examples of the archetype.

Because of the implications of this archetypal entity as a representation of the bisexual (or androgynous) nature of the psyche, the erotic content of the anima is sometimes acknowledged but more often sublimated in the course of her projection. Thus, she may be projected onto someone desirable, but unattainable, as Hygd might have been to Beowulf. Hygd's wisdom, both stated

(1926-27) and implied (as in her name, which means "thought"), remarkable in one so young, is a classic attribute of the anima projection, which often seems to impart a "timeless" quality, so that the women on whom it is projected appears young but seems to possess a "secret knowledge" (Fordham 54) that entices the hero with its promise of revelation and fulfillment.

The mortal, and often all-too-human, woman upon whom the anima is projected is seen as cherishing, satisfying and exalting, the supreme embodiment of the beauty felt in the physical world; but, in her negative aspect, as Maud Bodkin has noted, the anima's power is felt to be enslaving and betraying. There is perhaps a suggestion of this element, too, in the passing of the Brisng circlet to Higelac, a healsbeag, "collar" (1195) that binds him to her ofer yða ful, "over the cup of the waves" (1208) though, wearing it, his life is ultimately forfeit.

The perceived responsibility of woman for the tendency of the masculine unconscious to view her in such ambivalent fashion is associated with her anima role as mystic guide. Milton identified and challenged this male projection in Paradise Lost when Christ confounded Adam's capitulation to Eve by asking, "was shee made thy guide?" (X: 146). The presumed answer would have to be no, that men have themselves created this image of woman out of their own psyches. Nevertheless, woman has readily, and often with alacrity, assumed this role; for it has been her main source of power.

### Wealhtheow: The Anima and Female Power

Wealhtheow, the other positive anima-figure in Beowulf, exploited the non-sexual element of the anima's power. W.P. Ker sees "nothing complex or strongly dramatic in her character" (1957: 166), but Wealhtheow's speeches (and she is the only woman who says anything at all in the poem), while understated and necessarily subtle, reveal her to be forthcoming with personal advice and political counsel relating to the development of ego-consciousness and social values, and not unwilling to exercise what subtle influence she does possess (not that, in the really important things, such as the fate of her children, this does her any good). Management of the royal household was Wealhtheow's designated role, and she ruled her realm by whatever means necessary. During the banquet that followed the defeat of Grendel, she dispensed some of her womanly wisdom to Beowulf, revealing one of the ways in which she maintained control over her sphere of influence:

pegnas syndon geþwaere,      þeod ealgearo,  
druncne dryhtguman      doð swa ic bidde (1230-31).

The thanes are loyal; the people are willing;  
the warriors, having drunk,<sup>7</sup> do as I bid.

Aside from the humorous overtones of this speech, the passage evokes a much more primitive time, when women were the

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<sup>7</sup> The implication of druncne here is that of a pledge taken, perhaps to Wealhtheow, by some ritual associated with the ceremonial cup. But the humorous element remains implicit,

priestesses and magicians, and had control over the medicines and sleeping potions, as well as the drugs by which the mystical rites of passage were induced. This ancient role is symbolized in Beowulf by the woman's ritual duty to pass the ale cup.

Wealhtheow is the first woman we meet in the poem, and it is appropriate that she is, first of all, a mother, because the first form of woman encountered by male or female is the mother figure. Jeffrey Helterman has associated her with Grendel's mother in suggesting that both "together form what Jung calls the dual mother" (13), but it should not be assumed that Wealhtheow represents entirely the "good" element of this figure, for there is a suggestion that Wealhtheow was capable of her share of negative influence deriving from her ritual duty. When, later that night, Grendel's mother rose from the primordial waters of the mere to satisfy her instinctive maternal impulse, she found the Danes in drunken sleep, a situation created by Wealhtheow, for Wealhtheow had not only passed the ale cup herself, but had done so in the full knowledge of the power this duty conferred upon her. Tacitus noted the extent of this power from the point of view of a potential enemy: "You have only to indulge their intemperance by supplying all that they crave, and you will gain as easy a victory through their vices as through your own arms" (Mattingly trans. 120).

The fact that the function of serving ale to the warriors, a duty usually performed by a hall-thane, was ritually performed by the aristocratic lady on formal or state occasions suggests that

the initial signification of the ritual has been subverted. The actual effect of the woman's ritual duty at the feast, though it was attended by a formal acknowledgement of status, was to establish her in a secondary or submissive role, one that symbolically recreates her subjugation to the warrior class. In this connection, *Wealhtheow's* name is suggestive, for it may mean, as Klaeber, suggests, "Celtic (or foreign) servant" (xxxiii) -- which might, since the Celts were sometimes taken as slaves by the Danes, mean 'slave,' or, it may mean, simply, "servant of common weal (good)." The other 'theows' in the poem, *Ecgtheow* and *Ongentheow*, do contain some suggestion of submission, if not of martyrdom in their names; on the other hand, they also connote action and commitment, if not autonomy, in their compound senses -- *Ecgtheow*, "sword servant" or even "slave to the sword," and *Ongentheow*, "solitary servant" or, possibly, considering Trautmann's gloss for angenga, "slave to aggression." The men personifying these names might be in thrall, but it is by their own, individual human instincts that they are seen to be controlled, not by another individual or a ruling class's notion of 'good.'

Bernice Kliman inferred from the extant literature that the position of women in the Old English world was directly related to their usefulness to male-dominated society (32-49). The rationalization of this apparent subjugation of women in the society of *Beowulf* may be, as Kliman suggested, their inferior physical strength, which rendered them less "useful" on the



battlefield and, therefore, to the warrior society, less important in the overall scheme of things. Certainly the scop of Beowulf makes this idea perfectly clear when speaking in propria persona of the female monster:

|                 |                          |
|-----------------|--------------------------|
|                 | Waes se gryre laessa     |
| efne swa micle, | swa bið maegpa craeft,   |
| wiggryre wifes  | be waepnedmen (1282-84). |

The terror was less by just as much as the strength of women is less, the war-fear of a woman compared to a man.

This was so demonstrably untrue in Beowulf's actual battle with the mother of Grendel -- as, indeed, it may well have been in earlier Germanic society, when men and women faced one another on the absolute individual ground of the battlefield -- that it has to be irony. One must imagine that it is possible for a strong woman, a woman like Boadicea, to do a certain (even a lethal) amount of damage to an average (even a strong) man. However, such a casual generalization might have sufficed as an initial reason for getting women off the battlefield and onto the hearth. Following this move, their position as servants to the warrior group was consolidated. It remained to be established how best they might be deployed. In times of strife, they might, like Hildeburh and Freawaru, be used as "peaceweavers" or alternatively, like Helen of Troy, as excuses for war, but in times of peace, as Kliman observed, their dangerous sexuality becomes once again the object of fear and loathing. This is strongly implied in the story of Modthryth whose predilection for having her admirers executed is the subject of one of the so-

called "digressions"<sup>8</sup> that expand and develop the main text of Beowulf.

### Modthryth: Animosity and Sexual Power

The strong-minded Modthryth, whose name (mod, "spirit, temper, heart" and þryð, "might, strength") implies passion and whose nature exemplifies it, seems to have resented being seen as a 'sexual object': whenever any man, nefne sinfrea<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Wrenn questions the 'digressions' (88); Leyerle says "there are no digressions in Beowulf," (cf. Wrenn 77) and I agree.

<sup>9</sup> The nonce word sinfrea invites exploration because it only appears once in the whole extant corpus of Old English writings. Clark Hall translates this word simply as "husband," while Klaeber is more cautious - or perhaps simply more patriarchal- and inclined to "great lord." Wrenn suggests "noble lord," but also, following Klaeber, glosses the element sin as meaning "continual" or "perpetual" in the compound sin-nihte, to which may be added Sweet's earlier translation, "everlasting," as in sindream and the verb sinnan, "to care for." It is very tempting, since the word only does occur once, to think of sinfrea as a kenning created by the poet out of a combination of sinnig, "sinful," and frea, "-friend" (also glossed in Klaeber as "consort"). With apologies to Barney, [who says that "sin" is cognate with sob, "truth; true" and associates this group etymologically with forms of the verb "to be" (Word-Board 61) but cf. the discussion of besorgen in Ch.I] sinnan may be related to syn, "sin" in the same way that winnan, "to fight" may be related to wynn, "joy," and the question of whether "the Anglo-Saxons would have sensed no connection" (x) is, surely, immaterial. It is enough that the poet did. The thought of a lover or husband as a "sin friend" is appealing because it recalls the choice of Adam to join Eve in her "fallen" state (a choice made much of by Milton) and evokes the theology of St. Paul, who seems to have viewed sexual love and marriage as quasi-sinful conditions, "fallen" states that would have no place in Heaven. At the very least, sinfrea might be a pun.

(1943), cast his eyes upon her, she had him summarily executed. Although the poet sees her behaviour as an over-reaction to a ligetorn, "fancied insult" (1943), Thryth clearly believed there was something to get angry about. She might have simply been rejecting the projection of the anima upon her independent person.

Modthryth might have had historical antecedents, although it is not certain to which of two, or possibly three, historical figures she might have been related, a factor which adds to her collective appeal as a 'type' familiar in Germanic and classical legend. In his comprehensive Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn (1921), R.W. Chambers described three queens who could have served as a model for Thryth. There was, first of all, the virtuous wife of Offa I, the Offa to whom Modthryth was said to have been married <sup>10</sup>. Then there was Cynethryth (cyne could mean "royal" or "queen" according to Sweet), the much-maligned wife of Offa II, who was blamed for the death of St. Aethelbert, the vassal king of East Anglia (though, as Chambers noted, it was most probably her husband himself who was to blame) or possibly her daughter, Eadburh, who, as R.M. Wilson reports, was said by Asser "to live as a despot in the manner of her father" (1952:37). Finally, there was Eormenthryth (eormen means

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<sup>10</sup> Although Eliason wants to contend that it was Hygd who was really the wife of Offa I (126-27) this inquiry will prefer to concentrate on these events and relationships in the context of the poem.

"immense"), or Hermuthruda, named by Saxo Grammaticus as the wife of Offa's ancestor, Whitlaeg, founder of the house of Mercia, in which family, Chambers reported, almost half of the ladies had names in which the element bryd figured.

This last lady seems most appropriate as Modthryth's 'real world' counterpart, since she displayed all those negative traits with which Modthryth, before her conversion, was identified. Eormenthryth's nature is reported to have been similar to the nature of the legendary Brunhilt ("flaming sword"), who challenged her wooer to surpass her in three feats or lose his head, and who was later 'tamed' by a man; the character seems to be a stock one. The King of Britain, who wanted to marry Eormenthryth, prudently sent an emissary, Amlethus (Hamlet) to court the aggressive princess on his behalf, but the wooing went too well; Eormenthryth decided that she wanted Amlethus. Treacherous even to her object of desire, the lady had his shield and commission stolen from him as he slept and altered the letter so that her hand was requested, not for the king, but for Amlethus himself (a detail that faintly suggests the exploits of a later, more famous Hamlet, who altered a letter of execution sent to the King of England by the King of Denmark). Thus, Eormenthryth married Amlethus (presumably without too much resistance on his part); later, however, Whitlaeg came on the scene. He conquered and killed the chosen husband and Eormenthryth, willingly or unwillingly, married the conqueror. Offa

was a descendant of their somewhat intimidating line (Chambers 36-40).

By mixing the relevant elements of all these historical women, it is possible to see Modthryth as a kind of triple-goddess, incorporating three benign manifestations of woman in relation to Offa, who stands in this equation as a representation of the masculine perspective. As the matriarch of his genealogical line, in an insignificant position, she is the mother figure; in the sexually elusive role, as the object of desire (whether incestuous or healthy) she stands for another feminine 'type,' the "mistress/seductress" (Ferguson 16-17); after her marriage to Offa, settled happily into the sexually submissive role, she is transformed into his (historically) virtuous wife. Her over-riding image subsumes all three forms, as well as the fourth aspect, the 'hag,' in her malevolent phase.

Eormenthryth, Brunhilt, Cynethryth and Modthryth, whatever their historical or legendary connections, represent a familiar form of the feminine image in literature, the femme fatale. Beautiful, desirable (otherwise she would never get away with it) but infinitely dangerous, the antithesis of such women as Wealhtheow, Freawaru, Hildeburh and Hygd, this image of woman personifies the negative aspect of the anima, and something more besides.

As a fremu folces cwen, "noble queen of the people" (1932), Thryth would have been an obvious choice as the object of an anima-projection; but, as is often the case when such projection

is not willingly borne by the woman, she frustrated the stereotype and alienated male society by reflecting its actual, rather than its ideal values, becoming a parody of masculinity.

Besides being the only female character who actually undergoes a change or development in Beowulf (Hygd might have gone from youth to age, but that's another story), Modthryth's character displays evidence of the activation of an archetype peculiar to the female psyche, the animus. When this archetype which, like the anima in men, "gives prominence to those traits which are characteristic of the opposite sex" holds forth, the woman behaves like a man -- that is, "obstinate... dogmatic... argumentative and domineering," as well as overly concerned with structural and rational systems that Jung implies might be better left to the male (1972: 58). The poet's society might have agreed with this as an assessment of Thryth before her 'conversion,' when her behaviour challenged the male structure on its own terms. Whether we agree with Svetislav Stefanovic's interpretation of mundgripe (1938) in this context as a reference to the practice of Thryth (or, perhaps significantly, her father) to fight any prospective suitors (15-31) or whether we choose to see it as merely a summary seizure of the offending warrior, her attempt to dominate men by violence and the wielding of a masculine power identified particularly with that of Beowulf himself (cf. l. 1534 and see Chapter I) is implied.

As the poet, in a masterpiece of delicate litotes, suggests:

|                   |                           |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
|                   | Ne bið swyle cwenlic þeaw |
| idese to efnanne, | þeah ðe hio ænlicu sy,    |

paette freoðuwebbe      feores onsaece  
 aefter ligetorne      leofne mannan (1940-44).

That is not a queenly custom for a woman to practice,  
 no matter how beautiful she is. That a peaceweaver,  
 because of an imagined insult, should deprive a valued  
 man of his life - !

Kenneth Sisam calls the Modthryth episode a "crude  
 excrescence" (49), which may be a bit of an over-reaction in  
 itself; however, it is observed that, while this sort of  
 retribution for insults (real or imagined) might not be  
 inappropriate for a king or an abeling, and might have been  
 applauded in Judith, it was totally inappropriate to Thryth's  
 designated submissive social role as freoðuwebbe, "peaceweaver"  
 (1942). Naturally, this intolerable state of affairs could not  
 be allowed to continue and, indeed, it did not. Powerful though  
 she was, and violent and headstrong, Modthryth, like Juliana (in  
 this alone) was still subject to the will of the patriarch. She  
 "was given" (OE passive weard gýfen is the form used in line  
 1948) in marriage to Offa, a dominant young warrior.

When be faeder lare, "at her father's command," Modthryth  
 visited Offa's court ofer fealone flod, "over the dark waves"  
 (1950), she "suffered a sea change" and was so overcome by her  
 outstanding young husband that, like Shakespeare's Kate, she  
 completely reformed, performing all her obligatory tasks to  
 perfection and observing total fidelity to her husband so that  
 the poet can speak with certainty of Eomer as Offa's son,  
Hemminges maeg, nefa Garmundes, "Hemming's kinsman, nephew of  
 Garmund" (1961-62).

Modthryth's come-uppance was a source of much satisfaction to the ealodrincende, "ale-drinking" (1945) men of her time, whose beer-hall conversation applauded this subduing of her aggressive nature by the sexual dominance of her husband; she, in turn, was doubtless compensated for her restraint by marriage to the garcene "spearbold" man (1958).

Not to downplay the importance and the reality of sexual love, it is a fine irony of Thryth's life that she should have been conquered by the very power she sought to deny, her sexuality -- "Hoist with her own petar," some might say -- an irony which, one suspects, was not lost on the audience of Beowulf. Modthryth has been further diminished by literary critics such as the offended Sisam, who wants to annihilate her name and turn her back into an abstract noun (49), or Eliason, who insists she did not even exist (124-38). The poet might have understood this impulse, but one imagines he might have been a little less intense, a little more sympathetic; he himself reveals that warrior society limits and negates women's possibilities for self-defining action in his depictions of Freawaru and Hildeburh.

#### **Freawaru and Hildeburh: Depersonalization and Impotence**

Hygd, Wealhtheow and Modthryth had been given, and had, in another (Promethean) sense, stolen a measure of power, but it was



attended by a corresponding responsibility that negated their free will. The other real women in Beowulf, Hildeburh and Freawaru, were constricted in an equal but opposite degree. Though socially disenfranchised, their position was nevertheless glorified and romanticized by their society, so that they were cast in, and probably identified with, the role of martyrs, in an exaltation of passivity. The similarity between them all has led Elaine Hansen to describe both types of women, the "paragons" and the "sufferers," as "symbols for human impotence" (116). Indeed, the royal woman's social function as "peaceweaver," though it overtly assumes an element of power, also carries with it the corollaries of impotence and depersonalization.

Freawaru's depersonalization is implied in the fact that she was not imbued with any personal attributes, but is described only in terms of her relationship to men, as Öy wife (2028), seo bryd (2031) or se faemnan (2059). Her name only came to Beowulf through hearsay, leading to the conclusion that they were not formally introduced, although she was a royal princess in the court of Heorot and he an illustrious guest. The poet, in fact, totally overlooks the romantic possibilities of the situation (which is, of course, fitting; this is not, after all, a romance, and the poet might have been a monk, for whom such explorations would have been unsuitable). She was not mentioned in the poem at all until Beowulf returned to Higelac's court, although, as we learn from his narrative, she was present at the festivities in Heorot. Her effective non-appearance there parallels her

position in the world at large, for she, like many royal women, had no real existence in that world except as a pawn in the political manoeuvres of her father.

The use of women as freoduwebban, "peaceweavers" is criticized both directly and indirectly in Beowulf's projection of the fate of Freawaru. His story of her life cannot exactly be called prophetic or visionary because, as Brodeur has pointed out, he gets some of the details (even a key factor, from the point of view of history) wrong even though the story of Ingeld was probably well-known to the Anglo-Saxon audience (1959: 178). However, Beowulf is telling the story of Freawaru and of other women like her, and his story is told from a more universal perspective, as probability. Beowulf's overt criticism is utilitarian (it simply does not work to use women in this way) but he presents a very sympathetic argument in his depiction of this nebulous princess and her tragic fate.

As Beowulf tells it, Freawaru, whose name (which means both "noble" and "watchful") incorporates both her social status and her necessary existential condition, was betrothed to Ingeld as a means of securing peace between the Scyldings and the Heathobards. He says without equivocation that such marriages seldom accomplish their intended purpose, beah seo bryd dugu! "however good the bride might be" (2031). In Freawaru's case, he predicts, although her presence may, in itself, be irreproachable, the presence of her courtiers is nevertheless

likely to cause further strife, which places her in a most vulnerable position:

oð ðæt sael cymeð,  
 þæt se faemnan þegn fore faeder daedum  
 aefter billes bite blodfag swefeð,  
 ealdres scyldig; him se oder þonan  
 losað (li)figende, con him land geare.  
 þonne bioð (ab)rocene on ba healfe  
 aðsweord eorla; (syð)ðan Ingelde  
 weallað waelniðas, ond him wiþlufan  
 aefter cearwaelmum colran weorðað (2058-66).

...until the time comes that the woman's  
 retainer sleeps blood stained after the sword-  
 bite, paying for his father's deeds with his life;  
 the other escapes alive; he knows the land well.  
 Then the oath of the chieftains is broken on both  
 sides; afterwards, deadly hatred rises in Ingeld,  
 and his love for his wife grows cooler as the  
 troubles escalate.

In Christine Fell's estimation, Anglo-Saxon kinship ties remained legally unaffected by marriage, and if so, that was a good and necessary thing, because an aristocratic woman's abandonment by either her father or her husband would remove from her the protective isolation that was a natural accompaniment of her upbringing as a royal female. Effectively, Freawaru was groomed as a sacrifice to the gods of war, her virginity protected as much, perhaps, to fulfill a subconscious ritual requirement as to ensure an honourable exchange [which may be why she did not converse with Beowulf, and at least partially what he meant when he spoke of gōð, "good" in relation to seo bryd (2031)]. Her importance and her survival were directly related to her success or failure in appeasing the warring factions and yet this could in no way be influenced by her innate ability to

please or displease. She might have pleased Ingeld (according to Beowulf, she did, at least at the beginning). But it was not Ingeld in this story who renewed hostilities, it was one of his men who instigated a mortal feud with one of Freawaru's retainers (perhaps we should read "guards" here). Yet, although she had no active power, Freawaru had to share the consequences of others' actions; ultimately, she lost not only the safety of her father's house but the safety of her husband's affection, either or both of which were absolutely essential to her survival. Whatever may have happened to the historical wife of Ingeld, we do not find out what became of the Freawaru in Beowulf's story, and perhaps that also tells us something.

Pitiable as are the future possibilities for Freawaru, however, it is Hildeburh who is the classic representation in Beowulf of woman as "sufferer" (Hansen 116). The story of Hildeburh, who was dramatically ineffective in her woman's role of peaceweaver between her people, the Danes, and the Frisians, to whose leader, Finn, she was married, is a study in powerlessness. Hildeburh was an extreme victim of men's battlegames. It seems as though both her marriage and her subsequent return to her people were equally outside her control. When the fighting was finally over, she was transported back home "precisely," as Camargo says, "like a piece of the booty" (126) -- a statement that recognizes the status of women in this poem to be largely that of relatively valuable possessions. An extreme example of this was the case of Higelac's daughter, whom he gave to Eofor as

a hamweordunge, "home ornament" (2998) for killing Ongentheow. The matter-of-factness with which Hildeburh's misery was accepted by the warriors of Heorot is underscored by the immediate resumption of mirth and revelry following the singing of her tragic lay:

|                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
|                     | Leod waes asungen,    |
| gleomannes gyd.     | Gamen eft astah,      |
| beorhtode bencsweg, | byrelas sealdon       |
| win of wunderfatum  | þa cwom Wealhtheow... |
|                     | (1159-62).            |

The singer finished his song; his listeners  
 Laughed and drank, their pleasure loud  
 In that hall. The cup-bearers hurried with their  
     sparkling  
 Vessels. And then the queen, Welthow...  
 Appeared... (Raffel trans.).

From a structural and thematic standpoint, the story of Hildeburh represents a particularly poignant element in the poem's portrayal of heroic society, especially when we note that this is the point at which Wealhtheow went to plead with Hrothgar and Hrothulf on behalf of her sons (1169-91), already doomed, as she perhaps instinctively knew, by the subconscious rejection of the one and the rapacity of the other. It seems no co-incidence, either, that the episode was recounted by the scop in Heorot on the eve of the attack by Grendel's mother. The impression of deliberate juxtaposition is reinforced by the observation of parallel seasonal similes in the story of Hildeburh and the battle with the female monster (cf. 1132-37 and 1608-11), as well as the mention of fire (1122) and ice (1132). Fire and ice symbolize an important thematic opposition that recurs throughout

the poem, but is especially central to the battle with Grendles modor, who understandably yrmd e gemunde, "brooded over her sorrow" (1259). By the time her attack occurs, despite Sisam's contention that maintains the original audience (whoever they were) would not have detected any parallel with the case of Wealhtheow (66), <sup>11</sup> some of them might have been emotionally prepared, through the case of Hildeburh, to sympathize with that hideous creature who was, after all, only doing what Hildeburh herself might have done had she had the power -- avenging the death of her child.

Whereas Hildeburh was perhaps by nature and certainly by conditioning forced to play the passive and impotent role so typical of women in the warrior society that Maud Bodkin has given it an archetypal form as the "woman mourner" (163), the mother of Grendel, by virtue of her anti-social status, was empowered to act out the rage and pain she felt at the destruction of her son. When we are told that this she-monster gegan wolde/ sorhfulne sid, sunu deod wrecan, "wanted to undertake the sorrowful journey to avenge the death of her son" (1277-78), when we picture her terror, her desire to be gone as soon as she had repaid those who had mortally hurt her child, it

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<sup>11</sup> Sisam disputes the "structural elegance" of the poem, too (66). Obviously, this dissertation must inevitably disagree with both analyses, as with many other statements made by this eminent scholar. It looks like a case of binary opposition; Leonard Cohen's poem, "one of us cannot be wrong," shows how opposing views may be held simultaneously.

is difficult to think of her as being all that different from any sorrowing human mother. As Setsuko Haruta has said, "the poet betrays too much sympathy for Grendel's mother to allow us to brush her aside" (11).

It was also probably safe for the hall-dwellers to assume that this would be the last of her raids. That they did not really expect her to return is confirmed by the fact that, rather than lie in wait as he did for Grendel, Beowulf went instead to her lair, an infinitely more dangerous expedition and one not necessary to enhance an already secure reputation. However, the pattern of revenge had been set in motion, a pattern that, as the stories of Hildeburh, Wealhtheow and the primitive mother of Grendel illustrate, extends into the farthest reaches of the psyche, confronting the intellectual concepts of justice and balance with the nihilistic emotions of pride and hatred, the rationalization of which provides the social sanction for vengeance.

Although the mother of Grendel was only doing what any of the warriors of Heorot would have done in her place (had they had the courage), she had to be destroyed, not necessarily because she might strike again, but perhaps because she had committed what was coming to be perceived as an unpardonable act for a woman. In undertaking a course of vengeance, she, like Mod-thryth, had taken the role of the man. Thryth's outrageous violation of the woman's role as freodeuwebbe, "peaceweaver"

(1942) is seen to be even more heinous when projected onto the form of the merewif.

### The Merewif

The designation merewif, "Merewife," taken from line 1513, will be the formal reference for Grendel's mother, first of all because, as Freawaru has no identity, Wealhtheow no influence, Hildeburh no power, Modthryth no respect, Hygd no voice, and the woman mourner at the end of the poem no recognizable physical being, Grendel's mother has no name. Still, the term "Merewife" seems appropriate for her in that it contains three important elements of this remarkable form.

First, this word evokes the mere, which, in modern consciousness (if not in its own linguistic time frame) invites association with the modern French mer, "sea" and mere, "mother," suggesting its function as a symbol of the unconscious, and serving to cast her in her archetypal role as "the mother from the sea-depths" (Bodkin 160). The psyche has been called "the mother of all human facts, of civilization and of its destroyer, war" (Jung 1972: 50) and this metaphor, too, is pertinent to an understanding of the Merewife's essential nature. Secondly, the element wif has a particular modern connotation of the sexuality this study contends is integral to her interpretation. Finally, the resonance of the whole word, merewif, affirms the similarity suggested by Robert Kaske to the later word mere-men, or



"merry-men," which he compares to the meremenen, the sirena or mermaids of myth (421-31), a comparison relevant to analysis of her as a maternal and a sexual being (as Thetis and Aphrodite could both have been envisioned, in part, as mermaids).

The poem gives only one clue to the Merewife's origins, but it is in keeping with the dynamics of her genesis. In speaking of Grendel, Hrothgar, patriarch of the Scyldings, says:

no hie faeder cunnon  
hwaefær him aenig waes      aer acenned  
dyrna gasta (1355-57).

They do not know his father - whether he had one;  
he was born of secret spirits.

The supernatural or superstitious element introduced here mingles with the factor of dubious paternity in an inversion of the virgin birth to produce a chthonic shadow of Christ in the figure of Grendel and a corresponding inversion of the Virgin in the form of the Merewife.

Mary Kay Temple makes much of the designation ides, "lady," applied to the mother of Grendel as well as to Hildeburh and the other women in the poem, noting, with reference to Bosworth and Toller, that the word "in earliest times (applied to) superhuman beings, occupying a position between goddess and mere woman" (10). Marijane Osborn interprets this word in the context of the Finnesburg story to mean a "priestess" (185-94), while Signe M. Carlson sees her as a "primitive human" (357-64). Although she is, as Temple says, "no 'lady' " (13), the Merewife's origins do go back to the dawn of human awareness, when "woman the creatress

and destructress" (Graves 386) was worshipped in the form of the old earth goddesses. The figure of Demeter is evoked by the mention of the wicg wundenfeax, "horse with braided mane" (1400) ridden by Hrothgar to the mere, because the Demeter-aspect of this ancient mother goddess was once worshipped by the Gallic Celts in the form of a mare (Graves 384). The image of Hrothgar riding to the mere mounted upon a symbolic representation of this old corn goddess seems to epitomize the domination of the old earth mother by the patriarchal ruler of warrior society.

We may conclude from the entirely separate references to Wyrd in Beowulf that the Merewife is not identifiable with this entity, which Christine Fell concluded was a female deity once worshipped by the Anglo-Saxons; but she might be associated with Nerthus, or Mother Earth, who, according to Tacitus, was a goddess of ancient Germania; or perhaps she might be linked with Andraste, war-goddess of the fierce Boadicea, who was herself a priestess in that she is said by Dio Cassius to have "employed a species of divination" (Warmington 93-94) in order to encourage her people to fight against the Romans. However, since these figures, as they appear (or, in the case of Andraste, fail to appear) in Anglo-Saxon literary sources, are placed "firmly within the Christian God's control" (Fell 27) and the Merewife undergoes this process through the actions of Beowulf, it seems she must be outside this mythological tradition to some extent.

She has few discernable Scandinavian origins; the Norse goddesses were clearly subordinate to Odin, the "All-father," and

although, as Brian Branston reported, "the Old Norse evidence points unequivocally to an ancient goddess who is the earth," she was not a supreme deity, but only "wife to the chief god who was the sky" (128); but the Gallic Celts worshipped a female deity long before and long after the coming of either the Teutonic or the Christian patriarchal gods. Her name was Epona, and the relics of her cult survived in Ireland until the 12th century. The Merewife could in part represent this ellorgast, "alien spirit" (1349), worshipped by the Celts, whom Robert Graves describes as "non-Teutonic goddess-worshipping strains" (406) living in the British Isles at the time of the poet.

According to Graves' "historical grammar of poetic myth," The White Goddess, Epona was worshipped as a tri-partite goddess, "the Three Eponae," whose aspects followed the changes in the seasons of spring, summer and winter (384-86) and this is suggested by the seasonal metaphor of the epic simile that occurs in the poetry of this episode. The nature of the Three Eponae closely parallels the ancient Greek Triad, Aphrodite, Demeter, and Hecate, who personify the three phases of the moon in its waxing, full, and waning state, an association doubtless derived from the lunar pattern of the menstrual cycle, a source of mystery and taboo in primitive cultures. By Sophocles' time, this trinity had been infiltrated by Apollo, who ousted the mother goddess from her "navel shrine" at Delphi. The remnant was Jocasta -- mother/wife, and symbol of horror.

The Welsh are said to have observed the rites of a female goddess whose story, first recorded in the 13th century from a prototype thought to date back to the 9th century, strikes a very familiar chord in the theme of Beowulf's involvement with the Grendel kin. Cerridwen, or Arianrod, as she was also called, was worshipped by the Welsh as, initially, a grain or corn goddess. Like Demeter, she was referred to as a "white sow" (Graves 123), the domestic equivalent of the wild boar whose image the Teutonic warriors wore on their helmets.

The wife of a nobleman, Cerridwen, as Graves tells it, had two children. Her daughter was the most beautiful girl in the world, but her son was the ugliest boy. In order to compensate for his physical defect, Cerridwen boiled up a cauldron of wisdom which she proposed to feed to him. Leaving a local boy, Gwion, to stir the broth, she then went off to attend to the work of making the fields fertile. Meanwhile, Gwion, like any attentive and curious cook's helper, tested the brew with his finger, burned himself, put his finger into his mouth to relieve the pain and was instantly imbued with all knowledge (a beautifully down-to-earth agricultural rendition of the Prometheus myth). Furious, Cerridwen pursued the boy, first as a screaming hag (herself) and then through a series of mutual shape changes (since Gwion now knew the secret of these transformative powers) until he had turned himself into a grain of wheat, whereupon she became a black hen and devoured him. She returned to her normal shape to discover herself pregnant with the seed of Gwion, to

whom she eventually gave birth (or, really, re-birth). He was beautiful and now, of course, her own son, so that she could not then kill him, but neither could she keep him (I'm not quite sure why; maybe it would not have been fair to her other son, Morvran). Instead, she tied him in a leather bag and threw him into the sea, a detail that evokes the womb and also Grendel's glof, the bag into which he put his kill, as well as suggesting the patterns of Moses, Scaef and the list could go on. The hero set adrift alone into the world of affairs via a dangerous journey over water is a recurring element of mythology that certainly has more than a little to do with birth. Gwion was eventually caught by the fishing net of Prince Elphin of North Wales (which suggests the meremenen motif), renamed Taliesin and brought up at court.

Some of the motifs of the Cerridwen story are echoed in Beowulf. Her two sons, Taliesin (formerly Gwion) and the hideous Morvran (formerly Afagddu) may be compared to Beowulf and Grendel in their innate but divided relationship as well as in their physical characteristics, since Grendel was so repulsive that only his mother could love him, while Beowulf was described by the Danish coastguard as "peerless":

nis þæt seldguma,  
waepnum geweorðad,      naefne him his wite leoge,  
aenlic ansyn (249-51).

That is no mere retainer, dignified by his weapons,  
unless his appearance, his peerless form, belies him.

The name Morvran means "sea raven," suggesting the raven which is the symbol of Cain, from whom Grendel was descended. Taliesin means "radiant brow" which, Graves points out, is a symbol of Apollo (136) who fought the dragon Python(ess) at Delphi. The syllable "Tal" also figured in the primitive names of Hercules, or Heracles (136), to whom Beowulf, as a bear-son figure, has often been compared. Heracles, a devotee of Apollo, was ordered by the oracle at Delphi to atone for the wanton murder, motivated by sexual jealousy, of Iphitus; he was sentenced to slavery for one year, sold to Omphale, queen of Lydia, and made to do "women's work," while "Omphale assumed his lion's skin and club" and, presumably, his role (Harvey 202). Such associations suggest an inherently dichotomous sexual aspect of Beowulf's battle with the Merewife.

A later detail of the Cerridwen story places it as at least concurrent to the story of Beowulf. Taliesin, whose skill at riddles parallels Beowulf's own verbal felicity as well as Oedipus' greatest gift, is said to have confounded the twenty-four court bards of Maelgwyn with his wisdom (Maelgwyn's sycophantic bards are also mentioned by the 8th century historian, Nennius, which suggests the Cerridwen legend was a living tradition of that period). One of these riddles, which may be a later addition, is remarkable if only as coincidence:

Discover what it is:  
The strong creature from before the Flood...  
(Graves 29).

The Flood myth, native to many of the world's mythologies, is introduced dramatically in Beowulf by the inscription found on the magic sword in the Merewife's cave:

|                    |                       |                |
|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| ealde lafe,        | on ðaem waes or witen | hylt sceawode, |
| fyrngewinnes,      | syððan flod ofsloh,   |                |
| gifen geotende     | giganta cyn,          |                |
| frecne geferdon;   | þaet waes fremde þeod |                |
| ecean Dryhtne;     | him þaes endelean     |                |
| þurh waeteres wylm | Waldend scealde       | (1687-93).     |

...he scrutinized the hilt, the ancient heirloom, upon which was inscribed the rise of the primeval strife when the flood, the rushing deep, destroyed the brood of giants. They suffered terribly; that was a race alien from the eternal Lord, (and) for that the Sovereign Ruler gave them a final retribution by the surging water (Hall trans.).

In Judeo-Christian myth, the story of the Flood is a study of evil seen as inherently present within the psyche of mankind, drowned in unconsciousness but not annihilated. Evil continued to flourish in the aftermath of the biblical Flood, not just in Grendel's subdiluvian lair but on the wlitebeorhtene wang, swa waeter bebugeþ, "the bright and beautiful plain surrounded by water" (93) that, in the Hebrew cosmology as reflected in early Anglo-Saxon society, was the world. There Noah, sinking into drunken and naked slumber (Gen. 9:20-27) reinstituted shame as an integer of human experience. By going 'underwater' (in a reptilian reversion, perhaps) or in other words, by repression in the psyche, evil was seen to have survived the Flood despite man's (and God's) efforts to control or deny this element of human nature. When, aided by intoxicants, the inhibitions are lifted, the unrestrained impulse is released.

The references to drunkenness in Beowulf indicate an association of medu, "mead," ealu, "ale," and beor, "beer" with the forces of chaos and destruction -- i.e., evil. Beowulf's taunt to Unferth, and a rather subtle piece of irony employed by the poet in his description of the fight between Beowulf and Grendel [which contains in the word ealuscearwen, "ale deprivation, (distress, mortal panic?)" a direct linking of ale (or, by virtue of its power to confer false courage, the lack of it) with terror and distress] are the most overt of the poet's comments. Added to this, the implication of the drunken state of the warriors on the night of the Merewife's raid, as indicated by Wealhtheow (1231) and as emphasized in Beowulf's report to Higelac (2016), and the drunken quarrel which Beowulf predicts will be the cause of Freawaru's troubles, all form a cumulative impression that drunkenness played no small part in the catastrophes, both natural and supernatural, that beset the warrior tribes.

Considering that it was the particular role of women to pass the ale-cup on ritual occasions, and that the old earth goddesses were goddesses of corn and grain (substances out of which ale is made) this ritual woman's job carries a somewhat sinister undertone. The subconscious implication of the poem's indictment of drunkenness is a variation on the theme of woman as the means by which evil is permitted to do its work in the world of man. In establishing intoxicants as a disruptive and negative influence, 'reason' has been found to morally judge the results of the corn-



goddess's supremacy, to force her underground (as was the Earth Mother at Delphi) or underwater (as was the Merewife) and to link her implicitly with evil. She then becomes a grundwyrgen, literally "an accursed creature of the earth" (1518) or "accursed monster of the deep," a monstrous inversion of her former self. This dynamic suggests aspects of the first known Anglo-Saxon deity, Nerthus, who, Christine Fell notes, was worshipped on an island as Mother Earth and whose secret worship involved the drowning of the slaves who assisted in the ceremony. Ironically, the coming of Nerthus was supposed to signify the establishment of peace and all weapons were to be laid aside while she was among men (Fell 26). The necessity of seeing this partially benevolent deity as wholly evil is associated with her deposition by the masculine war gods, since, when an established system is overthrown, the first task of the successor is to discredit the former powers. As Shelley observed in Prometheus Unbound, "the conqueror can call the conquered evil."

However, the nature of the earth goddess, of whom the Merewife may be the chthonic remnant, initially included elements of both good and evil. The Arthurian legend of the Lady of the Lake, which depicts a benevolent spirit in possession of a miraculous sword, seems to have reconstructed the 'good' element of this underwater entity, who may represent the repressed or submerged memory of the great Earth Mother. This memory, repressed or not, is a very powerful archetype of the personal and collective unconscious.

In her archetypal form, this great Earth Mother was all-powerful, just as, according to Bruno Bettelheim (1975: 68), to the infant his own mother is the source of all pleasure (satisfaction of his primary desires) and pain (the refusal, or delay, of this same satisfaction). This primary contact, reinforced by aeons of human development, is thought to produce an image of woman which is registered at the deepest level of the psyche; in this sense, the Merewife can 'stand for' Beowulf's own mother. She is not, in this projection, the "good mother" of fairy-tale and ego-consciousness, the mother idealized by society. She is the "terrible mother" (Bettelheim 201), Beowulf's by virtue of his intrinsic relationship to Grendel, but also by virtue of his humanity: she is the primordial mother of all mankind, the archetypal form of Woman, who, as Temple says of Eve, is "the progenitrix of the human race" (15). This form exists, in all its terrifying proportion, as the most powerful archetype of the collective unconscious: the Eternal Mother (CW 18:484). That this image of woman as Mother should terrify is not incomprehensible.

The residual 'memory' of the womb may give rise to a formidable impression of Mother as engulfing and, by association with the perception that emergence from the womb officially signifies the beginning of life (i.e. conscious awareness), the death-state may be associated with Mother in the form of a fear of being sucked back into the womb, into a state of unconsciousness, giving rise to an image of mother as consuming.

This concept is primitively rendered in the Cerridwen legend by her eating the grain of wheat which is Gwion and becomes Taliesin, thus incorporating an initial, and an ultimate, devouring of the child, as well as his transformation or rebirth. This pattern illustrates the Welsh goddess's identity as the "goddess of Death-in-Life and Life-in-Death" (Graves 98); the former suggests pre-birth, while the latter contains the seed of rebirth.

Beowulf's descent to the bottom of the terrible mere, with its swirling eddies of blood and hatan heolfre, "hot gore" (1423) could, in one sense, signify the feared and desired return to the womb, where the womb is conceived as a cave, the warmth of incubation suggested by the fire he finds there, and the primary security by his rescue (for he is beset by sea-monsters in the depths of the water even as she carries him to her lair) -- his rescue, that is, from all terrors but that of herself. Yet, as the phonetic association of 'womb' and 'tomb' irresistibly suggests, this same descent may equally be seen as wilfully entering the death-state; the tomb may also be conceived as a cave, its terror is nameless as the Merewife is nameless. Beowulf's harrowing of this grundwyrgen is then the only means by which he may make his ascent, or be 'reborn' in a 'new' and, hopefully, better form.

The archetypal pattern of descent and ascent is a feature of classical mythology that appears in both the Odyssey (Book 11)

and the Aeneid (Book 6) <sup>12</sup> and, like all elements of myth, it serves a particular psychological goal, as well as a transformative psychic purpose. On the psychological level, Beowulf's descent into the underwater cave symbolizes descent into the underworld of the unconscious to face the monsters of instinct that can surface to attack the constructs of consciousness. On the psychic level, Beowulf enacts a ritual of transformation by means of which he, as the individual, advances spiritually. Both purposes are simultaneously effected in Beowulf's battle with Grendles modor (1258), since this confrontation could represent one of the major patterns of the maturation process, having as its goal the resolution of the Oedipal conflict.

#### **Beowulf, Oedipus and the Battle for Ontological Integrity**

While the aggressive instinct presents a problem for the individual from early childhood, when he or she must begin to assert distinct being without limiting the being of others, the

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<sup>12</sup> Some scholars have noted the "Vergilian influence" (see Klaeber 182, 184) upon the poet's description of Grendel's pool, but whether this influence was direct or derives from an image that existed (exists) in the unconscious as a universal mental landscape is difficult to assess. Just as myths from entirely divergent cultures resemble each other in startling particularities, so the symbolic landscape of internal experience may be everywhere the same, arising from an introjection of suggestive universal elements of the particular natural landscape, in the same sense that a desert may consist of either sand or snow.

sexual instinct becomes a source of consternation from puberty when the emergence of the sexual impulse stimulates in the adolescent the need to distinguish between the 'right' and the 'wrong' forms of sexual behaviour and presents the responsibility of choosing between the possibilities. This might be the period of life in which the final "fragmentation" of personality occurs, as suggested in the Genesis myth when the creation -- or awareness -- of two distinct sexes was the real beginning of Adam's (man's) separation from God. If there had been no Eve, it is implied, there would have been no temptation, no weakness, no rebellion and, consequently, no Fall.

In contrast to the Genesis assumption of a primordial male entity, femininity may be the primary propensity of any organism, while masculinity can be understood to demand "an active and positive happening" (Gordon 1983: 15). While nearly all societies have adolescent ceremonies for boys, designed to facilitate their transition from childhood to manhood, very few rites exist for girls, a factor which, according to Rosemary Gordon, has led Margaret Mead to suggest that men can become men "only by ritualizing birth, thus taking over symbolically a function that women perform naturally, a ceremony that also serves to sever them ritually from their own mother" (15). In order to experience himself as a male, this theory proposes, the boy must break free of his mother's, and perhaps his own, femaleness, or, in other words, he must 'achieve separateness.' The Oedipal conflict may be said to derive from this transitional

necessity, which arises with the irruption of the sexual instinct into the conscious realm. This awakening brings with it a complex of instinct and reason that further complicates the being of sapient life and generates in the individual a psychic conflict that demands a resolution.

In suggesting that the conflict between Beowulf and the Merewife enacts the ultimate resolution of the Oedipal conflict, I mean to include both the Oedipal conflict between mother and son, and also that between father and daughter [sometimes referred to as the Electra complex (Hendrick 44-50), recognized in the Bible in the story of the daughters of Lot], for, in his purest heroic function, Beowulf represents an aspect of the human spirit that has found expression on a level where "differences between male and female cease to be important" (Bodkin 217), acting for both male and female in conflict with instinctual drives which threaten to consume and destroy the values and relationships established by the conscious mind. It may be partially for this reason that Beowulf both symbolically rapes, and actually kills, the primordial sexual being, which in its purest form is similarly androgynous, combining aspects of both male and female. The text of the poem, whether by scribal accident or poetic design, suggests this, because, like the Norse god/dess Frey/a, the monster is sometimes referred to as se (1260, 1392, 1394, 1497) in addition to seo, although the overt intention of the poet was clearly to represent a female form.

In this transcendent heroic role, then, Beowulf acts for both son and daughter in conflict with the parent of the opposite sex. The classic tale of Oedipus, who unknowingly killed his father and married his mother, is the mythological prototype of this psychic situation, which arises from the projection of the sexual instinct upon what is, essentially, the first correlative object with which it comes in contact. Normal and inevitable as this projection may be, it is not acceptable in most societies and strong taboos against its fulfillment have been in force since antiquity. It is therefore the first function of the young man or woman to achieve separation from this attachment and thus to consolidate ontological integrity.<sup>13</sup>

This process, as mythologized in Beowulf, entails an epic struggle perhaps necessitating the identification of primary sexual desire as intrinsically evil, and an act of destruction that cleanses the spirit, as the mere was eal gefealsod, "all cleansed" (1620); it leads to a 'rebirth' or transformation from purely instinctual being to higher mental or spiritual (some might say more fully 'human') being. To achieve this, the hero descends into the fecund depths of his own unconscious as Beowulf

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<sup>13</sup> Since we are speaking primarily of men when referring to Beowulf as the protagonist in this struggle, and since the poem was presumably written by a man, documenting and interpreting a masculine cultural process, we may, while understanding the bisexuality of the libido, revert to this frame of reference to note that the resolution of the Oedipus complex confers a new independence on the young man, whose primary psychological task, as consciously perceived, is achieving separation from dependence upon the mother.

descended into the seething depths of the mere, struggles with the archetypal form of his own desire, as did Beowulf with the monstrous female, then symbolically fulfills that desire and, thereby, liberates himself from it, as depicted in the mythic battle with its final and absolute results.

**Se, Seo, Secg and Seax: Beowulf and the Merewife in Combat**

In her tri-partite form of woman as mother, sexual object, whether mistress or wife, for, as M.A. Ferguson has said, "both in myth and in life the roles overlap" (12-16), and hag, the Merewife is a particularly militant form -- aggressive, challenging, repulsive and, most frightening all, potentially dominant. As Christine Fell ironically notes, "Her fight with Beowulf...is not noticeable for restraint" (29). In fact, she almost wins the battle, which in certain suggestive elements could be read as a sexual encounter -- a somewhat violent one, perhaps, but one which, given the dynamics of the situation, is appropriate to the resolution of the conflict.

The tendency of warriors to regard sexual relationships as another form of battle is indicated by primitive rituals of manhood, which have always placed great store in violence, and by the conventionally phallic symbolism of weapons such as the sword (the word for which, secg, is also translated as "man" or "warrior") and the knife, seax, which, to an even greater extent



than secg, is orthographically suggestive of sex. The etymology of the MnE "sex" is traced by the OED to ME from the OF sexe or the L sexus, which perhaps derived from secare, "to cut," leading to a natural association with both the OE secg, "sword" and seax, "knife." It might be possible to make this association through oral transmission, as the OE Suð Seaxan became Sussex, but even without this strain on etymology, the linguistic link between sexuality and aggression is suggested by the masculine and feminine pronouns se and seo, which bear allophonic and orthographic similarity to secg and seax. The implication of cutting, or division, is wholly in keeping with the mystical and religious apprehension of a primordial 'separation' of an original asexual>hermaphroditic entity, a process which could be understood to have taken place with the energy of the libido directed through the aggressive instinct, which seeks to separate the organism from the being of other entities. The emergence of diabolin (two) from symbolin (one) is fundamental to an understanding of the evolution of linguistic and religious concepts (Ilgnier 1987).

The implied hostility of swords and knives as sexual symbols is modified by the awareness, validated by both genetic and cultural factors, that man, to an overwhelming extent, defines himself by his power to act and to effect. It has been observed that the kennings for men in Norse and Anglo-Saxon verse tend to describe them in terms of "what they do," as opposed to those for women, which tend to describe them in terms of "things they

wear," and "things they serve" (Foote and Wilson 331). The symbols of man's action in an agricultural society are his tools, and, in a warrior society such as that of Beowulf, his weapons. Woman, on the other hand, is seen by the paternalistic male as a receptacle, first of all of his physical being, as the container of his 'seed,' and secondly of his spiritual being, as the container of his 'life essence.' Her symbol in Beowulf is the cup, perhaps the faeted waege (2282) -- the term transcends translation -- through which fate finally overtakes the hero.

From the suggestive name of Hrunting <sup>14</sup>, the sword with which Beowulf made his final onslaught, to the failure of this phallic symbol (suggesting perhaps the male fear of impotence if not the state itself) to the Merewife's drawing of her own seax, which may represent her aggressive sexuality (a trait officially attributed only to the male, as this use of the male phallic symbol in the service of this eminently undesirable female indicates) to Beowulf's seemingly miraculous triumph syððan he eft astod, "after he stood up again" (1556) by means of a magic

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<sup>14</sup> The name, Hrunting, is irresistibly suggestive of an organic aggression that seems to derive from the guttural sound "hr..." Many OE words beginning with this sound refer to parts of the body (hreðer, "breast, heart"), to violent action (hreoſan, "fall, rush"), to the thrill of conquest (hremig, "exulting," and hred, "triumph"), to a joy that seems purely physical (hrobor, "joy, benefit" - cognate with hre) as opposed to the sense of spiritual or emotional joy implied in such words as gamen or dream - as well as to pain (hream, "scream"), physical decay (hra, "corpse") and death (hryre). A possible derivative of the verb hrinan, "to touch" or "reach," or, possibly, "hurt" (see Klaeber 360), the name Hrunting associates this sword intimately with the body, its desires, responses, and vulnerability.

sword (sexual magic is invoked as a means of protection against danger) the battle may as easily be envisioned in sexual as in aggressive terms. Its culmination in the death of the female, establishing the supremacy of the male, may be symbolic of sexual climax, which in literature has often been conventionally associated with death. Chaucer's Wife of Bath had an erotic dream in which, she said, her partner had "slain" her as she "lay upright" (i.e., supine) and the metaphysical poet and clergyman John Donne often used the word "die" in a sexual sense. The metaphor was a common one in 16th and 17th century European literature; in modern idiom, Italians refer to sexual climax as the "little death."

In struggling with this archetypal triple form of Woman, Beowulf was battling with the power of her image to hold him in thrall, to negate his own powers of action (for her powers were basically passive, somnolent, like the mere itself, after the conquest; it was only when roused by the pain of her son's murder that she undertook an active course) and to devour him, both literally (one assumes that, like her son, she consumed human flesh) and symbolically, out of a perverted protective instinct associated with her maternal omnipotence. Defeating the paralyzing power of "the Phallic Mother" (Kristeva 238) liberates the psyche to continue its quest for individuation and immortality as it liberates the youth to pursue an independent life. The pattern of behaviour required to fulfill the emotional requirements of this transcendence appears in early culture as a

"rite of passage" and in myth as a "rebirth pattern" (Henderson 145-48). (See Chapter I).

The fyr on flode, "fire on the water" (1366) of the dismal mere suggests a very esoteric and mystical element of the rebirth archetype, one which appears as the "ice bound seas and stagnant water burning" (Bodkin 252) of the Ancient Mariner and Dante's Hell. The combination of fire and water on one level symbolizes the "union of irreconcilable opposites" (CW 12: 140) that signifies the attainment of psychic unity. In the present discussion, the relevant opposites are the male and female elements of both soma and psyche, for, besides enacting the rites of passage necessary for the successful resolution of the Oedipal conflict, Beowulf must come to terms with the innate feminine element in his own nature, because before renewal of life can come about, there must be an acceptance of the possibilities that lie in the contents of the unconscious, "activated through regression...and disfigured by the slime of the deep" (Bodkin 66).

The feminine element of the male psyche which manifests itself in sublimated or exalted form as the anima takes on terrifying proportions in its libidinal state. In the murky depths of the mere there is the feeling of stagnation and corruption; that it is a place where "even radiance is foul" (Bodkin 49), is suggested by the fire that burns in the cave (1515-17). This light, described by John R. Clark Hall as a "lurid flame" (1950: 97), leaps into new brilliance after the

Merewife has been destroyed; the light is then compared to that of the sun, whereby the heavenly kingdom of the patriarchal sky god is invoked:

Lixte se leoma,      leohte inne stod,  
efne swa of hefene      hadre scinea  
rodores candel (1570-72).

A gleam flashed forth, light was diffused  
within, as when the candle of the firmament  
shines brightly from heaven (Hall trans.)

This is a fitting simile, because Beowulf has completed the destruction of the ancient earth goddess, as Apollo destroyed the Python(ess) at Omphalos [appropriately called the "navel of the world" (Liddell and Scott 489)] and replaced her with a sky, or 'heavenly,' god, an effect perceived (by men) to have enhanced the light of consciousness. Apollo's symbolic cutting of the umbilical cord was rather more crudely, but perhaps, from a symbolic point of view, more effectively accomplished in Beowulf's shattering of the banhringas, "bone rings" (1567) of the Merewife's neck. With this penultimate blow, the patriarchal structure symbolized by Heorot moved into ever more secure control of the life and destiny of human society, just as the individual moves into more complete control of his own existence through resolution of the Oedipal conflict.

The final act of the battle amounts to an inversion of the Christian Creation and, as God is said to have been pleased with His work, it is likewise said of Beowulf secg weorce gefeh, "the man (or, as the terms are interchangeable, the "sword") rejoiced in his (its) work" (1569). What was effected by both man and

sword, in the name of the Christian God, was the negation of the feminine influence upon individual and collective consciousness.

There is enough evidence from anthropology and poetic myth to indicate that the destruction of the earth goddess had been accomplished long before the coming of Christianity to the Germanic tribes of Beowulf so that one need not blame Christianity for this negative influence on their male-female relationships. Still, while the coming of Christianity eventually may have brought a measure of peace to the warrior tribes that they might otherwise not have achieved, it does seem as though the power of the feminine element, far from being somewhat restored by the advent of more peaceful times, was even further weakened by early Christian thought, which placed emphasis upon the symbolic facts that, unlike the old gods and heroes, neither God nor Christ had a wife,<sup>15</sup> and upon St. Paul's less measured writings on marriage, (in particular I Cor. 7: 1-9, in which the chief benefit of marriage was said to be as a deterrent to "fornication," and the apostle stated his personal preference "that all men were even as I myself" -- i.e., celibate -- but, allowing that, given the varieties of human nature, this was most likely impractical, permitted marriage on the grounds that "it is better to marry than to burn"), which injunctions

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, the case could be made that Mother Church is the effective bride of Christ, a metaphor symbolically affirmed or re-created in the 'wedding' of nuns to their vocation.

were (mis)interpreted as a call for celibacy by the early monastic orders that proliferated in the first centuries A.D.

Some gnostic Christian sects (most significantly, with reference to the mother of Grendel, the Cainites) exalted Eve, but these were the exceptions to an already heretical tradition; the Marcion gnostic priesthood gave women equal status with men, but this practice was absolutely unacceptable to doctrinal Roman Christianity then as now, and in A.D. 144 Marcion was determined by Polycarp to be the most dangerous man alive. "The first-born of Satan" was expelled from the Church as a heretic (EB Micro 7:826). However, in the late 7th century, Mary, the Virgin Mother of Christ, was officially accorded the divinity attributed to her by centuries-old Byzantine apocrypha and her elevation to the potential authority of a Greek goddess was sanctioned by her "Dormition" or Assumption; the only human not to die, she was said to have revived in body and/or spirit, depending upon the interpreters (Kristeva 241).

The worship of Mary and the elevation of women to sainthood was popular with the Anglo-Saxons and reached almost manic proportions in the early Middle Ages, so that by the time Julian of Norwich (c. 1343-1416) was writing her mystical tracts, the ideas of "our Mother God" and "Jesus...our real Mother" (see esp. chapters 59, 60 of Revelations of Divine Love) were possible, not only for Julian but also for Anselm (Jones 275). Focusing on what Julian called "our sensual nature...in the Second Person alone, Jesus Christ" (Ch. 59) and the "mercy and pity" and "pain"

(Julian Ch. 59, 60) of the Virgin birth, Marian worship reflects an aspect of the "humanization of Christ" that R.W. Southern noted in medieval art. Perhaps it came as a response to the horrors of the Inquisition,<sup>16</sup> when to many the image of Christ must have seemed the ultimate monster and His mother the only source of refuge within the cruel Church structure. Whatever explanation is offered for the deification of Mary, the phenomenon attests to the power of the feminine symbol's intrinsic religious content and Julian's tracts particularly indicate that the idea of God is incomplete without the feminine principle. That this form of worship was adopted so

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<sup>16</sup> The papal Inquisition was first instituted by Pope Gregory IX in 1231 after the appearance of large-scale heresies (particularly among the Cathari and the Waldenses), for the seizure and trial of heretics. The use of torture to obtain confessions was authorized in 1251 by Pope Innocent IV. Penalties could range from prayer and fasting to death by a number of unpleasant means, which, however, could only be carried out by the "secular arm" once the individual was handed over as an unrepentant miscreant. The Church "washed its hands" of the heretic at this point. The Spanish Inquisition, most famous because most horrible of the various forms of this repressive office, was authorized in 1478 by Pope Sixtus IV. The archetypal figure of this Inquisition was the grand inquisitor Tomas de Torquemada, a Dominican, who is conservatively estimated to have burned about 2000 people at the stake during his tenure of office. The Spanish Inquisition, with waxing and waning degrees of power, lasted until 1834. A less intimidating form of the office, the Roman Inquisition, was established in 1542 by Pope Paul III to eradicate Protestantism and was most enthusiastically pursued by Pope Paul IV and Pope Pius V. This form of the Inquisition continues today, having undergone a couple of redefinitions and name changes. In 1908 it ceased to be called the Inquisition and became known as the Holy Office under Pope Pius X's reorganization of the Roman Curia; in 1965, further democratization under Pope Paul VI called for a re-re-naming, to its present designation, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 6, *Micropaedia*: 328-29).



enthusiastically by men, who contributed not only secular poetry and song to the religious cause but also a whole semi-secular aristocratic philosophy and code of behaviour in the institution of chivalry, indicates that complete religious symbology must contain an element of desirability, in the libidinal sense, for the male as well as for the female. In the pattern there is also evidence of the projection of the anima, which has been called the "archetype of soul" (Fordham 54).

Anima means "soul," and, in accordance with the notion of the sexual nature of the spirit, the anima stands as a projected element of the "chaotic urge to life" (Jung 1939: 74-80) or the libido itself. A daimon, a poetic muse, an "incestuous image that stimulates the poet" (Webster 108), the anima may be seen as a projection of the soul's striving or an image of the soul itself which, when projected upon a real woman, "acquires that sensual libido which has hitherto adhered to the concrete object" (CW 6: 280); for, at its most basic level, the image of woman conjured up by the unconscious is mystical and religious as well as sexual.

The sexual aspect of Marian worship was openly displayed in secular Middle English love poetry, which was often addressed to Mary, or Marian, or an alternate sublimated designation such as "Alisoun." The tone of such poetry is decidedly one of romantic, rather than strictly spiritual, love, and the medieval romantic tradition of courtly love may be linked to the Marian worship of the period, which may itself be linked to the desire Southern

identified in people to bring Christ closer to human experience and approachability by emphasizing his physical and emotional humanity. The insistence upon chastity as an ideal, rather than a reality, of the love object of medieval romance is paralleled by the ideal, rather than the real, virginity of Mary who, although she is said in Old English poetry to have conceived without frige weres, "the love of man," in the Bible had other children besides her immortal Son. Theological constructs based upon her virginity involve an element of repression of fact, and the repression of primary fact is a basic requirement of symbol formation, at least from the point of view of consciousness, where "the symbolic processes function in order to disguise those unconscious contents that might be experienced by a person as either too painful or too shameful" (Gordon 1983: 14). Following through on Freud's earlier theory, Jung declared that "the repressed erotic impression of the unconscious (actuates) the latent primordial image of the goddess" (CW 6: 277).

As discussed earlier, the repression of the fact of female sexuality with reference to the mother figure is linked to incest taboos that were effective upon Anglo-Saxon consciousness long before their ultimate conversion to Christianity, so it was with a doubly affirmed intensity that the hero had to struggle to overcome the seductive and destructive power of this libidinal projection in the form of the Merewife. The necessity of repressing, once and for all, this unacceptable expression of the primary sexual drive may be seen as a natural and desirable

psychic activity because, as Julia Kristeva says, "if we acknowledge mother as 'master' of a process that is prior to the social-symbolic-linguistic contract of the group, then we acknowledge the risk of losing identity" (238) and such a prospect obviates the possibility of achieving either ontological integrity or individuation.

Beowulf's victory over the Merewife is in part an achievement of this repression, and the poet's description of the mere following the battle suggests the natural return to unconsciousness of the archetypal forms and patterns that irrupted into ritual activity through the conjoint engagement of the ego and the archetypal hero in this primary confrontation:

Lagu drusade,  
waeter under wolcnum,      waeldreore fag (1630-31).

The lake's waters, stained with blood, drowed  
under the sky.

The lake's return to a state of somnolence reflects the kind of peace that is attained by the repression of primary facts; its blood-stained condition indicates the incomplete nature of the repression. Beowulf's decision to take back with him no trophy of the Merewife herself suggests the necessary decision of ego-consciousness to suppress, as well as repress, many of the recollectible details of the primary experience, in order to accomplish its ultimate goal. In this instance, the moral imperatives of Beowulf's social conscience were taken, as part of consciousness, into the anarchic world of the unconscious, applied to the shapes found there, and validated. In this way,

Beowulf justified the supremacy of the new 'regime' as absolutely essential to the protection, continuation and renewal of his society. His return to Heorot with the head of Grendel, rather than that of the Merewife (when he already had a trophy of Grendel and might have been expected to bring back something of her if only to make people believe his story), while it establishes the continuing threat to society as existing materially in the aggressive tendencies of the warrior powers, also completes her absolute conquest and effective suppression. She will not surface again and the material evidence of her fearsome power has been submerged.

The exigencies of such a mission, however, dictate certain resultant conditions. First, there is the necessary identification of the female as, in some fundamental sense, evil; sexuality, therefore, becomes a source of guilt and shame. The battle-rape of the Merewife is a natural act under such circumstances, because Beowulf is battling his instinctual desire for union with a creature he has defined as evil. Secondly, rather than accept and assimilate the feminine element within his own nature, Beowulf has been forced to annihilate it. All the more understandable, then, is the reluctance of the hart which, as a sexual symbol (Warner 225) and a symbol of the soul (CW 12: 416), is a symbol of the anima in its libidinal phase, to risk its absolute being in the abyss of the deep unconscious. Finally, in negating his feminine nature, it could be that Beowulf has become unable to project even the positive form of

his anima upon attainable women in the 'real' world, and so he might be unable to fall in love, to find sexual fulfillment, and to thereby fulfill his procreative function. These possibilities are supported by the fact that Beowulf had no heirs. Seen by these warriors as a sign that God did not favour them, the failure to produce an heir, to be fruitful, implies a fundamental abortion of the sexual function.

The Christian Church's exaltation of chastity and the institution of celibacy, which attempt to harness ('marry') sexual energy to religious feeling, may be based upon an intuition (or conviction) that, sublimated, the sexual instinct becomes a vehicle for (artistic or) religious experience. The function of the anima in her role as spiritual guide is directly related to this possibility. Yet the process of sublimation implies a subversion of primary goals.

The subversion or subjugation of animal instinct has been a preoccupation of man since the development of consciousness and a recurring theme of Beowulf from the hero's first battle with the unacceptable form of the aggressive instinct personified by Grendel. It is not, therefore, surprising, that the perceived necessity of subduing the instinctual drives should extend to the sexual sphere. However, just as the aggressive instinct has a positive function in that it is the source of energy by which man acts, the sexual instinct has a universal creative purpose that is validated in its physical expression and result. This energy is sublimated as love.

### The Fate of Love in Beowulf

Love, the sublime expression of the sexual instinct in human beings, does not go entirely unmentioned in Beowulf, but it receives very particularized treatment.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps because the poet was a monk, but just as likely because he was a man of natural religious sensibility, the love of man for God is approved and exalted. Perhaps because he was an aristocrat, but just as likely simply because he was a man, the love of man for man is elevated into a social system, based upon the warrior society's structural relationship of comitas. Perhaps because he was disappointed in love, but maybe because he had a clear vision of the realities of the human condition of both women and men in

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<sup>17</sup> Although Beowulf is not a romance, but an epic, there is no reason this form should necessarily preclude the happy resolution of a love relationship. Nevertheless, it may be revealing that in the classical epics, too, romance or love -- as opposed to dalliance or duty -- comes to a tragic conclusion. Eg. the case of Aeneas and Dido (who committed suicide when her lover deserted her to pursue his heroic destiny) and even Odysseus and Penelope (whom he married as second choice to Helen of Troy and left in order to recover the abducted Helen, returning to his faithful wife only after many years of perilous and amorous adventures (only to be killed, according to post-Homeric legend, at the hands of Telegonus, his own son by the witch, Circe, to whom he and his crew had been enthralled for a year of his odyssey)). The observation that it is usually the woman who suffers in relation to this idea of love suggests the possibility that the romantic notion itself is an intrinsically feminine one that is judged, in the masculine world of the epic, to be, however enticing, essentially unrealistic. That it is, nevertheless, real, is indicated by Virgil, at least, in his depiction of the shades of the dead who have died for love, and in Dido's silent spectral reception of Aeneas' excuses.

the warrior world, the love of man for woman and woman for man is, in contrast, shown to be a relationship of domination, manipulation, separation and death: Modthryth's love for her husband causes her to come completely under his power; Ingeld's love for Freawaru will only degenerate into waelniðas, "deadly hatred" (2065) when she fails to accomplish her purpose as peaceweaver; Hygd's love for Higelac, and his for her, end in bloody and isolated death; and in the cases of Wealhtheow and Hildeburh, whose sons fulfilled the creative and pro-creative promise of sexual love, we see that fulfillment of love destroyed by war. These situational motifs provide clues to the failure of erotic love in the world of Beowulf, but they may all be reduced to a fear that haunts the individual ego: the fear of annihilation, either by another consciousness (as with Modthryth) or by the final force of unconsciousness, death.

The relationship of lovers, which is integrally physical, is inevitably associated with death because, born in the body, it must logically die with the body. In Christian thought, according to Matt. 22: 30 and Mark 12: 25, marriage does not exist in heaven, and the possibilities of sexual love may have seemed even more limited in the pagan warrior world, where the stark phenomenological reality of pain and physical annihilation was an everyday fact of life, than in the agricultural realm of the earth goddess, where the seasonal patterns themselves were an affirmation of the cycle of rebirth.

Yet, although the possibility of horrible and untimely death was considerably multiplied by the conditions of warrior society, the ethic to which these warriors subscribed managed to console them in part for its inevitability. The Viking's hope of a glorious death in battle and belief in the warrior's subsequent transportation to Valhalla provided a fantasy that replaced love with war. In a world where the idea of 'heaven' was a great hall in the sky where warriors feasted, fought, were killed and rose to fight again, there was not so much an idea of rebirth as re-death, and this fantasy permitted the warrior to distance his fear of the cold realities of pain and death in battle. Not so the actuality itself. Of this, he continued to be reminded by the antithetical power of sexuality to create pleasure and life, and therefore by the object of its immediate fulfillment, woman. The ultimate fulfillment of this urge, the experience of birth, brings the female into intimate contact with the realities of physical being, and these include the pain and death for which, in both Norse and Christian mythology, she is considered responsible.

Even in mythology, of course, this perceived responsibility is rather more symbolic than actual, and may derive in part from the fact that the observing and recording consciousness has traditionally been masculine. A man, contemplating the metaphysical implications of sexuality, can only do so in terms of its relation to the object of his physical desire, usually a woman. Therefore, even though it is a well-worn cliché of



Pauline theology that Paul rejected sexuality for himself in his oft-quoted maxim, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman" (1 Cor.7: 11) and railed against the sins of the flesh (Rom.7: 23-24), his reasons for doing so may be related, not to any intrinsic dislike of women, but to an aesthetic interpretation of the biblical account of the end of Paradise when, as Ernest Becker explains it, the discovery of sex "brought death into the world" (162).

Man's need to triumph over his sexuality, Becker contends, is a need to create a distinctly human personality that arises from his awareness that sexual self-denial allows him to "impose the cultural map for personal immortality over the animal body." Because sex represents "species consciousness and, as such, the defeat of individuality," says Becker, the sexual act itself represents a "double negation" both in physical death and in the loss of distinctly personal qualities (163).

Anglo-Saxon man's resistance to sexuality might be a natural product of his developing consciousness by virtue of its symbolic resistance to death and in its relation to the function of the ego, which seeks to establish the supremacy of mind over body in order to perpetuate its own existence. This preoccupation was of particular concern to Anglo-Saxon theology (see Chapter IV), lending credence to the theory that the poet of Beowulf was a priest or monk.

Paradoxically, of course, sexual love has been recognized as that aspect of the male-female relationship which "holds the key

to Paradise" (Bodkin 225) and the positive implications of sexuality include a cognizance and interpretation of death and rebirth. A later poet-theologian, John Donne, envisioned sexual climax as a kind of death into a new form of life in which, for a brief but infinite moment, a new being is created out of disparate and opposing principles. In "The Canonization," the metaphor of the phoenix, containing the antithetical forms of "the eagle and the dove," stands for the rebirth motif of sexuality, where the lovers "die and rise the same and prove/Mysterious by (their) love." The story of the phoenix was recounted in the Anglo-Saxon language by a typically anonymous poet who adapted it to a religious purpose, and it can also be explored as a representation of the pattern of psycho-physical transformation (see Chapter V).

Such associations suggest that the sexual instinct may be understood in religious terms to operate on a transcendental plane to stimulate the desire of man and woman to achieve physical and psychic unity in and through each other. Mystical and religious interpretations of sexuality acknowledge this primal impulse, and in this sense the religious instinct may be seen as a counterpart of the sexual instinct; and just as the achievement of sexual unity implies a 'surrender' or 'death' of the individual being, and the achievement of religious unity requires the willing submission of the individual will to the will of God, so the overall goal of psychic unity, individuation, requires the surrender and ultimately the death of the infantile

ego personality (which is limited by time, space and matter, factors that do not inhibit the unconscious) and a subsequent rebirth as a transcendent, more fully realized being.

As the heroic struggles of the libido may be said to be sexual in impulse, Beowulf's final self-sacrifice in battle with the Wyrn is an act of love and his final goal a transcendental consummation with the supreme love-object. Symbolic affirmation of this comes when the treasure is buried with Beowulf, but intimations of it exist in his conflict with the dragon, which in its symbolism incorporates both male and female elements, suggesting the possibility of an androgynous solution to the failure of erotic love in Beowulf.

#### **The Wyrn as a Symbol of Erotic Love in Beowulf**

The possibility of an androgynous resolution to the paradox of love in the context of Beowulf is both proposed and countered by the symbolism of the serpent, or Wyrn, which stands as a symbol of the opposite possibility implicit in its hermaphroditic combination of the phallic form with the female principle. The symbology of this empirical fact (as many worms are hermaphroditic) is found in the Biblical story of Eve and represented in Greek myth and art in the Omphalos, the conical block of stone near the temple at Delphi, a pre-Hellenic representation of the earth goddess (perhaps related to the

Omphale with whom Heracles changed identities), who was ousted by Apollo after he had slain the Python (sometimes called the Pythoness) who guarded her shrine (Harvey 137).

Dwelling in the eorðscraef, "earth cave" (3046) or, in Alvin Lee's reading, the "earth grave" <sup>18</sup> of the unconscious, the Beowulf dragon lives in the womb (or tomb) of Mother Earth, sharing with this primal female form her powers of destruction, as well as her material nature. The Wyrn is also a creature of air and fire, its spiritual aspect confirmed by the symbolism of the dragon in literature and myth. Its connection with the soul, or the spiritual body of man, is indicated by mythological traditions in which the souls of heroes take the form of snakes after death (CW 18: 92) and by alchemical traditions in which the "fiery serpent" is a recurring symbol of the soul which has been separated from God and which is, therefore, afflicted with desire and sin (CW 12: 159). [It is in this last incarnation that Beowulf confronts the serpent, as the projection of his own final, necessary guilt, the embodiment of the sin that stands between him and attainment of the treasure of immortality (see Chapter IV)].

As the embodiment of sexuality and hate, the serpent epitomizes "the destructive power of passion conjoined with the will to rule" (Bodkin 1934: 170). Nevertheless, although the serpent

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<sup>18</sup> According to John R. Clark Hall, eorðscraef was used to translate sepulchrum in King Alfred's translation of Gregory's Pastoral Care (1960: 107).

stands for a form of lust as the tempter of Eve, it also, through its identification with Christ (Bodkin 182), stands for a form of love, expressed dynamically as the desire for complete union (or reunion), whether of male and female, of man and God, or, in psychological terms, of ego with self, in the process of individuation.

This process, for man or woman, is essentially a solitary one, undertaken with the soul (anima) as guide and the image of 'God' as the ultimate goal, when God is identified as the source and goal of all psychic energy, the form of being which lives most purely in the androgynous "self" as the unity before and after the creation of the mundane world. In this sense, the requirements of spirituality might seem to take precedence over those of the body. However, as the didactic Anglo-Saxon Christian literature recognized more in a tortuous effort to comprehend these esoteric concepts than in any real intellectual grasp (although the Old English poetic metaphor was powerful enough), the Resurrection and St. Paul's doctrine of the spiritual body suggested an ultimate unity that was both psychic and physical. Jung's statement that "only together are man and woman the image of God" suggests what Julian of Norwich 'knew,' that the corresponding opposites of physical unity (in this case male and female) must exist in equal and balanced measure in the idea of the divine 'body' of God incorporated as Christ, and his explanation of Christ's childlessness is associated with this divine androgyny, which, he indicates, results from apprehension

and experience of the resolution of opposites that accompanies the process of individuation (CW 12: 19).

Although Beowulf's own childlessness may have another, less esoteric, significance, this moment of resolution occurred symbolically for Beowulf when the marvellous sword with which he had destroyed the two monsters of instinct melted in hilde-gicelum:<sup>19</sup>

|                     |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| aefter heaposwate   | hildegicelum,       | þa þæt sweord ongan |
| wigbil wanian;      | þæt waes wundra sum |                     |
| þæt hit eal gemealt | ise gelicost        |                     |
| donne forstes bend  | Faeder onlaeteð,    |                     |
| onwinded waelrapas, | se gewæld hafað     |                     |
| saela ond maela;    | þæt is soð Metod    | (1606-11).          |

Then that sword, that blade of war, began to dissolve in the hot blood of battle; it was incredible how it all melted in icicles of war, just like the ice when the Father loosens the frost's bonds, unwinds the stream's ropes. He has the power over time and season; He is the true God.

The epic simile states a recurring theme of paradox, fire and ice being absolutely opposing cosmic principles, containing polarities of heat and cold, light and dark, wet and dry. At the same time, it resolves that paradox physically and metaphysically, because in equal measure both fire and ice are symbolic of both life and death, evoking the nature of the mother goddess as the manifestation of Life-in-Death and Death-in-Life. However, this symbolic dynamic, which also includes opposing

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<sup>19</sup> This simile was discussed in Chapter I in terms of the nature of Beowulf's God, but I think it can bear re-examination or amplification here.

principles in the destructive power of Grendel's head~~os~~swat, "battle blood," is ascribed to Metod, "Measurer, or Creator," in his/its patriarchal role as Faeder who, in his power over saela ond maela, "times and seasons," has control over time and matter. In its turn, heat displaces cold and cold negates heat in a cyclic pattern that reveals the infinitely transformative nature of deity.

The concepts of change and renewal implicit in this simile are given their physical reality in the world of nature and time, as the pattern of birth, death and rebirth is established on the temporal plane of physical being. On the psychic or spiritual level, these same concepts are perceived as integral to absolute Being, because constant change is another paradox contained in the idea of deity.

That this seasonal pattern should here be specifically attributed to God the Father, establishing the dominion of the patriarchal sky god over the former realm of the Earth Mother, is a significant note in this very powerful movement of image and theme, which is central to Beowulf's rebirth as a spiritual being and should have been a moment of psychophysical wholeness in which the antinomies were experientially resolved and, like the sword blade, dissolved. It may be that the poet was affirming what Julia Kristeva calls Christianity's "matchless rationality" (237) or perhaps he wanted to assert that the notion of woman as "mistress" of the "begetting" or instinctive drive which "underlies the cult of any ultimately feminine deity" is a

"fantasy" (Kristeva 241). Yet, the dissolving of the sword blade in Grendel's blood, rather than the Merewife's, and Beowulf's failure to father children seems to indicate that the mythmaker was instinctively aware of the essential invalidity of some of the assumptions that might arise from the story of this conquest.

In the 'affirmative action' of substituting a male form of god for a female form, no moral advance is seen to be achieved. Evil may still work to negate the active power of the will to good represented by the magic sword blade; and men are to continue to be blind to the lessons of history: the story of the Flood is cryptic and open to misinterpretation in the desire to achieve righteous power; the pattern of the past will be repeated until Heorot, the warrior society, is destroyed in laðan liges, "hateful flames" (83), not by Flood but by fire, ecgheta, "sword hate" (84) and waelnib, "deadly hate" (85). It should be noted that this same dynamic exists in relation to Beowulf himself, who defeats the Water Witch but is destroyed by the Fire Dragon. The Geatisc meowle or geomeowle, the woman mourner who appears at the end of Beowulf, is an important figure in light of the poem's understanding of this dynamic. She personifies a responsive and prophetic element of the warrior society.



### The Geomeowle

The woman mourner in literature and mythology represents an aspect of woman that Maud Bodkin has likened to "the goddess Ishtar, or Innini, the visionary leader of the lament" (163). As Bodkin interprets this figure, she is the remnant of the ancient mother goddesses -- Ishtar, Demeter, Thetis, perhaps Epona and Nerthus -- whose stories end in "mourning for the divine child and husband that made (them) glad and fertile" (163). In heroic epic such as Beowulf, although she may be a youthful victim of tragedy, like Hildeburh, most often the woman mourner is an old woman, the final victim of warrior society.

While old men occupied a central position of respect in the world of Beowulf, illustrated by their role as sele-raedende, "counsellors in the hall" (52), and confirmed by the respect accorded the gugu, old women, whose role in the poem is limited to weeping and wailing, seem to have been relegated to the fringe of life. A woman's usefulness to society having depended upon the power of her sexual attraction (which facilitated the fulfillment of her social role as peaceweaver, her sexual or romantic role as love-object, and her domestic role as wife and mother), in old age, a woman might inevitably be diminished in both power and presence. Those who, with Englehardt, maintain that the woman mourner at Beowulf's funeral was actually Hygd (77-87), or, as Klaeber suggested, Beowulf's widow (230), would have to agree with this inference; in old age, if she was meant

to be either, it seems either solecistic or significant that she was not mentioned by name, nor identified in any way that might evoke the glorious youth of Hygd or the (imaginably) outstanding qualities of the woman who might have been Beowulf's wife. She is simply [(s)io] g(eo)meowle (3150), a word which, by virtue of the onomatopoeia of its feline resonances, might as easily be read "old pussy" as "old woman," and she is described as bundenheorde, "with hair bound up" (3151), perhaps to indicate her lack of sexual appeal, hair being a symbol of a woman's sexual attractiveness, or, as St. Paul rather romantically says, her "crowning glory" (1 Cor.1: 15). Time and decay seem to have played a material part in erasing her textual being as well, since the manuscript is all but indecipherable at this point. The reconstruction by Zupitza only admits the meowle, which probably speaks for itself, though in a greatly diminished voice. However, while appreciating the stringency of Zupitza and the scholarly ambivalence of Klaeber and Dobbie (whose official reconstruction of [Gelat]isc meowle is qualified by copious notes indicating alternate possibilities<sup>20</sup>) and a host of other editors and translators for whom line 3151 has posed such varying and tantalizing questions, it is suggested that the perceiver's role in the re-creation of a work of art (the only justification

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<sup>20</sup> In a personal communication, Marijane Osborn has pointed out that "Geatisc meowle is not a matter of choice after Pope's restorations of the manuscript text with infrared readings." My own inclination is to side with Klaeber in this, if only because I like the echo effect of giomorgvud and geomeowle in that line.

one can sometimes offer for the role of the critic, as opposed to that of the pure scholar) permits a further type of reconstruction that adds to this figure the dimension of an interpretive collective voice.

In his note to her lament, Klaeber says "that (the song of lament) should be uttered by a woman is what we expect" (230), quite properly citing the prospective fate of women following the death or defeat of their men, described prophetically in lines 3016-21. Although this is undoubtedly part of the reason, the geomeowle's lament would not be occasioned only by personal fear and loss. The woman lamenting the death of Beowulf would not be crying only for herself nor even solely for the death of her lord; she would be crying also for the future of her race which, on the broader scale, is the whole of the human race. The values lost by the death of Beowulf, and, in fact, by the passage of time, in which the patriarchal system and its warrior ethic gains ever stronger control, are values which were initially imparted to him by the women in his life. As their influence fades or is negated, growing weaker with each succeeding generation as the warrior society weox under wolcnum, "waxed under the skies" (8), peace becomes a vanishing dream and war and exile the material reality.

The woman mourner as she appears in Beowulf, both in the person of Hildeburh, the ides gnornode, "mourn(ful) lady" (1117), and in her final form at the end of the poem, seems to be a constant and visionary element of warrior society, and her

giomorgvd, "mournful song" (3150) an inevitable note. The ritual lamentation for the dead son, husband, or king was and is a continuing fact of a society in which women play designated roles and suffer definite consequences, but over which they have no actual control.

Even women who manage to become very powerful leaders in such a world must play by the warrior rules and only women who can outfight men on their own terms (like Boadicea or Modthryth) can even hope to achieve and maintain positions of power. However they might desire to establish a peaceful milieu, such women, in order to compete, have perhaps had to adopt and internalize the warrior ethic; once installed, they inherit the problems intrinsic to the warrior state, and the cycle continues. Inevitably, just as the seer can predict but cannot influence the course of events (illustrated by the myth of Cassandra, who foretold the doom of Troy to deaf ears) the woman mourner's power to envision the future and to learn from the past is negated by her essential position of powerlessness in the warrior structure: in this sense, the future is already the past, the mistakes of the past an inevitable part of the future, and her lament of these extensions laments also the continuing present reality, experienced as the tragic existential condition of both women and men in such a world.

A recurring figure of myth and history, the woman mourner remains a shadowy form, more sound than substance, perhaps at most an echo of the cry of protest that must have sounded in the

soul of woman at her degradation from immanent goddess to impotent pawn in the beadulacan (1561), those "battlegames" necessary to appease and maintain the masculine war gods raised up by the patriarchal revolution.

#### 4 THE WYRM, THE HORD AND RELIGION IN BEOWULF

##### "The Unconscious needs a God"

As Beowulf moves closer and closer to the end of his dogera daegrim, "number of days" (823), the symbolic forms through which his unconscious pursues its destiny become more and more pure, and yet, more and more complex. At the end, he is left with two unconscious projections. One of them, the WyrM, embodies all that he has come to reject in his own nature and in the manifest universe; the other, the Hord, in its combined sense of 'treasure' and 'what is hidden,' symbolizes all that he has come to value.

The other symbols through which the hero has come to realize his values have been gedaeled, 'separated out,' the positive features incorporated into his ego-consciousness and the negative consigned to the deepest unconscious, to aggregate to the form that presents itself at the end of his life as the WyrM. Yet, although his conscious affirmations of value have been assimilated to a great extent by the ego, there remains one final assimilation, a goal which may perhaps be reduced to the desire of the human spirit to be at one with the pure form of its

highest and truest values, symbolized by the Hord. The Wyrn, as the negative principle, stands firmly between Beowulf and the realization of this goal.

This necessary positioning creates the dynamic that gives rise to the final conflict of Beowulf's life: his struggle with the Wyrn as the projection of the darkest, most destructive impulses of his own animal being (which includes the body's will towards death in the notion of the 'death-wish') to achieve the treasure, which, as a symbol of the self, represents the objective validation of his highest, most creative possibilities (which include the soul's will towards life in the notion of immortality). In this struggle, he is armed with his sword (a symbol of the energetic qualities of the soul); his knife (a sacrificial tool); his shield (symbolic of his intellectual achievement<sup>1</sup>); the love and loyalty of one of his fellow men; and his own indomitable courage in the face of the final threat to ego-consciousness, the manifest reality of death.

Beowulf's battle with the Wyrn represents the ego's final confrontation with the fact of death, the irrefutable knowledge of which may have forced the emergence of a peculiarly human function, the so-called "religious instinct," characterized by Jung as "a dynamic existence or effect not caused by an arbitrary

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<sup>1</sup> In conventional Christian symbology, with reference to Eph. 6:16 and St. Paul's spiritual armoury, the shield may be equated with faith. However, it will be contended here that a certain feature of Beowulf's shield allows this alternative interpretation.

act of will," an instinct that "seizes and controls its human subject" who is thus "always rather its victim than its creator" (1939: 4).<sup>2</sup>

Although he did not negate the importance of consciousness in religious functioning (in fact, he gave it primary, if not final, authority and was almost Hegelian in his insistence upon the dynamic reality of religious symbols as representations of the self, which may be equated with Hegel's concept of Absolute Mind), Jung nevertheless located the impetus for religious awareness in the unconscious realm of human entity, on an instinctual level, though on a more complex or advanced plane than the instincts of aggression and sexuality. He hypothesized the existence of an impulse unique to man, one which, as Feuerbach said in The Essence of Christianity, provides for "the essential difference between man and the brute" (3).

Although its function might not be physically grounded or expressed, the religious instinct as thus understood is as dedicated to human survival as the instincts of sexuality and aggression. As the body's need for safety and sustenance both derives from, and is fulfilled by, the aggressive instinct, while its urge for continuance and renewal is both stimulated and satisfied

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<sup>2</sup> In the formulation of his theory of the religious instinct, Jung inherited a philosophical tradition begun by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who suggested that the focus of religious contemplation and of speculations on the nature of such contemplation most properly belonged in the realm of "feeling," and he carried on in the anthropological vein of Ludwig Feuerbach by postulating that religious thought is as much a function of biology as of culture and consciousness.



by the sexual instinct, so the psyche, too, seems to call upon its own energetic force which both impels and informs the human being's quest for psychic resolution, a quest Jung sees as the central function of both consciousness and the unconscious. In their affirmation of the primacy of this function, which at its highest level of expression takes precedence even over physical survival, many philosophers and post-Freudian psychologists have come to view man as a 'theological' rather than simply a biological being, a 'fact' that poets have known for millennia.

#### The God of Beowulf's Shaper

By the time he has reached the final battle of his life, Beowulf, though still conforming to the idea of a hero in the pre-Christian Teutonic world, is living a symbolic life which, as is conventionally recognized, closely parallels the last days of Christ. Through subtle analogy and syncretic skill, the supposedly 'pagan' hero has been transformed into a proto-typical Christian hero, a 'type' of Christ familiar to, and beloved by, the Anglo-Saxons, a people to whom conversion was an on-going process rather than a fait accompli. In a sense, this transformation in Beowulf's basic nature may have been the whole point of the poem from the point of view of the poet, whose ideas of heroism, so intimately related to his ideas of god, 'the

good,' demanded full and complete expression of his own religious ideals.

It is not the purpose of this study to explore all of the strains of religious thought suggested in Beowulf, but rather to follow the process of religious functioning in the individual and collective human psyche through its manifestation in the poem. However, because religion is necessarily a more conscious, if still instinctual, occupation, it is necessary to identify some of the influences that may have operated upon the conscious mind of the poet, and to attempt to identify the personality of the poet as revealed in the poem through the development of his hero.

The Beowulf poet's religion, like that of most people, was personal and integral to his vision of the world, and he would naturally tend to project his personal and conscious vision upon the world that he created out of the contents of his unconscious. Religious thoughts, which may follow or create religious feelings, reflect on one level the response of consciousness to the stimulation of the unconscious and, on another level, the projection of that response onto the world in which it functions. In that sense, the human being creates his own world, which may be said to exist objectively to the extent that he is able to involve others in it. Since the religious function in its most pragmatically useful form is to provide, for others as well as oneself, a viable, creative and sustaining world view that permits action in situations of crisis and trauma otherwise outside the control of human action (and see Chapter I for a

discussion of the hero as a religious figure) it is possible that the artist, in this case, the poet, is basically a creature of the religious instinct, because this is, fundamentally, the function of art, which, in this context, effectively says, "If everything else fails, let's sing and dance." It is therefore necessary, in attempting to trace the religious elements in Beowulf, to take into consideration what Klaeber has called the "didactic and emotional nature of the author himself" (lxi), because both elements are central to any analysis.

The voice of the 'shaper' of Beowulf is both didactic and cautionary, but, unlike that of most Old English poetry, not preponderantly so. Even allowing for the possibility of scribal interpolation of some of the more gratuitous didactic lines, such as the Wa bið ðaem...wel bið ðaem, "woe will it be with those... well will it be with those..." pronouncement at the end of fitt II, the poetic voice is strongly didactic through the words of Hrothgar when he cautions Beowulf against pride, and through those of Beowulf himself when he prays for strength before his battles or thanks his god for victory. Nevertheless, this voice is never submissive or fearful, unlike that of a poem such as Christ and Satan, which is obsessed with hell and damnation, an obsession which, S.A.J. Bradley contends, is "general" rather than rare in Anglo-Saxon poetry (xix). Instead, the voice of Beowulf sounds triumphantly faithful even as it remains uncertain; it is the voice of one who, it seems, has chosen to believe, perhaps in spite of serious doubts, and who affirms the

possibility of joy even as he acknowledges the prevalence of sorrow.

The relative incidence of sorh and gamen or dream in the poem, the foreshadowing of dreadful events in the midst of rejoicing (when Heorot's destruction is synchronously present during its period of salvation) and Beowulf's own dread premonition before he goes to fight the Wyrn, all illustrate that the poet himself was aware that facts challenge both faith and hope, and that these essentials to psychic survival must be maintained by an act of will. Beowulf's final declaration of trust in, and gratitude to, God, coupled with his reluctance to die, express most poignantly this paradoxical awareness. Like his hero, the poet appears emotional and yet strongly rational, a man whose faith, though holding firm, was sorely tried by cold, hard fact.

That the poet of Beowulf was a Christian is apparent from the most cursory reading of the poem. Haarder credits the Icelandic transcriber, Thorkelin, as the first to observe that the Christian mode of perception is almost immediately introduced into the poem (14) and after this beginning, the Christian perspective colours its picture of man and the world. In the early episodes, Christian thought and terminology are reflected in the equation of Grendel with Cain, the singing of the hymn of Creation in the regressive court of Heorot and in the coastguard's blessing, when he refers to God as Faeder alwalda, "Father Almighty" (315); however, it should be noted that the

story of Cain predates Christianity, and the notion of God as a "Father" was explicit in Norse myth as well as in Christian. Robert P. Creed, pointing to Hrothgar's use of Christian terminology, interprets what he determines to be a deeply integrated Christian idea of God as a natural expression of an Old English-speaking "Christian singer" who, sometime after St. Augustine's mission of conversion to England in A.D. 597, recreated what might have been a prototypical Old English version of the original Danish or Geatish song in the Anglo-Saxon verse form, and to whom "the notion that this magnanimous warrior was not a Christian was unthinkable" (141). By this reasoning, the basically Christianized language of the poem would already have been established by the time it was first written down by the person I rather arbitrarily think of as 'the poet.'

Sir Frank Stenton's assessment was that, by A.D. 663, Christianity was the dominant religion in England, but traditions of its heathen times were still very much alive (128), and it continues to be debatable whether Beowulf himself was meant to be a pagan or a Christian hero. He speaks of and to God as Metod (967), Frea (2794) and God (1658), terms that existed in the language before the impact of Christianity, but that, Wrenn noted, were first used in a Christian context by Caedmon (26),<sup>3</sup> so there is evidence for a dual pagan/Christian tradition

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<sup>3</sup> This is not to overlook the possibility that the terms were conventions long before Caedmon's time. Assuming, with Donaldson, that the Anglo-Saxon conversion to Christianity began with the arrival of St. Augustine in A.D. 597, there would have been approximately one hundred years for the religious language to

in the terminology as well as in the poet's notion of true heroism, which is finally understood to be something more than the heroic ideal that Beowulf inherited from his society. However, the fact that Christ is never mentioned in the poem leads to the conclusion that, even if we are not meant to see Beowulf as a Christ-figure (although I would say we are), his understanding of deity can be thought to derive from his own innate sense of himself in relation to his god. His assumption of a single, all-powerful deity and his attributing to that entity a nature that includes benevolence and moral will, establish him, if not necessarily as a Christian, then certainly as a man who expresses a natural religious sensibility and interprets the world in religious terms. He has, as Donahue has asserted, "a natural knowledge of God" (55), a knowledge that perhaps arises from an instinctual base.

#### **Conscious and Unconscious Religious Influences on Beowulf**

Conscious and unconscious influences upon the religious perspective of Beowulf include, in addition to the syncretic Christian theology of the poem, the underlying body of Teutonic

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develop between the initial evangelistic wave and Caedmon's Hymn, and, as R.M. Wilson wrote, "Although Bede considered that Caedmon was the first and the greatest, he makes it clear that he was not the only writer of Christian poetry in the vernacular. But of these we know nothing whatever" (67n.).

myth and Celtic folklore as well as the tales of legendary Viking and Anglo-Saxon heroes, who may be viewed as quasi-religious figures or shamans (see Chapter I). Christian mythology and the ideas and mythology of alchemy and gnosticism must also be considered in connection with this ancient work, in addition to the acknowledged influences of St. Paul, St. John, St. Augustine and the possible influence of that peripheral Christian/heretical thinker, John Scotus Eriugena. The whole poem must, of course, be multi-perspective because of the exigencies of the oral tradition, which reflects above all a collective process. Even if consensus of opinion now holds that "extant Old English poetry is the work of learned men who obeyed the conventions of oral poetry" (Roberts 1989), it might be observed that these conventions, like the form itself, derived from the psyche of the race when it depended upon the oral transmission of knowledge, and that many of the oral formulae had similarly been set down.

Accepting the overwhelming consensus on the religious background of Beowulf, this study sees both pagan Germanic and Christian influences as basic to the poem, but wishes to divide these influences with reference to conscious and unconscious religious processes. Along these lines, it is suggested that the Christian motif is predominantly a conscious imposition upon the basic 'pagan' materials of the poem, the historical elements of which date back to at least the fifth century, while the legendary and mythological elements must considerably predate these. The assumption arises from the possibility that much of

the immediately identifiable Christian material may have been later scribal interpolations by monks with a particularly Christian bias and a flair for Anglo-Saxon versification [and while I wouldn't necessarily agree with criticism that contends the overtly Christian passages are poetically worthless, neither do they appear to be particularly inspired] and also from a sense that the poet was himself a Christian in his most self-conscious phase, so that the Christian perspective may represent the workings of the super-ego in the didactic poetic voice and of the ego in the more personal and formal composition.

Whether the poet of Beowulf was a priest or monk himself, or, as is also possible, a scop or court poet of the same aristocratic class as the people who, as Dorothy Whitelock contends, formed his audience, the concepts and precepts of Christian theology obviously held great sway over his perceptions. However, mainstream Christian mythology and the theology of Augustine and the Church Fathers are by no means the only strains of inspiration and thought discernable in Beowulf.

In direct opposition to the biblical myths of the Creation and Cain repeated by the scop in Heorot, and of great importance to the structure and tension of the poem and its hero, is the pantheon of Teutonic gods, goddesses and heroes to which the poet alludes either directly, as in the mention of Weland and Sigemund, or indirectly, as in the reference to the Brising necklace. In The Making of the Middle Ages, R.W. Southern noted the tenacity with which the Northmen maintained, "under the thin



crust of Christianity the stories and ideals and experiences of their pagan past" and the continued dedication of their poets to the preservation "in literary form (of) the old, clear pagan light of epic achievement" (29). The Anglo-Saxon poet's purpose in introducing these elements in Beowulf may not reflect a conscious desire to preserve the race's cultural heritage, [which, we may presume, was less "impenetrably vague" (Stenton 96) at that time than it is today], although the effect was to do so, but perhaps simply his desire to suggest the pagan milieu and to compare implicitly the two modes of religious experience.

This polarizing of the pagan and Christian mythological elements within the poem is a somewhat transparent poetic device that contributes to the tension of the poem and serves a useful didactic function from a thematic point of view. However, it also seems as if the old Teutonic myths exercised a power over the poet quite independent of their usefulness as a foil to the subsuming power of Christianity. The shaper of Beowulf might have realized, from a poetic perspective, the psychic integrity of mythology itself, as Milton quite consciously did in constructing Paradise Lost; from a religious perspective, he might have felt that a re-merging of the traditions would have syncretistic value, much as the retelling of the Phoenix myth in Christian allegorical form might have seemed appropriate both poetically and from a religious perspective to the poet of The Phoenix. This appears to have been conventional Church practice in the early centuries following the death of Christ. The

seemingly casual allusions to Weland and the Brising necklace suggest that the audience knew and loved the old Teutonic stories; the similarities between Beowulf and Thor (like Beowulf, Thor was characterized by immense physical strength, battled, unsuccessfully, with a woman he later learned was the spectre of old age, and was finally killed by a serpent) and the intimations of Ragnarok (a Norse version of Armageddon) in Beowulf's final battle seem to point to a more fundamental representation of Norse mythology in this subliminally Christian poem.

In addition to the influence of Norse myth, Beowulf displays a Celtic influence, particularly, as Martin Pulvel noted, in its representation of Grendel's mother, the fearsome Merewife, whom Pulvel likened to the female demon, Groa, in Celtic myth (17-18). Robert Graves also described a Welsh goddess, Cerridwen, whose story sounds especially suggestive of this female form. Their epic battle, discussed at length in Chapter III, has been interpreted in part as depicting the psychic struggles involved in the overturning of the old corn goddesses of Celtic tradition by the patriarchal gods of both the Norse and the Christian traditions, a factor that provides a link with a much older religious consciousness on which the image of woman was the prevailing influence.

Parallel to the wide mythological scope of the poem, Beowulf seems as well to be influenced by some of the less orthodox and more esoteric philosophical ideas that were in opposition to established and approved Christian thought set down for the age

by such seminal writers as Augustine or Alcuin, to which the mainstream of religious writers and thinkers subscribed. It might have been impossible to find an educated person who was not inevitably religious in perspective in medieval Europe, but it might also be asserted that not all of them agreed with, or followed, the paths of thought prescribed by the Church. As the violence and disputation in doctrinal and canonical matters during the first few centuries after the death of Christ and the continuing medieval vigilance against heresy illustrate, mainstream Christianity was constantly being challenged by other highly organized intellectual/religious systems; of these, the most persistent contender was gnosticism.

A form of "higher paganism" (Richardson 41) deriving from the Hellenic and Iranian traditions, gnosticism in its broad sense was adopted by both orthodox Christian theologians such as Clement of Alexandria and by pagan writers such as the Hermetists (Dodd 97). Gnostic thought most nearly approached a synthesis with Christianity through the writings of St. Paul, who, perhaps because he was himself a convert, was a figure of great importance to the Christian Anglo-Saxons. Unlike Paul, however, who placed love above knowledge,<sup>4</sup> the gnostics believed that they

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<sup>4</sup> Now as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.

But if any man love God, the same is known of him.

(1 Cor. 8: 1-3, King James Version).

could reason their way to an experiential apprehension of divinity and effectively transform themselves into immortals through application of the mind and will. "Salvation by knowledge" (Richardson 41) was their conversion formula.

A mystical sect of the gnostic tradition, the Ophites, proposed a theosophical vision in which the God of the Old Testament, Yahweh, was a false divinity and Satan, the serpent, was really the saviour sent to save mankind from the irrational vengeance of this usurping deity.<sup>5</sup> Another quasi-Christian sect, established by the second century alchemist, Marcion, focused its thought upon the mythical elements of the Old and the New Testaments (Jonas 1963: 137-46) and interpreted them in the light of an understanding that would stand up well beside modern psychological theory. Among the more bizarre and interesting gnostic sects, from the point of view of Beowulf, were the Cainites, who flourished in the 2nd century A.D. The Cainites represented a shocking departure even from established heretical gnostic thought, which tended towards a radical asceticism that ultimately made its mark upon medieval Christianity. These devotees were committed to libertinism and considered it their mission to break every one of the original Ten Commandments in affirmation of the basic gnostic contention that the god of the Old Testament was a false divinity. The Cainites, as their name

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<sup>5</sup> This may have been the origin of Satanism, although the Ophites would hardly have indulged in the physical excesses associated with devotees of the modern practice of this religion. With a few notable exceptions, the gnostics were ascetics.

implies, revered Cain, and they also worshipped Eve and Judas Iscariot as incarnations of heroic defiance (Jonas 95). Grendel, of course, was a descendant of Cain, who, in gnostic anthropology is represented by the figure of "Jave, the bear-faced" (Jonas 205). Whether this coincidence has any further significance or not, a parallel between Jave and Beowulf as "bear-son" figures is invited by evidence on display at the British Museum that the bear figured prominently as a totemic animal in Gotland, thought to have been Beowulf's homeland. The bear may have been worshipped as a resurrection god, and, in some gnostic systems of thought, Christ is thought to have effected the resurrection of Cain (Jave) by his Harrowing of Hell (Jonas 95). That Grendel may by this means be also seen as a "bear-son" seems to further consolidate the intrinsic connection of Beowulf and Grendel. By this argument, the gnostic influence on popular mythology can be seen to extend at least back to the 4th century, when, as Jonas records, Epiphanius of Salamis, the last of the major heresiologists to deal extensively with the gnostic sects, was writing (xv).

After the 4th century, the furor created by the gnostics' pronounced opposition to Christianity died down, and it might be that the subject was effectively closed to orthodox consciousness from that time on. On the other hand, the fact that consciousness does not deal with a system of thought does not mean that such a system cannot function. If oral poetry can record history, it can also reflect philosophy, and when that

philosophy is replete with symbolism to the point that it may approach mythology (as gnosticism consciously did) then it lends itself naturally, perhaps inevitably, to oral transmission, which would seem to be the logical alternative for those whose views, in written form, might confidently be expected to be suppressed or destroyed.

It may also be that gnostic ideas themselves persisted into the 8th century. The alchemists, a perennial group of quasi-scientific thinkers, forerunners of the modern chemists and physicists, generally tended to be gnostic in their philosophy and aims, and there is also evidence that Augustine, who was at one time a Manichean, was influenced by gnosticism through Porphyry (Jonas 61). Although Augustine shifted the emphasis of religious contemplation from the metaphysical aspect to the moral one, and with this shift introduced Aristotelian principles to counter the Neoplatonic foundations of gnostic thought (Harris 1988), the suggestive Manichean notion that "salvation...aims at the restoration of the original unity" (Jonas 59) remained a basic premise of the psychological quest for God, and many of the major gnostic imaginative or 'poetic' notions are found in Old English poetry almost as conventions. The idea of man as an alien in the world, a primary symbolic pattern of gnosticism, is integral to The Seafarer and The Wanderer, and is suggested in Beowulf by the fact that Beowulf himself was a sailor and the son of an outlaw; the tension and suspension of opposing forces, a concept that, according to Jonas, originally derived from Iranian

gnosticism (57), is a major abstract theme of Beowulf, one that is explored through the essentially gnostic symbols of light and darkness, as well as other structural and binary oppositions that include the tension between youth and age noted by Tolkien and the polarization of the archetypal forms (and see Chapter III). The notion of a warring dualism, which is of gnostic origin and which was repudiated by orthodox Christian theology, holds great power over the poetic imagination. The idea, basic to the binary oppositions noted in Beowulf, is implicit in the writings of both John and Paul (see especially Ephesians 6: 10-17, where Paul describes the Christian 'armoury') to whom, according to Hans Jonas, the Christian gnostics traced their origins and to whose writings Beowulf has traditionally been related (cf. Sutherland).

Gnostic thought itself is so disparate and divergent that it would be impossible within the scope of this study to discuss the many variations on the basic theme of radical dualism provided by the different schools. However, one writer of the Anglo-Saxon period, if not the milieu, who seems to have moved easily between the established, orthodox Christian doctrines and the so-called 'heretical' gnostic ideas was a 9th century Celtic figure from somewhere in the British Isles (most probably Ireland, but this is disputed), Johannes Scottus (John Scotus) Eriugena,<sup>6</sup> who was

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<sup>6</sup> Eriugena began his theological career firmly ensconced within the bosom of the Church. As a young man, he was invited by the prelates to defend the True Faith against heresy, but his defence went to such extremes that both he and his doctrine were condemned. His intellect was such, however, that the Church obviously felt it could not do without him: he was deemed to have been redeemed and began translating into Latin the works of the

variously an apologist for and antagonist of the Christian Church. Like most Christian thinkers of his own and later times, Eriugena was much concerned with the question of sin and the nature of being and perceiving, ideas that he explored in his major work, the Periphyseon, in terms more closely related to gnosticism than to orthodox Christianity (this may account for his ambivalent position in relation to the Church, which nevertheless often appealed to him to help defend its doctrines). If

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patron saint of France. It was during this time that he was said to have "fallen under the spell of Greek Platonic theology" and was once again condemned by the Church. He went on to translate the works of the so-called Pseudo-Dionysius, an undertaking that, according to I.P. Sheldon-Williams' introduction to his edition of Eriugena's Periphyseon (1968), laid the foundations of Western mysticism. Although he does not appear to have taken orders, Eriugena taught at Laon and his connections with the Church remained strong. Among his more powerful ecclesiastical friends and students were Wufad, Abbot of Montierendon and later Archbishop of Bourges (c. 858), Wicbald, Bishop of Auxerre (c. 879-87) and Helias, Bishop of Angouleme (861-75). His major work was the Periphyseon, or De Divisione Nature, in which he outlined a systematic reconstruction of the nature of God through a dialectical discussion between two characters named Nutritor and Alumnus. The Platonic influence is obvious; the empirical or scientific mode of philosophical exploration is implicit; and the effect is to suggest the possibility of a synthesis of Plato and Aristotle. The combination of these elements identifies Eriugena with gnosticism in its broad sense, even if we had not the Church's official brand of heresy to support the association.

The sophistication of Eriugena's thought, its strong empirical approach to questions that are essentially idealistic, raises him above those gnostic thinkers and writers whose language and symbolism grew increasingly obscure as the Church grew increasingly and more dangerously repressive, making these ideas intellectually accessible to philosophical interpretation. At the same time, as Sheldon-Williams says, "the Platonic tradition which had flowed more purely and more richly through the teachings of the Eastern than of the Western Fathers liberated him from the confines of logic and dialectic and opened up wider fields of speculation..." and it is this element that might have appealed most to poetic interpretation.



Kevin Kiernan's controversial contention that Beowulf was actually an 11th century work (1981) is accepted, Eriugena is one of the more interesting figures who might have had direct influence on the poem.

Among Eriugena's more remarkable theories, from a modern perspective, and of great importance to an understanding of Beowulf from the point of view of this reading, is his notion of "condition," which may be compared to the theory of relativity as well as to the rationale for gnostic duality. "Condition," in Eriugena's context, means "in relation to something," and contains the essential gnostic awareness that the definitive existence of one thing implies the necessary existence of its opposite, but each only exists in relation to the other:

For you will certainly never form a notion of standing distinct from the notion of lying, but the two always occur to you together, although they do not appear together in any one thing...these names do not proceed out of the nature of things but from the point of view of one who observes them part by part. For there is no up and down in the universe, and therefore in the universe there is nothing either higher or lower or intermediate (Sheldon-Williams trans. 93).

The theory of opposites is central to gnostic thought, and Eriugena's contemplation on the nature of opposition establishes this concern as a continuing dialectic of his time. The binary oppositions in Beowulf, from the fyr on flode of the dreadful mere to the elemental opposition of the hero and the dragon, may by this means be thought to have been conscious creations of the

poet rather than simply projections of unconscious awareness. It seems clear that this preoccupation, and its gnostic and Christian rationalizations, were familiar intellectual subjects, particularly in the theological world and, as the poetry overwhelmingly indicates, in the poetic realm as well. The opposition focused upon most strongly by didactic poets of a perhaps priestly persuasion was, of course, the mind (or soul) and body duality, to which all other metaphor of opposition may be reduced in the same way, it is suggested, that all 'gods' may ultimately be reduced to one 'God.'

Since this study is concerned with analysis of Beowulf from the point of view of ontogenetic and phylogenetic transformation and takes its impetus from the biological idea that ontogenetic change is necessary to direct phylogeny (or, to state it in humanistic terms, that the individual transformation -- or mutation -- effects, as well as affects, the development of the race) the gnostic concern with psychic and physical transformation, pursued most energetically by the alchemists, is also relevant (see Chapter V).

Even if the gnostic influence was not direct (and this, too, is debatable, since Augustine was influenced by gnostic thought, which he went to great lengths to resolve when he officially joined the established Church, indicating that the conclusions he arrived at were the direct result of a dialectic of opposing gnostic and Christian ideas) the basic language and

symbolism found in the writings of both John <sup>7</sup> and Paul might appeal directly to the poetic imagination and could conceivably have given rise to a gnostic perspective independent of direct acquaintance with gnostic ideas. It is difficult to see how this idea could be avoided in contemplating the implications of Christianity itself, which begins with a fundamental split in the nature of man that may be reduced to the conflict of 'soul' and 'body,' and culminates in the "hypostatic union" achieved by Christ, explained by St. Paul in his theory of the "spiritual body," which has been related to Beowulf by Delasanta and Slevin.

The eponymous subjects of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Phoenix, three famous Anglo-Saxon poems found in the Exeter Book (Krapp and Dobbie), display gnostic elements in their symbolic content as well. Both the Wanderer and the Seafarer may be seen to represent stages in the life of a primary gnostic figure, the "Alien Man" (Jonas 75-80), who may equally be interpreted as a kind of Christ in his quest for enlightenment and salvation, while the Phoenix was created with reference to a mythical bird

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<sup>7</sup> Raymond C. Sutherland in his 1964 monograph makes a case for the Gospel of St. John as the model for parts 1 and 2 of Beowulf. St. John's Gospel is another powerful poetic source for the light/dark symbolism and imagery noted in the poem, and the reader might wonder why one would bother to look any further for a key to this symbology. However, many commentators think that St. John was himself influenced by the symbolic language of gnosticism, which is possible; others contend that he influenced the later gnostics, which is equally possible. The same is theoretically true of St. Paul's writings. The jury is still out on this question, but it seems possible that both views could be accommodated in a synthetic analysis. C.H. Dodd effectively contends this in The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel (97-114).

that originated in the Middle Eastern (Iranian) tradition (Bradley 1982: 284) out of which formal gnostic thought emerged (Jonas 33). Lactantius, who brought the phoenix myth to Rome, certainly interpreted this bird as a type of Christ, a syncretic practice followed by the Anglo-Saxon poet, and one which suggests most clearly the way in which gnostic thought could have been integrated into conventional Christian thinking without incurring the wrath of the more pragmatic, less poetic Church Fathers.

Whether the poet of Beowulf would have wished consciously to depart from the orthodox Christian frame or not, there is indication that he did do this in his inherited symbology, which delineates a radical dualism denied by orthodox Christian theologians. The presence of the dragon suggests this dualism, while the treasure of "rusted gold" may be said to represent in part the attempt to resolve it symbolically. The dynamic created by these symbols and the patterns of action deriving from them, apart from their significance in any discussion of the transformative pattern essential to the function and nature of the hero (see Chapters I and V), suggest the tension arising from conflict between the rational and the emotional elements of the conscious mind of the poet, who may have found an objective correlative of his inner conflict in the pagan/Christian motif of the material with which he was working.

While the poet, whether of clerical or secular affiliation, would have had easy access to the theological writings of John and Paul and other texts of the Christian Bible, and probably, as

Bernard Huppe (1959: 231-33) contends, the writings of Augustine, perhaps, as well, through more covert study, he knew the philosophical tradition that gave rise to the writings of Eriugena. Although by the earliest time our version of Beowulf is thought to have been written, gnosticism itself, in the context of the surviving cults that still followed its directives, had certainly lost all claim to Christian theological authority, in its broader application, and through the agency of thinkers in the tradition of Eriugena, it nevertheless remained a mode of thought that might be said to have great potential for poetic purposes, and it could be contended that the Beowulf poet might have had imaginative access to this ancient theology. On the grounds that the poetic consciousness would tend to be particularly stimulated by the ideas and intuitions afforded by this dynamic mode of inquiry, as opposed to the more static and consciously delineated exegetical or anagogical approaches of established Bible interpretation, and because, whether consciously or unconsciously employed, its symbols consistently recur in Old English poetry, this study would argue for the inclusion of general gnostic religious influences upon the mind of the Beowulf poet as an heuristic device that might help in uncovering some of the more esoteric meanings of the poem to be explored in Chapter V. The ideas of gnosticism are particularly relevant to 20th century criticism, having been brought back into force by the development and adaptation of Jungian psychology, and if these ideas seem a trifle too esoteric or mystical for a

modern consciousness not steeped in or stimulated by the mysteries of physics and chemistry, it should be remembered that the Anglo-Saxons lived a more symbolic life than most of us do today, and would have had much less difficulty accommodating the mystical elements of what proves to be an extremely sophisticated, if often-times obscure, mode of thought.

In addition to the religious concepts reflected in its echoes of folktale and mythology and the imposition of religious dogma or mysticism upon the more basic materials of the poem, Beowulf contains some more primitive elements of human religious consciousness in its representation of symbolic forms that possess mana, or power, by virtue of their association with the animal world. These include the boar images that the Geats wore on their helmets, the entwined snakes engraved on their sword hilts, the stag horns adorning the roof of Heorot and the raven which, besides being the bird 'familiar' of the Norse god, Odin, was an Anglo-Saxon tribal symbol. On a more complex level, the connection between Beowulf and the bear is implicit, as is his connection with Christ.

In his book, The Way of the Animal Powers, Joseph Campbell theorized that, at the earliest stages of religious awareness, man felt an unconscious connection with the elements or the animals that shared his environment in a dynamic that combined awareness of need with both gratitude and fear. The 'attraction' and 'repulsion' that Jung associated with the most powerful religious symbols may derive from this primary source. The

raising of the bear to the status of a divinity by primitive Northern man reflects this dynamic.

The bear had, for the people of Gotland, certain intrinsic qualities, among them great strength and an intimation of cyclic rebirth (implicit in its hibernation pattern) that inspired awe in themselves. Add to this the necessity to kill the animal for its meat and fur, and the dangers associated with fulfilling this need, and the bear becomes a potent object of a fearful desire that, in its paradoxical nature, is proto-religious. A similar dynamic may be noted in Beowulf in connection with the treasure hoard, which has a symbolic value of comparable emotional weight. On the one hand, the Hord is 'attractive' -- it is perceived to be of great value, which value draws the hero towards it; on the other hand, it is 'repulsive' in that, guarded by a dragon, it simultaneously represents fatal danger. Both the bear and the treasure may by this measure be seen as religious symbols, in that it was not the bear itself that the hunters desired but the flesh and fur (and, perhaps, later in their development, the strength and immortality) so valuable to their people, just as it is not the treasure itself that Beowulf desires, but rather what that treasure will mean to minum leodum, "my people" (2797). Both bear and treasure stand for elements perceived by those who wish to acquire them as essential to the survival or well-being of themselves and their society.

An essential component of this equation is the "people," the society on whose behalf those ancient heroes sought the desired

prize, because the religious drive, while it is experienced as personal, is equally a collective process, dedicated to the survival of the whole society. Integral to the religious dynamic of the poem is the importance of the group experience of religion, or human brotherhood, and this implies the necessity for a symbol, or a common object, on which the emotional energies of the group might be focused. For the society of Beowulf, this object might have been Beowulf himself, as for the disciples it was Christ, and in this connection it is relevant that, just as Christ is never mentioned in Beowulf (a factor which leads scholars to assume a syncretic equation of the two), neither is the bear, the animal with which Beowulf is associated. Although neither is mentioned, it may be observed that both are implicitly present. Beowulf himself may 'stand for' both these resurrection gods, which may be said to represent the human and the animal incarnations of the spirit of immortality. In this, he represents a syncretization or humanization of the salient features of both, or at least of those features which would most have appealed to the Viking and Anglo-Saxon tribes who, it might be added, would have been emotionally inclined to welcome a human and divine incarnation of a spirit they had, in their proto-religious phase, affirmed in its animal form. This study wishes to propose that this process was, in part, a conscious one, and that this is partly what Beowulf was -- an attempt on the part of the poet to follow the injunctions of the Church Fathers and to answer, in poetic form, Anselm's famous rhetorical question "What



has Ingeld (read Beowulf) to do with Christ?"<sup>8</sup> This objective involves the functioning of the religious instinct in its most conscious phase.

**Religious Ideas in Beowulf Part I:  
Repentance, Sacrifice and Redemption**

Feuerbach located the religious function specifically in the realm of consciousness, saying it was "identical with self-consciousness" (2) while Jung, taking this a step farther in the same direction, suggested that consciousness itself has its origins in the unconscious, and that the primary function of human consciousness is the re-integration of conscious and unconscious being, a process which involves bringing to consciousness the contents of the unconscious, by which means, he suggested, man may attain something approaching that total consciousness perceived as essential to the nature of God. In doing this, he thought, man 'realizes' (i.e. 'makes real') the divine content of his own nature and thereby achieves unity with this element within his own being, thus accomplishing his own apotheosis.

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<sup>8</sup> Anselm's question was a restatement of an earlier one by Augustine, who asked "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" The answer was supposed to be "A lot" and the imperative was "Find it and adapt it," the essence of the syncretic genius of the early Christian Church.

This elaborate rationalization may, of course, reflect 'nothing but' Jung's response to what he interpreted as man's desperate need to counter the natural fears generated by his awareness of death, an awareness explored in great detail by the poet of Beowulf. Death (to be considered at length in Chapter V) is understood here to underlie the religious pre-occupations of man in the sense that religion attempts, as Dorothy Whitelock said Beowulf itself intends, "to combat primitive fears of the natural universe" (1958: 100). In this sense, Beowulf himself is a religious figure who enacts the 'traditional' religious "drama of repentance, sacrifice and redemption" that Jung believed to underlie all religious functioning (1976: par.2).

The religious instinct may be said to generate the desire for unity and transcendence that characterizes man's conscious search for God, which may be psychologically restated as the search for (self-)fulfillment. Operating on energy generated by the religious instinct, Beowulf, as hero, enacts the symbolic religious pattern that is perceived by Christian consciousness to be the only way to repair man's separation from the Father, and by Jungian psychology to be elementary to the process of re-integration, or individuation, of the fragmented psyche. In the notion of guilt as integral to the divided psyche, Jung closely parallels the Christian theologians as well as mythology, which most frequently represents the heroic figure as fallible to the 'sin' of excessive pride. This process is presented in pagan or classical mythology as a pattern of action through which the

heroic protagonist attains immortality either in the achievement of fame or in reconciliation with the gods or the souls of the dead, a goal which can only be achieved through his own inevitable destruction.

The necessity of the poetic pattern of guilt, repentance, sacrifice or self-sacrifice and redemption to the progression or evolution of the individual and society has been affirmed by history and psychology, as well as by theology and philosophy. In (Christian) theological terms, this pattern is considered the means for man to repair his separation from God; in psychological terms, it may be understood as a process or pattern leading to individuation, which has as its final goal the realization (i.e. 'making real') of the transcendental self, an entity identical, in Jung's schema, with the entity called in Christian theology 'God the Father.' In a more down-to-earth -- in a sense, historical -- application of the same idea, the Christian philosopher Rosemary Haughton interprets this pattern in basic human terms by describing the resolution of a quarrel between two children who, she says, "came to a new life, and new experience of relationship, because they had sinned," asserting that "without the wrong the good would not have happened" (1967: 34-35).

The necessity of 'wrong' or, in Christian terms, 'sin,' to this process is directly related to the role of consciousness in religious functioning, because it is consciousness that is

preoccupied with judging action and assigning value, and this process takes place in the world of inter-subjective awareness, in relation to others, whether those 'others' are humans, animals, or gods. If there were no others, there would be no need for morality nor any necessary concepts of good and evil (indeed, there might be nothing at all) and in this sense, religious functioning may be understood to be intrinsically bound up with the factor of community, a very important underlying theme of Beowulf, as illustrated by the network of relationships, interrelationships, and codes of behaviour that held together these volatile, fragile civilizations built upon kinship ties and tribal allegiance. It was probably religious consciousness, as much as enlightened self-interest, which forged the bonds that provided protection in their violent and dangerous world.

The dynamic of guilt, sacrifice and self-sacrifice may be said to have evolved out of practical group necessity in the communal frame of religious experience. In earliest religious consciousness, the necessity to kill and eat a fellow creature might have clashed with primary instinctive, pre-conscious or conscious feelings of altruism and love, generating an obscure sense of uneasiness and responsibility, or guilt. When the carnivorous urge was satisfied by devouring an animal that was also feared and respected (as well as desired), and eating its flesh, or heart, or other significant parts was imagined to confer upon the eaters a measure of its power, a further complex of emotion might result. The meal would then become a

compensatory ceremonial, when the animal could be both worshipped and eaten; the ritual 'sacrifice' and 'sharing' of the beast would give 'absolution' from the residual guilt felt by the developing human conscience. The rationalization derives from the argument of necessity and the greater, collective good.

The sacrifice of a highly valued member of the tribe to appease or cajole a dangerous god might be similarly rationalized, the collective taking precedence over the individual in a reflective phase as a result of such awareness, as well as through the natural promptings of the sexual instinct, which displaces the aggressive drive to preserve the individual entity at all costs and seeks instead a conjoint goal in order to ensure the survival of its essential components. The sexual partner and, of course, the offspring, then take precedence over the individual and, since early society was structured upon blood relations, the well-being of every member of the community and of the community as a whole entity in itself, would come to be seen as having greater over-all value than the preservation of the individual life. Religious awareness reflects this dynamic, and religion, while it is perhaps basic to the individual, is a community experience in a more creative way than experience deriving from the instincts of aggression or sexuality can ever be. That one person of heroic nature, such as Beowulf, might be

willing to sacrifice his life for the greater good of the clan or tribe is understandable in light of this dynamic.<sup>9</sup>

The social dynamic has a circular impact or recursive effect upon the psyche, both arising from and returning to act upon it. On the one hand, greater concern for others than for self might arise naturally from the evolution of the religious instinct out of the interaction of consciousness with the sexual function; on the other hand, the expression of that concern in the realm of interpersonal relations might be reinforced by social awareness of the collective good, or simply by enlightened self-interest on the part of others in the society. The idea of a symbiotic relationship between all elements of nature and society might similarly be both conscious and unconscious: it might be a notion maintained and reinforced by society for its own protection, or it might have arisen, as the structuralists would contend, from unconscious knowledge of such a relationship in a realm unconsciously or poetically 'known' to be more 'real' than the temporal world. Perhaps it might be both, in which case the idea has an authority that defies challenge. Whatever its authority, however, there is no disputing the evidence that religious awareness -- consciousness of the religious mode and conscious involvement in the expression of that mode of living, thinking and feeling -- has directed the actions of humanity both individually and collectively since the dawn of human awareness.

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<sup>9</sup> For a possible introjection of this same dynamic in the self-sacrifice of ego-consciousness, please see Chapter V.

**Symbol Formation and Symbols of the Soul in Becvulf**

Once raised from the murky depths of unconsciousness to the scrutiny of conscious appraisal, religious processes may be said to be concerned with two main activities: the creation of symbols and the assignment of value. The first is 'artistic' and derives primarily from unconscious activity, since the symbols themselves may arise in dream images, trances, visions, words conjured up in and through ritual chants, or objects in the natural world that seem to possess mana through the projection of the religious individual's inner reality upon the objective material. Religious symbols are created (or, really, re-created) through reification, when the object of devotion becomes the concrete (or, in the case of a god) abstract representation of an idea, in the same way that a revered animal's mana may become transferred to the shaman of a tribe or, later, the shaman or hero (powerful, perhaps identical, religious figures) may come to be seen as gods (see Chapter I). The process of reification is a process of concretizing the abstract, or of attributing concrete reality to abstractions. It is a cyclic process, in that the concrete object that absorbs or contains the abstract projection may then be understood to be, in itself, the abstraction: the bear may, through displaying aspects of immortality in its hibernation pattern, come to be worshipped as an incarnation of the spirit or idea of immortality, and imitation of these aspects understood to be the way oneself might become immortal (like the bear god); or

Christ, displaying the aspect of love, may be worshipped as the incarnation of divine love, and the pattern of his transcendence understood to be the pattern of action whereby others may achieve divinity (i.e., immortality). In less complex, or, perhaps, less important, symbol formations, those that can be admitted or recognized as metaphor rather than fact, the object is simply understood to 'stand for' the idea, by virtue of its displaying some attributes associated, consciously or unconsciously, with that idea.

The second activity, the assignment of value, is a result of the application of consciousness to these symbolic forms and patterns, and may be understood as being 'moral' to the extent that consciousness determines value with reference to the antinomies of good and evil. The hero archetype, the psychic entity engaged in the continuing process of interaction with these symbolic forms, is in this process both an unconscious and a conscious entity. On the one hand, he is essentially an unconscious archetype -- the archetypal projection of the active power of the libido as the prevailing will to live (a will which may be deemed amoral); on the other hand, he is an archetypal form of consciousness -- the archetype of the heroic ego in its struggle for maturity and individuation (and is therefore concerned with the assignment of moral value to the forms with which he interacts). In this latter dynamic, the hero must a priori identify himself with the 'right' or 'good,' as Beowulf did with reference to the treasure, and must of necessity ident-



ify opposing entities or ideas that threaten his being, such as, in this analysis, the dragon, as intrinsically 'wrong' or 'evil.' Preoccupation with notions of good and evil arising from this supra-conscious activity and a conviction of its own autonomy may lead the heroic ego to increased awareness of its own existential position in relation to what it thereby perceives as absolute values, and a further awareness of a possible alignment with either -- in other words, of a possible condition of 'sin.' By the same measure, the whole self may be seen as the source of all 'supernatural' entities, good or evil, which may themselves be fragmented projections of "the inside of the unknown man" (Jung 1938: 103). These elements, though perceived to be related to man's life and death, are not fully understood by consciousness; to the extent that they are not understood, they are projected onto supernatural beings.

In Jungian theory, conscious knowledge develops through the "withdrawal of projections," whereas, conversely, "all gaps in actual knowledge are still filled by them" (1938: 100-01). As consciousness expands and the undeniable reality of darkness and danger (evil) can no longer be attributed solely to metaphysical beings, there seems, Jung says, "no alternative but to make man responsible for it" (1972: 37). Because of the cherished ego-ideal of free will and its existential corollary of absolute responsibility, man must inevitably become aware that "everything of a divine or demonic character must return to the soul" (Jung 1938: 102) and the result of this awareness is that he then

assumes that everything that is wrong in the world derives from himself. This psychological assumption leads logically to a feeling of responsibility, or guilt, perhaps not unlike the unfamiliar and obscure sense of guilt that troubled Beowulf when he was confronted with the direct and personal attack of the Wyrn:

|                   |                        |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| þa waes Biowulfe  | broga gecyðed          |
| snude to soðe,    | þæt his sylfes ham,    |
| bolda selest      | brynewylmum mealt,     |
| gifestol Geata.   | þæt ðam godan waes     |
| hreow on hreðre,  | hygesorga maest;       |
| wende se wisa,    | þæt he wealdende       |
| ofer ealde riht   | ecean dryhtne          |
| bitre gebulge.    | Breost innan weolle    |
| þeostrum geþoncum | swa him geþwe ne waes  |
|                   | (2324-32, Dobbie ed.). |

Then the truth of the horror was quickly revealed to Beowulf: that his own home, the best dwelling, the gift-throne of the Geats, was melting in waves of fire. The good man's heart repented, there was the greatest anxiety in his mind. The wise old man believed that, beyond the old religious rites, he had severely angered the ruler of all, the eternal lord. His breast surged within with dark thoughts, which was not usual for him.

The brynewylmum, "waves of fire" that ultimately consume Beowulf's ham, his physical body as well as his castle, contain the paradoxical fire/water metaphor that runs consistently throughout Beowulf, and parallels the polarity of body and mind (if not soul) that makes itself felt in the language of this movement. The alliterative pair hreow/hreðre, provide a context of physical dimension to the gerund of emotion (hreow, "sorrowful, repentant") and the spiritual realms in which it may be experienced [hreðre or hrede, "mind, thought, (heart)" -- but

also "breast, bosom, (heart), womb")] in their initial hr... sound, which is almost, perhaps not quite, a growl, whether of pleasure or pain. As earlier observed in connection with its subliminal suggestion in the name of the sword, Hrunting, this sound is intimately associated with the functioning of the body (see Chapter III), particularly with its vulnerability to the forces of nature and being. We see that Beowulf was largely a man of physical or sensitive responses, a warrior who depended for his life on body-knowledge, not a priest or poet given overmuch to introspection, although his facility with words was renowned.

Klaeber interprets these lines to mean that Beowulf was "searching his heart for sins he may have unwittingly committed" (lix) and the poet's observation that this "was not usual for him" bears this out, because Beowulf has not been used to thinking himself in any way sinful; indeed, quite the opposite. In recounting his first mythic battle with Grendel, he described himself as unsynnig, "sinless" (2082), a moral position which gave him that necessary sense of right out of which he could act decisively and with confidence. Throughout his life he had followed for the most part the advice of Hrothgar, whose age and latter-day adversities had led him to conclude that the real purpose of life was to prepare for the after-life. In his admonition to the young hero, Hrothgar reminded Beowulf that he would eventually die and urged him to live a moral life (as negatively defined by the example of Heremod) in preparation for

a righteous death without fear, secure in the knowledge that he had done his duty. This Beowulf did. But still, at the end of his life, the attack of the fire-dragon upon his own home awakened in him a dreadful anxiety, one that was necessary to the completion of his heroic cycle. For the first time in his life, Beowulf assumed, not merely responsibility, but guilt.

Beowulf's assumption was that he must have done something ofer ealdr riht, "contrary to the eternal law" (Hall trans.), performed some deed which, although not, perhaps, formally proscribed, nevertheless contravened the fundamental laws of his race or his God. In pursuing his memories down a path of self-justification, he came around to the thought of Daeghrefn, champion of the Hugas, whom he had killed in a battle during an expansionist errand of wlaþeo, "pride, reckless daring" many years before. Beowulf had been proud of his conquest of Daeghrefn, at least consciously. However, Jung has noted that, although the law and the church are concerned only with sins of which the individual is conscious, "nature is not at all lenient with unconscious sinners. She punishes them just as severely as if they had committed a conscious offence" (1938: 92) -- a psychological 'fact' illustrated to the point of overkill by the story of Oedipus. It is exactly because Beowulf was a man of good will that a subconscious feeling of something 'wrong' should haunt his conscience; the final significance of this incident is established by the fact that Beowulf considered it at all at such

a crucial point in his life.<sup>10</sup> He was really thinking, of course, not so much (consciously) of Daeghrefn as of the sword, Naegling, which he had plundered from the dead champion's corpse, to which he referred in an attempt to psych himself up for the impending battle.

The thoughts and feelings that arise from such preoccupations, or give rise to them, are considered to be experienced in the province or through the activity of the soul, an archetypal psychic entity well-known to the Anglo-Saxons. As is the case with other psychic entities or archetypal ideas, whether of aggressive, sexual or religious origin, the soul is present in Beowulf in symbolic form.

While the unconscious religious drive may take its course through patterns of psychic activity and behaviour that need not be understood by consciousness in order to be effective, religious consciousness focuses upon the symbols and rituals generated by these unconscious processes. It could be said that human religious experience consists in the interaction of consciousness with these projections of the unconscious, and that our defining quality of reflective self-awareness, a measure of our consciousness, is, in the religious mode, preoccupied with the contemplation of symbols of unconscious being and activity.

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<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of the killing of Daeghrefn, see Chapter II.

Religious consciousness is linked to artistic expression (or vice versa) by virtue of a primary tendency to create or adopt symbols for those things it cannot explain. It could be contended that all art arises out of the religious impulse and that art itself is a product of this fundamentally human mode of experiencing and understanding the world. From the cave drawings of the Stone Age and the chanting of the ancient worshippers of sacrificial animals such as the goat or the bear, to the modern day Christian mass during which the body and blood of Christ are consumed in a recreation of the sacrificial meal, religious symbols serve to contain the essence of the religious experience in a form that is simultaneously both concrete and abstract. A psychic entity that actually engages in or stimulates such activity is an essential imaginative projection of mystical or religious experience.

The soul is an archetypal psychic centre that may be said to find expression in symbolic form in literature and art. Identification of the soul (anima) which, as Peter Clemeos has said, is different from, and yet essential to, identification of the faculty of mind (mens) (3) reflects awareness that a certain part of the human psyche is given over to or bound up with an intangibility that defies the conclusions of logic and reason. This factor was conceived so clearly by the Anglo-Saxons that it was frequently personified in their poetry.

The concept of the soul and symbols of the soul abound in extant Old English literature. If the writer is not speaking

directly of or through the soul, personifying it, as does the writer of the Exeter Book poem, Soul and Body II, then (s)he speaks figuratively, using one or another of what appear to be relatively common and consistent symbols for that psychic factor. One of these symbols, a particularly interesting one in view of the primitive religious origins of Beowulf, was the hart, the animal associated with Heorot.

Once a primitive god, the hart is a three-dimensional symbol, containing elements of both sexual prowess and aggression in its nature as well as having a well-established religious significance. Stone Age caves show innumerable pictures of reindeer in sexual contexts with humans (LaBarre 391) and, like this animal, to which it is closely related, the hart displays a strong sex-linked aggressive streak in its natural disposition to fight to the death any rival for its mate. The religious significance of the hart is further indicated by the archaeological find of the golden horns of Gallehus. The fact that the hart contained the mana of sexual and aggressive power perhaps contributed to its religious content a symbolic energy that was felt not only in the so-called pagan religions but also in the Judaic tradition out of which Christianity emerged. The hart that pants for cooling streams is compared to the soul that "panteth" for God in the Old Testament psalm,<sup>11</sup> and on this metaphorical ground the equation of the hart with the soul is

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 42: As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.





of the 'heart'), than its sacrificial role at the brink of the dreadful mere, and this element is suggested in the reference to the animal's strong horns, a trophy that adorned the wall of Heorot, the psychic (and physical) enclosure intended to keep the Scyldings safe from harm. That the Scyldings identified with the hart indicates their awareness of themselves as sawlberendas, "bearers of souls" (1004), an Old English kenning for "human beings," and, as it seems unlikely that these Germanic warriors would have particularly admired the hart's immediate instinct to run when confronted with a threat to its life (appropriate though that association might have been in their case), the conclusion may be drawn that it was the animal's sexual mana, symbolized by its antlers, that inspired their reverence. As discussed in Chapter III, the anima, to Jung, was essentially a spiritual symbol that derives from the projection of the sexual (libidinal) drive, and it is perhaps in this sense that the nature of the soul may be seen to comprise the 'masculine' element of desire (the active desire of the unconscious for a god) as well as the 'feminine' element of receptivity (the passive willingness to receive the god as manifest in symbolism and experience). For this dual process, two other symbols of the soul are indicated, the sword and the cup. Both figure prominently in Beowulf.

The feminine element of the soul is traditionally represented by the cup. In Beowulf, the cup has been associated with woman from the beginning, when the ceremonial task of passing around the communal ale-cup fell to the royal lady

attendant upon the feast. A pagan tradition perhaps harking back to times when women were priestesses, this practice suggests the function of the anima as a mystic guide and the tradition, pursued through the later medieval motif of the Grail quest, continues the somewhat ambiguous theme of altered consciousness (implied in the effects of the contents of the cup) and spiritual authority (implied in the fact that the cup is, in a primary sense, controlled, whether by priest or presenter). The cup that Beowulf receives via the slave, the same cup stolen from the treasure hoard (which means it participates in the nature of the treasure itself), is also a symbol of the soul that has acquired a stronger mana from its association with the hord, which stands, for Beowulf, as a symbol of absolute value and goodness. In religious terms, the hord may represent God; in psychological terms, the self.

That Beowulf must fight for this treasure implies a further dynamic, one that requires the exercise of will, and this element is suggested by the sword with which he fights, because the feminine image of the soul as anima reflects only a part of the archetypal complex of soul. The partial vision of the treasure hoard afforded by the cup is essentially a passive one and the soul-image is incomplete without the driving energy needed to make the vision a reality. This energy is provided by Naegling.

The sword, Naegling, represents the energetic aspect of soul that is not present in its anima incarnation -- one might almost say its 'masculine' side, bearing in mind its patronymic suffix,

"-ing" (OED, 4, 1933: 282), and the phallic symbolism of the sword itself. The energetic element is vital to the function of the soul, because it is the soul's perceived purpose to act specifically in the service of the religious instinct to change and transform the whole organism, a process which must begin with the breaking down of existing patterns. The ultimate aim of the soul as symbolized by the sword is effected by engaging and extending the will of its possessor and, in the Christian schema, by mortifying (i.e. 'bringing to death') the flesh. The dynamic connection of the sword, as well as the cup, to the treasure symbolizes Beowulf's conscious awareness of the existence of his soul and its necessary relationship to the divine form represented by the treasure hoard for which he feels he must fight. His awareness of his soul as an active psychic entity perhaps began in the Merewife's cave with his vision of the magic sword.

The bringing to consciousness of the archetype of soul, a process which Yeats, in his "Dialogue of Self and Soul," sees as a form of dialectic, is an important function of the ego, because the soul, as Jung has defined it, is "the inner personality" (CW 6: 467) which is correlative to the outer personality, or the persona. While the persona is the characteristic attitude that an individual turns towards the outer world of society, the soul, or anima, is that aspect of the individual which turns towards the psychic processes of the inner world of the self. The soul bears the same relationship to the self that the persona does to

the ego: it identifies with and participates in the nature of that central psychic entity, as the cup to the treasure.

The development of the soul is related to the process of self-knowledge by which a person achieves individuation; identification of the persona as an incomplete personality is thought to generate a process of self-examination that leads to awareness of a necessarily complementary personality that resides on the other side of consciousness, in the unconscious (CW 6: 463-70). This personality manifests itself when the integrity of the whole organism is threatened, as Beowulf was in the unconscious realm of the Merewife.

Like the miraculous, idealized sword that was revealed to Beowulf, as he said, by Waldend, "the Ruler of Men" (1661), in his hour of most desperate need, the more vulnerable sword that Beowulf carried into his final battle is a symbol of his soul, and it may be inferred from the corresponding presence of swords in the treasure hoard that this sword, like the cup, participates in the nature of the treasure, which stands as a symbol of ultimate reality, God or the transcendental self.

The soul in its symbolic form as the sword represents the active desire of the unconscious for a god, as well as an aspect of that divinity which the ego can admit as a possibility within its own range of comprehension. In seeking conscious or objective validation of its own psychic disposition, it may be that the soul, like all living entities, is compelled to fight; its battle may be either to deny that the physical evidence of

death is applicable to the psyche, or to transform the physical reality of death into a psychical experience of transcendence, or, perhaps, both.

The active nature of this psychic drive, its intimations of divinity, and its iconoclastic energy seem to be epitomized in the magic sword with which Beowulf overcame the threat of annihilation by the seax of the Merewife. The magical nature of that particular sword seemed clearly to point towards a power greater than itself, of which it was both an agent and an image. However, even that sword was vulnerable to the power of evil: it wasted away in the corrosive blood of Grendel. This factor is symbolically appropriate of the soul, because just as the sword, whether magical or mundane, carries death as its corollary, the soul, like the persona, has a dark shadow: sin.

The notion that the soul will take the shape of its psychic environment informs the development of this idea. We may note that Unferth's sword, Hrunting, perhaps 'deformed' by his discordant and negative psyche, was of no use to Beowulf, while Naegling, too, fails to overcome the dragon, and breaks at the ultimate moment:

|                         |                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
|                         | Naegling forbaerst,      |
| geswac aet saecce       | sweord Biowulfes         |
| gomol ond graegmael.    | Him ðaet gifede ne waes, |
| ðaet him irenna         | ecge mihton              |
| helpan aet hilde;       | waes sio hond to strong, |
| se ðe meca gehwane      | mine gefraege            |
| swenge oferschte,       | þonne he to saecce ðær   |
| waepen wund[r]um heard; | naes him winte ðe sel.   |
| þa waes þeodsceaða      | þridan siðe,             |
| frecne frydraca         | fæhða gemyndig,          |
| raesde on ðone rofan,   | þa him rum ageald,       |
| hat ond headogrim,      | heals ealne ymbefeng     |

biteran banum;        he geblodegod wearð  
 sawuldriore,        swat ydum weoll (2680-93 Dobbie ed.)

Nagling shattered:  
 Beowulf's sword, ancient and grey-coloured,  
 Failed him in the fight.

It was not granted to him  
 That swords made of iron should help  
 Him in battle: his hand was too strong,  
 And, as I have heard, he overtaxed with his blows  
 Each and every blade: whenever he carried to the fight  
 A weapon hardened by blood, it helped him not the  
    slightest.

Then for a third time the scourge of the people,  
 The terrible fire-dragon, set its mind to attack.  
 When it had an opening it rushed out on the mighty one,  
 Hot and fierce in battle, and seized his neck  
 With a snap of its tusks. Beowulf's life-blood  
 Gushed out from him in surges (Roberts trans.).

The name, Naegling, evokes two paradoxical associations, one pagan, the other Christian. In the first case, the name recalls the mythical vessel, Naglfar ('so-called because it was made out of the nails of dead men) that carried the forces of evil to Ragnarok, the Norse Armageddon. In the second, the translation of naegling as "nail" or, perhaps, "son of nail," provides an association with the Crucifixion, when Christ, the Son of God and Man, was nailed onto a cross. While the former is most immediately associated with apocalyptic evil and the latter with ultimate good, both images are paradoxes of hope and despair: the battle of Ragnarok prepared the way for a beautiful new world and the rebirth of Balder (Crossley-Holland 173) while the act of crucifixion, even considered as part of God's plan for redemption, must be recognized as a measure of the potential for evil in human action. Ambiguity confounds consciousness and the awareness that the soul can be manipulated by evil (man) as well

as inspired by good (god) generates in the ego a doubt that might undermine the most heroic human effort to affirm the over-riding power of good. As even Christ was subject to doubt in his final hours on the Cross, so Beowulf's doubts, both ideological and personal, must rise up to overwhelm him and to render him temporarily impotent.

The battle with the Wyrn is the most difficult battle of Beowulf's life because of these doubts, because he can no longer be sure, as he needs to be, that he is in a position of right and that God is working through him. In this sense, Naegling stands (and falls) as a symbol of Beowulf's synbysig, "sin-busy" soul.

### Sin, Guilt and the Unsynnig Hero

The importance of the feeling of guilt, or the awareness of sin, to the development of consciousness seems to derive from the Judeo-Christian concept of man's free will and his relationship to God, a theology that emphasizes the notion of 'original sin.' Such a premise does not seem to have been a part of the pagan consciousness, even one as complex and differentiated as that of Aristotle, for whom, while he acknowledged human responsibility in his treatise on Ethics, the human imperfections of the hero need not be related to his fall. In the Poetics, the fall of the hero could be understood to have been brought about, not by a flaw in his character, but by hamartia, or simple error.

To a poet whose world view might have been subconsciously influenced by Aristotelian principles, Beowulf's acceptance of the golden cup from the slave, could be seen as, simply, a 'mistake' that brought down the wrath of the Wyrn upon his head. The concept of the tragic flaw, not found in Aristotle, seems to have some connection with Christian ethics and didactic literature, and it could be argued that this form of guilt was not a major preoccupation of the society portrayed in Beowulf. Actual, or legal guilt was, of course, acknowledged, but such guilt could be paid off in money, the werigild, releasing the transgressor from further retribution. Moral guilt, on the other hand, was a more nebulous notion, requiring a mental refinement that might derive from conflict in the conscious mind between the Christian idea of 'free will' and the classical idea of 'fatalism.' The notion of free will, while it perhaps existed implicitly in classical thought, became explicit with Christianity and was a conscious theological question of Christian scholars. That this conflict did take place in Beowulf's mind on a pre-conscious level is implicit in his recollection of the story of Herebeald and Hathcyn, where the question of responsibility and retribution was less clear-cut than in other cases of vengeance, and was finally resolved, not by the action of the aggrieved party but by fate.

By examining this memory, it can be seen that in the world of Beowulf the operation of fate, or Wyrð, while it may appear random, is nevertheless perceived to relate directly to the



affairs of men, so that a causal connection could be made between two separate events in time that reinforced or satisfied man's sense of the significance of his own actions, whether the resolution was favourable or devastating. Hathcyn's accidental killing of his brother, Herebeald, an apparently random act of fate, set off a chain of events, starting with the withdrawal and early demise of their father, Hrethel, that led to an inevitable exchange of hostilities during which the 'innocent' killer was himself killed (2472-85). The incident provides classical motivation for Beowulf's impending doom: he can be seen to be the victim of a fate set in motion by events with which he had no actual or moral connection, in the same way that Oedipus was the victim of a curse precipitated by a crime for which he had no moral responsibility -- unless killing, in itself, be deemed morally wrong, a possibly anachronistic and unrealistic conclusion, though just as possibly one made subconsciously by humankind.<sup>12</sup> The inevitably violent death of Beowulf could, nevertheless, be explained in classical (or 'high pagan') terms as a predestined calamity, the natural result of the necessarily unavenged blood-guilt that preceded his ascendance to the throne of the Geats.

Herebeald and Hathcyn were Beowulf's uncles, as was Higelac, their brother, who later became king. Beowulf came to the throne by rightful ascent upon the death of Heardred, Higelac's son,

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<sup>12</sup> It is certainly true that the tragedy of Oedipus could never have occurred if he had not killed.

and, having no sons, he would himself be the logical recipient of the ultimate vengeance unleashed by the fates. His hamartia in accepting the cup could be seen as the fulfillment of fate. Remembering this long-ago incident on the day of his own death, Beowulf does seem rather more overwhelmed by a sense of man's vulnerability to fate than judgemental of the hapless Hathcyn, who was quite properly outside the reach of conventional justice and finally succumbed in battle to Ongentheow, the Swede, whose killer, Eofor, was rewarded by the remaining brother, Higelac, for avenging that death (2484-89). Although in recollecting this pattern of events Beowulf does raise the possibility that a tragic fate has played a large role in his meeting with the Wyrms, his examination of his conscience and his determination to continue in spite of the opposing evidence of accidental fate (which seems to negate all man's possibilities for free choice) suggests that he himself has not completely accepted its finality and, in fact, believes that his actions have not only been meaningful in the past, but will continue to be meaningful in this final context. It is on this premise that the notion of final guilt rests, and it may be partly for this reason that guilt is felt to be a necessary component of self-actualization or even, perhaps, of survival.

It may also be, as Aristotle and Kant insisted, that a man of good will, such as Beowulf was, is inherently good and should not, therefore, have cause to feel guilty. If such a man

performs an act which, by his own precepts, is right, then he is himself in a position of right: it is intent, or motivation, that identifies man with evil. The accidental killing of Herebeald by Hathcyn, which parallels the tragic death of the Norse god Balder through a mistake on the part of his blind brother, Hodur, introduces intent as a necessary element in establishing moral guilt and separates, in a primary way, the act from the doer, a distinction made clearer by contrast with the story of Cain, a natural one in view of their common theme of fratricide. Although the story of Cain indicates that man can have an evil intent, the stories of Hathcyn and Hodur indicate that it is also possible for evil to operate through man, without being intrinsic to him. Perhaps such perceptions lie behind Beowulf's deathbed speech, which is not a confession but a self-justification:

|                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
|                          | Ic ðas leode heold  |
| fiftig wintra;           | naes se folccýning, |
| ymbesittendra            | aenig ðara,         |
| þe mec guðwinum          | gretan dorste,      |
| egesan ðe on.            | Ic on earde bad     |
| maelgesceafta,           | heold min tela,     |
| ne sohte searoniðas,     | ne me swor fela     |
| aða on unriht.           | Ic ðaes ealles maeg |
| feorhbennum seoc         | gefean habban;      |
| forðam me witan ne ðearf | waldend fira        |
| mordorbealo maga,        | þonne min sceaced   |
| lif of lice              | (2732-43).          |

I protected these people for fifty years;  
 there was no king of any of the surrounding  
 nations who dared to come gainst me with  
 swords or terrorize me with threats. In my  
 home I awaited what fate might bring, held  
 my own well, sought no treacherous quarrels,  
 nor swore any false oaths. Weakened by mor-  
 tal wounds, I can take comfort in all of  
 this, because the Ruler of Men will have no

cause to accuse me of the murder of kinsmen  
when my life departs from my body.

By his own lights, with reference to the warrior's code, Beowulf has behaved as he ought, and in a certain sense it may be anachronistic to superimpose upon his being the mores of the poet, much less those of a 20th century observer. However, the former imposition is unavoidable, since this poem is as much about the poet as about the hero, and to the poet the Christian implications of Beowulf's acts were all-important.

In Christian terms, therefore, Beowulf may be thought to be guilty of two of the Seven Deadly Sins personified most memorably for a later society in Spenser's Faerie Queen. In the Christian reading provided by Burton Raffel's translation, the implication is that Beowulf was guilty of the sin of greed, or avarice:

|                        |                               |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Swa hit oð domes daeg  | diope benemdon                |
| ƿeodnas maere,         | ƿa ðaet ƿaer dydon,           |
| ƿaet se secg waere     | synnum scildig,               |
| hergum geheaðerod,     | hellbendum faest,             |
| wommum gewitnad,       | se ðone wong strude,          |
| naes he goldhwaete     | gearwor haefde                |
| agendes est            | aer gesceawod.                |
| Wiglaf maðelode,       | Wihstanes sunu:               |
| 'Oft sceall eorl mcnig | anes willan                   |
| wraec adreogan,        | swa us geworden is (3069-78). |

So the spell was solemnly laid, by men  
long dead; it was meant to last till the day  
Of judgement. Whoever stole their jewels,  
Their gold, would be cursed with the flames of hell,  
Heaped high with sin and guilt, if greed  
Was what brought him: God alone could break  
Their magic, open His grace to man.

Then Wiglaf spoke, Wextan's son:  
"How often an entire country suffers  
On one man's account: That time has come to us..."

Raffel's somewhat unnecessarily creative translation here creates an impression that is more accurately constructed (in terms of the poem's language) by Hall's translation of naes he [naefne] goldhwaete gearwor haefde/agendes est aer gesceawod, a line which is in some dispute.<sup>13</sup> Hall translates this passage as "Yet by no means too eagerly had Beowulf before gazed upon its owner's treasure of gold with the curse on it" (172-73), a reading which contends that Beowulf's desire for the treasure was not disproportionate. This study is also inclined to reject avarice as a possible motive for Beowulf, if only because this sin is so conventional, so commonplace, and so completely unfitting to the nature of the hero qua hero and as revealed in the poem. Beowulf did not display any evidence of greed, either in Heorot or later, at Higelac's court, when he presented his gifts from Hrothgar to his king and gave Wealhtheow's gift of the Brising necklace to Hygd. Loyalty, generosity and the spirit of comitas took precedence over material things for him, and in those instances where the material object becomes important it seems to be as a symbol, not as a thing in itself, that it becomes so. It may be that the physical element of the treasure was important (it will later be contended that this was so) but even in this case the symbolic meaning is uppermost.

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<sup>13</sup> I prefer Klaeber's interpretation, " 'he had not seen the treasure more completely than now [at his death], ' implying that he had never seen it in its entirety" (227) for reasons unrelated to the present discussion (but see Chapter V).

It might more persuasively be argued that Beowulf was susceptible to the 'sin' of pride, because the element of pride is essential to the character of the hero. Beowulf's pride was an important, necessary, and highly visible element of his heroic presence, and was, therefore, far more liable to perversion than a trait he hardly possessed in the first place. That corruption had, in fact, taken place is implicit in the story of Daeghrefn. Through the story of Daeghrefn, Beowulf is shown, by the facts of his life, to be guilty of primary sin in both cause and effect.

The fight in which Beowulf killed the champion of the Hugas was ostensibly undertaken to protect Higelac's treasure, the same Brising necklace Beowulf had once given to Hygd, a motive which might at first glance be construed as avarice. However, as with the wyrahord, the necklace had another, more important meaning to Beowulf. In this context, once the king was dead, the necklace represented Higelac's honour, and Beowulf was fighting to protect his liege lord's final reputation. Beowulf was fighting out of wlenco, "pride" -- a pride which had become ofermod or hubris (see Chapter II).

In his slaughter of Daeghrefn, Beowulf had shown he was not always on the side of right, either from an ethical or a moral standpoint. Yet, there is a sense in which this position may be seen as unavoidable, the result of factors perceived by the Christian poet to be integral to human nature: sin, and the guilt that is its emotional concomitant. When Naegling, the symbol of Beowulf's human, and therefore imperfect, soul failed him, it

failed because, as the poet says, his hand, the symbol of his humanity, was to strong, "too strong" (2684). Fighting the Wyrn, Beowulf might feel that he was no longer fighting for God, but against Him, in defence of himself, against a just punishment meted out to him, personally, for the sins of his own life. In this sense, the hero stands for man's sense of self in relation (and opposition) to "God, Fate and the Devil" (Bodkin 1934: 49).

With or without this inherent existential function, a man of heroic nature might find it more difficult to stand up for self than for others, if only because he can never be sure that his subjective interpretation of a situation might not be false, or that he is not fighting for selfish purposes. This final self-questioning, or self-doubt, would not occur to those whose dominant instinct is for self-preservation, just as such people, like the cowardly retainers who fled to the woods leaving their failing king to face the dragon alone, would be unlikely to assist another at any risk to themselves. Yet, the element of self-preservation is likewise integral to the human condition, and necessary for survival. The dilemma associated with this instinctual conflict gives rise to questions concerning the value to be placed upon self-interest as opposed to the interests of another, a conflict at the heart of Christian theology, which affirms, in the passion of Christ, the transcendent value of love, expressed as the greater concern for others than for self.

The Christian schema, which ostensibly removed the burden of 'original sin' and erased the burden of man's guilt by the

atonement of Christ, by that same exemplary act effectively installed the pattern of guilt and sacrifice as a necessary component of redemption.<sup>14</sup> To maintain, as we do, that Beowulf is the product of a Christian consciousness, we must acknowledge that Beowulf's heroism was, in essence, modelled along the lines of Christian heroism and that he was created with reference to the ideal of Christian heroism exemplified by Christ; and in that case, his final battle with the dragon, the archetypal symbol of evil, enacts the Christian symbolic pattern of religious transformation, essential components of which are an acceptance of a primary guilt on behalf of himself and his people, a sacrifice of his physical being to an ideal of cosmic heroism, and, through the attainment of the treasure, a final fusion with God, or the self, which, as the image of God in man, is the archetype of his own immortality.

In this sense, Beowulf must be a 'Christ figure,' but in that same sense, Christ himself is an archetypal hero, because the pattern of action that he followed was the same pattern of rebirth set down by mythological heroes from many cultural traditions. Instantiation of a recognizable pattern of activity does not exhaust the significance of individuals and their acts, but instead increases this significance, making it collective, universal and purposive, a pattern to be imitated in the lives of

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<sup>14</sup> Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and Noel Davy suggest something very near this in citing Matt. 26:28 as evidence for "making the death of Jesus the ground of redemption" (The Riddle of the New Testament 122).



all individuals who seek the same end. The aim of this pattern -  
 - the transformation of the individual consciousness onto a plane  
 of being not bounded by its individuality, the realization of the  
 "hidden immortal within the mortal man" (Jung 1972: 55) -- is  
 most perfectly exemplified, Jung affirms, by Christ (CW 5: 302),  
 an affirmation with which the poet of Beowulf would concur.

#### Religious Ideas in Beowulf Part II: Death and Immortality

The notion of immortality, like the notion of God, may be  
 said to arise from primary data: it is, perhaps, an a priori idea  
 (or form) that exists in the unconscious mind. Whether this  
 "primordial thought" (Jung 1933: 113) is the result of  
 psychological 'wish-fulfillment' or a response to the prompting  
 of Lorenz's "flight instinct," arises from a repression of the  
 primary fact of the finality of death or derives from an  
 introjection of phenomenological evidence gleaned from  
 observation of the life patterns in the seasonal cycles (the  
 grain of wheat that 'dies' in the winter and is 'reborn' in the  
 spring) or whether these psychological and physical patterns  
 themselves reveal the working of a metaphysical design that  
 exists intrinsically in every entity, as St. Paul suggests  
 (1 Cor. 15: 35-42), the desire for (one might almost say, the  
 urge towards) immortality may be identified as an unconscious  
 idea that has burst into human consciousness by the kinesis of

the religious instinct. In the consciousness of the pre-Christian Teutonic world, this proto-religious idea was interpreted pragmatically as a desire for fame, "immortality on the lips of men." In the highly reified Christian consciousness, the expression of this primal desire envisions immortality on ðæs Waldendes waere, "in the keeping of God" (3109). The Beowulf poet incorporates both ideas as reflections of man's theological being when Beowulf fights against the Wyrme, the projected symbol of his annihilation and death, to win both fame and the wyrmhord, which, as the counterfoil of the sawle hord (2422), has intimations of both death and immortality.

In their symbolic forms of the sword and the unseen treasure (cf. 3073-75), the soul and the "hidden immortal" are related as subject and object -- that is, the final meeting with God which is identified with the attainment of apotheosis is the objective of the archetype of soul, just as the attainment of the treasure is the object of action by the sword. Yet in another sense, suggested by the poetic construct sawle hord, "soul hoard" (i.e., the "treasure of his soul") the "hidden immortal" is the most perfect form of the soul which, in its energetic phase, is separated from and yearning towards its own perfection in God as the absolute subject of all experience. Once this has been attained and the faith that directs the emotional and energetic action of the sword has been fulfilled, faith itself is rendered useless, like the swords found in the treasure hoard, which were omige burhetone, "rusted and eaten through" (3049). What then

remains is the distillation of the soul-image in the object of faith itself.

The absolute energetic reality of which the soul is a transitory (thus corroded) image is to be found in the incorruptible element of the treasure. As a concrete object of intrinsic and lasting value, the treasure acquires the "sensual libido" (CW 6: 280) of the anima and may be said to constitute the projection of the soul's striving for an ideal. The soul's infusion, or projection, of psychic energy into its object of desire imparts a numinous quality to the treasure, which may then be felt to have intimations of metaphysical significance, or truth. The designation of value is a function of feeling, an emotionally-toned function of human comprehension; but the recognition of value implies an objective quality of the thing in itself, an aspect that appeals to the cognitive or rational faculty. When both factors seem to co-exist in a material object, that object becomes a very powerful symbol, in contemplation of which the mind is led to an idea of a transcendent nature. By the same measure, the dragon in Beowulf has a malevolent transcendental power that derives from its symbolic function as the projection of man's sin and guilt.

The power of the feeling of guilt, which carries far more emotional weight than the mere rational idea of guilt, derives from the importance of feeling itself as an important adjunct to the rational function of consciousness. This "feeling function" is an important element in Christianity (Fordham 40), which is

especially concerned with assigning value and lack of value: in other words, with determining good and evil. Jung has postulated that the development of the feeling function in the mind of Western man has "forced a choice on him which led to the moral splitting of the divinity into two halves" and he thought it was probably because of this that "the morally ambiguous Yahweh became an exclusively good God, while everything evil was united in the devil" (1972: 37). However, the deeper symbolic contents of the serpent, the first and final form of the devil in orthodox Christian mythology [the devil appears as a serpent (or vice versa) in Genesis and in Revelation] seems to indicate that this perceived separation can only be maintained on a conscious level. While the Wyrm, the serpent form in Beowulf, seems clearly to stand for all that is evil, anti-human and absolutely Other, the wider historical and mythological manifestations of draconitas indicate that, in all major serpent-dragon symbols, the good and bad are delicately balanced. In fact, the serpent was once worshipped as a god.

The serpent figures prominently in Hebrew legend (from Moses' lifting the serpent in the desert to John's reference to Jesus being "lifted up" as Moses lifted the serpent) as a symbol of immortality (deriving from its tendency to shed its skin and emerge 'renewed'). The serpent was the focus of attention onto which religious devotees in these desert regions once projected and objectified their values. The Ophites, a gnostic sect dating from the first century A.D., believed that the serpent was the

High God (a form possibly corresponding to an aspect of Fate, or Wyrd, in Beowulf) to enable man to escape the bondage of ignorance imposed on him by the Jewish Yahweh, who was not, to them, the real God at all, but a vengeful, ill-tempered father of evil. To the Ophites, Christ was the serpent (CW 5: 382). The Old English language contains intimations of an underlying connection in the orthographic and phonetic similarities of the words wyrd, "fate" and gewyrde, "eloquence" or "speech" (cf. word) and wyrm, "snake" or "worm" as well as maðel, "speech" and maða, "worm." Here seems to be a linguistic, as well as a theological, connection between intellection and evil that semiotically foreshadows Hamlet's philosophical statement, "There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so." In both semantic pairs, the connection between language (a product of consciousness) and both good and evil is implicit and consistent with both Christian and classical mythology, in that Christ was called by John "the Logos," the "Word," while the oracle was a major manifestation of the gods in Greek myth.

The narrative motif of the final battle, that of a man attempting to take something precious from a cave guarded by a dragon, as Prometheus stole fire from the gods, is a recurring one in myth and folk-tale, and the identity of the dragon as a hostile guardian of a "treasure hard to attain" (CW 5: 382) is a prevailing motif of early medieval literature and art, so it would seem that this archetypal embodiment of the power of evil held great power over the conscious and unconscious minds of the

audience of Beowulf. If the dramatic entry in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for A.D. 793 <sup>15</sup> is to be taken literally, it is likely that the Anglo-Saxons believed in the existence of monsters and dragons, and there is also, of course, the possibility that, in certain archaic forms, these creatures did exist (one thinks of the Giant Squid) so that the monster or dragon was not only a product of the imagination but the introjection of an objective or composite reality of the more primitive world. Such forms might conceivably exist in the 'race memory.' The difference between the mere monster and the dragon (or serpent, or Wyrn) however, seems to lie in the transcendental nature of draconitas as the embodiment of paradox.

This paradoxical image seems to have developed along independent lines in many mythologies: not only Hebrew but Greek, Roman, Egyptian, Oriental and Scandinavian. The power of the Wyrn was invoked in Teutonic culture. In the world of Beowulf, for example, the image of the serpent adorned the swords, which were wyrmfah in an attempt to call upon the power of this archetypal form, and the ancient Teutons used to keep a "house-snake" as we today (or the ancient Egyptians) might keep a cat, as a minor guardian house spirit and rat-catcher (EMS 144).

Unlike its Teutonic cynne, the Beowulf dragon was no

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<sup>15</sup> 793 her... waeron ge seowene fyrene dracan on pam lyfte fleogende, "in this year, fiery dragons were seen flying through the air..." (Plummer v.1, p. 54).

benevolent house pet and its positive attributes are not explored in the poem although, as Alvin Lee has pointed out, Beowulf and the fyrwyrn, "fire-snake" are frequently described in the same terms (215), indicating a connection between them that goes beyond the necessary antagonism dictated by their polarization as archetypal forms. In fact, although most myths represent the hero as elementally opposed to the dragon, Scandinavian myth often links the two, and the hero may display attributes of the wyrn. Sigurd, for example, was called "Ormr í Auga," which means "snake's eyes" (the OE wyrn is cognate with the ON ormr). With reference to such evidence, Jung contended that "the hero is himself the snake, himself the sacrificer and the sacrificed" (CW 5: 382).

It would seem on such grounds that the snake or dragon represents an aspect of human nature, and its recognition as such provides a key to understanding the nature of the soul-body dualism that may be at the root of one of Western man's primary existential anxieties. The Christian religious perspective contends that it is only when this dualism is resolved in the subsuming triumph of the spirit that man can attain the unity of which immortality is a conceived component, a perception reflected in the dynamic of Beowulf's final battle, for it is only by defeating the dragon of physical nature that the heroic spirit of Beowulf can attain the treasure. To the Anglo-Saxons, obsessed as they seem to have been with the difficulty of

reconciling their physical desires with their spiritual aims, the body was considered evil and its active and emotional expressions -- sin and guilt -- functioned as necessary agents of the transformative experience that was the desired end of their spiritual struggles -- and, perhaps, of all spiritual struggle, since, as Maud Bodkin has said, it is only through the "agony of conflict with a false divinity" that the individual spirit can achieve "the glory of union with its true values" (1934: 287).

In a final unmasking of false values, the fyrwyrn manifests itself in destructive acts against the foundation of Beowulf's life: his people and his home (i.e., his society and his own physical being). Confronted with the Wyrn, Beowulf must acknowledge that its existence arose from his own being, as he does when he searches his heart for sins he might unknowingly have committed and comes to the semi-conscious awareness of his unheroic slaughter of Daeghrefn. By facing this fact, the hero takes the penultimate step towards self-realization; and, in rejecting and overcoming that aspect of himself which has caused his 'illusion' of a primary separation of himself from God, by sacrificing both himself and the dragon to an unconscious symbol of unity (which the treasure represents, because it is unseen, and contains in its paradoxical form as the wyrnhord the reconciliation of duality), he actualizes his own redemption.

The treasure's intrinsic properties make it a potent symbol of the transformative state of being and becoming. The numinous quality of precious stones and metals has long fascinated the



human mind, in part, perhaps, because they are themselves products of elemental physical transformations. When these materials, which are perceived to have intrinsic worth, are further transformed, through the creative power of man, into works of art, this power increases. Such objects then represent a fusion of matter and spirit that both expresses and points towards a higher possibility for the matter and spirit that constitute the human form. (As all artistic activity is in this sense a religious function, the work of art is ultimately a religious symbol.)

That the treasure should stand as a symbol of the highest good for Beowulf is not, therefore, inappropriate, nor does it indicate avariciousness in his nature. This trait, inherent in the nature of the dragon, represents the perversion of the treasure's symbolic meaning. The dragon's intimate connection, or obsession, with the treasure in its most superficial material form reveals the underlying error of materialism, a system of value based upon the purely physical or sensual. It was out of a similar compulsion that Milton's Satan set about appointing his hellish court with the gold and jewels that first symbolized, and eventually came to replace, the love and light of God's heaven. We are told that, although the Wyrn had total control of the treasure, ne byð him wihte ðy sel, "he was not one whit the better for it" (2277), just as materialistic man, without the illumination of his spiritual nature, far from being better off through his possessions, is reduced to meaningless and joyless

attachments to objects which, in themselves, have no real value apart from the context of their metaphysical design. Moreover, although, separated from their source of meaning, they are perversions of value, these objects themselves may acquire power by virtue of the subject's projections, and the subject himself, like the dragon, becomes an object in the service of a lesser entity. In this sense, and illuminating the poem's vision of freedom and slavery, the Wyrn was enslaved: he did not choose the treasure; it enslaved him by fulfilling the criteria of (false) value arising from his own innate materialism.

Although the treasure was also the object of desire for Beowulf, it was so for a diametrically opposed reason, because the hero was acting in direct opposition to the forces operating through the Wyrn. This is a defining aspect of his existential position and his heroic commitment to act on behalf of the greater good of the whole psycho-physical organism. For this reason, the hero's alliance must be with conscious values when those values have, through experience and intuition, been affirmed accurately to reflect the conscious goal of the whole entity. Beowulf makes this judgement both consciously, through his own experience, and unconsciously, through the activation of a late form of the hero archetype, the Old Wise Man in its positive phase, which is both himself in his own old age and a spirit of wisdom that transcends time. This form of the hero archetype is called the "archetype of meaning" (Fordham 60). Beowulf's intrinsic power to apprehend meaning assures that the

value he assigns the treasure is of a spiritual, rather than simply a material, nature. The unconscious power of the archetype ensures that this meaning is established beyond his power to resist.

In its symbolic and physical properties the treasure hord contains both spiritual and material elements that parallel the apparent duality of human nature, making this symbol a natural focus of humanity's highest and lowest desires and thus a compelling one for a poetic consciousness steeped in the theological dilemma of the mind/body duality. The duality is contained symbolically in the treasure's dual properties of gold and iron. The poet's description of the treasure, the iumonna gold, "gold of the ancients" (3052) speaks of helm monig/eald ond omig, "many helmets, old and rusty" (2763-64) and dyre swyrd/omige burhetone, "precious swords, rusted and eaten through" (3048-49) in addition to the hoard of gold flagons, dishes, armlets, jewels and banners, so we may conclude that, since rust is a property of iron, this base metal was welded to the gold which, because it does not rust, has "intimations of immortality."

Iron, the metal symbolic of and essential to the age of Beowulf, epitomizes certain mundane values of his society and symbolizes the decay to which the physical body is subject, linking it by implication with man's imperfections, manifest in his need for weapons and tools (for, until his metaphorical expulsion from Eden, man had no need to toil). The respect and

awe accorded a semi-legendary figure such as Weland, the blacksmith, in Iron Age culture was in marked contrast to the slightly ridiculous aspect of Hephaestus in the distant and idealized Age of Gold. In the Iron Age, the smith was foremost among the tradesmen, and had a status approaching that of a shaman because of the seemingly magical properties of iron, especially its mysterious magnetic energy. Nevertheless, this power was often viewed as diabolical, especially in Christian folklore, in which craftsmen who worked with iron were identified with the devil because of the flames (EMS 32). The Christian poet of Beowulf might have been aware that the art of making tools and weapons was first taught, according to Judeo-Christian scriptural tradition, by Tubal-Cain, a descendant of the fratricidal Cain, who, acting upon the basest promptings of his aggressive instinct, may be said to be the archetypal father of strife in the human race. Iron, by these associations, seems to represent the refinement and implementation of man's lower nature, the 'Beast,' which, born of the body, will die with the body. It may be partly for this reason that ireнна ecge, "iron swords" can never be of use to Beowulf.

Gold, on the other hand, expresses the distillation of man's highest aspirations. The most precious of metals, it is the materialization of the summum bonum. As the sun's image in the earth, gold may be said to be a reflection of divinity, since the sun has long been a god-image. One of the three gifts of the Magi to the Christ Child, gold also symbolizes royalty -- not

inherited rank, but inherent nobility of spirit, the natural meaning of kingship. Beowulf himself displayed this quality, rising from obscure origins as the son of an outlaw to become, by natural design and selection, the leader of a powerful nation. His natural royalty is revealed in his actions, especially when those actions are compared to those of Hrothgar, who represents certain negative aspects of the Old Wise Man, and who had only inherited, not earned, his high office.

Through its connection with the Nativity, and extended by its use in the making of rings, gold symbolizes both love and loyalty. To Beowulf and his people, the giving and receiving of gold rings represented more than the childish, acquisitive pleasures of 'primitives.' It signified an exchange of vows of fidelity between a true king and his true subjects, in the spirit of comitas. Yet, over the course of the poem the metaphysical properties of gold change dramatically from beneficent to maleficent, indicating that its symbolic meaning could, all too easily, degenerate, and the gold become all-important in itself, as the hoarding of treasure and the practice of plundering a defeated tribe's treasure store suggests.<sup>16</sup> If the giving of

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<sup>16</sup> Love of gold, Tacitus indicates, was not intrinsic to the Germanic tribes of the first century A.D., and may have been a corruption brought about by their contact with the Romans: "The Germans take less than the normal pleasure in owning and using [gold and silver]. One may see among them silver vessels...as lightly esteemed as earthenware. The Germans nearest us do, however, value gold and silver for their use in trade..." (Mattingly trans. 104). By the same token, at that time in their history, "There [was] not even any great abundance of iron" (105).

treasure indicates love, the taking of treasure (except as a gift) implies the exercise of power, which is a perversion of love. The will to power, Jung said, results from an inverted or repressed eros (1972: 22).

While Beowulf, in his desire to give the treasure to his people, is removed to a degree from this charge, it is nevertheless true that he intends first of all to take it from the Wyrn, who bears the projection of "the destructive power of passion conjoined with the will to rule" (Bodkin 170). The attachment of this anti-force to earthly treasure, as the Wyrn is attached to the treasure in Beowulf, represents the final perversion of love from a life-creating power to a totally destructive force that seeks to reduce all spirit to dead matter. Beowulf is himself subject to this perversion of love by virtue of his intrinsic association with the Wyrn, but it is a possibility of his being that he fights against with every bit of power he possesses, including the power that his consciousness has acquired through previous encounters with his unconscious: the power of the ego as well as the powers of the hero and the Old Wise Man. Without doubt, Beowulf is an extraordinary being even at this, the nadir of his life, senex et iuvenis simul, "an old man and a youth at once" (Jung 1959: 38), combining the spirit of youth with the wisdom of age. In this dynamic, Wiglaf stands for Beowulf's own youthful and innocent strength, and the two together make possible the transcendent moment in which the hero is empowered to draw his knife and sacrifice that element of

his animal nature which prevents him from attaining the treasure of immortality:

þa gen self cuning  
 geweorð his gewitte,      wællseaxe gebraed  
 biter onð beaðuscearp,      þæt he on byrnan waeg;  
 forwrat Wedra helm      wyrn on middan.  
 Feond gefyldan      - ferh ellen wraec -,  
 onð hi hyne þa begen      abroten haefdon,  
 sib æðelingas.      Swylc sceolde secg wesian,  
 begn aet ðearfe!      þæt ðam þeodne waes  
 siðas(t) sigehwila      sylfes daedum,  
 worolde geweorces      (2702-11).

Then the king himself regained control over his senses; he drew the slaughter-knife, keen and deadly sharp, that he wore in his corslet; the protector of the Geats cut the Wyrn through the middle. They had felled the foe - courage had driven out its life - and they had destroyed it together, the two noble kinsmen. So must a warrior be, a thane in time of need! For the prince, that was the last of his own glorious deeds, the end of his work in the world.

### Beowulf and Wiglaf: Religion and Community

The intervention of Wiglaf introduces an emotional element generally missing from the poem as a whole. Although loyalty and respect implicitly form a large part of the spirit of comitas to which the warriors subscribed, and although Hrothgar openly (and somewhat inappropriately<sup>17</sup>) demonstrated his tearful affection

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<sup>17</sup> That this display of grief was inappropriate and, in fact, unmanly, by Germanic standards at least of the first century A.D. is indicated in Tacitus' Germania: "A woman may decently express her grief in public; a man should nurse his in his heart" (Mattingly trans. 123).

for Beowulf, in no other part of the poem does feeling translate into action at quite the same level of experience. Even in the case of Beowulf himself, whose fidelity to Higelac and gratitude to Hrethel are both referred to and demonstrated, the degree of risk is proportionately less because of his near-invulnerability. Wiglaf had no supernatural protection nor any special powers that we know of; his risk, and, therefore, his commitment, seem greater.

Whether this extra measure of commitment derived from consanguinity, as the scop suggests (2600-01) or from a sense of right as defined by the ideals of the warrior's code (comitas) as Wiglaf himself says (2653) or from a dawning sense of fraternitas incorporated in the ideals of Christian brotherhood as outlined by St. Paul and as the Christian poet might have understood them, the relationship between Beowulf and Wiglaf illustrates the communal element that is integral to the religious experience, in that it demonstrates a "sense of new energy in union with others, of the breaking down of the barriers of individualism" (Bodkin 278). Through Wiglaf's action, the essentially selfish and introverted preoccupation of the personal unconscious is mitigated by the validity accorded the Other. The apotheosis of this awareness is found in the 'Thou-relationship' with God and reflected in the importance accorded others in the religious experience and the necessity for a symbol, or common object, on which the emotional energies of the group may be focused. For



Wiglaf, it is suggested, this 'object' was, first of all, Beowulf himself (as for the disciples it was Christ). By logical extension, it became the object that Beowulf desired, the treasure.<sup>18</sup>

By virtue of its antiquity, the treasure fulfills a basic requirement of a religious symbol for Beowulf: that it should link the present with the past, "sustaining the individual's sense of communion...with the ancestors of the tribe, and with all they achieved or willed for their descendants" (Bodkin 279). The ancient treasure and the other ancient objects given prominence in the poem represent the symbolic process active in the transfer of cultural values from generation to generation; but, in a final sense, as Maud Bodkin has observed, "the individual will experience satisfaction and assurance only when, passing perhaps through conflict and disillusion, he has achieved a sincere relation to the values he can assimilate from amongst those which social institutions and traditions offer" (280). If we construe the golden items selected from the treasure and brought by Wiglaf to his dying lord to be an image of the divine (as man's 'unfallen' self is said to have been made in the image of God) and further recognize that Beowulf's commitment to his people is a true commitment to his fellow man, we may agree that the values to which Beowulf is faithful unto death are fundamental to the psychological experience of religion, and

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<sup>18</sup> As, for the martyrs, it became the Cross, sought as a desirable form of death in imitation of Christ.

particularly of Christianity. However, these were not the same values to which Beowulf had subscribed throughout the course of his dramatic history. He has undergone change and growth: transformation.

### **Transformation of Religious Symbology in Beowulf**

While allowing that the Beowulf poet was ideologically a Christian and may even have been a monk or a priest, and admitting the possibility that his poetic nature and his intellect might have been captured or intrigued by symbols contributed to the popular imagination by gnosticism, we may infer, from his allusions to Danish history, legend and myth, that he was strongly influenced by the stories of religious devotion to the gods of his ancestors, which were still worshipped in Sweden, Denmark and parts of England at the time Beowulf is generally thought to have been written (Wilson 36).

The background of Norse myth imparts a basic feeling-tone to Beowulf, highlighting, by its dark sensuality, the light and spirituality of the Christian story superimposed upon it; but it is not merely a foil, nor are the ultimate aims of these two world views entirely antithetical. In some ways, the intrinsically Christian milieu of Beowulf anticipates the transformation of the Teutonic world after Ragnarok, the final battle of the Aesir, gods of Asgard, with the forces of evil, the

Vanir. After this Norse Armageddon, it was said, Odin's son, Balder, the singular Christ-figure in Norse myth, would return to life (he had been accidentally killed by his brother, Hodur, a theme well known to the audience of Beowulf) and a newer, more beautiful world would be born (Crossley-Holland 175). The poetic vision of Beowulf's heroic psyche seems to be a vision of the possibilities of the new Christian world; as a heroic traveller in his own mental landscape, the pagan Beowulf traversing the middangeard, "middle ground" between consciousness and the unconscious in search of glory, "immortality on the lips of men," is reminiscent of Odin who, travelling throughout Midgard, the human world of Norse myth, in search of knowledge, is granted a vision of a future that will not include him.<sup>19</sup>

In the sense that a true poet must also be a 'pagan' in both the unconscious processes themselves and the validity accorded these processes by the poetic consciousness, the Teutonic myths alluded to in the poem may be seen as a reflection of the pagan unconscious of the poet and the society to which he belonged, which had evolved out of the society depicted in the poem. To the extent that the poet was aware of these myths as myths, we may say that he has attained a conscious control over them and

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<sup>19</sup> This parallel between Beowulf and Odin may be extended to Odin and Christ, as Thomas H. Ohlgren's article, "The Crucifixion Panel on the Gosforth Cross: A Janusian Image?" OEN 20, no. 2 (1987):50 strongly suggests. Ohlgren contends that in this work "the so-called Crucifixion scene is the result of the sculptor's superimposition of Odin hanging on Yggdrasil over the image of Christ on the cross."

perhaps transformed them into analogues of Christian patterns in the same way that he effectively transformed Beowulf into a Christian hero.

By the time he has reached the final battle of his life, Beowulf, though still conforming to the idea of a hero in the old Germanic world, is living a symbolic life which, as has conventionally been recognized, closely resembles the last days of Christ: from the moment he receives the cup (2403-05) Beowulf is committed to fight the dragon, just as Christ, in accepting a "cup" in Gethsemane, was committed to die on the Cross; Beowulf's thanes desert him at the extreme moment, just as the disciples of Christ abandoned Him; Wiglaf, like John, the only man who comes to his defence (after wrestling with his fears and his sense of duty) is left to interpret for his followers the significance of Beowulf's life and death; like the twelve apostles of Christ, twelve men ride around Beowulf's barrow singing his praises; and the penultimate line of his eulogy describes Beowulf as manna mildust ond mon (ðe) aerust, "the mildest and gentlest of men" (3181), a description so startlingly in contrast to what we might have expected of a pagan hero that it is almost superfluous to recall that this expression is more properly descriptive of Christ. In Norman Davis' edition (1959) of Zupitza's facsimile of the original manuscript, these words are all but obliterated; Klaeber notes that manna mildost also occurs in Exodus 550, though miltisto, "kindest" is an alternate possibility [so, one assumes, might be militisc, "military," which, in combination

with mann means "soldier" (Sweet)] so the reconstruction could represent the interpretation of a later mind; however, on reflection, the words as generally accepted by scholarly tradition are not inconsistent with the Beowulf who has been presented to us in the poem. Relative to the rest of his own society and in his own estimation, Beowulf was a peace-loving man.

The impulse to transform the supposedly pagan hero of Beowulf into a Christian prototype might as certainly have been a conscious and conventional one on the poet's part as a subconscious assumption on the part of the hypothetical "Christian singer" proposed by Creed; but both impulses might also have been inspired by a deeper, perhaps unconscious, affirmation of a truth inherent in the idea of God, rather than in allegiance to any particular manifestation of that transcendent entity.

In his book, The Lost Gods of England, Brian Branston cites linguistic parallels as evidence that the pagan influence upon Anglo-Saxon religious awareness was stronger than the people themselves might consciously have known. He identifies many of the Christian names for God as having their origins in ancient North-West European religious cults -- Frean, for example, may be identified with Frey/Freya -- and Indo-European cults, to which source he ascribes Wyrd (65), which, as Christine Fell agrees, may have been a dreadful, omnipotent female deity whose presence was felt in the British Isles long before the coming of either the Anglo-Saxons or the Vikings (27).

Branston's point, which is accepted in principle here, is that what appear to be 'new' gods are, in actuality, the 'old' gods revitalized or 'transformed' in conjunction with the requirements of expanding consciousness. This perception may be related to Thomas Aquinas' meditation on the nature of God, which essentially postulates that all gods are really one, and that it is only because of our limited consciousness that we persist in separating the predications of God into identities or personalities (personifications).<sup>20</sup> The Christian God's separation into a Trinity with the later elevation of Mary and the 'pantheon' of saints to follow reflects this innate human tendency, and it may be, as Branston strongly contends, that Christ, too, was very much in the tradition of a particular type of "bleeding and dying god" represented in Norse myth by a figure

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<sup>20</sup> Aquinas' treatise includes a treatment of ascribing several names to the one divinity that might be applied to the many Anglo-Saxon names for God in Beowulf. Alwalda, "Omnipotent One"; Andwalda, "Ruler"; Faeder, "Father"; Metod, "Creator"; and Wealdend, "the Lord," are all used in addition to the term God, and all denote a particular aspect or function of the deity as perceived by those who interpreted the nature of the divine. Aquinas suggested that "...by means of a name we express things in the way in which the intellect conceives," but he went on to observe that "the higher an intellect is, the more it can know more things through one likeness, while a lesser intellect manages to know many things only through many likenesses." The whole of mankind falls into this lesser category, so that Aquinas saw the necessity of giving God many names: "For, since we cannot know Him naturally except by arriving at Him from His effects, the names by which we signify His perfection must be diverse... Were we able to understand the divine essence as it is and give to it the name that belongs to it, we would express it by only one name" [Summa Contra Gentiles, Bk. I, Chaps. 30-31, in St. Thomas Aquinas: On the Truth of the Catholic Faith, A.G. Pegis, trans. (New York: Doubleday, 1955)].

such as Balder (189), or in Greek myth, perhaps, by Dionysus. The full impact of the poet's description of Beowulf, "bleeding and at the end of his life," is felt by subliminal association with these figures.

It was obviously not the poet's intention to evoke the spirit of Dionysus, and it was probably not his intention to suggest that Christ was a reincarnation of Balder; however, it seems clearly to have been his intention to draw a parallel between Beowulf and Christ, and to effect a change in the hero's understanding of the symbols by which he fulfilled his psychic destiny -- which destiny was, in a final analysis, to transform the symbology of his society through his acquisition of the treasure.

In the past, Beowulf had owned and employed many 'treasures' to which both he and his society had ascribed symbolic value: the sword Hrunting, its ultimate uselessness symbolic of the dead end predicated by faith in iconoclastic aggression; the 'magic' sword with the cryptic message of the Flood (a foreshadowing of his own death by fire that completes one movement of the fire-water theme with reference to Christian mythology); the Brising necklace, with its intimations of sexual guilt and its association with betrayal, violence and death; and his final weapon, Naegling, trophy of his sin. All are described as "ancient," and all represent particular value to Beowulf's society deriving from their antiquity; but these symbols are ultimately subsumed within and transformed by the image of the

treasure as "rusted gold." The failure of Hrunting and Naegling, the dissolving of the lethal blade of the magic sword, and the tragic fate attached to the owner of the Brising necklace, seem to presage the final inadequacy of these symbols of sexuality and aggression as of either symbolic or actual value to Beowulf in his quest for immortality and lof, "praise."

Although his spirit of commitment to his fellow man was evident from the first in the application of his mundgripe, the "handgrip" that was a sign of his humanity, Beowulf's initial commitment derived from, and served, not the idea of immortality in God which is the intuited source and instinctive goal of the religious function, but the heroic objective, set down by aggressive ego ideals, of fame and glory, "immortality on the lips of men." In the service of this ego-ideal, the true spirit of human brotherhood was effectively displaced, because, in order to achieve personal glory, Beowulf rejected the assistance of any of his comrades, insisting that it must be ic...ana, "I, alone" (cf. 424-26) who accomplish the victory. In contrast, during his final battle with the Wyrn, he needed, and was granted, the assistance of his fellow man. This need enhanced rather than diminished his human greatness and ensured a projection into the future of his own deepest values. With Wiglaf's intervention, Beowulf received confirmation of his ideals and, at the same time, a sense of grace and hope which could not have come without a prior sense of abandonment and despair, a dynamic that is intrinsic to the Christian religious perspective. Because this



was a new feeling to Beowulf, his human need represents an expansion of his consciousness in the midst of his supra-conscious battle; it prepares him for his vision of the treasure, which, in the end, is also determined by his dependence on his fellow man.

Wiglaf's importance to Beowulf's increased awareness is indicated not only by the obvious fact that, had Wiglaf not come to his aid, the bite of the dragon would have obviated the hero's chance for transcendence but also, and more importantly in this context, because it was Wiglaf who actually had the power to choose out of the treasure hoard those objects he believed would represent its best meaning and content to the dying king -- not the rusted swords and armour, but the golden dishes and goblets, the anima objects that stimulated Beowulf's desire for the treasure and effectively led him to it. He also brought Beowulf the golden banner of victory, beacna beorhtost (2777), by the light of which he was himself enabled to see the hord. Like the segen gyldenne, "golden ensign" (102) bestowed on Beowulf by Hrothgar after his victory over Grendel and the Merewife, this banner proclaimed Beowulf's temporal victory, which occasioned his prayer of thanksgiving; and, like the segen gyldenne (47) that flew above Scyld's funeral ship on its solitary journey over the waves, this banner also proclaimed his transcendental victory, which includes the victory of consciousness over the annihilating powers of darkness and unconsciousness. Its light is the light of conscious perception, recalling the leoht estan,

"light from the east," beorht beacen Godes, "the bright beacon of God" (569-70) that illuminated Beowulf's struggle during his first real moment of conscious choice; its promise is total consciousness, the absolute consciousness of the hidden immortal within himself.

The golden objects that Wiglaf brought to fulfill Beowulf's vision represent an abstract idea of value and, as gold was symbolic of love to the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons, it is suggested that the essence of that value was love, an aspect of the divinity from the Christian perspective. Reflecting the divine in the mundane world, Christian love includes, as an integral and informing component, the idea of brotherhood. The importance of fraternitas to both the theme and structure of Beowulf may derive from the Christian (perhaps monastic) society of the poet, or from the tribal societies of Viking and Anglo-Saxon culture, but it may also be said to derive from the religious instinct, which may itself be a reification of the fact that an individual derives from and must relate to his society. For this reason, even in approaching and attaining individuation, a solitary journey that parallels the solitary journey of (and to) death, the heroic individual must leave to society something of worth to replace what he takes from it in undertaking and completing the internal process. When the completion of the psychic life process ends, as it ultimately must, in the silence of death, it seems imperative to those left behind to discover something of value in the death of a person whose life was so

important, and incumbent upon the individual to provide something for them to discover and hold on to. Otherwise, all is meaningless.

In the case of Beowulf, the meaninglessness of his death might easily overwhelm the Geats. For some scholars analyzing the implications of this final battle, and particularly for Raffel, whose elegiac translation creates this impression, there were intimations that Beowulf did not have to fight (although he knew he did); that he fought for the 'wrong' reason, out of greed for gold (although Hall's more literal translation shows Raffel's words to be misrepresentative); that his death would leave the Geats vulnerable to invasion and enslavement, without a strong leader to protect them (although Wiglaf's transformation and his courage seems to have marked him as a likely successor, if not Beowulf's equal in strength, then certainly his equal in courage); seeking to blame him for his own death, and despairing of the future, some of the Geats, like Raffel's Wiglaf, might have forgotten a very important fact: that Beowulf had sacrificed his life for their well-being.

In trying to understand the meaning and importance of the sacrifice of Christ, E.O. James suggested that Christ's sacrifice represented a "surrendered life" which was to be "shared" by his followers, and concluded that it was not the taking, but the giving of life that is important (Bodkin 285). Applying this maxim to Beowulf, it is to be hoped that the ideal for which the heroic life was given be accorded a value by the Geats in keeping

with the value of the surrendered life itself. If the "rusted gold" for which Beowulf fought represented nothing more than the materialistic values of a violent world, then Beowulf's followers were wiser than he when they buried the treasure with the ashes of their lord. Even if this were not its meaning (and clearly, it was not), the Geats, in burying the treasure with Beowulf, demonstrate their knowledge that it was the idea of the treasure, rather than its tangible reality, which was to prove of continuing importance to them, just as it was the memory of Beowulf, his spirit, which was to prove immortal:

|                         |                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Geworhton ða            | Wedra leode                     |
| hl(aew) on [h]lide,     | se waes heah ond brad,          |
| (wae)gliðendum          | wide g(e)syne,                  |
| ond betimbredon         | on tyn dagum                    |
| beadurofes becn;        | bronda lafe                     |
| wealle beworhton,       | swa hyt weorðlicost             |
| foresnotre men          | findan mihton,                  |
| Hi on beorg dydon       | beg ond siglu,                  |
| eall swylce hyrsta,     | swylce on horde aer             |
| niðhedige men           | genumen haefdon;                |
| forleton eorla gestreon | eorðan healdan,                 |
| gold on greote,         | þær hit nu gen lifað            |
| eldum swa unnyt,        | swa hi(t aero)r waes (3156-68). |

The people of the Geats raised a mound upon the cliff, which was high and broad and visible from afar by voyagers on the sea: and in ten days they built the beacon of the warrior bold in battle.

The remnant of the burning they begirt with a wall in such sort as skilled men could plan most worthy of him. In the barrow they placed collars and brooches - all such adornments as brave-minded men had before taken from the hoard. They left the wealth of nobles to the earth to keep, - left the gold in the ground, where it still exists, as unprofitable to men as it had been before.

(Hall trans.)

Apart from the irony of the poet's didactic comment on the uselessness of the gold, the symbolic actions of both Beowulf and his people provide a dramatic irony here that adds to the sense of pathos and tragedy of the poem and at the same time points towards a development in consciousness on the part of the Geats, even though their action may, to outward appearance, seem regressive. The practice of burying a dead person's most prized possessions with the remains was essentially a pagan tradition that slowly died out with the Christianization of the Anglo-Saxons, which may reflect a transition from materialism to spirituality through the influence of the Christian Church (or, equally, may have resulted from a desire on the part of the Church to fall heir to the riches hitherto buried with the aristocratic dead). The burial of the treasure might, as Klaeber suggested, "be explained as a corollary of the motive of the curse resting on the gold" (230).<sup>21</sup> However, it seems unlikely the Geats would have buried a cursed treasure with their honoured lord, and in any case, the burial of the treasure was appropriate from a pragmatic poetic perspective (since the poet might have wanted to juxtapose the atmosphere of a magnificent pagan funeral rite, with its excesses of passion and despair, and the

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<sup>21</sup> Klaeber also notes that in Grettissaga, ch. 18.16 there is the injunction: 'all treasure which is hidden in the earth or buried in a howe is in a wrong place' (230), which leads to the conclusion that some observers, pagan or Christian, could find better use for treasure than the purely symbolic.

subliminal Christian message of peace and hope) and also from the point of view of effect. Beowulf's acquisition of the treasure for minum leodum, "my people" and his people's burying it all with him may be compared to the situation in O. Henry's "Gift of the Magi," where the sacrifice of the most valued aspect of each for the affirmation and enhancement of that value in the other effected a pathetic, yet ennobling, transformation in the relationship of the young husband and wife. In wanting the treasure to go to his people, Beowulf was setting an example of generosity and love, and projecting that example into the future by rejecting the materialistic desire to 'take it with him,' a desire that might apply equally to his physical being; paradoxically, in relinquishing the material gain of Beowulf's sacrifice, his people were affirming his spiritual achievement and exemplifying it, and a transformation of collective consciousness has been achieved.

In another sense, Beowulf could not, however much he wanted to, leave the treasure -- his treasure, as he knew it -- to his people. The treasure had a meaning to Beowulf's people, and one that Beowulf himself had created, but, although this meaning was not a material one, neither was it transcendental. The transcendent meaning of the treasure was clear only to Beowulf, as the attainment of psychic unity can, ultimately, only be experienced by the subject himself. This final fact must rest with Beowulf. What he could, and did, leave his people was the example of his life. The beadurowes becn stands as a visible

sign of the actualized life and death of a great, and greatly loved, man; more than that, as he desired above all, he lives in their hearts and in their stories and songs:

þa ymbe hlaew riðan hildedeore,  
 apelinga bearn, ealra twelfe,  
 woldon (care) cwiðan, [ond] kyning maenan,  
 wordgyd wrecan, ond ymb w(er) sprecaþ;  
 eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweord  
 dugudum demdon, - swa hit gede(fe) bið,  
 þaet mon his winedryhten wordum herge,  
 ferhðum freoge, þonne he forð scile  
 of lichaman (laeded) weorðan.  
 Swa begnornodon Geata leode  
 hlafordes (hry)re, heorðageneatas;  
 cwaedon þaet he waere wyruldcyning[a]  
 manna mildust ond mon(ðw)ærust,  
 leodum liðost ond lofgeornost (3169-82).

Then the battle-brave warriors rode around the barrow, the sons of princes, twelve in all. They lamented their sorrow and mourned their king, chanted an elegy and spoke of the man himself, extolling his nobility, and they highly praised his deeds of valour - so is it fitting, that a man should praise his friend and lord with words, and love him in his heart, when the time comes that he must be led forth from his body-home. So the people of the Geats, his hearth-companions, lamented their lord's death; they said that of all the kings of this world, he was the most generous of men and the gentlest, kindest to his people, and most eager for praise.

This is immortality of a kind. It is at least a kind of immortality that they can understand and, in part, confer. Whether there is immortality of the soul, a 'life after death,' they still cannot know; but they do know that a great man has died in loyalty to an idea of transcendental value; and, implicit in the kenning, lichama, the "body home" from which Beowulf may be "led forth," as well as in the Christian spirit so gracefully

interlaced with the pagan matter of this final passage, from the echoes of Genesis <sup>22</sup> to the final revelation of the hero, there is an element of hope. Hope, above all, is what the religious instinct desires to create, the kind of hope that enhances the struggle for survival against seemingly impossible odds. Pagan or Christian, this is the motivating force of the religious drive in accordance with its function as the highest human projection of the libidinal will to life.

It is Beowulf's testament that has allowed his people to hope, to face coming adversity with the courage imparted by the example of his heroic sacrifice, to affirm his apparently paradoxical values of brotherhood and individual integrity, and perhaps to experience, both personally and collectively, their own redemption and transcendence.

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<sup>22</sup> Klaeber's note to lines 3173-76: "The lines setting forth the praise of Beowulf by his faithful thanes sound like an echo of divine service, and closely resemble Gen. 1 ff.,; ..." (230).



## 5 THE HERO AT EARNANAE: TRANSFORMATION IN BEOWULF

### The Transformative Powers of the Hero

In a poetic affirmation of the transcendent power of spirit over matter, Beowulf's heroic spirit is sustained to the end of his life, reaching its zenith as his body's vitality "plunges downward into darkness" (A.C. Bradley 350). His final battlefield is the antechamber to eternity, a field on which the trinitarian and quaternal symbols of spiritual transcendence fuse with the circular motif of psychic wholeness to form a mandala, the "squared circle" (Douglas 79), which represents, in alchemical lore, the mystic condition of absolute unity of being.

The trinity is to be found in the triad of masculine combatants, Beowulf, the Dragon and Wiglaf. The most striking manifestation of the quaternity is the Christian Cross which, as in a work such as The Dream of the Rood, may be said to have been an object of intense veneration in Anglo-Saxon tradition.<sup>1</sup> This symbolic configuration also appears in the Book of Revelation as

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<sup>1</sup> According to G.O. Roberts, the "old orthodoxy" contends that Beowulf and The Dream of the Rood are from the same century and geographic area -- i.e. 8th century Anglia and the north east, broadly interpreted so as to include Northumberland and Mercia (i).

the four beasts (Rev. 4:6) and the four horsemen (Rev. 6: 1-8); it is represented in Beowulf's final battle by the four alchemical elements, Aristotle's four basic components of the universe: earth, in the harne stan, "gray rock" (2553, 2744) and the eorðscraef, "earth cave" (3046) out of which the dragon emerges; air, in the flight of the dragon and in the suggestive name of the fight's location, Earnanaes, "Eagles' ness" (3031); fire and water, the remaining elements, are represented as synthesis in the admixture of fire and water, a recurring thematic image of the poem, found metaphorically here in the ligvōum, "waves of fire" (2672) and the burnan waelm heaðofyrum hat, "the welling of the flood with deadly fire" (2547-48: Hall trans.) that issues from the dragon's mouth. The circle is represented by the coils of the serpent, the golden rings of the treasure hoard, and the magic circle in which the treasure is enclosed, galdre bewunden, "encircled by a spell" (3052. God sylfa, "God Himself" (3054) is identified as the keeper of that spell and as the power by which it may be broken. The dragon's breath, described as hat hildeswat, "hot battlesweat" (2558), incorporates air, fire and water, but not the 'feminine' element of earth, and this composition evokes an inevitable comparison to the masculine Trinity.

Such interwoven symbolism creates both a mystical and a didactic vision of the personal apocalyptic moment, when all disparate and opposing elements of matter and spirit come together, signifying the culmination and resolution of the

individual life process, and effecting the final transformation of the heroic entity from material to spiritual being, in accordance with St. Paul's transformative mystery:

Behold, I shew you a mystery:  
We shall not all sleep, but we  
shall all be changed,

In a moment, in the twinkling  
of an eye, at the last trump: for  
the trumpet shall sound and the  
dead shall be raised incorruptible,  
and we shall be changed (1 Cor. 15: 51-52).

The last battle of Beowulf's life is his struggle for transcendence, which is the final goal of the archetype of transformation, a symbolic pattern enacted in the psyche through the activity of symbols of the libido in its final phase of life in the psycho-physical world. The libido's goal is the goal of the whole organism, and remains a creative one, which must also mean a transformative one. As agent of the libido, the hero wishes to accomplish its goal on two planes of being, the psychic and the physical. In the former realm, this goal may be said to be transformation. In the latter, it is transmutation.

Previous chapters have considered the changes effected in human beings by the emergence of graduated instinctual drives and functions, and the changes effected in the expression of these same drives by their necessary adaptation to meet the challenge of survival. In Chapter I, the hero was shown to be one who had the potential power and the responsibility to change both himself and his society. Chapter II observed how he gained control over

his aggressive instinct, and transformed its negative power to action for the higher, collective good, initially identified with survival and, erroneously, with God. Chapter III dealt with sexuality, and the transformation of the female earth/agricultural goddess into a male sky/war god. The theme of Chapter IV was the religious instinct, which was interpreted as a transformation of man's more purely animal nature into something uniquely human and of the God-concept from simple to complex to, as William Blake or T.S. Eliot might have it, profoundly simple form. The concomitant artistic function, symbol formation, suggested to be the source of myth and ritual, reflects the human being's desire to both create and change in imitation of, and response to, what (s)he perceives to be the divine creative principle, and this present chapter will contend that Beowulf embodies in its symbols and symbolic patterns "all those paradoxes and ambiguities that attach to the notion of transformation as intrinsic to the nature of the divine" (Peter Harris, personal communication, 1988). In accordance with the objective of uncovering something of the nature of the divine as it might have been understood by the Beowulf poet(s), the discussion wishes first to look at the abstract ideas of transformation and transmutability as manifest in experience and in the poem itself.

### Transformation in Beowulf

The idea of 'transformation' has been a central one in Western religious thought for thousands of years, from the 'metamorphoses' of the Hellenic tradition to the gnostic systems of the Middle East to the Christian ideas of St. Paul and his formulation of the idea of the "spiritual body"<sup>2</sup> to the syncretic aims of the early Church Fathers in their battle to 'transform' pagan gods and heroes into analogues of Christ and the Christian vision. Science, too, has been much taken with the idea, from the early alchemists, who sought to transform base metal into gold, to Darwin's theories of evolution, a process that implies the transformation of one original entity into many differentiated forms of life, to anthropology's identification of the transformative stages of the human species, to psychology's interest in the psyche's pattern of change and adaptation, to modern quantum physics with its systems based on Einstein's theory of relativity, of which the conversion equation of matter

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<sup>2</sup> So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption:

It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body (1 Cor. 15: 42-44).

to energy to matter is an essential postulate. Poetry may also be said to be dynamically involved in the process of transformation, since art is above all a creative transformation of the experience of life. It could be contended that the process of transformation is necessary not only to life but to our understanding of life. Without this idea -- perhaps this reality -- material and spiritual being are incomprehensible.

A study of pattern necessitates acceptance of the notion of transformation as fundamental to the original design such a study attempts to discover. In the microcosm of the epic poem, the relationship of pattern to design may be studied without any necessary reference to ultimate truth, but merely with reference to the shaper of the poem, who stands *in loco parentis*, as it were, for some transcendent creative principle, the nature of which may be dimly glimpsed through the shadow of its fire in the poet. In this sense, the study of poetry may be a study of absolute reality. (One does not, however, wish to pursue this metaphor too far.)

Whether considered as an absolute principle, accepted as a necessary premise of human understanding, or simply envisioned as an intriguing possibility, the idea of creative change, or transformation, remains integral to all the processes considered in this reading of Beowulf. From the evolution of the human being out of pre-consciousness and into super-consciousness, to the development of social relationships from primitive to relatively civilized systems, to the growth of the individual

from infancy to maturity and, perhaps, the emergence of graduated instinctual functions from a primary undifferentiated will to live, what appears common to all processes is the necessity of change. How that change is perceived, whether as part of a causal or synchronistic pattern or simply as a random effect, has everything to do with the functioning of the intellect.

Intellectual functioning may be chiefly guided rationally, as in the case of the scientist or critic, emotionally, as in the case of the religious thinker, sensually, as in the case of the warrior, or intuitively as in the case of the artist. Allowing for over-simplification in the foregoing application of Jung's theory of psychological types (CW 6:280), acknowledging that most people function on all four levels of apprehension at one time or another, and agreeing that there is no one 'superior' mode of intellection, it is still possible to observe that while all four primary mental dispositions may adequately demonstrate the process of transformation, it is through the rational function that process may be perceived as pattern, and through intuition that pattern is conceived as design.

The artist operates in the intuitive realm and brings to his or her creation the element of design that evolves out of, or into, pattern. Pattern and design are related in the same way as are structure and form, in that while pattern and structure are concrete, design and form are their abstract projections. Which one is truly prior, or whether each is dependent upon the other, are questions debated by literary critics and philosophers;

artists simply desire to create, as the Beowulf poet has done, a work that dynamically demonstrates the operation of all factors.

The formal intent of Beowulf, as of all epic poetry, was not simply to tell a story but, in the telling, to present as completely as possible the poet's vision of life and the world. From his perspective in þæm dæge biſses lifes, "at that time in this world," the Beowulf poet rationally perceived pattern; reflecting this perception, his poem has a tight structure, a historical and an archetypal pattern of action, as well as symbolic patterning. Such structural elements as: the three battles; the 2:1 numerical ratios of good:evil, youth:age; the numerological symbolism in the poem; the historical patterns of vengeance; the tragic pattern of cause and effect illustrated by the story of Herebeald and Hathcyn, or the recurring symbolic patterns of binary opposition -- fire and ice, gold and iron, light and darkness, protagonist and antagonist -- all reflect the poet's awareness of patterning as significant to his understanding of the world.

The Beowulf poet detected pattern not only in the actions of men but also in the action of God, an entity he saw as controlling saela ond mæla, "the times and the seasons," through a cyclic pattern that seems to resolve the antipathies perceived in the elemental environment of fire and ice, expressed in the poem's epic simile. This metaphorical resolution of paradox rests in an intrinsic and infinite transformation of one extreme into and out of another, as the ice melts only to freeze again.



While these polarities are not perceived to be God, while God is considered to be outside and in control of them, their enantiodromia is intuited as a manifestation of the power of God, and this power is seen to be essentially transformative.

### **Mutability and Transmutability in Beowulf**

If comedy is an effect of timing, then, in this poem, tragedy is an effect of time. The destructive power of time plays a large role in Beowulf, as in much Old English poetry. One of the more

important functions of time in this poem, however, in contrast to its representation in other poems, is its use as a foil to the transcendent powers of the hero.

Powers of transformation (creative change) and transmutation (the changing of form and substance) are seen as necessary and desirable elements of the archetypal hero, but the process of change itself was a cause of fear and lamentation in Anglo-Saxon poetry. In light of the Beowulf poet's treatment of the theme of 'mutability' -- "the process of change and decay that affects everyone under the heavens" (Roberts iii) -- the transmutability of the hero can only be understood in a positive sense if it is seen to promote that kind of change by which things can be seen to remain constant. Thus, Beowulf's transmutability would be evident in his ability to transcend his age and physical

mutability, and maintain his courage in spite of the ravages of time. The assumption made here is that in the process of transmutability there is an element of will: transmutation is an active state, whereas mutability, in the context of this argument, is an effect, the result of a passive vulnerability to stronger forces.

A part of the necessity of transmutability is the factor of negation. In order to continue to be, in opposition to the encroachment of decay, whether physical (such as, in Beowulf, the changing from youth to age) or psychic (as from his presumption of innocence to his assumption of guilt) it becomes necessary to negate an element of the being that no longer serves the purpose of continuance and renewal. Thus, if Beowulf is to maintain his courage, he must negate the physical evidence that he can no longer fulfill his boasts (either by blocking out the truth, or else by making extra provision to ensure victory, as Beowulf does when he provides himself with a sword and a, for him, completely new device, a shield, before going into his last battle). If the psyche wishes to negate the phenomenological evidence of physical reality in an absolute sense, it effectively wills the denial of death. But in order to deny absolutely the fact of death, the psyche must negate an element of itself that will not rationally accept this denial -- the ego. From such a perspective, it can be seen that, for the archetypal hero, the ego must finally be sacrificed in order to maintain the courage to continue to be.

In the final postulate of this hypothesis, the desire to continue to be must be considered fundamental to the nature of the hero, if the hero is quintessentially the personification and transmutation of the will to life, the libido, who leaves the "impersonal" and "neuter" realm of metaphysics and "takes human form" (Jung 1919). The archetypal hero, of which Christ may be seen as the supreme historical incarnation, must act to fulfill the libido's driving urge for life and creation. His act of affirmative self-sacrifice may, therefore, derive from an unconscious 'knowledge' of the creative principle. If this is so, then it follows that this knowledge must, in spite of the ego's intense desire to deny it, be carried right up to, and include, the act of death. Since his genesis in the unconscious, the hero has been fated to die a wundordead (3037).

Beowulf's first awareness of what fate would demand of him came when he received the stolen cup and the knowledge that, because of it, the Wyrn had begun to ravage his people and his home, the ground of his own being. This cup seems to be an early precursor of the Holy Grail, the object of a mythic quest in Arthurian literature when, as Eliot interprets it in "The Waste Land," it stood as a symbol of the regenerative powers of Christ who, accepting a cup in the Garden of Gethsemane, accepted also his role as sacrificial lamb.

In brutal contrast to this pastoral image of Jesus is that of Beowulf the "war wolf" (Hall trans. 139) who, seeing in the golden cup tangible proof of the existence of a treasure of

immeasurable value, decides he must win that treasure for his people. Still, Beowulf and Jesus share a common nature in their paradoxical selflessness and sense of self. As Jesus died to redeem mankind from the death and guilt of Original Sin, Beowulf dies to save his people from the retribution of the Wyrn; and as Jesus earned the treasure of eternal life for mankind, Beowulf earns the treasure of gold and iron, not for himself, but minum leodum, "for my people" (2797).

The greater concern for others than for self may be seen as a characteristic that derives from sublimation or transformation of the sexual instinct, which might further an understanding of the symbolic (and actual) childlessness of both Beowulf and Jesus, since sublimation could conceivably result in diversion of the energy available to the purely sexual function; conversely, the energy of the sexual instinct would, diverted, make an immense source of libidinal power available to the religious instinct; this energy would then flow through new channels but would shape these channels in its own way.

The alternative source of energy available for sublimation to the religious instinct is that of the aggressive drive. In this case, however, the resultant character trait might be extreme selfishness, because, rather than to seek the greater good of the race or species (as is the effective function of sexuality) the chief function of aggression is to protect and advance the individual organism. In that case, the personal ego would become all-important, the survival of the known parts of

the organism being logically preferable to that of the unknown element. The resulting action might be like that of the cowards who deserted Beowulf in his time of need to save their own lives, as the disciples deserted Christ.

While Beowulf and Christ both had strong aggressive drives (Beowulf's projected, in that he actively fought 'monsters' in the 'objective' world, and that of Christ introjected in that he passionately resisted the temptations of Satan in the subjective frame) their aggressive energies were subsumed in the intrinsically sexual urge to find fulfillment in and through others. Thus validated, negated and intensified, the sexual instinct, mastered by ego-consciousness, could be sublimated in the service of the religious quest. It is this transformative achievement that makes possible, and necessary, the final sacrifice.

#### Earnanaes, the "Middle Ground" and the Transformative Milieu

The activity at Earnanaes is the context for analysis of the archetype of transformation in Beowulf. This process of creative change is associated with death in that every change implies the death of a pre-existing form of the thing changed, and also in that death itself is an ultimate (if not necessarily a final) change. The Death card in the ancient, esoteric Tarot is a card of change, not finality, and most orthodox religious views of

death consider it a rite of passage to another form of existence (whether conscious or unconscious), even when that new form may seem, as Stephen Hawking (1988) said of any universe existing prior to, or coming after, our own, to be so completely unrelated to our own as to be irrelevant to our experience. Without accepting any particular interpretation of the meaning of death at this point, this analysis wishes to focus upon Beowulf's death and the pattern of symbolic behaviour that led up to it, as the manifestation of the archetype of the transformative pattern. Earnanaes is the transformative milieu.

The similarities between Midgard, the world of men that exists in the misty regions bounded by the extremes of fire and ice that make up the Norse cosmos, and Middangeard, the Anglo-Saxon human world, seen in Beowulf as wlitebeorhtne wang, swa waeter bebugeð, "a bright and beautiful plain surrounded by water" (93) located in the "middle yard" between Hell and Heaven, may be observed with reference to Jung's notion of the "middle ground" (CW 6: 479), a state of psychological awareness that unites action in the unconscious realm with action on the conscious level to produce a wholly new and intrinsically human plane of experience. Implied in the apprehension of all three states of being is an elementary experiential meeting point between absolutely antipathetic contraries. Upon this mythic ground, a kind of psychic Ragnarok or Armageddon occurs, in which, for the artistic or religious consciousness, the cosmic conflict of good and evil takes place and the battle for

immortality is ultimately decided.

Jung's "middle ground" might be seen by modern psychiatry and would certainly be seen by anthropologists such as Weston La Barre, as a psychotic state peculiar to certain types of schizophrenia or drug-induced complex, in which individuals undergoing the experience perceive themselves to be engaged in a supernatural battle between the forces for good and evil. The schizophrenic conflict often takes a decidedly 'religious' form in which the protagonists, said to be undergoing ocular or aural hallucinations, hear the voice of, or, according to their own reality principles, see God or the Devil, and perceive themselves to be in a position of acting for or against one or the other of the opposing (psychic) entities. Some interpretations of the conversion of Saul to Paul might refer to this 'psychotic' condition.

There is indication that the Anglo-Saxons were much taken by the fact of Saul's conversion: one of the treasures unearthed at Sutton Hoo was a set of ornate silver spoons, one of which was inscribed "Saulus" and the other "Paulus" (see British Museum exhibit, Case 54). It is reasonable to assume that the owner of these spoons did not regard Paul's transformative experience as invalid, in either sense of the word. Nor did his society. Paul's conversion provided inspiration for the conversion of an entire race of people, whose first major Christian edifice was a cathedral raised to his memory in the 6th century. Rebuilt time and again on the same site until its most recent reconstruction

by Sir Christopher Wren, the present day St. Paul's, with its magnificent tributes to dead heroes, appears to be as much a monument to war as to its saintly exemplar,<sup>3</sup> and in this may be found an indication of the religious instinct's possible evolution through transformation of the more primary aggressive drive.

The research of Konrad Lorenz (1963) suggests that religious ritual may have had its origins in a transformative 'accident' of animal behaviour that proved dramatically effective in deflecting negative aggression that might otherwise lead to species annihilation. Lorenz observed a pattern of activity in a particularly aggressive and seemingly intelligent species of graylag goose, which goose, though it will peck to death any hapless member of another flock, exhibits, upon encountering other members of its own flock, deterrent behaviour similar to the ritual dances of primitive peoples as well as to modern 'breakdancing.' The breakdance originated in Harlem, New York City, as an alternative to street fights between rival gangs, and quickly became a popular conscious means of deflecting aggression; the dance partner is, in reality, not just symbolically, often an opponent, and the dance itself is symbolic of a fight. Lorenz's geese -- and these dancers -- quite literally, to employ the Christian metaphor, "turn the other cheek" to their potential opponents in a ritual dance that takes

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<sup>3</sup> Not inappropriate, really, when you consider Paul's metaphor of the Christian soldier and his psychic armoury.



the place of confrontation. To state the dynamic of this pattern semiotically, the "inherent poetic wisdom" of primitive man in this case "inform(s) man's response to his environment" and also leads to his "reforming" of that environment and of himself" (Hawkes 3). These intuitions and patterns of successful evolutionary behaviour are then, through the arts of dance, music, painting (one thinks particularly of the drawings of the ancient Egyptians in their ritual dance posture) and poetry, recast in the form of a "metaphysics of metaphor, symbol and myth" (Hawkes 4) to which even our most highly advanced religious exemplars may refer.

The necessity of controlling and rechannelling the aggressive drive, of transforming it into positive, creative action as Saul's desire to destroy the Christians was transformed by his personal religious experience into an equally intense desire for their continuance and renewal, may by this means be seen to have generated the evolutionary necessity of an 'instinctive' religious drive. The level of experience on which Saul's transformative activity took place may be said to be psychic rather than psychotic on the utilitarian grounds that the ultimate result of the experience has been, by many, adjudged creative rather than destructive. On the further grounds that it is psychic activity which has given rise to all of our species' greatest transformative achievements, it is contended that such activity has a reality both in itself and in its effect upon the

objective world. Inner psychological experience, realized in action, becomes real experience.

In a psychological sense, transformation is made possible when the personal ego wills self-sacrifice in the unselfish interest of an unconscious, collective objective, as when Beowulf resolves to win the treasure for his people, knowing he will be going to his doom. It is advanced by means of the humility and despair engendered by the loss of all self-conscious support, as signified when, in striking at the dragon's head, Beowulf's sword breaks. The penultimate moment of transformation is complete when Beowulf, accepting the help of Wiglaf, kills the dragon, symbolically sacrificing his ego-pride to his highest conscious and unconscious ideals.

The ultimate moment of transformation -- transcendence -- presumably occurs when, after seeing the treasure, Beowulf dies. Presumably, because, for Beowulf as for us, the final transformation is not a 'given,' it is merely a projection of faith and hope. For this reason, the final sacrificial act requires a 'leap of faith' over the obstacle of rational thought, made necessary because Beowulf's ego can never know for sure whether its sacrifice will be validated, just as the contents of the hord, in its original linguistic meaning of "what is hidden," will not be revealed to him until he has given his life to win it. The ego's surrender is a true sacrifice because the potential for tragedy is implicit.

In 1 Corinthians 15:14, St. Paul shows that he is aware of the tremendous risk man takes in staking his whole being on an idea of cosmic transcendence:

And if Christ be not risen, then  
is our preaching vain, and your faith  
is also vain.

However, he goes on in verse 20 to affirm his faith and belief in the reality of that idea:

But now is Christ risen from the dead...

Paul's sense of both danger and certainty seems to be shared by A.C. Bradley in his observation that, in all great tragedy, we become aware of an ultimate spiritual power to which the hero "was never so near...as in the moment when it required his life" (1926: 84). Maud Bodkin conceives this power in psychological terms as "the awakened sense of our common nature in its active emotional phase" (1934: 21), which might be interpreted to mean the conscious recognition of man's collectivity, affirmed in the validity accorded the idea of the cosmic (collective) self. The form of tragedy, therefore, although it involves destruction, does not necessarily require a sense of total devastation, but may carry with it "the suggestion of some continuance or renewal of the strong life that plunges downward into darkness" (Bodkin 1934: 215; cf. Bradley 350). This sense of renewal, essential to the concept of sacrifice as a rite of passage to regeneration, is all-important to the theme of Beowulf.

The ego's arrival upon the middangeard of psychic

experience, like Saul's on the road to Damascus and Beowulf's at Earnanaes, makes possible its vision of and identification with the self (the treasure) as the prototype of its own being. But, just as Saul was struck blind and did not regain his sight until he had obeyed the promptings of his unconscious, and Beowulf could not see the treasure without first heroically killing the dragon, the ego's vision will be fulfilled only when the elemental conflict between thesis and antithesis has been played out to the finish by its archetypal protagonist and antagonist, the leofes and laðes, "the loved and the loathed." The ego, itself in a suspension of will, can be released only with resolution of the conflict. Until then, it must stand, as it were, helplessly by, while its heroic agent, Beowulf's own spirit, allied to its most cherished values, fights against the perversion and negation of these values by a 'false divinity,' a force which his consciousness, though at one time convinced of its validity, has now adjudged evil.

Chief among these threatened values for Beowulf was the ideal of comitas. Love and loyalty between comrades-in-arms has been the mainstay of Beowulf's life. This ideal, even as he fights, is being corroded by the incursion of the Wyrn when, violating every principle for which Beowulf is fighting, his ten companions break ranks and run.

### The Transformation of Value in Beowulf

If the human entity is intrinsically selfish, as biological science contends, if 'the good' is simply the highest displacement of enlightened self-interest, as existential philosophy and anthropology seem to suggest, if, in fact, the 'self' is 'nothing but' the final reality from which consciousness seeks to escape because it prefers the warm fiction of illusion to the cold fact of its own finitude, as orthodox psychology maintains, then what is the purpose of the ideals for which man lives and, in a myriad pathetic or triumphant cases, dies?

Biologists, such as Konrad Lorenz, might say that these ideals have no purpose outside of their context of physical survival; philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and writers such as Iris Murdoch might view them as 'ends in themselves' and see their essential worth as self-determined. But what if physical survival is not the goal and what if, as in the case of Beowulf, those ideals are disintegrating before one's eyes? Then, as one of Tennessee Williams' most disillusioned and triumphant characters has said, "We must still go on."<sup>4</sup> It is in the spirit of such courageous despair that we may interpret Beowulf's final moments.

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<sup>4</sup> Alexandra del Lago in Sweet Bird of Youth.

The cowardly thanes showed neither love nor loyalty, and it has already been contended that this was because their religious instinct chiefly derived from sublimation of the aggressive instinct -- the way of the half-tame warrior; the way, in fact, of the majority. Although he, too, was a warrior, Beowulf was not of that kind. He was the one in twelve free men (and, earlier in his own time, to follow the poet's own progressive groupings, the one in fifteen) who saw another way, who believed in the ideals passed on to him by those others who had gone before him and who, even in his most ferocious and deadly power, could still, in a primordial way, love and respect his enemy. Most likely he knew that his own dearly held values were not truly held by his society; he had seen enough battle for that, and always he had known that it was for Ice ana, "I, alone," to accomplish the work of salvation. But now he is truly all alone, and failing; and the terrible thought must cross his mind: 'What if it's all for nothing?'

Beowulf did not often experience despair. He might, at times, have approached it, as during his battle with the Merewife. However, in that battle, salvation was at hand: he had only to reach for the magic sword and instantly his troubles would be over; this was part of the psychic knowledge and power that accompanied identification of the sword as 'magic.' Part of the ability to make this identification derived from his experience of the world and of reality: in his milieu, the possibility of there being a 'magic sword' was accepted on a deep

psychic level that went beyond the modern popular ascription of power to lucky charms. His belief in this possibility conferred a psychic gift, in that the sight of any sword at all would be accepted as an inspiration to hope, which is equated with salvation. Such belief, whether objectively valid or invalid, could well fuel the struggle for survival and contribute materially to its success. In that earlier battle, success was equated with winning the battle and living to tell about it. Which he did.

The final battle is a different case with reference to the condition of despair. We learn that he feels it, or its precursor, before he even enters the engagement. He does not dwell on these feelings, although they intrude on his consciousness with enough persistence that, the poet tells us, breost innan weoll/ beostrum geponcum, "his breast surged with dark thoughts" (Roberts trans.), a condition which "was not usual to him" (2331-32). He speaks of his life in the world; he recounts history: his early recollections, his allegiances, the patterns he has detected in the world of human interaction. He ponders his own good fortune and the sad fate of others, such as that of King Hrethel and the grieving father of a young hanged man (a fate that might have overtaken his own father and obviated his birth, if Hrothgar, in a spirit of socially affirmed generosity, had not intervened). Most importantly, he reviews and reveals his values.

Besides his adherence to the warrior's code and the

obligations of comitas, implicit in his reconstruction of his relationships with Hrethel and Higelac, Beowulf's respect for bravery and physical courage is revealed in his admiration for these qualities in Daeghrefn. His desire for justice is displayed, ironically, in his justification of the desire, or need, for vengeance with reference to the necessarily unavenged killing of Herebeald; his validation of the code of vengeance establishes it as one of his values even though, to the poet, this might have seemed a pagan value not to be accepted by Christians. In a fundamental sense, it is less important that Beowulf's values are 'pagan' than that the archetypal hero has values, ideas of a transcendent nature that he wishes to project and implant in his community. It is only because he has values that Beowulf can finally be threatened with their destruction. However, since these are the things Beowulf holds most dear, perhaps it is these values which must be sacrificed; indeed, they must be, in order to be transformed into values compatible with the Christian vision of salvation. The merging of classical and Christian mythopoeic elements in The Phoenix provides an illustration of the way such transformation might be effected.



The Phoenix and the Transformative Process in Time

On the fringes of the didacticism present in most Old English poetry were a few voices through which the struggle of conflicting symbologies created a middle ground of psychic activity on which opposing principles met, either to annihilate one another or to form a synthesis by the creation of a new symbol or the recreation of an old. Concurrent with the developing dogma of theologically approved Christian ideology, the legacy of gnosticism provided symbolism that appealed to some minds, particularly those with an empirical bias. Christian gnostics believed it was possible to know and experience God through the attainment of esoteric knowledge and the exercise of the intellect. A mystical faction, the alchemists, believed it possible, through a combination of chemical experimentation and meditation, to effect the perfect union of matter and spirit they imagined to comprise immortality. To such minds, the symbol of the phoenix would appear most compelling.

The poet of The Phoenix (Krapp and Dobbie) was perhaps inspired by the legend recorded of this mythical bird by Lactantius to recreate it as a metaphor of the soul's transformative purpose in the process of rebirth. Present in some form in all of the world's great mythologies, the pattern of rebirth celebrated in pagan festivals is eminently analogous to the Christian vision. S.A.J. Bradley noted that the idea of the phoenix was incorporated into Christian thought via a commentary

on the Old Testament Job 29:18 (285), so the poet may have been working well within conventional lines in creating his metaphor, but even so, his depiction of the phoenix luxuriating in the wynsumum wyrtum, "the winsome garden" (653), of sensuous pleasure comes perilously close to an idea of physical reincarnation or heretical notions of heaven not strictly acceptable to Christian ascetics, while his focus upon the promise of joy, rather than the threat of damnation, marks a departure of sorts from the somewhat morbid perspective of much Old English religious poetry. The stoical "Seafarer" and the worldweary "Wanderer" express more the need for the idea of God than any dynamic transformation effected by such an idea, and the hysterical voice of the "Soul" in Soul and Body II expresses nothing so much as fear; but The Phoenix embraces the possibility of transformation and regeneration with all the Anglo-Saxon's love of earthly life, as well as with considerable rhetorical and imaginative power.

Besides being a vehicle for the Christian message of rebirth and renewal, and apart from its obvious equation with the figure of Christ, the Phoenix may represent the culmination of a psychic process that may be imagined to have begun with the solitary journey of the Seafarer, whose lonely isolation and longing for fulfillment of a spiritual nature at odds with its physical desires is the prelude to the experience of the Wanderer. The Wanderer has effected, either through his own will or the will of destiny, a separation from all earthly ties, and has experienced, by his own account, are.../metudes miltse, "grace...the Lord's

mercy" (1-2). Self-knowledge and the experience of a portion of God's grace have made him wise, but, although he has not succumbed to despair [much, it seems, to his own perplexity (cf. 58-62)], he cannot be said to be happy. At this late stage of psychic development, archetypically represented by the figure of the Old Wise Man, the human soul longs for its objective correlative as the Wanderer longs for his true lord and the ideals of comitas that gave meaning to his life, and as the aged Beowulf desired the treasure. At the same time, the rational mind must hold with ever greater tenacity to its ideals, fighting doubt and fear as Beowulf, at the end of his life, had to fight the Wyrn that threatened the precepts, values and constructs of his kingdom and his own being.

The image of the old warrior, Beowulf, like the image of the Wanderer, is essentially heroic, but it is a tragic heroism that is suggested -- or it would be, without the redeeming cosmic message of Christ. It is this message that the Phoenix poet brings, in a form that admits its possibility for all men, pagan or Christian.

The symbolism of The Phoenix mixes Christian and 'pagan' esoteric teaching in such a way that it permits assent to the possibility of a synthesis. The ocean, the sun, the wynsum wyrt of the earth and the fantastical bird itself may stand for the quaternary of water, fire, earth and air seen by Aristotle and the alchemists as the four basic manifestations of matter and spirit, all of which are represented in Beowulf as well, on his

final battlefield. These elemental forms exist in perfect balance and harmony on that ideal plane where the Phoenix has its genesis; but when the bird enters the 'middle world' of time, as the soul must enter time in its function as the projection of the spiritual element of God, this primordial balance must undergo change because, in accordance with the protoplasmic paradox of life, it is only through change that things can remain constant. The sun stands for that aspect of time and change, and its rising and setting are measured out by the bird into twelve hours, each marked by three beats of its wings. The numbers three and twelve were powerful, mythic numbers in the science of numerology practised by the gnostics and the alchemists, and figured prominently as well in Christian numerology, since Christ spent three days in the tomb and had twelve disciples, and it was most probably with reference to such integers that this mystical relationship of abstract fact and formulation evolved. In this connection, and by virtue of its property of light, the sun also stands for consciousness, the "light in the darkness" of biblical imagery, while the water of the ocean represents the 'sea' of unconsciousness out of which life and consciousness emerged (as the sun is perceived to emerge, as it were, from the sea). This ocean of unconsciousness, perhaps referent to the Deep in Genesis 1:2, is what the bird, the projected spirit of God, crosses on its path to the material realm of time and space. Perhaps a metaphor for the "spiritual body" proposed by St. Paul, the body of the Resurrection, the Phoenix represents the soul as a psychic

entity with a physical form that exists absolutely in a realm of perfect harmony of matter and spirit, beyond time and space, beyond consciousness and unconsciousness.

Once the Phoenix has entered the time-world, it becomes subject to the laws of time: change and decay, the "mutability" consistently observed in Old English poetry. It grows old, though still resplendent, taking on the metaphysical dimension of its physical immersion. In the highest being, that of the most exalted spirit made flesh, such as that of Christ or the Phoenix, the highest element of original purity is retained, and its power is manifest as inspiration, comparable to the idea of the Holy Spirit. In depicting the Phoenix as a 'type of Christ,' the poet mentions the wonder of its physical form, the impulse of some to reproduce, recreate, imitate scyppendes giefes/faegra, "the Creator's beauteous gift" (327-28) in works of art, and the instinct of others to look towards it for guidance. It is a quality associated with the transcendental form of the true Cross by the dreamer of Dream of the Rood. Beowulf also contains this inspiring numen, which has a critical effect on the Danish coastguard, who immediately trusts him and recognizes him as a natural leader of men.

In The Phoenix, men and birds are one, symbolically and poetically, in their universal recognition of the transcendent image of perfection. Yet, while the birds may be said to represent the souls of men, the reference to men in the poem may signify the poet's awareness of an aspect of man's psychic being

that stands in apposition to his soul but is not totally to be identified with it: that is, his rational mind (the mens, as opposed to the anima). This aspect of the mind must be overcome in order for rebirth to be possible, either actually or imaginatively, because the rational mind does not readily assent to the plausibility of rebirth. The self-immolation of the Phoenix, when its course of time has run, signifies complete and willing submission to the supra-rational process for which it was designed. The burning, which also takes place in Beowulf, suggests something about the nature of that process, which involves a destruction of certain elements of being in order to recreate and renew these same elements. The transforming fire both annihilates and achieves total consciousness; the dust and ashes of transformation are the elemental material of rebirth [a mystical equation that might appeal to modern chemists, since it is repeated in the physical world in the sense that ashes are a form of carbon, which is itself the matrix of life (Asimov 182)]. The spirit of the Phoenix rises from the indestructible, fertile material residue and uses it as the foundation of its renewed psycho-physical life, which proceeds through symbolic stages that closely parallel those of both pagan and Christian mythology: from the apple and the worm (signifying, in part, knowledge and its antithesis); to the form of a bird idealised by alchemy, the eagle, an Anglo-Saxon tribal symbol, associated in conventional metaphor with strength (Donaldson 103 n.1) and the inspiriting numen of the place name, Earnanaes; and, finally, beyond both

symbolologies, to the fulfillment which is also a new beginning, the original entity.

In Anglo-Saxon times, the story of the phoenix was both living legend and myth. There is some evidence in the poem to suggest that the poet might have believed in it quite literally (see l. 424, where he refers to the scholars who declared it to be truth) but whether he did or not is really of little relevance because, like all myth, the phoenix symbol seems to have burst out of some deep reservoir of form by the kinesis of the religious instinct as an expression of a psychic fact that continually recreates its own laws and patterns in and through the imaginative faculty of man. In drawing the implicit parallel between the Phoenix legend and the story of Christ, the poet was consciously recognizing a recurring symbolic pattern, which he adapted to his own intuitive vision. Unlike previous versions of the myth and unlike, in fact, most Old English poetry (particularly the tales of the Saints) it focuses upon life, rather than simply the embrace of death, as the true goal of the unconscious, heroic, intrinsically religious quest, and this life it presents in all its sensory joy. The beauties of the land, on which the Seafarer, like Adam, must turn his back, are not negated but regained, and the steadfast faith of the Wanderer is vindicated in joyous reawakening to the fulfillment of the pleasures he thought lost forever -- if, in the Phoenix, soul and body may be seen to be reunited in a vision of immortality that restores the physical dimension to which the Anglo-Saxon mind and

spirit were inalienably attracted. In the realm of his poem, beneath the strong didactic voice, within the symbolism and through the compelling metaphor itself, the Phoenix poet, using and recreating a high pagan symbol, did create the conceptual possibility of a fusion of body and soul that bridges the gulf between reason and faith and allows for the willing suspension of argument in the contemplation of synthesis.

The Phoenix provides a mythic scenario whereby the struggles of the archetypal hero might be seen to lead to perfection in the archetypal form of psycho-physical wholeness, God or the self, without being negated by the fact of death, by transforming the idea of death into a process of rebirth rather than a final reality. In this case, the dynamic embrace of death becomes a necessity to the process of transformation. This, in essence, is what both St. Paul and Jung also attempted to prove possible -- along, one supposes, with countless idealistic thinkers before and after them. That these two men, who, like the Phoenix poet, were artists in their own fields, did succeed in translating the notion of a transmutation of physical fact into a compelling metaphysical fiction that appeals not only to the wishful imagination but also to rational thought, is a measure of their individual powers of intuition and reason; their conclusions incorporate a synthesis of mystical and empirical awareness. That one might perhaps want to accept these conclusions might militate against the probability of final acceptance without in any way denying the attraction of the idea as possibility.



A similar ambivalence may be imagined in the attitude of the Beowulf poet towards this conundrum, since he was faced with the same problem and essentially the same proposed resolution. On the empirical side, there was the hard evidence of corruption and mutability, the sort of irrefutable evidence that led the poet of Soul and Body II (Krapp and Dobbie) to struggle morbidly and hopelessly with the idea that these two components of human being were inseparable, dependent upon one another for their existence. The fate of the soul, that poet suggests, is inextricably bound up with the body; the body, indeed, says the soul, though it is wyrmcynna baet wyrrest, "the worst kind of snake" (79) will for unc bu ondwyrdan scealt/ on þam miclan dæge, "have to answer for us both in that great day" (82-83) -- although from reading the poem it is difficult to see how the body will be able to answer for anything since it is destined to be wyrmes giefel, "worms' food" (119).<sup>5</sup>

Such morbid imagery does not permeate Beowulf, unless we choose to see the reference to the wyrmhord as implicitly presenting the same idea (as well it might, though more dynamically). Yet, if the Beowulf poet is not overtly obsessed with the image of worms gnawing the body, the pagan frame of Beowulf establishes an existential condition in which Christian salvation does not operate, and this possibility may throw into doubt all certainty of salvation from the final fact of death, a

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<sup>5</sup> Unless, of course, that is the answer.

doubt to which Christ, as the pioneer of the Christian faith, was also subject. However, I think the Beowulf poet faced this doubt squarely, without shrinking from its nihilistic postulation, when he did not sentimentally rescue the hero from his pagan fate.

The immortality the poet confers upon Beowulf is not that conceived by the Christian consciousness, but is simply that of the pagan, that is, fame. Although Beowulf sees himself as going to join his ancestors, the Waegmundings, there is no sense of joy in this reunion; rather, there is a sense of finality and doom in the kenning metodsceaft (2815, cf. 1077, 1180), which Klaeber glosses as a noun, "decree of fate, death," and Hall, in his Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, also lists as, to methodscafte, "to die." Chambers' interpretation is "appointed doom," while Roberts translates this compound word as "predestined end," retaining the finality but including the notion of predestination with its necessary implementer, the 'ordainer of fate' implied in the element Metod; this takes the perception closer to that of the more didactic Christian consciousness of the poet, if not close enough to provide full Christian consolation for the fact of Beowulf's death. It can be seen that the poet is well aware of the possibility that death might very conceivably be dreamleas, "joyless," and that, to the consciousness of Beowulf, it was probably perceived in this way. For Beowulf, at least, fantasies of transcendental joy did not exist.

On the other hand, this might not have been true for the poet, who was heir to a theological and philosophical tradition

that completely contradicted the realistic fatalism of Beowulf's speech with the assertion of an astonishing implausibility. The Christian poet was committed to the idea of joyous immortality of spirit and body, to their integration and perfection in final reconciliation with a personal God. While formally retaining the pagan world view for the poem's characters, he has nevertheless suggested the dynamic of such a relationship in Beowulf, both directly (perhaps superficially) through the didactic interpolations, and indirectly (though more fundamentally) through his poetic language and symbolism. In doing this, he has suggested ways in which Beowulf himself might participate in this process, by identifying basic similarities between the Geat hero and Christ, and by effectively transforming him, through the transformative fire of his funeral pyre and in the perception and words of his followers, so that he rises, like the Phoenix, to become a Christian prototype. In this final sense, in his final form as the Old Wise Man, the pagan hero may be thought to have transcended his milieu.

### **The Transformative Experience and the Soul**

The transformative pattern and process is fundamental to Beowulf as to any understanding of existence, at least when that existence is experienced in the temporal world. However, the

Beowulf poet did not deal just with the physical world of saela ond maela; he dealt also with the world of the spirit, experienced by the soul, and here again he found the transformative process to be integral. The substantial body of Anglo-Saxon writing dealing with this theme indicates that, in accordance with Augustine's equation of the soul with the mind (i.e., memory, understanding and will), the relationship of the soul to the transformative experience was elemental to the poetic understanding of psychic being and intrinsic to its understanding of the nature of the mind.

The purpose of the soul's action (i.e., its passion) was perceived to be to transform the whole human entity into a "spiritual body," as St. Paul suggested was demonstrably possible for all men through contemplation and emulation of the experience of Christ. In this process, the soul was understood to be an entity that journeys through, and finally transcends, time; and it seems as if time was understood intuitively by the Anglo-Saxons much as it is understood rationally today: as a contingent function of matter, space and perception. This may be illustrated with reference to four Old English poems from the Exeter Book, three of which deal most particularly with the journey of the soul through and beyond time: Soul and Body II, The Seafarer, The Wanderer, and The Phoenix. By juxtaposition with Beowulf, these works help to clarify the process of psychophysical transformation as either intuited or rationalized by Anglo-Saxon consciousness. That these were a highly conscious

race, and conscious of their consciousness, is a hypothesis that must emerge from reading these poems.

A poetic fascination with the nature of mind permeates the poetry of the Old English period; much as the nature of thought moves from simple to complex truth, the latter elucidating and ultimately returning to the former (a process best expressed by T.S. Eliot's line, "our end is our beginning"), Old English poetry incorporates intuitive as well as rational processes in its depiction of that reflective self-awareness which forms the basis of the specifically human consciousness.

That philosophical speculations on the nature of the mind had attained a high level through the writings of Augustine and Alcuin, and that their conceptual formulations influenced the poets of The Wanderer and The Seafarer, has been persuasively argued by Peter Clemons in his article, "Mens absentia cogitans in The Seafarer and The Wanderer." Clemons' contention that the Christian religious consciousness informed the development of both poetic and philosophical notions of mind (62) is a very important point in the understanding of Old English poetic codices, and this consciousness may be said to be the prevailing influence upon much of the extant corpus of Old English writing.

On the other hand, religious consciousness, independent of dogma, may be said to be a factor in all human creative endeavors in the sense that religious consciousness is a function of the human mind and represents a mode of understanding and organizing experience with reference to those abstractions which the mind,

by its own intrinsic nature, "thinking intensely of distant things," (Clemoes 63), affirms to have a reality independent of, and yet reflected in, the immediate, empirical world. It may be from this source that symbols derive, or are created, and in this context symbols are, as Jung contended, "the living facts of [psychic] life" (CW 8: 152). So, while the ideas of Augustine or Alcuin may be said to reconstruct (or, arguably, deconstruct) the rational, if not the emotional, foundation of Anglo-Saxon poetic inspiration, these accepted perceptions are reflected in the poetry itself through the symbolism and patterns by which the poets constructed objective correlatives of their own subjective processes. The poetic representations of creative, individual minds that suggest themselves irresistibly as examples of this process are The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Phoenix. Like Beowulf, all three attempt a synthesis in which physical reality takes on metaphysical meaning (an impetus that is as much a product of the religious function as of the poetic) and all three use the four elements -- earth, air, fire and water -- as relatively stable symbols of the abstract notions of materiality, spirit, consciousness and unconsciousness that suggest themselves as the basic component of psycho-physical being.

In supposing these parallels between the four elemental manifestations of matter [as it can be said to have appeared to the pre-scientific (though far from 'primitive') mind] and the properties of psyche as identified by a thinker such as Augustine, one is admittedly upon very shaky ground, not least

because the theories of mind advanced by the early Christian apologists inevitably took on a three-fold, or trinitarian, aspect, doubtless in imitation of the Trinity. However, it seems that for the poetic consciousness the masculine, immaterial Trinity was a somewhat inadequate symbol. Though ascribed to intellectually and affirmed formally, it seems to have been augmented in the best poetry by the vivid affirmative representation of the feminine, or material, element omitted from the image of the Godhead presented by Christian theologians. This subliminal conflict contributes much to the tension of Old English poetry.

Even as they assert and affirm most forcefully the same intellectual argument advanced by Paul, Augustine, and the poet of Soul and Body II, the poets of The Wanderer, The Seafarer, and The Phoenix, like the poet of Beowulf, depict physical, sensual life as compellingly real and attractive, though often painful. The Seafarer's description of the city life he purports to despise and the land that he rejected in favour of wandering on the iscealdne sae (14) conveys the intense pleasure and pain the writer found in earthly things, suggesting what the much later English philosophers John Locke and Jeremy Bentham emphatically contended, that it is through the experience of both pain and pleasure that man knows himself to be alive, and it is by this measure that human actions may be said to be governed. Yet, it is precisely this materiality of being, manifest in the

experience of pure physical sensation, that the Anglo-Saxon Christian was urged to deny.

The explicit reason for this denial, most clearly expressed in the ubi sunt motif of The Wanderer, was the transitory nature of all material reality. Swa baes middangeard/ealra dogra gehwan dreoseð ond fealleþ, "thus, on each and every day, this middle-world decays and falls" (62b-63) -- and since this is so, the arguments implies, it is best not to become too attached to it. This rhetoric naturally provokes contradiction by the "eat drink and be merry" faction, who counter with the hedonistic injunction, carpe diem, and so the dialectic proceeds.

Dogmatic, didactic, or desperately pragmatic injunctions aside, The Seafarer and The Wanderer represent stages in the resolution of the conflict that impels individuation, a process described in ancient esoteric systems and in modern psychology. The Phoenix represents the culmination of this psychic process, which begins with the solitary journey of the Seafarer, when the individual mind, having become aware of its own processes and its essential difference -- its separation -- from purely physical nature, is impelled to embark on a voyage of self-discovery, to answer the sodgyied, the "true riddle" of its 'self,' in the regions of unconsciousness symbolized by the sea. With advanced consciousness, the Seafarer becomes the Wanderer, a revered figure of esoteric lore, comparable to the Hermit of the Tarot, as well as to the pilgrim of later medieval literature and the Old Wise Man, the archetype of transcendence in Jung's



psychology. His purpose is self-discovery and, through self-discovery, experience of God (divinity) -- which, according to Augustine's treatise, De Trinitate, is contained within man in the form of his mind.

Beowulf, too, is a seafarer and, at the end of his long life, as he sits apart from his men on the headland, an Old Wise Man and a solitary like the Wanderer. Although a warrior and a sensual man, not usually given to introspection, he is, nevertheless, relentlessly engaged in symbolic conflicts that enact the continuous process of individuation, and his heroic accomplishment of this goal (for it is by no means an easy battle) is, as has been contended throughout, the subject of the poem.

Thinking of the poem Beowulf as representing a totality of individual and collective human experience, of Beowulf the hero as a manifestation of the libidinal will to life and simultaneously as agent of the heroic ego's conscious struggle to maintain its life and being, and of the other forms as representations of other elements of the fragmented psyche,<sup>6</sup> it is possible to see the patterns of action in the poem as symbolic enactments of psychic processes that lead to the resolution of the life cycle. This resolution would ideally complete, or perfect, man's total being, but the notion of perfection or

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<sup>6</sup> I.e. those forces which may be perceived as positive (such as the Soul/Sword or the Treasure) or negative (such as the Monsters or the Wyrm).

completion, as thus understood, might seem necessarily to include two apparent antitheses: the desire of the libido to continue to live versus the empirical fact of death, which seems to negate this libidinal desire.

### Death in Beowulf

Beginning with a funeral by water and ending with one by fire, the movement of Beowulf is circumscribed by death. The alpha and omega of the poem, death stands in apposition to the actualized life of Beowulf as a constant and determining factor of his existence. In the world of Beowulf, death is the gryre-giest, "the terrible stranger" (2560) that is, nevertheless, as intimate and personal as life itself.

Death is a problem of human consciousness. Indeed, it may be that it is the problem of consciousness, in that the awareness of death is thought to be peculiar to man, who, observing the phenomenon in nature and in other men, must finally project its inevitability for himself.

Still, confronting the undeniable temporal reality of death, the human mind seems by nature impelled to deny its absolute reality. Ernest Becker, following Aristotle, theorizes that man's whole life is centred upon the fact of death, and argues in his book The Denial of Death that all human neuroses and psychoses derive from the attempt of our consciousness to escape

from this final reality. The Ghost Dance, by Weston LaBarre, contends, at some length and with impressive supporting argument, that religion is the psychological product of man's response to the trauma of confronting this final fact. For the religious man, even to speculate upon, or speak about, his darkest fears without reference to the hope of immortality provided by the idea of God may be a risk, and this risk is experienced by the poet in his role as "Shaper."

Saussure's theory of the "signified" (Hawkes 25-26) effectively states what John Gardner suggests in Grendel, when the scop transforms ignominious defeat into heroic victory in his song: that the Shaper's power to recreate mundane reality in symbols or words (which immediately involves distortion or 'reification' to some degree) is also a power to create a new kind of reality. Like the poet, the religious figure must experience more intensely than most people the dangerous hubris of the mind, its susceptibility to inflation through its power to create 'gods' by whose precepts the course of human history may be affected, because it is the fundamental role of the religious figure to assuage the fear that overtakes people at the prospect of death and annihilation.

In this context, the idea of death exercises a powerful, perhaps fatal, attraction for human consciousness, one that seems to have been crystallized by the poet in his description of the wyrnhord:

Sinc eape maeg,  
gold on grund(e) gumcynnes gehwone  
oferhigian, hyde se þe wylle! (2764-66)

Treasure, gold in the earth, can easily get  
the better of any man, hide though he will!

The 'problem' of death is amplified by the awful fact that man can know absolutely nothing about death 'in itself.' This problem of unknowing is central to Beowulf. Although the poet postulates that the dead journey on Frean wære, "into the keeping of the Lord [perhaps Frey <sup>7</sup>] (27), on þæs Waldendes wære, "into the keeping of the Ruler" (3109). or, perhaps, on feonda gewæld, "into the power of devils" (808), he must, at the very outset, admit that:

Men ne cunnon  
secgan to soðe, seleraedende  
haeleð under heofenum, hwa þæm hlaeste onfeng.  
(50-52)

Men do not know, to say as a truth, neither the  
counsellors in the hall nor the heroes under the  
heavens, who received that cargo.

This absolute mystery is a challenge to human consciousness as well as a goad to fear. In attempting to resolve it, perhaps some people are led to create philosophical and theological systems depicting death as a desirable goal towards which humanity, as a physical and psychic entity, is (irresistibly, in any case) moving. Christianity affirms the possibility of another,

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<sup>7</sup> Idiosyncratic as this aside may seem, it reflects the contention of Brian Branston that the word frea, used 17 times in Beowulf, implies a "memory of Frey," as, he further contends, does the word Frean in The Dream of the Rood (139).

better life after death; the Christian poet of Beowulf must, therefore, see death as a positive spiritual advancement, not something to be feared but something to be, quite literally, embraced:

Wel bið þaem þe mot  
 aefter deaðdaege      Drihten secean  
 ond to Faeder faeþmum      freoðo wilnian! (186-88)

Well is it for him who, after his death-day,  
 may seek the Lord and find peace in the embrace  
 of the Father.

On the other hand, the opposite possibility remains equally strong and infinitely more imaginable:

Wa bið þaem ðe sceal  
 purh sliðe nið      sawle bescufan  
 in fyres faeþm,      frofre ne wenan,  
 wihte gewendan! (183-86)

Woe is it with him who must violently impel  
 his soul through the cruel abyss<sup>8</sup> into the  
 embrace of fire, expecting no comfort, no change  
 at all!

We can see here, through the well-established device of negative definition, how important, how central, the idea of change was to the Anglo-Saxons' sustaining notion of continuance and renewal, and we must also bear in mind that the poet might have imagined this latter fate for his hero. Imagination is a key word in this metaphysical equation, and one of the other possible meanings of the verb wenan, here translated as "expecting." Wenan can also mean "to hope" or "to despair," but,

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<sup>8</sup> See John R. Clark Hall A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, p. 251 for this possible meaning of nið.

of course, "to imagine" subsumes all these meanings and adds a dimension which, though less definite, is also less limited. All possibilities exist within the imaginative projection, and the power to create sustaining alternate possibilities, the poetic function as well as the religious, is essentially a power of the imagination. However, despite his own power to imagine the embrace of God as a desirable possibility, the poet was well aware that a man who loves life and lives it fully, as Beowulf did, is naturally reluctant to undertake that sorhful sið, "sorrowful journey." As Jung observed in one of his last works, Modern Man in Search of a Soul, "life's cessation, that is, death, can only be acceptable as a goal when existence is so wretched that we are glad for it to end" (111). Such was the case with King Hrethel, whose life grew so empty and painful through the death of one son at the hand of another that:

He ða mid þære sorhge,      þe him to sar belamp,  
gumdream ofgeaf,      Godes lecht geceas;  
eæferum laefde,      swa deað eadig mæn,  
lond ond leodbyrig,      þa he of life gewat (2468-71).

Because of this sorrow, which had too painfully befallen him, he gave up the joys of men; he chose the light of God; to his sons he left, as wealthy men do, his lands and fortifications, when he departed his life.

This suggests suicide and the death-wish, most provocatively expressed by Shakespeare:

World, world, O world!  
But that thy strange mutations make us hate thee,  
Life would not yield to age (King Lear, IV, i, 10-12).

Edgar's notion that death is, finally, an act of volition is suggested in Beowulf by the launching of Scyld's funeral ship, as if he were going on a journey, and by Beowulf's own wilful engagement in his final battle.

The sense of a mystical complicity between the individual and his own death may be said to derive from physiological fact: the body does die and decay, and it may seem inevitable, as it did to the author of Soul and Body II, that the psyche, which is grounded in the body, will not only share the fate of the body but must finally embrace it. It may be that religious consciousness, translating this physical fact into metaphysical terms, attempts to find, or create, meaning in the paradox of attraction and revulsion that is associated with the idea of death, a paradox expressed by the compound wyrnþord, which stands for the treasure in its most dangerous form. Tormented beyond endurance by the sight of his father's mutilation, Edgar's outcry expressed the desire of consciousness to have control over death in claiming its decision to "yield," as well as the conscious and unconscious idea that death provides a desirable escape from the manifest evil in the world. However, Edgar's agony, and that of Hrethel, is possibly not the case for most people. It was certainly not so for Beowulf, whose life was marked by vigour and triumph, and whose contemplation of his own impending doom filled him at first with þeostrum geþoncum, "gloomy thoughts" (2332), though at the last with a sense of completion.

The ambivalence of the poem's attitude towards death

reflects the conflict of ego-consciousness with ideology. It expresses as well a conflict within the libido itself, which, at a certain point in its life cycle, seems to be striving forward and backward at the same time. Although the energy of the libido by definition must manifest a constant movement towards life, evolution and creation (the direct opposite of the negation represented by the fact of death), this same energy, at a certain point, seems to will its own involution. The poet illustrates the dynamic of this psychic bi-polarity in the heroic personality by contrasting youth and old age.

In his youth, Beowulf was able to face the fact of death primarily because he saw it as an external power, an objective form that appears as the deorc deapscua, "the dark shadow of death" (160), Grendel, who nimeð, "takes away" (cf. 441, 447, 1491), warriors in the midst of their sensual joy. Such a view is 'primitive' in the same sense that a child's mentality is primitive: although it envisions death with a certain instinctual integrity, recognizing its darkness and its random inevitability, it also sees death as separate from the personal ego. Friends, relatives and lovers are "taken away" from the individual, who, although he can project from their manifest fate the possibility of his own death, does not, in any real sense, yet confront it as probability, much less as inevitability.

The deaths of others, enemies or loved ones, are, in a certain sense, the category into which all known experience of death falls, because death is something that can only be observed



in, or reported of, others. Ultimately, for all but himself, the death of Beowulf, like that of Scyld, is a reported death. The funerals of both Scyld and Beowulf, like all funerals, emphasize this absolute experiential separation, because funerals, while they may sometimes (not, as in the case of Beowulf, always) take into account the express wishes of the dead, are actually rituals for the living, to exorcise their fear and grief.

From the observation of death in others, the individual moves, as Beowulf did, to the recognition of the possibility of his own inevitable death.<sup>9</sup> For Beowulf, this moment was precipitated by the attack of Grendel's mother, in whose deadly embrace he first experienced despair. He was rescued from that paralyzing state by the vision of the magic sword, the soul-image by which his heroic nature was empowered to reassert itself; but the impact of that moment remained with him, to be heightened by Hrothgar's final exhortation. Death will come, Hrothgar warns him, and not in some nebulous future, but soon:

Nu is þines maegnes blaed  
 ane hwile; eft sona bið,  
 þæt þec adl oððe ecg, eafopes getwæfed,  
 oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm  
 oððe gripe moces, oððe gares fliht,  
 oððe atol ylðo; oððe eagna bearhtm  
 forsited and forsworced; semninga bið,  
 þæt þec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyded (1761-68).

Now shall the fullness of thy strength last for  
 awhile. But soon it shall be that malady or sword  
 shall cut thee off from power, or the embrace of

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<sup>9</sup> Considering the "possibility" of an "inevitability," one is reminded of the wisdom of the late William Saroyan, whose last words reportedly were, "I always knew that death was inevitable, but I always thought that I would be the exception."

fire or welling of a flood, or onset with the knife, or arrow's flight, or hideous old age. Or brightness of eyes shall diminish and grow dim, and at length it shall be that death shall overpower thee, noble chieftain! (Hall trans.)

To Hrothgar, facing his own death in atol yldo, "hideous old age," the relativity of time is thrown into sharp relief, and his ominous sona, an echo of St. Paul, is less a cautionary prediction than an expression of the shortness of time when seen from the far end of the continuum. His own time has run its course, and its wear and tear on the body is painfully evident to him. A controlling theme of the poem, the contrast between youth and age incorporates the temporal and physical elements of phenomenological death, those elements by which it is gumum undyrne, "manifest to men" (127).

Although the idea of death, once fully assimilated, inspires fear in the most heroic spirit, as indeed it did in Beowulf, the insupportable nature of that fear generates the impetus to find some means of transcendence, simply in order to live. At first, this might be accomplished by repression of the fear itself (Becker 20), in which case it will inevitably return in the form of the 'monsters' that haunt the dreams of children and the folk-tales of adults.

For the pagan Beowulf, as for the Christian poet, the idea of death was externalized by making it the focal point of an ideology. Thus, before he actually confronted the immediate possibility of his own death at the hands of the Merewife,

Beowulf could refer to that death utterly without fear, even with arrogance:

Ure aeghwylc sceal      ende gebidan  
 worolde lifes;      wyrce se þe mote  
 domes aer deape;      þaet bið drihtguman  
 unlifgendum      aafter selest (1387-89).

Each of us must endure the end of this  
 world's life; let him who may win glory  
 before death; that will be best for the  
 warrior, after he is dead.

Despite the pragmatic utility of this perspective, Beowulf's acknowledgement of death here is purely intellectual, deriving from the heroic code which, based upon the necessary will to a glorious death in battle, idealized the fact of death until it lost its personal significance. Although this allowed him to function well enough in situations over which he had control, such as in his battle with Grendel, it failed on an elemental level in those situations in which he found himself out of his natural element, confronting a hostile force more powerful than himself, as in the Merewife's lair. At that point, something more was needed, perhaps some awareness of a power greater, not only than himself, but than the manifest power of death. He found this in the marvellous sword that miraculously appeared at the nadir of his own powers. But nothing could prevent his final, fatal confrontation with the Wyrme.

**Transformation Symbolism: the Draca and the Hord**

Although the Draca or Wyrn in Beowulf has set its force directly in opposition to the desire of God and man by seeking to destroy or pervert the creations of both, its existence may still be seen as necessary to the achievement of transformation and unity with reference to Eriugena's ideas of "condition" and the purpose of the "binary oppositions" so often noted in the poem, because these factors indicate that the experience of good is not possible without evil and man's separation from god. So, although in its symbolic role the Wyrn stands for both the projection of Beowulf's ego-pride and his psyche's will towards death, and is committed to the destruction of existing psychic forms (whether they are identified by the ego as 'good' or 'evil'), in its dual role as both the necessary or 'fated' instrument of sacrifice and the sacrificial beast, the Wyrn, as Draca, also incorporates what Jung terms the "numen of the transformative act as well as the transformative substance itself" (1962: 436). In this aspect, the Draca may be seen as a means of Beowulf's transformation, or transmutation, from natural to spiritual body. Its function is to separate Beowulf's soul from his body.

The dualistic view taken by St. John and the gnostics, in which body and spirit are elementally opposed and it is the spirit alone which lives forever, is reflected in two common Anglo-Saxon oral formulae used in Beowulf. The alliterative

pairs feorh and flaesch, "soul" and "flesh," lif and lice, "life" and "body," suggest that the fleshly body can be left behind, as a snake sheds its skin, in the transformation from physical to spiritual forms of life:

|                   |                              |
|-------------------|------------------------------|
| se ðone gomelan   | wyrd ungemete neah,          |
| secean sawle hord | gretan sceolde               |
| lif wið līce;     | sundur gedaelan              |
| feorh aepelīnges  | no þon lange waes            |
|                   | flaesche bewunden (2420-24). |

Fate was violently near, impelled  
to seek out the old man, the treasure  
of his soul,  
to separate life from body;  
no longer was the hero's life spirit  
contained by flesh.

The most telling word from this passage is the word gedaelan, "to separate," which is also used to great effect in combination with the alliterative pair lif wið līce, when Grendel mynte þæt he gedaeīde...lif wið līce, "intended that he would separate the life from the body" (731-33) of the warriors in Heorot. The word in this context has negative connotations, as, in everyday modern use, the word "separate" often carries a negative charge. However, the Anglo-Saxon verb, daelan, as glossed by Klaeber and in Hall's dictionary, has multiple, paradoxical meanings, combining "divide, part, fight" with "share, bestow, take part." Another meaning of the word, perhaps its most significant metaphysical form, is "diffuse." Because its opposing connotative and denotative meanings move towards one another in an intelligible semiotic pattern, so that

one can understand how "divide" and "share" can be contained in the same word, daelan is a fine linguistic example of enantiodromia.

The use of this word in connection with a formulaic reference to the process or meaning of death provides occasion for reflection on the process of separation (gedal) itself, so necessary to the transformative process and to the formation of individuality. The "solitary journey" that an individual makes towards his death, like the journey in quest of individuation (which word itself negates the Latin dividere, "to divide"), implies a process of continuing separation in which all three instincts play their parts. The aggressive instinct, by impelling man to assert himself, effectively separates him from the limitations of his environment; the sexual instinct, by generating in the first place the original two-out-of-one, separates male from female and, paradoxically, by impelling them towards one another in enantiodromia, effectively separates them through their union from independent existence; the religious instinct, by focusing dynamically upon death, seeks ultimately to separate the individual from attachment to life. These processes attract the energy of the life instinct, or libido, because it is only through division, separation, and their resultant transformations that life can continue. The perceived evil of this primary division (suggested in the transformation of the Greek diabolin, "two" to diabolos, "devil") is projected onto the symbol of the dragon (draca). The dragon is, nevertheless,

perceived to be necessary to the realization of the treasure (awareness of the self) in the same sense that the pain of separation and fragmentation is understood to be necessary to a final conscious apprehension of absolute unity (symbolon) of being. As Yeats has said, "nothing can be sole or whole/that has not been rent" or, to state this theologically, man could not love (i.e. yearn for union) with God if he has never known separation from that transcendental entity.

The Wanderer, who has come to final awareness and acceptance of his own essential separation from all earthly attachments, "through grace and by empirical evaluation of the world through which he wanders, to a redeeming insight" (S.A.J. Bradley: 320) presents this insight not as dogma, but as the culmination of a psychic process and a legacy to the future. By such legacies, oral or written, which incorporate symbols and patterns that express the highest and lowest elements of its composition, the consciousness of a race grows.

Rejection of the body may be a 'logical' emotional/philosophical offshoot of dualistic perception. However, in his vision of the spiritual body, St. Paul seems to suggest a necessary reunion of the body and spirit that implies a kind of rebirth [perhaps subsequent to a return to the womb of the "terrible mother," who, in some myths, is also a dragon (CW 18: 91)]. It may be that, beneath all the differentiation of function by which life proceeds, the dragon finally represents the primary material of Mother Nature (Mater Natura), the fecund

ground of material being and the physical base of the animate entity's energetic spirit. In classical and pagan systems of thought, the mythic mating of the Sky God and the Earth Goddess and the resulting generation of all living being, reflects this notion. In Christian thought, where the figure of God the Father may be the symbolic projection of the transcendental unity of being that Jung calls the "self," the conjunction of masculine spirit and feminine matter (or body) is a natural implication of the Incarnation.

If the 'mother' is the receptacle of being and the 'father' the pure energy of creation, it seems logical (if logic can be said to play any role in esoteric argument) to assume that both must be present in divine union in order for perfect being to exist. So, too, must the cycle of transformative rebirth. The energy of creation demands change and growth, or evolution, while the ground of receptivity demands the return to inertia, to involution; both these demands are satisfied by the rebirth pattern. As the explosion of a dying star releases the primary particles of life, or the splitting of an atom creates energy out of 'dead' matter, matter may be transformed into spiritual bodies which, if the scientific metaphor were to be pursued, must be transposed into material bodies once again in a cycle of 'eternal life.'

The poet of Beowulf suggests such a pattern in the enantiodromia of the opposing principles of fire and ice, which expresses the same synergistic intuition. The polarization of



the male and female principles represented by the fire (masculine, energetic, conscious) and water (feminine, material, unconscious) and the poet's constant attempts to reconcile them, from the fyr on flode, "fire on the water" (1366) of the dreadful mere in the Merewife episode to the brynewylm, "fire-flood" (2326, of the dragon's breath, to the structural motif provided by the funerals of Scyld and Beowulf, all indicate the poet's intense feeling that these apparently irreconcilable opposites must be resolved (that is, they must co-exist in perfect balance and in their totalities) in order for perfect being to exist. The same is also true of the other opposing physical principles of earth and air, represented in this final moment by the cave of the dragon and the place name of the battlefield, Earnanaes, "Eagle Headland." Both pairs have as their metaphysical counterparts the abstract notion of 'feminine' matter and 'masculine' spirit. When these antinomies meet in the irresistible movement of one opposite towards its counterpart, symbolized by the conflict of Beowulf and the Wyrn, the meeting must inevitably be accomplished by collision. The aim of each part of the whole, like the 'aim' of the protons and electrons that combine in the countless reformations (transformations) that give rise to new forms in the physical world, must be either to annihilate with or succumb to one another. In the act of love, the sacrifice of exclusive identity will be made; in the act of war, the fight is to the death.

Beowulf and the Wyrn meet in an act of war necessitated by the ego's involvement in the process of being and becoming. Because consciousness perceives in terms of opposites, ego-consciousness is continually forced to make choices; in order to validate these choices the ego must assign them a value, or lack of value, that reflects its own reality. The hero, as agent of the ego, must act accordingly. Then the dilemma arises: annihilation has been perceived as an evil, so the hero must fight against it; but self-sacrifice -- or the sacrifice of the self known to consciousness -- in the service of an ideal is considered by the heroic consciousness (ego) to be a good. The ego finds itself in a position of stasis, followed by involution.

This moment is signified in Beowulf by the dragon's bite. The bite of the dragon is a ritual requirement of the archetype of transformation, the pattern of creative change which may be said to have begun for the last time in Beowulf's life when his decision to undertake the final battle was made. Although this archetypal pattern may arise at any point when an "unsatisfactory psychic situation must be replaced with a satisfactory one" (Jung 1958: 223), it is of particular relevance to the religious experience, which converts the internal psychological process of individuation to an out-reaching desire for transcendence. That Beowulf is a religious figure is a central assumption of the following discussion, which proposes to focus on the transformative power of the religious personality upon the society it both arises from and purports to serve.

The dragon, in part representing Beowulf's animal nature, his body, may be understood from a religious perspective to be the final inhibitor of his personal transcendence. The necessity of enduring the bite of the dragon without identifying with it (and thus becoming obsessed with it, as in the case of the mythic werwulf) and without running away (CW 12: 138) parallels the necessary meeting of both consciousness and the unconscious in the inevitable fact of death, embodied in the Wyrn.

However, the obvious identification of the Wyrn as the embodiment of death in Beowulf is complicated (or, in John Donne's metaphysics, perhaps, illuminated) by the fact that the same fate which has drawn Beowulf towards the treasure operates upon the Wyrn as well, because:

|                     |                         |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
|                     | He gesecean sceall      |
| (ho)r(d on) hrusan, | paer he haeðen gold     |
| warað wintrum frod; | ne byð him wihte ðy sel |
|                     | (2275-77).              |

He was fated to seek out the hoard under the earth, where, old in winters, he must keep watch over the heathen gold, - and be not one whit the better for it (Hall trans.).

Since both are fated to die in the struggle for the treasure, it is equally certain that, while the Wyrn may embody death for Beowulf, the converse also applies. This is an implication of the similarities between the two [like the Wyrn, Beowulf is also frod, "old" (2209), had ruled his people for fiftig wintra, "fifty winters" (2209) and when he carried into battle waepen wund(r)um heard; naes him wihte ðe sel, "a weapon wondrous hard, he was not one whit the better for it" (2687)].

Because of their integral identification, the Wyrn may be seen as a mirror image of Beowulf's human nature, and most particularly of that element in him which was understood to be the cause of his own death, not just of the body but also of the spirit. In this context, the dragon reflects the negative aspects of Beowulf's perceived duality. The hero is a man, and man, Erich Fromm has suggested, is essentially of a paradoxical nature, "half animal and half symbolic" (Becker 26). On the one hand, he is a creator, with a mind that can contemplate itself, its being in the world, and the possibility of greater being. On the other hand, as Ernest Becker uncompromisingly observes (echoing -- unconsciously, one presumes -- the author of Soul and Body II) man is "a worm, and food for worms" (26). This devastating paradox, which affirms the human being's godlike attributes yet weds them to the corruption of his physical nature, is a restatement of the same duality considered by St. Paul to be the result of man's fall into sin, which Paul characterized as the tendency to dwell too much in the body and to place too much value on physical or material things:

For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death (Rom. 7:5).

For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting (Gal. 6:8).

With reference to such apostolic prophecies, the Anglo-Saxons suffered from a sometimes morbid preoccupation with duality.

The conflict between body (matter) and spirit (energy) represented in that particularly formidable didactic poem, Soul and Body II, expresses the philosophical crux of the problem: there, it is contended that matter is not 'real,' and that the things of the spirit, or soul, are alone of enduring value and 'reality,' but the fears related to the possibility of the final reality of matter are revealed.

It seems significant that a major preoccupation of Anglo-Saxon writings was the question, or problem, of the soul/body duality. Explored to the point of obsession by the gnostics, this abstraction led to a radical split in these modes of experiential reality, expressed in Soul and Body II in Soul's tragic obsession with the idea that its transcendence is not possible within the context of the body, and yet cannot be achieved without the will of the body. The existential position of the soul in such a vision is perilous, and this poet seems to have been responding to the fear that peril engenders, rather

than to the possibility of synthesis suggested by St. Paul's doctrine of the "spiritual body."<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting and ironic that the desirable product of psychic activity for Paul should have been the establishment of a physical extension of psychic perfection; interesting because this seems yet another of the many reasons why his ideas should have held such great attractive power for the Anglo-Saxons, who seem, above all, to have taken a strong and robust pleasure in the physical aspects of life and ironic because Paul did not counsel physical indulgence in this life. Evidence of the Anglo-Saxons' delight in physical joy may be found in their feasting and fighting; in their pagan past, 'heaven' was conceived as a constant round of both. They were in this sense the "earthy" men of 1 Cor. 15, and theirs was a state of which Paul himself might not entirely have approved, though it might not have engendered in him the horror it seems to have triggered in the author of Soul and Body II.

The poem is a monologue in which the psychic entity known as "Soul" speaks from a purgatorial state, berating the body for its wilful carnality and describing to it the horrors of its fleshly fate, a fate which the soul, if unredeemed, must share. Through

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<sup>10</sup> The linguistic and philosophical tradition out of which Paul might have developed his idea of the spiritual body was explored by John A. T. Robinson, whose book, The Body, delineated both the Old Testament and the Hellenic framework for Paul's interpretation of the psychic source of his revelation, the apparition or manifestation (or powerful mental image, 'hallucination' or 'ghost') of the Logos, Jesus Christ.

grisly descriptive imagery, largely fixated on the gluttonous lust of worms (the kenning for the body in this poem is wyrmes gief, "worm's food"), the soul agonizes over the fate of the mind, with which it in part identifies and which it locates in a physical context. The poet seems to envision the mind as having both a corporeal and a spiritual aspect, the spiritual element represented by the notion of 'soul,' the corporeal allied to the operation of will. The image of worms gnawing their way in through the eyes ufon þæt heafod, "to the head" (120), to feast upon the brain suggests that the Anglo-Saxon poet was fearfully aware that this physically-based faculty might very well share the fate of the physical body. The over-riding concern of this poet seems to have been to find a means whereby the individual human identity might be preserved. He implies that directing the mind, or, with reference to Augustine's formulation, the will, to the conquering of fleshly desires will effect a transformation in which soul and body will be united on an incorruptible plane. These standard Pauline teachings are simply presented didactically. However, in Beowulf, these same ideas are presented dynamically, as a natural process inherent in the structure of the whole human entity, which incorporates both soma and psyche.

In Beowulf, the treasure in its temporal form, as the wyrmhord, contains both elements and includes the factor of corruption that inevitably attends the physical form. When, at the end, the treasure is brought to the dying Beowulf, it has

been transformed into something analogous to the spiritual body hypothesized by Paul. In this sense, and as a symbol of Beowulf's transcendence, the treasure is a product of a process of symbol transformation that is effected through apocalyptic self-sacrifice.

In this process, the serpent, pictured as an ouroboros, is a recurring image of the involutory stage of life-into-death. Jung envisions the serpent as "analogous to the end of the world" and points out that in Norse myth the deluge was expected to begin when the Midgard Serpent (Jormungandr) "rises up for universal destruction" (CW 5: 438). The serpent 'stands for' problems associated with the apparent contradiction in the idea of a libidinal will to death, and Jung, with reference to this symbol, reduced these problems to a simple formula: "In youth, it denotes fear of life; in age, fear of death" (CW 18: 439). In his own youth, Beowulf did encounter serpent-like creatures, the nicras. When he did, however, he either destroyed them or was protected from them, so it may be inferred that, while not without his own moments of fear and apprehension, he was not about to be overcome by destructive ideas.

Stimulated by the instincts of sexuality and aggression, in youth the healthy human organism strives for growth and expansion; but in the second half of life, as the warnings of Hrothgar show, this creative energy is directed increasingly towards an altered goal: a conflict with elements perceived to be within oneself, rather than a conflict with external forces.



Telling the story of Heremod, Hrothgar isolated pride, or oferhygd, "arrogance" (1740) as the final enemy within. His warning to Beowulf shows that he knew the young warrior to be susceptible to this characteristic:

Bebeorh þe ðone bealonið, Beowulf leofa,  
 secg betsta,      ond þe þæt selre geceos,  
 ece raedas;      oferhyda ne gym,  
 maere cempa! (1758-61)

Against such evil rancour guard thyself,  
 dear Beowulf, best of men; choose that better  
 part, thy lasting profit. Incline not to  
 arrogance, famous warrior! (Hall trans.)

Beowulf could not learn from Hrothgar's warning, because pride was an integral part of his heroic make-up, as well as a necessary element of his ego-consciousness, permitting the self-assertion by which his ontological integrity was forged and maintained. Hrothgar might have been correct in identifying pride as the real danger to Beowulf's ece, "eternal" being, but this is a realization that Beowulf must come to on his own; he cannot and must not accept as true everything that even the most respected authority figure values. His instinctive responsibility is not to didactic law but to natural law, as he understands and affirms it, and he can neither understand nor affirm without engaging his ego directly in the process of growth and expansion, a process to which the element of pride is essential.

Although Hrothgar's injunctions were somewhat didactic, and thus illustrate the limitations of his own adjustment to the fact of death (confirmed by his unwillingness to risk his life when

the deorc deapscua, "dark shadow of death" fell over his own home), they reveal the workings of the religious instinct as the force that prepares the human organism for death by proposing to it a transcendent goal, ece raedas, "lasting profit," materially represented in Beowulf by the treasure the hero is impelled to seek. The compound wyrmhord suggests that the treasure may in part stand for the objective reality of death, an objective characterized by attraction and repulsion. As the completion and fulfillment of the natural life cycle, death must become the object of unconscious desire even as it remains an object of conscious fear. In its function as the fulfillment of the "death-wish," the treasure is indeed "death's jewel." Undoubtedly, it exercised a fatal attraction, one towards which Beowulf was irresistibly moving; for Beowulf, like every man, must inevitably die.

### The Death of the Hero

The death of a hero, like the death of any man, is a necessary projection of the fact of his life; but the death of a hero must be more than an ordinary death. It must be an exemplary death. One reason for this definitive necessity, perhaps, is that the ordinary man, contemplating the imminent certainty of his own death, might be frightened to the point of immobility. The archetypal hero, as the embodiment of the active

principle, must transcend this terror as Beowulf, in braving the apocalyptic threat of the Wyrn, transcends his own age and limitations. That Beowulf was neither immobilized nor intimidated by the fear of death was apparent from his earlier battles, particularly his battle with Grendel who stood for the objectification of that fear. Yet, there exists an element of the fear of death to which Beowulf, for purposes of survival, can not be immune: the fear of consciousness that it will be annihilated.

As far as the precepts of consciousness are concerned, the annihilation of mental awareness is the final evil, to be resisted to the end. Functioning as the heroic agent of the ego, Beowulf must passionately will the survival of the ego-self and fight to preserve it. His pride is in the service of this goal, and this pride is nowhere as evident as in his final battle. It is displayed in his decision to fight, and in his parting words to his men:

|                       |                                |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Gebide ge on beorge   | byrnum werede,                 |
| seccas on searwum,    | hwa <del>e</del> er sel maeg   |
| aefter waelraese      | wunde gedygan                  |
| uncer twega.          | Nis <del>paet</del> eower sið, |
| ne gemet mannes,      | nefn(e) min anes,              |
| paet he wið aglaecean | eofro dæle,                    |
| eorlscipe efne.       | Ic mid elne sceall             |
| gold gegangan,        | oððe guð nimeð,                |
| feorhbealu frecne     | frecan eowerne! (2529-37)      |

Watch on the barrow, ye warriors in your armour defended by coats of mail, which of us two can endure wounds best, after the desperate onslaught. That is not your affair, nor a possibility for any man, save for me alone, to put forth his power against the monster and do heroic deeds. By my valour I will win gold; or war, the dread destroyer

of life, shall carry off your lord! (Hall trans.)

This speech, as much by virtue of its content as its use of the pronouns "I" and "me," is a direct expression of the ego, and it can be seen that Beowulf possesses a strong centre of consciousness, one that will not easily give up its power and identity in the interests of a goal it cannot fully comprehend. Yet, although it is for most ordinary purposes an agent of the ego, the hero is also an archetype of the collective unconscious, and so must also be in the service of the unconscious goal, which has begun to reveal itself as the very death so feared by the ego.

Although Beowulf is prepared for death and accepts it on both the conscious and unconscious levels, his ego cannot admit this as an acceptable goal, and strives with all its power to deny its reality. It is at this point that the ego's pride, like all unchecked impulses of personality and instinct, may be seen to be acting against the interests of the whole organism. When this happens, the individual is in a regressive state, effectively blocking his own progress, although the ego cannot see it this way for reasons which have to do with its own survival. To Beowulf's ego, the Wyrn is the final threat to survival. However, to his unconscious, heroic self, it is the ego that is the final enemy. Its necessary pride has become a fatal hubris.

Hubris in the ego, Jung says, is "refusal to listen to the voice of the inner friend," (1972: 66) or the soul. The soul

points the way inwards, away from the ego, which must give up its centrality in order for transformations to take place. This is the most difficult task of ego-consciousness, but, at the same time, if death is to be accepted or transformation effected, it is also the most necessary, and it can only be accomplished by heroic self-sacrifice on the part of the ego. Because the ego can only sacrifice what it possesses, and because these possessions can be reduced to conscious being and value and the assertive pride that has built and maintained this state, it can only be these once-necessary predicates of conscious being, projected as elemental antagonists, that must be sacrificed.

The transcendence of ego-centricity is necessary when the sacrificial death of the hero is understood in psychological terms to signify the death of the ego in the realization of the self (see Chapter I). This psychic process, enacted mythically by the archetypal hero and dragon, involves a 'religious' process of symbol formation (see Chapter IV) that resolves the individual ego with its ideal symbol of the collective self, the treasure. In this schema, both hero and dragon represent opposing aspects of the fragmented archetypal self which must be reconciled before a final resolution can take place.

In order for a collaboration of opposing states to be possible at all, these antithetical states "must first face one another in the fullest, conscious opposition" (CW 6: 478). This means a necessary and elemental conflict, and this is what happens with Beowulf and the Wyrn. Because of his ego-pride,

Beowulf is in no doubt as to where he must stand in relation to the Wyrn; ironically, it is this pride, the very thing he must defeat, that gives him the active strength necessary to engage his heroic energy in the inevitable conflict:

Let *ða* of breostum,      *ða* he gebolgen waes,  
 Weder-Geata leod      word ut faran,  
 stearcheort styrmde      stefn in becom  
 heaðotorht hlynnan      under harne stan.  
 Hete waes onhrered,      hordweard oncnio  
 mannes reorde;      naes *ðær* mara fyrst  
 freode to friclan (2550-56).

The lord of the Geats, when he was enraged,  
 then let a word burst from his breast;  
 stoutheartedly he stormed; his voice, clear  
 in battle, went ringing under the grey rock.  
 Hatred was aroused; the guardian of the hoard  
 recognized the speech of man; there was no  
 more time to ask for friendship.

The intense consciousness of Beowulf at this moment is revealed in the control he exerts over all his faculties, and in his awareness and rejection of his instinctive desire freode to friclan, "to ask for friendship." He does not do anything without pre-meditation; like the heroic protagonist of Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," who raised the horn to his lips and sounded his defiance in full conscious knowledge of his fate, Beowulf let...word ut faran, "let go" a "word," the first and most powerful symbol of his defining consciousness; that word reveals him to be a man, a self-conscious being in proud opposition to all unconscious nature -- including his own. However, this psychic positioning "entails a violent disunion with oneself, to the point where thesis and antithesis negate one

another, while the ego is forced to acknowledge its absolute participation in both" (CW 6: 478).

This complex, crucial, and inevitable point constitutes a moment of apocalyptic crisis for Beowulf, and signifies the culmination of a process that may be said to have begun in the Merewife's cave. It was there that he uncovered the "underground lake of guilt in the soul" (Tuchman 109) that revealed his own vulnerability to a negation so powerful it defied his will to effect good. Knowledge of the negating reality of evil was what caused the hart, a symbol of the pure soul, to give up its life rather than expose its spirit to the corruption of the dismal mere. But Beowulf was not a pure spirit; he was a man, albeit a superior sort of man; and the life of a man involves the necessary risk of exposure to evil, as the poet himself observed:

|                    |                           |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| leofes ond lades   | Fela sceal gebidan        |
| on ðysson windagum | se þe longe her           |
|                    | worolde bruceð! (1060-62) |

He must experience much of good and evil  
who labours long here in the troubled days  
of this world!

When Beowulf arrived at Earnanaes, he had already passed through a lifetime of such experience, and had resolved the struggle with himself touched off by his sudden awareness of the dire meaning of the dragon. He arrived on that battlefield as a hero, not as the complex of fear, guilt and desire that characterized him as a man among men. These things seemed to fall away from his spirit, and the impending battle became once

again a clearly defined battle between good and evil, leofes ord laðes, "the loved and the loathed" (2910, cf. 1061).

This condition was possible because his consciousness had committed itself to its highest ideal in submission to a higher will which it had affirmed as good. In the service of this unconscious (or, it may be, supremely conscious) will, the hero is bound by his identification with ego-consciousness to the extent that he must fight for good; but he is relieved of the burden to decide between good and evil, and simply becomes Good, in a final justification by faith. Nevertheless, he is not the same Beowulf of his earlier battles, the confident young warrior who plunged into the fray without a backward glance. This time, he knows his own weaknesses and the power of his adversary, and reveals a need for protection. The young hero has been changed by the development of his consciousness to a mature manifestation of the hero archetype, the Old Wise Man. This late form of the hero archetype adds the powers of consciousness to those of the unconscious in its function as the "archetype of meaning" (Fordham 60). An integral part of that meaning is the possibility of transcendence.

#### **The Old Wise Man and the Archetype of Transcendence**

The archetypal form of the Old Wise Man, a figure of dual possibility, appears in mythology as a king, hero, medicine man



or saviour (Fordham 60). The snotor guma, "wise man" or frod cyning, "old (wise) king," respected figures in the world of Beowulf, represent a manifestation of this archetype in the sense that age is traditionally (if not always correctly) considered to confer wisdom and moral enlightenment.

An aggregation of conscious ideals assimilated by the collective unconscious, the Old Wise Man has been called the "archetype of meaning" because its manifestation seems to point towards an understanding of ultimate reality; it reveals itself as a source of hitherto hidden knowledge. Although it usually occurs at a late stage in the heroic life cycle, this archetype may appear at any point during the psychic life process, as a form of inspiration that guides the action of the individual. Like all the archetypes, it displays both positive and negative attributes, so that allowing it full control can be dangerous. In situations of doubt, the Old Wise Man may generate a sense of certainty and significance and its power is felt to be supernatural, shamanistic: it is a mana personality, who imbues events or objects with particular importance. However, this power, though it can be illusory, can also "possess" the ego personality, so that it becomes "inflated" (Fordham 61). In a basically weak character, manifestation of this archetype may serve merely to further entrench the collective wisdom (or rationalizations) of conventional man, endowing these notions with an authority they might not merit.

Such seems to have been the case with the aged Hrothgar who, although he gave the young hero much good, sound advice, dispensing his life-gotten wisdom with a great sense of certainty, nevertheless drew some conclusions that derived more from his own personal nature and experience than from any truth inherent in the maxims he advanced. One of these dubious pronouncements was his prediction that the heroic nature would eventually succumb to the assaults of old age -- a notion Beowulf himself disproves. Overall, like his actions, Hrothgar's voice was negative rather than positive: he told Beowulf how not to act (it was Wealhtheow who gave positive guidance). Although the Beowulf poet does not overtly criticize Hrothgar, and, in fact, pays due and frequent lip service to him as a god-cynning, the impression remains of Hrothgar as a negative, cowardly, somewhat insidious figure. He may represent the negative aspects of an absolute authority figure,<sup>11</sup> a superego who may not be overtly criticized [and must, in fact, be praised, as the poet does in propria persona (see 862-63)] but who may, through dramatic device, be judged, nevertheless, as Beowulf effectively judged Hrothgar, by implication, inference and action. When, for example, he was about to avenge Hrothgar for Aeschere's death, Beowulf presumed to tell the old king what he should have known himself:

'Ne sorga, snotor guma! Selre bið aeghwaem,

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<sup>11</sup> In Four Archetypes, Jung has suggested that the Old Testament God was a projection of what he termed the "daemonic" side of the Old Wise Man archetype (136).



and also, in his passivity, of the unacceptable alternative to heroic action which presents itself in every situation of existential choice. In the same way that 'sin' or 'evil' can be seen as a catalyst to transformation, Hrothgar's negative example can be seen to have provided the strongest impetus for Beowulf's own self-definition.

An active sense of self inspires the emergence of the hero, but it is effective self-knowledge that influences its development into the Old Wise Man. viewed by Marie-Louise von Franz as a precursory manifestation of the self (196). Self-knowledge is a function of ego-consciousness, where objective fact may not be overlooked. With reference to objective reality, Beowulf does not, in his final battle, disdain the use of every weapon as he did in his battle with Grendel; nor does he, with diplomatic grace, take a sword at the submissive request of a humiliated foe, as if only to spare him further embarrassment, as he did on the occasion of his battle with the Merewife. In his final conflict, he acknowledges the realities: that he is old, that the dragon breathes fire, that the fight is uneven, that he might not win.

Accordingly, he equips himself with a special means of defence. The iron shield, a creative innovation at a time when linden-wood shields were standard issue, stands for an advance in consciousness; even at this late stage, the hero continues to progress. His sword represents the energetic qualities of his own soul, which may stand for the active manifestation of his faith.

When Naegling fails, it may be that Beowulf's faith, too, falters, leaving him vulnerable to the fears and doubts that are natural to any consciousness -- even an advanced one -- rooted in animal nature. With the breaking of Naegling, Beowulf is totally vulnerable to the dragon, which represents the animal nature of the unconscious. The Draca's poisonous bite takes the battle onto an entirely new level of experience where the ego is exposed to the full power of the unconscious, a power that includes the unconscious will to death.

### The Archetype of Transformation

The activity presented by the poet of Beowulf as the archetypal enactment of the final transformative pattern may be outlined as follows: Beowulf, the hero, is attracted by conscious and unconscious forces to confront the deadly keeper of a treasure; the hero is simultaneously repelled by the conscious and sub-conscious awareness that this confrontation will result in his death; after arming himself for the battle, he meditates on his life and confronts the possibility of his own will towards death, expressed as the guilt that he connects with his downfall; overcoming reluctance and anxiety, he initiates verbal action; the dragon reacts violently; the hero then strikes -- ineffectually; the dragon recoils and breathes fire, against which the hero can have no weapon or defence; the hero's thanes

desert him; he suffers, both physically and spiritually; one man returns to help him, that man a relative, standing for a manifestation of his own youthful self; the dragon attacks again; the old hero strikes at its head with his sword; the sword breaks; the dragon bites the old man on the neck; the youthful hero strikes at the dragon's body -- effectively; the dying hero cuts the dragon through the middle with his knife; the young thane brings treasure to his dying lord; the archetypal hero gives thanks and praise; he dies.

While all of this action is significant, some elements are more significant than others for purposes of this discussion. The attraction/repulsion motif of the treasure establishes it as a powerful, religious symbol in the order, if not the magnitude, of the Christian Cross. The meditations may constitute a form of repentance for sins unwittingly committed. Beowulf's choice to initiate action with a "word" and to aim for the dragon's head signifies that consciousness has a major, self-sacrificial role to play in the psychic action. The hero's solitary suffering constitutes atonement. The return of his thane gives notice of (temporal) redemption. The breaking of the sword may signify a loss of faith and a failure in the initial essay at transformation. The bite of the dragon has been identified as the initial, paralyzing connection of consciousness and the unconscious, over which the hero must (and did) triumph. Beowulf's use of the knife to cut through the dragon's body signifies sacrifice of his own sensual being; and the treasure

brought to the dying king by the young thane signifies Beowulf's union with a more pure form of his own absolute values and reality, contained in the treasure as a symbol of his transcendental self.

After this process of symbolic death and rebirth, his actual death may seem redundant, but it is, in fact, the essential and inevitable culmination of Beowulf's ultimate transformative experience. However, while his whole life has been a prelude to this moment, and despite the poem's focus upon death, vengeance, pain and horror, the vision of Beowulf is ultimately an optimistic one.

The optimism of Beowulf is not an optimism that depends solely upon the existence of God, although there is no doubt that the idea of God, if not the reality, is seen in many ways to be essential to survival. That Beowulf believes in a god is important. That he dies having at least partially fulfilled his vision is important. That his god may not have been the Christian god is of less importance to the poet, and, therefore, less annihilating a fact, than that his action was philosophically and in practice the symbolic pattern of action prescribed by Christianity.

That this pattern of action made possible changes in Beowulf's society, even if those changes were themselves subject to change, is also important to the optimistic vision of the poet. When the Geats buried the treasure with Beowulf, they were following a pagan practice, but its meaning had been transformed,

and the ritual at his funeral, in which twelve men (like the twelve disciples of Christ) described the pagan 'magic circle' around his barrow, provides a bridge between the old forms of behaviour and the new; and this is most important of all because, as the scop indicates in his continuing lamentations and recreation of the history of a more violent past, human behaviour must change if the human world (i.e. civilization) is to survive. That it can change may have been indicated to the poet by the rise of Christianity, even though that rise was itself attended, as he must have known, by violence and strife.

The Christian vision of a world of peace and love transcended its violent milieu and slowly, by the actions and passions of singular individuals, it transformed the collective psyche of the Viking and Anglo-Saxon people, reducing, if only barely perceptibly, the tendency to aggression that threatened to annihilate them. The famous conversion of Guthrum by Alfred (Laing 179), and the long, creative peace that followed, historically illustrate this dynamic, which, before or after that event, the poet recognized. Whether he also saw the Christian god as the "one true god" is less relevant, because it was the ideas that formed around this god which effected the transformation in human behaviour. Whether these ideas could have taken hold without the direct intervention of the god is (and was) a subject for theological discussion; the poet simply shows how they can take hold -- and it is much as Beowulf took hold of the magic sword in the Merewife's cave: he was prepared to believe in



the possibility of there being such an object; he saw something in his direst need that he identified as such; he reached out and seized it; 'it' then inspired him with greater strength and courage; and he ultimately triumphed in both the subjective and objective worlds. This is the essence of transformative energy and power.

Perhaps the important thing is to believe that things can change, even though, for Anglo-Saxon poets, conscious of mutability, change was viewed for the most part with fear and sadness. Without the belief that things can change, and the courage to transcend the ego's fear of change, idealism gives way to nihilism and nihilism is realised in annihilation. Nihilism is giving up, and this was something Beowulf never did. Even at the end, he chose to see his death in terms of a 'going after,' in his case, after his ancestors, the Waegmundings. Ic him aafter sceal, he said, "I must go after them," and whether he might have meant into oblivion or into further consciousness, the active, continuous quality of the statement remains the same. For this, as much as for any other reason, continuance and renewal is felt to be the prevailing theme of Beowulf, the kind of continuance and renewal that depends upon the heroic individual's will to affirm it, and his power to transform and recreate his society's ideas and their symbols.

Symbol Transformation and Symbols of Transcendence in Beowulf

A living, dynamic symbol, Jung wrote, is "born of man's highest aspirations and must at the same time spring from the deepest roots of his being" (CW 6: 478) and this implies a full conjunction of both conscious and unconscious factors in its creation. For Beowulf, these opposites met in the wyrmhord, which ultimately stands for the positive and negative poles of Beowulf's own individual being, which is, nevertheless, firmly rooted in his collective identity and in God.

The alchemical quest to turn base metal into gold, like the fairy tale motif of spinning straw into gold, illuminates the transcendental significance of this wyrmhord of gold and rusted iron. The esoteric search for the right chemical reaction to produce such a transformation was, in intent, a search for immortality through the attainment of that pure spirit which transforms all things into perfect form; the quest of the alchemists was informed as much by transcendental meditation as by experiment (Jung 1959: 124), while the secret of the transformation of straw into gold was, as encoded in "Rumplestiltskin," the guessing of a secret name, a word that would unlock the mystery to the captive seeker.

The energy, both psychic and physical, theoretically necessary for alchemical transformation, is generated through the opposition of opposing forces, whether those forces are material (as in the metals) or energetic (as in the opposition of powerful

wills), or both. Alchemists ideally worked in pairs, usually a man and a woman (the Magus and the High Priestess of the Tarot symbolize these figures). In "Rumplestiltskin," the opposition is between the wills of the gross dwarf and the beautiful lady. This same kind of transformative energy is generated by the battle between Beowulf and the Wyrn, which may be compared to the alchemical experiment. The crucible of this 'divine experiment' was Eornanaes, the "middle ground" of psychic activity. The result was a fusion, in the treasure, of the disparate and opposing principles represented by the archetypal protagonists.

In a kinetic sense, the whole contents of the final battlefield -- the protagonist, the antagonist, the treasure and the observing ego-consciousness of Beowulf and his poet -- are one and the same entity and, as each acts out its psychic role to the end, each is assimilated into, and completes, the totality. The draca or wyrn, killed by the joint effort of Wiglaf and Beowulf, and the hero, succumbing to the infusion of poison and the outpouring of his life-blood, seem to melt into one another and merge into the ego, which remains long enough to finally realize its ideal in the treasure. Released at last from the suspension of will that was the inevitable result of its powerful attraction to an object which simultaneously is equally repulsive (as the wyrmhord, the "treasure with its curse of the worm," -- i.e. the resolution with God through the process of death -- must surely be) the ego is free to contemplate the object of its desire, to identify with it and to be at one with it as the pure form of its

true values. In this sense, the treasure is a living religious symbol for Beowulf, one that he himself, by virtue of his own powerful psyche, has created, recreated and then transcended in an archetypal process of transformation. Through contemplation of the treasure, which, by Wiglaf's affirmative choice of representative objects, has, for Beowulf, been restored to purity and value (in this pragmatic sense, reminiscent of the function of the artist or 'shaper,' it is Wiglaf who has turned base metal into gold) Beowulf's death may begin to be accepted, not as a cosmic tragedy, a dark negation of life and love, but as the fulfillment of a transformative reaction in which evil was an essential catalyst.

As Christian mystics found in the Cross the most perfect symbol, which, in its structural and ideological configuration, contains that tension and suspension of opposites which "expresses the inexpressible idea of Christ's transcendence in unsurpassable form" (CW 5: 303), Beowulf found in the treasure the living symbol of his own complex and transformative relationship to his society. His compulsion to acquire it (as Christ was compelled to be crucified) thus takes on a universal significance, for, if he could consciously 'acquire' this suspension of opposites by bringing to consciousness its unconscious contents, he would be gaining for all of humanity [or, as he himself saw it, minum leodum, "for my people" (2797)] a greater understanding, an expanded consciousness, a cultural and psychic evolution that would move humanity closer to the

ultimate goal of total consciousness. That goal -- whether it is perceived abstractly in terms of the aggressive instinct as psycho-physical immortality, in sexual terms as creative unity, or in religious terms as apotheosis -- may only be won individually (hence its psychological name, individuation) but it must be identified through collective values, which themselves have been established through a series of biological and psychological transformations. For this reason, the symbolism of the treasure had already been established in part by Beowulf's society, just as the symbolism of the Cross had already been partially established by the social milieu of Christ. Both Beowulf and Christ, however, dynamically affected the way in which these familiar symbols were afterwards perceived, and in this way transformed them.

Christ's paradoxical statement, "The last shall be first and the first, last," may be a prophetic description of the process of 'redemption' made possible by the creation and transcendence of symbols of man's unknowing.

A living symbol, in every epoch, "is the best possible expression of what is still unknown" (CW 6: 477), and this means that it must, in order for it to have collective appeal and significance, be a product of both the highest and lowest minds of that age. For this reason, the "most complex and differentiated mind" (CW 6: 478) which is alone capable of creating a symbol by giving objective form to its own highest and lowest nature, must, in another sense, have already transcended

the need, and the desire, for the symbolic object itself -- as, in actuality, Beowulf has done (he has no desire to take the treasure with him, though his less rational people, in an ironic exemplification of his own truest values, try to make sure that he does). Yet, although Beowulf no longer needs the treasure for himself, the intrinsic power of that symbol as the perfect form of the tension and suspension of opposites that gave rise to his conviction of the possibility of transcendence is established beyond his power to resist. In recognizing its value, first for himself and then for his society, the hero, as the ideal agent of the ego, is compelled to acquire it through a simultaneity of conscious and unconscious effort.

The state of compulsion<sup>12</sup> which constitutes Beowulf's attraction towards the treasure is accompanied by an equal and opposite degree of revulsion and fear generated by the dragon. Both feelings are present as an immediate psychological condition. For the conscious mind of Beowulf, this is an entirely insupportable and potentially immobilizing state of being which can only be overcome through action initiated by the hero.

The conscious state brought about by the co-existent parity of opposites, affirmed by the ego's full participation in both, is, effectually, a suspension of the will, 'will' being here defined as "the amount of psychic energy at the disposal of

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<sup>12</sup> Or, perhaps, simply impulsion, in the sense that impulse is the effect of instinct and it is chiefly through the activation of instinct that this state may be said to arise.

consciousness" (CW 6: 479-80). Suspension occurs because the will cannot operate when every motive has an equally strong counter-motive; inertia and regression are the natural possibilities of this condition. Since, as Anglo-Saxon poets realized through their contemplation of mutability, life cannot proceed in inertia, the only active possibility is regression and this, in theory, is what happens in the psyche. The energy of the libido streams back, as Jung says, "to its source," a change in direction made necessary by the neutralization and inactivity of consciousness. This brings about an activity of the unconscious, "where all the differentiated functions have their common, archaic, root" (CW 6: 479-86).

Although the intensity of this conflict of opposites has paralysed the ego in its conscious world (the effect upon Beowulf of the dragon's bite), the unconscious counterpart of the ego, the self, exists as a continually creative centre that generates a new form of psychic activity. The intensity of consciousness, which, as the bite of the dragon also signifies, is now allied to unconsciousness, brings the elemental struggle between the opposites onto a new level, one that is both mythic and supremely human.

The poisonous bite of the dragon consolidates the relationship between Beowulf and the dragon (which the poet has established in both a causal and a symbolic context) and parallels the conjunction of thesis and antithesis with reference to consciousness and the unconscious. Beowulf and the Draca stand

in antithetical opposition to one another in a metaphysical equation where thesis and antithesis are reduced to spirituality and sensuality (represented in biblical myth by the figures of Christ and Satan). Yet, in the sense that each thesis exists only in relation to, and by suppression of, its antithesis, both factors are parts of a whole, just as Beowulf and the dragon must, beyond consciousness, be intrinsically connected in their necessary opposition.

As the dragon's bite brings about Beowulf's death, so the demands of the unconscious act upon consciousness "like a paralyzing poison on a man's energy and resourcefulness, so that it may well be compared to the bite of a poisonous snake" (Jung 1919: 106). This apparent negation signals the commencement of the penultimate transformative process, preparing the way for a final resolution in the process of transmutation that begins with the ego's act of self-sacrifice.

Outlining the dynamic of this process, Jung says that, in the act of self-sacrifice, "consciousness gives up its power and possessions in the interest of the unconscious" and this act "makes possible a union of opposites resulting in a release of energy" (1962: 303). In sacrificing the claims of the ego to the greater claims of the unconscious, Beowulf must relinquish "all the ties and limitations which the psyche has taken over from childhood into adult life," including his duty to remain as king of his people, in affirmation of the greater importance of his own unconscious goal. It is not in blind obedience to a rigid



idea of outmoded heroism that Beowulf sacrifices his life, nor is it out of common greed; it is in response to something living and dynamic, contained in the treasure as a symbol of his true self, "the totality of his being, which is rooted in his animal nature and reaches out beyond the merely human towards the divine" (Jung 1962: 303-04).

That Beowulf's self is indeed "rooted in his animal nature" is confirmed by the function of the dragon, which acts in this apocalyptic drama as the aggressive agent of the unconscious. As the archetypal form of his sensual and material nature, the Wyrn is a form of death, since the first and last reality of all physical being is its subjection to this final law of nature. In this aspect, the Wyrn is a living death which, like Jormungand, the "world serpent" of Norse myth (Crossley-Holland 33), grows larger and fatter sustained by nothing more than certain knowledge of its own inevitable fulfillment. The poet's picture of the Wyrn, nacod niðraca, "the naked, malicious dragon" (2273), emphasizes this malevolent sensuality, and its mindless attachment to the treasure reveals its nature to be materialistic, adhering to a system of value based entirely upon physical considerations. In this sense, the Wyrn is the "body of sin" (Rom. 6:6) into which man's soul may plunge to its destruction, as did Naegling.

The treasure's intimate connection with both Beowulf and the Wyrn suggests that these two opposing forces are necessary

elements of the paradox which must be reconciled in the process of transformation, which is elementary to the process of individuation. This is in part why both Beowulf and the Wyrn must die: both forms must cease to exist independently of one another before the treasure can be revealed and the goal of complete psycho-physical unity realized.

As a symbol of this archetypal psychic unity, the treasure is transcendent in that it lies beyond the reach or apprehension of Beowulf's immediate experience, yet can still be affirmed to have existence; however, in the sense that it has been partially understood and experienced symbolically in the objective factor of the cup, the treasure, like the self, may be said to be immanent. The transcendental aspect of the treasure, like that of the self, may be equated with God, since its reality or existence is not bounded by the individual or collective existence of human being: if, as the Geats expect of themselves, humanity were to be destroyed, taking with it all conscious or sentient being in the universe, the transcendental self would still be immanent in unconscious nature, as the treasure would, as it always had, remain in grunde, "in the ground," because the self is both conscious and unconscious. Although it could not, in that cataclysmic instant, be immanent in consciousness (because the perceiving consciousness would no longer exist) it would retain its transcendental consciousness in an absolute sense, being then the sum total of itself and all consciousness

that was once projected -- being, in other words, re-collected, or self-collected -- awaiting the next moment of projection.

The transcendental self's state of total consciousness may be compared to the more limited process of individuation, when internal human reality, re-collected from the environment, gives rise to a symbolic manifestation of the archetype of transformation. The totality of Beowulf's life experience, which involved bringing to consciousness the contents of his own unconscious as well as interaction with other entities, culminated in the creation and transcendence of a symbol for all that he did not yet know -- the treasure. Although the treasure was objectively there, and although Beowulf had some tangible proof of its existence in the form of the cup, in a more immediate sense the treasure for which Beowulf fought can be said to have existed only in his mind, until he actually acquired it through victory in conflict with the archetypal forces that would negate (or prevent the realization of) its immanent reality. Therefore, although the transcendental existence of the treasure is not determined by Beowulf's success or failure, its immanent existence is dependent upon his ability, finally, to see it "face to face."

Ironically, or perhaps inevitably, this never does occur. He only sees some of it, though perhaps enough to validate his sacrifice. What he sees may be likened to his conscious recognition of the divine aspect of his own immanent self; what he does not see may be likened to his necessary faith in the

reality of infinite divine being, the transcendent self. But his vision is still contingent upon a factor over which he has no control -- the choice of Wiglaf.

This detail is consistent with, and faithful to, the conceived dynamic of human, as opposed to divine, nature. For the divine, it is presumed, there are no absolutely other entities and no contingencies; even the apparent contingency of immanent being is subsumed within the absolute. For the human being, even when there may also exist within him a divine element that permits apprehension of the possibility of the unity of all things and his participation in that unity, the autonomous existence of that which is not himself creates a necessary relationship with that other that is fundamentally dependent. The fairy-tale or legendary motif of the faithful retainer, thane or knight, who must bring treasure to the dying king, for whom the object may sometimes have restorative power, deals with this relationship. As Beowulf needed Wiglaf and the treasure, man needs other men and God.

This knowledge adds a note of high pathos to Beowulf's dying mael:

|                     |                           |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 'Ic ðara fraetwa    | Frean ealles ðanc,        |
| Wuldurcynninge      | wordum secge,             |
| ecum Dryhtne,       | þe ic her on starie,      |
| þæs ðe ic moste     | minum leodum              |
| aer swyltðaege      | swylc gestrynan.          |
| Nu ic on mæðma hord | mine bebohte              |
| frode feorhlege,    | fremmað gena              |
| leoda þearfe;       | ne mæg ic her leng wesan' |

(2794-2801).

'I utter in words my thanks to the Ruler of all, the King of Glory, the everlasting

Lord, for the treasures which I here gaze upon, in that I have been allowed to win such things for my people before my day of death! Now that I have given my old life for the treasure, do ye henceforth supply the people's needs, - I may stay here no longer' (Hall trans.).

Beowulf's response to his partial vision of the treasure, which comes so soon before his complete entombment with it in death, has a particular poignancy because his heroic ego, though it has made the necessary sacrifice and submission, continues to wish for its own continuance, as is its nature. The hero's last words, which seem to capture the essence of the conscious feeling that might arise from such a submission, evoke the Yeatsian experience of "tragic joy."

His repeated use of the pronouns ic and min, and his later use of his own name (2807) indicate the degree to which Beowulf's ego- ("I-") consciousness, aware of its fate, strives to retain control. His final and very specific request for a monument to be built at Hronesnaes (2802-08), so that he will be remembered in his individuality, expresses the passionate desire of his consciousness to continue to be, in the sense that to be is to be perceived, even as it willingly relinquishes its own defining power to perceive and, therefore, in an equal and opposite measure, to be, in itself, a real entity.

In the end, however, Beowulf indicates his calm acceptance of death's inevitability for himself and for all men, and expresses his belief in some form of continuation, if not renewal:

ealle wyrd forsweop  
 mine magas to metodsceaft,  
 eorlas on elne; ic him aefter sceal (2814-16).

Fate has swept off all my kinsmen, valiant  
 heroes, to their death; I must go after them.

### "We Shall Be Changed"

The theme of creative change and renewal, pursued implicitly throughout the poem in the images of fire and ice, through the seasonal metaphors, the cycles of vengeance and war, or the emotional patterns of gamen, "joy" and sorh, "sorrow" that result from them, may be seen to continue beyond the elegiac ending of the poem, for while it has been suggested that one of the tragic notes in Beowulf is struck by the intimation that there will be no-one of heroic stature to succeed him, this is not necessarily the case. Wiglaf, though young, and, till then, untried, shows both heroic courage and strength in his defence of his lord; and the fir picture of the twelve good men who describe the symbolic circle around Beowulf's barrow suggests the twelve apostles, whose writings and teachings ensured the continuance and renewal of Jesus' spirit in the world.

In a Christian sense it may be that a feeling of tragedy results from an imperfect faith, and that because all forces must be seen to work ultimately for the good, any sense of tragedy is an illusion, if not an affront to God. However, A.C. Bradley's idea of "tragic glory" (1926: 86) seems to admit the possibility of tragedy from the Christian perspective. This idea of tragedy is limited to man's 'being-in-the-world,' and, while it includes the notion of sacrifice in the attainment of a higher value (whether personal, social or transcendental), it points to the tragic condition of man as "the limited embodiment of the limitless divine" (Bodkin 281). In such a view, the tragic hero is Everyman, as every man affirms participation in the nature of his God (whatever that ultimate nature might be).

The tragic irony of such perception must lie in the unavoidable recognition that although man may lay claim to, and actually believe in, an immortal or 'divine' element within his being, he is actually mortal and human, and therefore limited in his own world -- and it is this world which, despite its imperfections, he loves, and in which he wants to fulfill his destiny. In this connection, the tension in Beowulf between the conditioned and fleeting and the transcendent and eternal takes on a particular relevance to man's tragic condition, for, whatever the transcendental appeal of the eternal and divine, it clearly does not represent the joy of life as known by man in his limited, mortal, corporeal form. It is this joy, expressed so poignantly as a sense of loss by the Last Survivor, that

exercises its power over Beowulf and his poet. The reluctance of Beowulf to relinquish his physical life on ðæs Waldendes waere, "in the keeping of the Lord" (3109), is simply his recognition that, whatever death might be, it is not life, a fact that the poet reiterates in his frequent use of the Old English negative definition, unlifigende, "unliving."

An abstract idea of transcendence might offer scant consolation to a warrior, such as Beowulf, whose joy in life was as much sensual as mental. When he speaks of the grieving father's loss of interest in the joys of heroic life, his language is sensuous and emotional, conveying a sense of what that loss would mean to him:

|                   |                                 |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| Gesyhð sorhcearig | on his suna bure                |
| winsele westne,   | windge reste                    |
| recte berofene, - | ridend swefað,                  |
| haeleð in hoðman; | nis þær hearpan sweg,           |
| gomen in geardum, | swylce ðær iu waeron (2455-59). |

With sorrow and care he sees in his son's dwelling the festive hall abandoned, the windswept resting place bereft of joy: the riders sleep, the champions in the grave; there is no sound of harp, no merry-making in the courts, as once there was

(Hall trans.).

For a man such as Beowulf, perhaps the happiest metaphor for death lies in the poet's depiction of death as the sleep that follows the banquet of life, even if that sleep is dreamleas, "joyless":

|                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| þær his lichoma    | legerbedde faest |
| swefeð æfter symle | (1007-08).       |

There his body, fast in its bed of rest,



sleeps after the banquet.

The contrast of the sensual and conscious with the deadening of the senses and the suspension of consciousness implied by the state of sleep is echoed later in the poem and given greater dimension by the poet's description of the death of the Last Survivor:

|                                   |             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
|                                   | deaðes wylm |
| hran aet heortan                  | (2269-70).  |
| Death's tide touched his heart... |             |

As a symbol of unconsciousness, the imagery here has a primal power and rhythmic inexorability that overwhelms the center of physical and spiritual life symbolized by the heart. In this image, the surging "tide" of unconsciousness engulfs the center of sentient being, in a compelling metaphor for death that seems to admit its elemental force, its inanimate terrors and its inevitable triumph. When, bitten by the dragon, Beowulf's swat ydum weoll, "(his) blood surged out in waves" (2693), the image seems complete in its psychic and physical implications; the ego's immersion in the unconscious self is seen to be a transformation that will not be effected without pain.

It is because of such instinctual and perceptual fears that any sacrifice, which implies giving up the known for the unknown, is not made without reluctance. Even in his willingness to sacrifice his life to obtain the treasure for his people, it can be seen that Beowulf had regrets that were as much physical as psychic. His final regret is patently physical:

'Nu ic suna minum      syllan wolde  
 guðgewaedu,      þær me gifeðe swa  
 ænig yrfeweard      æfter wurde  
 lice gelenge      (2729-32).

Now I would have wanted to give my  
 battle-dress to my son, if it had  
 been granted that an heir, issue of  
 my body, should come after me.

The failure to produce a son, though one of Beowulf's deepest regrets, nevertheless raised him above the general pattern of nature. It seems he was not fated to fully complete his natural, individual life cycle, because he produced no child to continue his being into the future. Instead, he is to be a sacrifice to the realization of the supreme collective goal. Because he is a conscious being, his sacrifice, like the sacrifice of Christ, must be a willing one, made in full cognizance of the importance of the gift and out of faith in the validity of a goal which is, nevertheless, not understood.

Beowulf's dynamic and transformative embrace of death must therefore have been made out of faith, hope and love, and in loyalty to the values deriving from his archetypal god. The values for which Beowulf reluctantly but willingly bebohte/frode feorhlege, "traded (his) old life" (2799-2800) were symbolically contained in the form of the treasure, which finally symbolizes the goal towards which all the primary instincts strive, and in relation to which the ego alone (ic...ana) is both impelled and repelled.

The death of any entity is an implied condition of its life. If death did not exist, consciousness, with its penchant for

opposites, would have had to invent it -- as, perhaps, it did, at least in so far as all human perceptions of death, like our perceptions of the God with which it is identified, are entirely the product of conscious attempts to understand what lies beyond our powers of comprehension. This is as true of a rational or scientific explanation of the mysterium tremendum as it may be of a mystical or religious one. However, there is a point at which the two approaches seem to merge, and that point is contained within the idea and the actuality of transformation.

St. Paul, to whom both Jung and the Beowulf poet owed a large measure of their inspiration, was insistent upon the first and final reality of the transformative power of God. He, by his own account, had experienced it personally, on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Jungian psychology sees the conversion of Saul as originating within himself, his mystical experience as a manifestation of the archetype of transformation deriving from the centre of his being. It is an explanation that satisfies consciousness, without consoling it. But Saul, or Paul, himself a man of highly developed consciousness, to whom Porcius Festus, the procurator of Judea, is recorded to have said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24), was aware of the pitfalls of consciousness, particularly the factor of pride, which tends to ascribe all power and glory to the individual. He would not have agreed with Jung's humanism, his idea that all was contained in the "inside of the unknown man." For Paul, there was a greater power, reflected in

man but not contained in him. This power was not simply subjective but also objective, not merely awareness but the object of human awareness and, therefore, necessarily, both the subject and the object of human being. Nevertheless, in Jung's contention that all subjective perceptions both derive from and create objective reality, there may be found the great psychoanalyst's own essentially religious sense of a mystical relationship between man's mortal self-consciousness and his immortal self that transcends both realms of being.

It remains to be hoped, if not expected, as the watchers on the brink of the dreadful mere wiston and ne wendon, "hoped but did not expect" (1604), that their hero would return from the realm of the dead, that this relationship might follow the patterns of transformation and renewal implicit in the cycles, antinomies and transmutations that have been observed and experienced in the physical world since the dawn of human awareness, and that the power moving that unconscious world through its patterns of creative change will continue those principles in the metaphysical realm of consciousness to which we partially belong.

If the transcendent power of both human and divine nature to transform and recreate themselves in accordance with a principle of life and survival prevails over the immanent power of both to do the opposite, perhaps the transformations of mind and matter achieved by the heroic struggles of our ancestors will not have been for nothing. But even if, as is also possible, the human

race does not ultimately prevail, perhaps, like Beowulf, we can face the possibility of nothingness with a renewal of joy in the fact of our being and maintain the courage "to be or not to be," without weakening in our will to establish in the collective consciousness those principles we affirm to be best for the well-being and survival of our world.

This was the treasure for which Beowulf fought, for which Christ surrendered, to which, in every age, the heroic human spirit by nature aspires.

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## Glossary

Unless otherwise indicated, these terms are defined in the sense in which they are generally used by Jung, as his usage sometimes differs slightly from the ordinary, or from that of other psychologists.

From: Frieda Fordham, An Introduction to Jung's Psychology, 3rd ed. (1953; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966): 146-47.

**anima:** the unconscious feminine side of a man

**animus:** the unconscious masculine side of a woman

**archetype:** a content of the collective unconscious which is the psychological counterpart of instinct. Also loosely used to designate a collective image or symbol

**collective:** psychic contents which are not common to one individual, but to many. When these are unconscious, they are termed the collective unconscious.

**complex:** an affectively toned group of associated ideas

**ego:** the centre of the conscious mind

**individuation:** the process of becoming an individual

**instinct:** an unconsciously determined impulse or action which is collective; ["An innate biologically determined drive to action" (Rycroft).]

**libido:** psychic energy

**persona:** the facet of personality which is turned to the world and by which a relationship with the environment is made

**personal unconscious:** repressed memories, wishes, emotions, and subliminal perceptions of a personal nature

**projection:** the transmitting of a subjective process into an object

**psyche:** a necessary postulate defining the subject matter of psychology, and as such including the conscious and the unconscious

**self:** the centre of the totality of the ego and unconscious, and/or the synthesis of the ego and unconscious

**shadow:** the unconscious 'natural' side of a human being

**symbol:** an expression of something relatively unknown which cannot be conveyed in any other way









