

BEOWULF

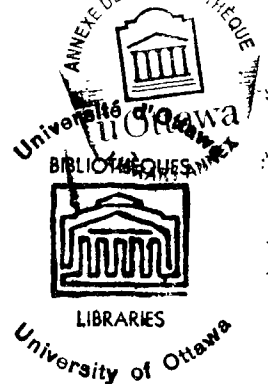
A CHRISTIAN POEM:

AN APPROACH TO CERTAIN DIFFICULTIES

BY

Flight Lieutenant

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## CHAPTER I

## EARLY CRITICISM OF THE POEM

When the bust of Emperor Vitellius was resting on the bookpress containing the Beowulf manuscript in Sir Robert Bruce Cotton's home at Westminster, in the first decade of the seventeenth century, the owner was probably unaware of the nature and great value of this document. Neither was Lawrence Nowell,<sup>1</sup> one of the first to revive the study of Anglo-Saxon in England. Nowell is reputed to have had the Beowulf manuscript in his possession in 1563.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the turn of the eighteenth century, in Queen Anne's reign, that some scholars interested in Anglo-Saxon became aware of its existence. And we owe it to the Dean of Worcester College, Oxford, George Hickes, one of the earliest and greatest students of Anglo-Saxon, for

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1. G. Smith, The Dictionary of National Biography, (edit.) Stephen and Lee, Oxford University Press, 1960, Vol. XIV, pp. 695-6. Nowell was a diligent antiquary, and learned in Anglo-Saxon. He revived the study of Anglo-Saxon when staying in the chambers of his brother Robert, attorney-general of the court of wards, in Gray's Inn. Among the manuscripts he left is Vocabularium Saxonicum, an Anglo-Saxon dictionary, which is now in the Bodleian Library. A transcript of this was made by Francis Junius.

2. W. Huyshe, Beowulf An Old English Epic, London: George Routledge and Sons, Ltd., 1908, p. xiii.

commissioning Humfrey Wanley, to look for Anglo-Saxon manuscripts throughout England. The results were published by Hickes in 1705, and appeared in the second volume of Linguarum Veterum Septentrionalium Thesaurus - Treasury of Ancient Northern Languages. The title of Wanley's volume is 'A Catalogue of the Books, both written and printed, of the Ancient Northern Nations which exist in the Libraries of England'.<sup>1</sup>

Wanley's catalogue is considered one of the outstanding sources of Anglo-Saxon literature. Page 218 records the entry referring to the bound volume, containing ten different manuscripts, found in the Cottonian Library, entitled 'Vitellius A.XV', as 'Codex membraneus ex diversis simul compactis constans' - 'a Parchment Codex consisting of several bound together'. Wanley describes each one according to the contents. Beowulf is number 9 in the volume, and it is described 'Tractatus nobilissimus poetice scriptus'. In keeping with Hickes's instructions, Wanley quotes the first <sup>e</sup>nineteen lines which he calls the preface, and the first twenty-one lines of the first section. This is followed

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1. Huyshe, op. cit., pp. x-xiii.

by his description of the work:

In hoc libro qui Poeseos Anglo Saxonicae egregium est exemplum descripta videntur bella quae Beowulfus, quidam Danus ex Regio Scyldingorum stirpe Ortus gessit contra Sueciae Regulos - In this book, which is a beautiful example of Anglo-Saxon poetry, there seem to be described the wars which Beowulf, a certain Dane, sprung from the royal stock of the Scyldings, waged against chieftains of Sweden.<sup>1</sup>

A transcript of Beowulf was made in 1787 by an Icelandic scholar, residing in Copenhagen, Grim. Johnson Thorkelin. He gave the world the first printed edition of Beowulf, in 1815, one hundred and ten years after it had been made known by Wanley. The whole poem is printed with Latin in parallel columns. Thorkelin believed that he was working from a translation made in King Alfred's time from a Danish original, whose poet was a contemporary of the heroes he describes.<sup>2</sup>

The year that Thorkelin put out his Beowulf, a young pastor from Copenhagen, the future Bishop Nicolaj Frederick Severin Grundtvig, set to work on Thorkelin's edition. Before the year was over he published a series of

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1. Huyshe, op. cit., p. xiii.

2. Ibid., p. 210.

articles in The Copenhagen Sketch-Book, attacking Thorkelin's translation. Grundtvig gave a translation in verse of the beginning of the poem, Thorkelin's so called Prologue, giving the story of Scyld and the sea-burial, the meaning of which Thorkelin had apparently completely missed. With the view of producing a poetical version of Beowulf, the brilliant young scholar undertook the study of Anglo-Saxon. In 1820 he put out his edition of Beowulf, now the second edition of the poem, giving it the title Bjowulfs Drape - a Gothic Hero-Poem of a Thousand Years ago from the Anglo-Saxon into Danish Rhyme.<sup>1</sup>

In England, the historian Sharon Turner touched on Beowulf in his first edition of his History of the Anglo-Saxons, 1799-1805. He reported the poem to be a narrative of Beowulf's feud with Hroðgar. This view he modified in the fourth edition printed in 1823, and at the same time gave a translation of large parts of the poem. He shared the belief of the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus, that Beowulf was Bous, son of Odin, who was killed in battle about the year 340.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Huyshe, op. cit., p. 210.

2. Ibid., pp. 211-12.

The next English scholar to deal with Beowulf was Reverend J.J. Conybeare, who died in 1824. He was professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. He translated parts of the poem into blank verse giving the original equivalent in Anglo-Saxon. He supplied also a summary of the narrative with a translation in Latin. He appraised Beowulf as a picture of manners and opinions, a specimen of language and composition, and in some measure, a historical document. Beowulf, in his opinion, "has the most claim to our attention" as an "antiquarian document".<sup>1</sup> His work, Illustration of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, was published posthumously by his brother in 1826.<sup>2</sup>

The honor of presenting the world with the first English edition of the complete text of Beowulf with a historical preface and a glossary went to J.M. Kemble. His book, called The Poems of Beowulf, is dated 1833. In his opinion the original poem was composed from Angle legends, the hero being Angle. It was probably<sup>written</sup> in Angeln, the place of birth of the English, now called Schleswig-Holstein. It was brought to England "by some of the early Anglo-Saxon

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1. Huyshe, op. cit., p. 212.

2. DNE, Vol. IV, p. 986.

chieftains who settled upon our shores".<sup>1</sup> He modified this view in his edition of 1837, informing his reader that his first preface had rested on a false premise. He now felt that Beowulf had had a much closer acquaintance with the mystic history of the North.<sup>2</sup>

It was a German scholar, Professor Massmann of Munich, who had directed the attention of Kemble to Beowulf. Kemble's work and views gave scholars and critics the incentive that they needed in the study of Beowulf. English, American and German scholars saw a new field open to them and went to work. The first was Professor Leo of Halle. In 1839 he shared some of Kemble's views, particularly regarding the origin of the poem, and placed the date of its composition about A.D. 580.<sup>3</sup>

A year later, in 1840, L. Ettmüller, of Zurich, became the first translator of Beowulf into German. It was he who initiated the German view of the poem as the result of separate lays which in time had been merged into one poem.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Huyshe, op. cit., p. 213.

2. Ibid., p. 213.

3. Ibid., pp. 214-15.

4. Ibid., p. 215.

## EARLY CRITICISM OF THE POEM

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The work on the second German edition was begun in 1857, by C.W.M. Grein, and was finally published in 1867. Grein brought forward the interesting approach, in itself a contradiction of Ettmüller, that Beowulf is the work of a single poet. This view was attacked by Karl Victor Müllenhoff, who had spent twenty years, from 1849, to the study of Beowulf. Müllenhoff came to the conclusion that six different authors had a hand in the making of Beowulf. These were an original author, an interpolator, and four others who added, interpolated, and amplified the poem. This view was in keeping with deeply ingrained notions in the minds of some learned Germans that great works of old literature, epics in particular, are the results of the imagination:

not made by art and device, but that they grew spontaneously and blindly - this was that imagination in the air which attended the first entertainment of Beowulf in the Fatherland...<sup>1</sup>

Scholars from various countries followed in Kemble's footsteps. K. Simrock published the third German translation in 1859; and Moritz Heyne, the fourth in 1863. The first French edition was by L. Botkine in 1877; the first Italian in 1883, by G. Grion; the first Swedish in 1889, by R. Wickbert; and the first Dutch by L. Simons in 1896. Other Germans who contributed to the Beowulfiana

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1. Huyshe, op. cit., p. 213.

are Dietrich of Marburg, Bugge of Christiania, Ten Brick, Moeller, Rieger, Sievers, Sarrazin, A. Holder, Schuecking, Paul Vogt, and Trautman. Not all subscribed to Müllenhoff's theory of multiple authorship. In fact, G. Sarrazin, a scholar from Kiel, expressed the view that the single author or compiler of Beowulf was to be found, in part, at least, in Cynewulf's (eighth) century.<sup>1</sup>

What else did German scholars of Beowulf find in the poem? Most of them looked upon Beowulf as a poem primarily pagan, embodying the natural, that is pagan, Germanic spirit. Whatever Christian touch the poem had was the work of interpolators. This school of thought had far reaching detrimental effects, still noticeable today.

In 1956 Herbert J.C. Grierson and J.C. Smith wrote concerning Beowulf:

The story is mere folklore; Beowulf - the bees' foe, the bear - is one of those folktale heroes who have been suckled by a wild beast and imbibed its strength, and his three exploits are too much like one another. The story, then, is a poor one, and there is not enough of it; it has to be padded out to 3,000 lines with digressions and long speeches. Yet there are noble things in Beowulf -

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1. Huyshe, op. cit., pp. 216, xxvi, xxvii.

not only loyalty and dauntless courage but courtesy in hall and respect for ladies; the style too has a grave dignity throughout; and the figure of the old king going out to fight, and, as he knows, to die for his people, is truly heroic. How much of what is noblest in the poem is due to the Christian scribe we cannot tell; but loyalty and courage at least are pagan virtues.<sup>1</sup>

Earlier, however, Huyshe had gone much further in his interpretation of the poem, placing the emphasis on the Christian nature of Beowulf. He argued that the poet had tone down barbaric elements, and had given us a heroic poem with outstanding manly vigor:

Let us be thankful on the whole, then, that the poet or compiler of Beowulf was a Christian and set about his task with the evident intention of eliminating from it Scandinavian theology and, possibly, some heathen brutalities. His having done so has not impaired the value of the poem as an authentic record of sixth-century society, for the heathen basis is there; the poem is a heathen poem, just "fumigated" here and there by its editor. The saga spirit remains in what may always have been a clean saga - clean and masculine, for the Christian editing has not eliminated the intense virility and vigour of the poem.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Herbert J. C. Grierson and J.C. Smith, A History of English Poetry. London: Chatto & Windus, 1944, p. 3.

2. Op. cit., p. xlvi.

German scholars saw in Beowulf a good story giving instruction, delight, and amusement to the historian, the philologist, the artist, and the archaeologist. They remarked particularly the interest of the poet in feud and the duty of revenge, and recognized in this characteristic a feature of customary law among early Germanic tribes.

In England, scholars began to take a closer look at the poem. "The fault of Beowulf is that there is nothing much in the story", but the killing of monsters wrote W.P. Ker in 1904.<sup>1</sup> In a lecture delivered to the British Academy in 1936, J.R.R. Tolkien upbraided critics of Beowulf for giving the poem the reputation of being "a half-baked nature epic...killed by Latin learning", a group of pagan lays put together by monks, the work of a Christian antiquarian learned but inaccurate, the "product of Christianity", a pagan "heroic lay", a wild folk-tale, a history of Sweden, and "a manual of Germanic antiquities".<sup>2</sup> Tolkien singled out Archibald Strong, who translated Beowulf into verse in 1925, for his pronouncement of 1921:

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1. Dark Ages. New York: Mentor Books, 1958, p. 160.

2. Proceedings of the British Academy. London: 1936, vol. XXII, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics", pp. 245-8.

Beowulf is the picture of a whole civilization, of the Germania which Tacitus describes. The main interest which the poem has for us is thus not a purely literary interest. Beowulf is an important historical document.<sup>1</sup>

In 1935 R.H. Hodgkin, describing the world of Beowulf, placed emphasis on "the material rewards of heroic action", the attainment of gold and choiced weapons, and "on wide dominions and plenty".<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that Hodgkin reiterated this opinion in the fourth edition of his work, in 1959, and continued to endorse in particular the views of the Swedish archaeologist Knut Martin Stjer-na.<sup>3</sup>

In Canada, William Francis Collier published in 1872 a manual of literature "for the use of schools in British North America", and described the poem in the following terms:

Beowulf is a nameless poem of more than 6,000 lines, thought to be much

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1. See Tolkien, op. cit., pp. 251-55.

2. A History of the Anglo-Saxons. London: Oxford University Press, 1959, vol. II, p. 461

3. Essays on Questions Connected with the Old English Poem of Beowulf. Coventry: the Viking Club; Society for Northern Research, University of London: King's College, 1912, translated and edited by John R. Clark Hall. These essays place emphasis on the profusion of gold, the prevalence of ring-swords, hoar-helmets, ring-corselets, and ring-money.

older than the manuscript of it which we possess. Its hero, Beowulf, is a Danish soldier, who, passing through many dangers by land and sea, slays a monster, Grendel, but is himself slain in an attack upon a huge dragon.<sup>1</sup>

In France, Georges Guibillon, in his survey of English literature written in 1892, and intended for pupils of the upper classes of French secondary schools, had this to say about Anglo-Saxon poetry:

the poems written in the seventh and eighth centuries are pagan in spirit, and if in some of them Christian thoughts or references occur, these are obviously superadded elements, very different in tone from, and in most cases written at a much later date than the main body of the pieces. These<sup>2</sup> are...of purely Teutonic stock.

Identical views are expressed in Guibillon's twentieth edition of 1954.

The influence of German scholars reached the turn of the century, and spread to the United States. In 1909 a text-book of English literature, intended for schools in the United States, was written by William J. Long. Although Long had studied at the University of Heidelberg for his

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1. A History of English Literature. Toronto: James Campbell & Son, 1872, p. 19.

2. La Littérature anglaise par les textes. Paris: Librairie A. Hatier, 1954, p. 10.

doctoral degree, he makes no mention of the concept of interpolation of the German school of thought. In the chapter dealing with Anglo-Saxon poetry, he writes that at the time Beowulf was composed there existed Scandinavian legends of Beowa, a hero with divine powers, and the monster Grendel. The monster was represented sometimes as a bear, or as the malaria of the marsh lands. He suggests to those interested in symbols that:

the simplest interpretation of these myths is to regard Beowulf's successive fights with the three dragons as the overcoming first, of the overwhelming danger of the sea, which was beaten back by the dykes; second, the conquering of the sea itself, when men learned to sail upon it; and third, the conflict with the hostile forces of nature, which are overcome at last by man's indomitable will and perseverance.<sup>1</sup>

Fifteen years later, in 1924, John Louis Hanly, Head of the Department of English of the Central High School in Philadelphia, wrote that Beowulf is a "welding together of pagan lays" from the sixth or seventh centuries, in a manuscript of the eleventh century, showing the "influence of Christian scribes who made additions to the older heathen

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1. English Literature. Boston: Ginn and Company, 1909, p. 17.

portions of the poem". Hanly reached this conclusion after teaching English literature for twenty years.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting to note to what extent some of the foremost scholars were influenced by this German school. This seems unfortunate, but when men of letters become the vehicles for the dispensing of knowledge, the damage reaches greater proportions. A case in point is that of Henry Bradley, joint editor of The New Oxford English Dictionary, a Fellow of the British Academy, and author of several important literary works. Contributing to the article on Beowulf appearing in the 1944 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica Bradley wrote:

the general impression produced by it is that of a bewildering chaos...Many episodes that have nothing to do with Beowulf have been inserted with the seeming intention of making the poem into a sort of cyclopaedia of Germanic tradition...; and though there are some distinctly Christian passages, they are so incongruous in tone with the rest of the poem that they must be regarded as interpolations...There is a curiously irrelevant prologue... the poem is of unique importance as a source of knowledge respecting the early history of the peoples<sup>2</sup> of northern Germany and Scandinavia.

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1. English Literature. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924, p. 15.

2. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Incorporated, 1944, vol. III, p. 425.

One of the outstanding examples of belief in the work of Christian interpolators is found in an article written by F.A. Blackburn in 1897. He accepted a priori that critics without exception consider Beowulf a pagan poem. The subject, he argued, came from tales dating before the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, the lays having existed at one time without the Christian "coloring" that is now found in the poem. Following an examination of the poem, he concluded that it would be very simple to remove the Christian tone by making emendations and giving certain words their older meanings. This would return the poem to its original form and dispose of the changes made at one time by "some monkish copyist, whose piety exceeded his poetic powers".<sup>1</sup>

In order to prove that interpolations took place, Blackburn points to certain passages, the song of creation - lines 90-114, Cain's fratricide - lines 1261-66, and the worship of idols - lines 175-188.<sup>2</sup> He explains these inter-

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1. "The Christian Coloring in the Beowulf", in PMLA, vol. XII (1897), pp. 217-8.

2. The Anglo-Saxon text of Beowulf referred to throughout this thesis is that of Fr. Klaeber, Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg. Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950. We are not giving the lines referred to here. They are mentioned in Chapter III and discussed in Chapter IV.

polations as being either intentional or unintentional on the part of the pious copyist. Blackburn's theory is this. He believes that the manuscripts the scribe copied from had marginal notes, and the copyist, either through zeal or ignorance, thought they had to be inserted. Blackburn's overall conclusions are:

1. Of the passages in the Beowulf that show a Christian coloring, two are interpolated...in one case...statements in it...are contradicted by the evidence of the poem itself...the other by the dislocated arrangement, which shows an unskilful insertion of marginal matter.
2. All the other passages in which any Christian tone can be detected have been made to suggest Christian ideas by slight changes such as a copyist could easily make.
3. From these two conclusions there naturally springs a third; that the Beowulf once existed as a whole without the Christian allusions.<sup>1</sup>

It is not our concern, at this point, to refute Blackburn's views about interpolations and the Christian "coloring" in Beowulf. These two subjects are treated in Chapter II together with changing views and the new orthodoxy dealing with a different approach to Beowulf.

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1. Op. cit., p. 225.

## CHAPTER II

## LATER AND CHANGING ATTITUDE

Our survey of the early criticism of Beowulf dealt mostly with the German school of interpolation and Christian "coloring", and its effects on critics in other countries. The view that Beowulf suffered at the hands of interpolators was not shared by all. In Germany and elsewhere, other scholars were also at work with Beowulf. Their approach was different. They went to Beowulf as a poem, and studied it as piece of Anglo-Saxon literary composition. This chapter attempts to bring their views to light.

Ironically enough, the views that Beowulf is not a pagan poem, that is, an expression of the natural Teutonic spirit, that it has not suffered at the hands of interpolators, and that the poem is not an accretion of popular lays, were to come from the country that had given birth to contrary views.

The first was Alois Brandl, an Austrian scholar, professor of English literature successively at Prague, Goettingen, Strasbourg, and Berlin. He was also President of the German Shakespeare Society. His views regarding Beowulf were stated in the chapter on Old English literature in the second edition of Paul's Grundriss, published in

Berlin in 1908.<sup>1</sup>

Brandl's Beowulfian innovation paved the way for the new school of thought which produced valuable works by such scholars as Fr. Klaeber,<sup>2</sup> 1922; R.W. Chambers,<sup>3</sup> 1921; Francis B. Gummere,<sup>4</sup> 1923; W.W. Lawrence,<sup>5</sup> 1928; J.R.R. Tolkien,<sup>6</sup> 1936 and others. In the wake of such scholarship, critics of Beowulf modified their views, and many adopted the Christian view point thus endorsing Brandl's ideas. Others, however, maintained their position regarding the paganism of Beowulf and the interpolation of Christian elements, while some remained neutral.

For example, in the introduction to his selection and translation of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, R.K. Gordon avoids

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1. See J.R. Hulbert, "The Genesis of Beowulf: a Caveat", in PMLA, vol. LXVI (1951), p. 1168.

2. Op. cit.

3. Beowulf An Introduction. Cambridge, England, at the University Press.

4. The Oldest English Epic. New York; The Macmillan Company.

5. Beowulf and Epic Tradition. Cambridge; Harvard University Press.

6. Op.cit.

any reference to the Christianity of Beowulf. He limits his remarks to the statement that;

Beowulf has survived complete, not because it was necessarily the best of the old poems, but merely because it was luckier than its fellows.<sup>1</sup>

But further on in his book, in the summary of the plot of Beowulf, he states that one may find many references to Christianity that "seem strangely incongruous".<sup>2</sup> This, he believes, is particularly so when the Christian references are considered in the light of the pagan background of the poem. As a case in point he mentions the minstrel's song of creation and Beowulf's cremation. In spite of this observation, Gordon's remarks about interpolations are limited to what previous scholars have said, namely, we cannot be certain, but it is possible that the poem as we have it is the work of the original poet.<sup>3</sup> His general attitude is one of caution in terms of Hulbert's treatment of the genesis of Beowulf.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Anglo-Saxon Poetry. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, Everyman's Library, No.794, 1959, p. v.

2. Ibid., p. 1.

3. Ibid., p. 1.

4. Ibid., p. 1; and Hulbert, op. cit., pp.1168 ff.

In the 1923 revised edition of his book, Gummere says that many have explained away the hand of revisers and adaptors of Beowulf "in matter and in manner to the point of view of a monastery scriptorium".<sup>1</sup>

In his article appearing in the 1960 edition of the Cambridge History of English Literature,<sup>2</sup> H.M. Chadwick expresses the belief that the poet "must date from Christian times", since there are many passages of a definitely Christian character. He thinks it not unlikely that several lays have been put together. Regarding interpolation, Chadwick endorses the belief in monkish insertions. He states that Christian passages "afford the only sage criterion for distinguishing between earlier and later elements". But when were these interpolations made, he asks? He notes that the Christian element is evenly distributed "between the speeches and the narrative", and is of the opinion that

if Christian influence had made itself felt at this stage, we should surely have expected to find it more prominent in the narrative than in the speeches, for the latter would, presumably, be far less liable to change.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. vii.

2. "Early National Poetry". Cambridge: The University Press, vol. I, pp. 19-40.

3. Ibid., pp. 28-9.

What strikes Chadwick particularly is the two-sided feature of Beowulf: the customs and ceremonies are pagan, the sentiments are Christian. This is true but surely it cannot be used as the norm for determining if there were interpolations. In Chadwick's opinion the account of Beowulf's funeral "could or would" not have come <sup>from</sup> a Christian:

I cannot believe that any Christian poet either could or would have compose the account of Beowulf's funeral. It is true that we have no references to heathen gods, and hardly any to actual heathen worship. But such references would necessarily be suppressed or altered when the courts became Christian... It may, perhaps, be urged that, if the work had been subjected to such a thorough revision, descriptions of heathen ceremonies would not have been allowed to stand. But the explanation may be that the ceremonies in question had passed out of use before the change of religion. Hence, such passages could not excite the same repugnance among the clergy as they would have done in countries where the ceremonies were still practised.<sup>1</sup>

While Chadwick recognizes the particular blend of pagan background and Christian sentiments in Beowulf, he fails to grasp the proper significance of it. He misses the technique used by the poet: the epic approach. The poet chose a pagan heroic story and infused into it the

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1. Op. cit., p. 30.

the Anglo-Saxon Christian spirit of his time. As a weak compromise, Chadwick finds the answer to the Christianity of Beowulf not so much, as some critics have believed, in the influence from Iona missionaries, as in the changes made by minstrels who had a poor knowledge of the new faith;

The Christianity of Beowulf is of a singularly indefinite and undoctri-  
nal type...In explanation of this fact it has been suggested that the poem was composed or revised under the influence of the missionaries from Iona. But is there really any reason for thinking that the teaching of the Irish missionaries would tend in that direction? A more obvious explanation would be that the minstrels who introduced the Christian element had but a vague knowledge of the new faith.<sup>1</sup>

A point of view diametrically opposed to this is that of R.W. Chambers; he believes that Beowulf was written under the influence of the "vernacular Christian poetry" of the time, influenced perhaps by the Caedmonian and Aldhelmian schools. In his opinion there are forcible resemblances "between Beowulf and...the school of Caedmon". He states that "the whole spirit of Beowulf is Christian".<sup>2</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 30.

2. Man's Unconquerable Mind. London: Jonathan Cape, 1952, p. 61.

Chambers explains his convictions about the Christianity of Beowulf in these terms:

In the epoch of Beowulf, an Heroic Age more wild and primitive than that of Greece is brought into touch with Christendom, with the Sermon on the Mount, with Catholic theology and ideas of Heaven and Hell...the gigantic foes whom Beowulf has to meet are identified with the foes of God. Grendel is constantly referred to in language which is meant to recall the powers of darkness with which Christian men felt themselves to be encompassed 'inmate of Hell', 'adversary of God', 'offspring of Cain', 'enemy of mankind'. Consequently, the matter of the main story of Beowulf, monstrous as it is, is not so far removed from common medieval experience as it seems to us to be from our own.<sup>1</sup>

Another interesting opinion is expressed by Chambers concerning Beowulf. He believes that we find in Beowulf "the character of the Christian hero".<sup>2</sup> He remarks that not all of the virtues of Beowulf are exclusively Christian. The new faith, in his opinion, is better noticed in the hero's gentleness, humility, and in his concern with afterlife.<sup>3</sup> For example, he refers to Beowulf's

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1. Op. cit., p. 66.

2. Ibid., p. 67.

3. Ibid., p. 67.

dying words:

Beowulf rejoices that he has sought no cunning hatreds, nor sworn oaths unrighteously: 'for all this may I have joy, though sick with deadly wounds, that the Ruler of men may not charge me with the slaughter of kinsfolk.' And he thanks the Lord of all, the King of glory, that he has been able to win such treasure for his people. And so the poem ends: So did the people of the Geatas, his hearth-companions, bewail the fall of their lord; they said that he was a mighty king, the mildest and gentlest of men, most kind to his people, and the most desirous of praise.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike Chadwick, Chambers recognizes the art of the poet of Beowulf, who successfully projected the Christian spirit of the age on a pagan heroic past. In so doing, Chambers' views are in keeping with the strong belief now existing favouring the Christianity of Beowulf.

The trend in the belief that Beowulf is a poem with a Christian background, has picked up tremendous momentum since 1950. Responsible for this are such scholars as Dorothy Whitelock,<sup>2</sup> Adrien Bonjour,<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Sisam,<sup>4</sup> Arthur

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1. Op. cit., p. 67.

2. The Audience of Beowulf. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958.

3. The Digressions in Beowulf. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950.

4. Studies in the History of Old English Literature. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1953.

Gilchrist Brodeur,<sup>1</sup> Bernard F. Huppé,<sup>2</sup> C.L.Wrenn,<sup>3</sup> Father Maurice B. McNamee, S.J.,<sup>4</sup> G.V. Smithers,<sup>5</sup> Peter Clemons,<sup>6</sup> David Wright,<sup>7</sup> Vincent F. Hopper,<sup>8</sup> and others.

The works of these Anglo-Saxon scholars brought to light the almost forgotten and certainly neglected English literature of that period. They provided the stimulus needed to stir a general interest in that field. Of particular significance was D. Whitelock's inaugural lecture<sup>9</sup> given in 1958 on taking the Chair of Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge.

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1. The Art of Beowulf. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.

2. Doctrine and Poetry Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry. New York: The State University of New York, 1959.

3. Beowulf, (ed.). London: George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd, 1958.

4. Honor and the Epic Hero. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1959.

5. The Making of Beowulf. Durham: The University of Durham, 1961.

6. The Anglo-Saxons, (ed.). London: Bowes & Bowes, 1959.

7. Beowulf, (ed.). London: Penguin Books Inc., 1957.

8. Beowulf, (ed.). Great Neck: Barron's Educational Series, 1962.

9. Changing Currents in Anglo-Saxon Studies. Cambridge: The University Press, 1958.

About the same time many valuable articles dealing with Beowulf and other Anglo-Saxon poems appeared in literary periodicals.<sup>1</sup>

Discussing the audience of Beowulf, D. Whitelock states that the "Christian element" is not only there, but "it permeates the poem", and "pervades every imagery".<sup>2</sup> The poet, she says, wrote for a Christian audience, "whose conversion was neither partial nor superficial".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Mention is made here only of those articles which have been consulted in the preparation of this paper and have been considered of particular interest. R.E. Kaske, "Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf" in SP, vol. LV (1958), pp. 423-456; Herbert G. Wright, "Good and Evil; Light and Darkness; Joy and Sorrow in Beowulf" in RES, vol. VIII (1957), pp. 1-11; D.W. Robertson, "The Doctrine of Charity in Mediaeval Literary Gardens: A Topical Approach Through Symbolism and Allegory" in Speculum, vol. XXVI, pp. 24-49; Marie P. Hamilton, "The Religious Principles in Beowulf" in PMLA, vol. LXI (1946), pp. 309-30; J.R. Hulbert, "The Genesis of Beowulf: A Caveat" in PMLA, vol. LXVI (1951), pp. 1168-76; Charles Donahue, "Beowulf, Ireland and the Natural Good" in Traditio, vol. VII (1949-51), pp. 263-77; Morton W. Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth" in Traditio, vol. VII (1949-51), pp. 410-15; Father Maurice B. McNamee, S.J., "Beowulf - An Allegory of Salvation?" in JEGP, vol. LIX (1960), pp. 190-207; Margaret E. Goldsmith, "The Christian Theme of Beowulf" in Medium Aevum, vol. XXIX (1960), pp. 81-101; Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial: a Chronological Bibliography" in Speculum, vol. XXIX (1954), pp. 116-24; J.B. Bessinger, "Beowulf and the Harp at Sutton Hoo" in University of Toronto Quarterly, vol. XXVII (1957-8), pp. 148-68; Peter F. Fisher, "The Trials of the Epic Hero in Beowulf" in PMLA, vol. LXXIII (1958), pp. 171-83.

2. Audience of Beowulf, p. 4.

3. Ibid., p. 5.

The Master of Jesus College, Cambridge, E.M.W. Tillyard, admits that Beowulf was produced in a period which gave us Christian works. He recognizes Christian influence of some kind in Beowulf, but does not explain what it is. Commenting on Routh's assertion that the gap between the doctrine of original sin and the self-confidence of the Teutonic conquerors was too wide to be bridged,<sup>1</sup> Tillyard states:

Christian doctrine did not eliminate the hero but changed his character from warrior to martyr. About the time when the unknown poet wrote Beowulf, Bede near the beginning of his Ecclesiastical History described in lavish terms the martyrdom of St Alban. And the Anglo-Saxon poems on Judith and St Andrew are surviving examples of what must have been a common literary form: the heroic episode on a Jewish or Christian theme. The earliest English poets dreamt at least they could extract poetry from a mixture of new theme and old form.

He warns his readers not to go to Beowulf in preference to other works if they wish to find a classic expression of the virtue of patience. In his opinion the "tradition of daring and endurance" dates long before the arrival of Christianity

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1. H.V. Routh, God, Man, & Epic Poetry. Cambridge: The University Press, 1927, vol. II, pp. 91-5.

2. The English Epic. London: Chatto and Windus, 1954, p. 118.

to Britain, and is greatly more emphasized in the poem than Christian patience. "Primarily Beowulf depicts the old Teutonic world", but he suggests that perhaps eighth-century Anglo-Saxon combined "an astonishing mixture of English and Mediterranean", and that Beowulf and the Ecclesiastical History of Bede "are near each other in date".<sup>1</sup> In recognizing the blend of Anglo-Saxon heroic times and Mediterranean Christianity Tillyard is pointing the finger at the double-time technique employed by the author of Beowulf.

To the French writer, Emile Legouis, may be applied the remark made by Tolkein that to many critics Beowulf "was something that it is not".<sup>2</sup> Under the title "The Poems which refer to the pre-Christian Age: Widsith, Deor, Beowulf", Legouis states that these poems embody "traditions of the pagan age", but do not represent a true picture of the "pre-Christian times", because they were put together by Latin clerks "whose minds were coloured by Christian morality".<sup>3</sup> The clerks removed what they objected to in conscience, interpolated passages, or added "edifying conclusions".<sup>4</sup> Like

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1. Op. cit., pp. 121-2.

2. Op. cit., p. 248.

3. Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature. London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1960, pp. 20-25.

4. Ibid., pp. 20-21.

Gordon,<sup>1</sup> Legouis finds objection to what he calls striking incongruities between Beowulf's funeral and the song of creation; he objects to this sign of "the obstinate idealism" which makes a saint out of a "strong-armed fighter", and a king's court ringing with "noble sentiments and with counsels of modesty and wisdom".<sup>2</sup> Legouis finds in Beowulf much too much gloom and not enough sunshine. He concludes his remarks;

but Beowulf, or rather the poet who narrates his adventures, has introduced the Christian idea of earthly life among his gloomy scenery, has plumbed the emptiness of mortality, and found it of little worth at the very moment at which he celebrates mortal glory. This is indeed a poem which has come out of a cold cell in a Northumbrian cloister.<sup>3</sup> It breathes the air of the tomb.

One hears in Legouis's analysis of Beowulf a very distinct echo of the early German school. In spite of the many developments which have taken place since the twenties and particularly the fifties, his views have not been modified in the 1960 edition of his work. The answer to the opinion of Legouis comes from Tolkien. Beowulf is a poem,

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1. Op. cit., p. v.

2. Op. cit., p. 23.

3. Ibid., p. 25.

not a history. Legouis, perhaps, has made his critical analysis of Beowulf more difficult in not working with the poem in original. One must recognize that much of the beauty of Anglo-Saxon alliterative metre of measures and rules, of rhetorical artifices are lost in translation. In the words of M.B. Ruud, Beowulf has:

a magnificence of language which leaves critic and translator helpless. Indeed, if the poem has a weakness as a work of art, it lies in this all-pervasive artistry. Beowulf...carries one along on a great golden stream of poetic rhetoric. ..It is a great literary tradition at its finest flowering...Beowulf may not be one of the half-dozen great poems of the world - I confess I do not know - but for sheer style, there are not many works to be put above it.<sup>1</sup>

And W.W. Lawrence adds, the author of Beowulf was "a gifted poet", and his work was one of "beauty and artistry".<sup>2</sup>

The concluding remark of Legouis regarding a cold monk's cell breathing the musty air of the tomb, reminds one of Molière's Les Précieuses ridicules, and point to a lack of basic understanding of the poem, and a failure to keep abreast of changing currents in Anglo-Saxon literature. Surely the revisors of Legouis's work cannot disregard the

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1. See A.C. Baugh, A Literary History of England. New York; Appleton Century-Crofts, Inc., 1948, p. 94.

2. Op. cit., pp. vii-viii.

opinions of Anglo-Saxon scholars like Whitelock, Klaeber, Wrenn and Chambers to mention a few only. A manual of English literature of the tenor of Legouis's must, if it wishes to remain impartial and scholarly, carry or at least mention the opinions of the foremost experts in the field, even though they cannot agree with them all.

In A.C. Baugh's history of English literature,<sup>1</sup> Kemp Malone argues that unlike the Aeneid with its pagan approach of Greece, Beowulf reflects "Christian Rome".<sup>2</sup> He recognizes in Beowulf a piece of literature, whose poet gave his readers a background of pagan heroic past and Christian ideals of his time. Malone touches here on the double-time concept:

the poet turned to the heroic age of the Germanic peoples...from which so many Germanic tribes, the English among them, had gone forth down the years. The poem thus celebrated, not contemporary deeds of heroism, but events of a past already remote, already glorified by a tradition centuries old...The English poet accordingly pictures a society heathen and heroic, but strongly colored by Christian ideals of thought and deed.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Op. cit.

2. Ibid., Book I, Part I, The Old English Period, pp. 3-105.

3. Ibid., pp. 92-93.

The poet of Beowulf, says Malone, makes the hero "Christ-like" in his fight against monsters which portray the forces of evil, the hero eventually giving his life for those he loves.<sup>1</sup> It might be mentioned that A.G. Brodeur read the Anglo-Saxon material prepared by Malone for Baugh's book.<sup>2</sup>

In his College Survey of English Literature published in 1942, B.J. Whiting, points out that many things in Beowulf are "truly pagan", but there can be "no possibility" of interpolation of Christian elements in the poem.<sup>3</sup> Although the Christian theology it contains may not be of the profound kind, (a view which has now changed), it "is part of the essence of the poem".<sup>4</sup>

In the preface to the Beowulf section in their manual of English literature, Deferrari, Brentano, and Sheekey are a great deal more conservative regarding the Christian element in the poem. They write:

interest centers chiefly on the conflicts presented; comment on the conflicts and on the events of life are all highly moral and serious in tone, some of them so thoroughly

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1. Baugh, op. cit., p. 93.

2. Ibid., p. vi.

3. New York; Harcourt Brace and Company, pp. 16-17.

4. Ibid., p. 17.

Christian as to be regarded as insertions into the story by later Christian poets.<sup>1</sup>

This approach to Beowulf is more than one expects to find, and the more surprising since the manual in which it appears is especially groomed and earmarked for Catholic schools in the United States. This manual is the product of The Committee of Affiliation of the Catholic University of America for the Revision of English Curricula.<sup>2</sup> One would expect a wider treatment of the matter of the Christian view point of Beowulf, and certainly an up-to-date presentation of the question of interpolation.

There is no hesitation, however, on the part of H. Spencer to state that the poet of Beowulf was a Christian, a man of talent, that the poem has a pagan background, and the poet's "infusion of Christian ethics" did "not weakened but sweetened" the poem.<sup>3</sup> Spencer refers to the epic handling of historical material in this way:

the English poet is not trying to paint an accurate picture of life on the Baltic in the sixth century, though some of his details may be precise. Just as

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1. Roy J. Deferrari, Sister Mary Theresa Brentano, and Brother Edward P. Sheekey, English Voices Book IV. New York; Sadlier, 1946, p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. iv.

3. British Literature. Boston; D.C. Heath and Co., Vol. I, pp. 8-9.

Shakespeare depicts his Greeks and Romans by blending bits of local color, picked up from his reading, with a wealth of ideas, feelings, and customs ascribed by him to ancient times but actually the fruit of his own observation of human nature in Elizabethan London...so we may presume the Beowulf poet wove into his tapestry of life in an earlier age and a distant land a great deal of what he saw in his own era and country, very likely as an ecclesiastic at some Anglian court.<sup>1</sup>

Among the foremost exponents of the Christian spirit in Beowulf is Fr. Klaeber. His views are put forth in a monumental work which is now considered by many, the magnum opus of the students of Beowulf.<sup>2</sup> In his opinion, the Christian element in Beowulf has not only been "grafted", but it permeates the poem and belongs to it right down to the "fabric" as the very substance of it;

The Christian elements are almost without exception so deeply ingrained in the very fabric of the poem that they cannot be explained away as the work of a revisor or later interpolator...the main story has been thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

Klaeber discards the view of multiple authorship and that of

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1. Op. cit., p. 9.

2. Op. cit., p. 1.

3. Ibid., p. 1.

interpolation.<sup>1</sup> He sees in Beowulf a struggle between good and evil, an "impersonation of evil and darkness", an "incarnation of the Christian devil" with its various epithets, this devil being a member of the tribe of Cain and living in hellish surroundings. The dragon, he says, belongs to "Ecclesiastical tradition".<sup>2</sup>

In Klaeber's opinion, Beowulf is the "truly ideal character", the "spotless" champion of right over wrong and might.<sup>3</sup> He might even be considered, in some aspects, as a symbol of Christ:

We might even feel inclined to recognize features of the Christian Savior in the destroyer of hellish fiends, the warrior brave and gentle, blameless in thought and deed, the king that dies for his people...such a Christian interpretation of the main story on the part of the Anglo-Saxon author could not but give added strength and tone to the entire poem.<sup>4</sup>

Dealing with the relation of Beowulf to other Anglo-Saxon poems, Klaeber is of the opinion that the Caedmonian school generally, and Genesis (A) in particular, had

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1. Op. cit., pp. cii-cv.

2. Ibid., p. 1.

3. Ibid., pp. 1-11.

4. Ibid., p. cx.

a marked influence on the poet of Beowulf. In addition to the similarities in the poetic diction of both poems, he has traced other affinities which he believe can nowhere else be found. Such are the religious motives of the "Creation", "Cain's fratricide", and the "giants and deluge".<sup>1</sup>

The Christian element in Beowulf was discovered by Klaeber as a natural outcome after years of intensive study of the poem. He exercised the "caveat" approach of Hulbert objectively. And as he points out in a footnote to the supplement concerning the genesis of Beowulf, the problem faced with in arriving at a satisfactory explanation of "the peculiar spiritual atmosphere of the poem is not met by maintaining a merely negative attitude".<sup>2</sup> Klaeber mastered the language before attempting to interpret the poem, and worked with the original and not through a translation. He approached the poem as a poem. He read the critics of the so-called German school of Beowulf, thus understanding and being able to evaluate their view point. This approach to the poem enabled him to discover in Beowulf a unique piece of literature "with the highest type of Christian heroism".<sup>3</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. cx.

2. Ibid., p. cxxi, footnote number 2.

3. Ibid., p. cxxi.

Klaeber warns that it is difficult to determine "beyond question" how far one may go in looking at the religious atmosphere of Beowulf.<sup>1</sup>

One of our most prominent contemporary Anglo-Saxon scholars, Dorothy Whitelock, endorses the belief in the Christianity of Beowulf. She discusses the poem in The Audience of Beowulf attempting to clarify the date of the poem from the audience it was intended for.<sup>2</sup> Some of her findings have already been mentioned, others will be brought forward in the examination of the poem, appearing in Chapter IV of this work.

By far the most fortunate event in the studies of Beowulf was the discovery in 1939, at Sutton Hoo, in Suffolk, East Anglia, of a ship-burial dating back to the seventh century. This of course was not the first Anglo-Saxon boat-grave to be discovered in England. A small boat was discovered in 1938 on the Sutton Hoo estate, and another in 1862 at Snape, eight miles from Sutton Hoo.<sup>3</sup> The location

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1. Op. cit., p. cxxi.

2. Op. cit.

3. R.H. Hodgkin, A History of the Anglo-Saxons. London: Oxford University Press, third edition, 1959, p.704.

of the Sutton Hoo ship-cenotaph overlooks the river Deben, and is located about two miles SSW of Rendlesham, once the seat of the Anglo-Saxon kings of East Anglia.<sup>1</sup>

Describing the Sutton Hoo ship, Hodgkin points out:

it was an exceptionally large vessel... the woodwork of the boat had almost entirely disappeared. The many hundreds of iron bolts and rivets...remained in position, and the shell of the boat, a mere stain, in which the bolts and rivets sat, could be clearly traced and exposed in the sand for a length of 80 feet. With stem and stern complete it must have been at least 86 feet in length, longer than the longest boat yet discovered of the later Viking age. The grave-goods had been laid out in a strongly built gabled cabin, 17½ feet long and some 10 to 11 feet high, constructed amidships.

The burial-goods, according to Magoun, Jr., are "of a magnificence unequalled in Western Europe".<sup>3</sup> The treasure now rests in the British Museum to which it was presented, and "constitutes the greatest gift ever received by the British Museum from a living person".<sup>4</sup> This gift is conjecturally valued at some one million five hundred dollars.<sup>5</sup> The items

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1. Francis P. Magoun, Jr., "The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial; A Chronological Bibliography" in Speculum, vol. XXIX (1954), p. 116.

2. Op. cit., p. 698.

3. Op. cit., p. 116.

4. Ibid., p. 116.

5. Chambers, op. cit., p. 509.

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discovered include a sword with golden pommel encrusted with garnets, a scramasax-knife, a great shield, a helmet, a coat of mail, javelins and spears. Among the ceremonial objects is a royal standard mounted with a bronze stag. There is also a golden harness made up of forty-one individual pieces of solid gold, most of them encrusted with garnets. A small six stringed harp found with the treasure has been the object of an article by J.B. Bessinger.<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered that harps are mentioned frequently in Anglo-Saxon poetry. There were drinking horns and vessels with silver-gilt mounts, iron-bound wooden buckets, sheet bronze cauldrons, a bronze bowl with drop handles imported from Alexandria, and hanging-bowls of Celtic manufacture. The silver objects are made up principally of sixteen dishes of classical design and Mediterranean origin. One silver dish bears the assay stamp of the Byzantine Emperor Anastasius I (A.D. 491-518). There is also a pair of silver spoons. The gold includes thirty-seven coins, in a purse with gold fittings, from Merovingian mints. The coins provide the clue to the date of burial.<sup>2</sup>

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1. "Beowulf and the Harp at Sutton Hoo" in the University of Toronto Quarterly, vol. XXVII (1957-58).

2. Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 703.

Commenting on the treasure, Hodgkin remarks:

the gold-work at Sutton Hoo...is quite as remarkable for its quality as for its quantity...we have here work of one of the greatest goldsmiths ever produced by the early Germanic world...the purse-lid is an astonishing achievement in this medium - cut stones and cell-work - and one to which no parallel can be found...The remarkable naturalistic representations in cloisonné work, the men between the beasts and the birds of prey stooping on ducks, on the purse-lid, and the boars on the ends of the shoulder-clasps do not occur in any other piece of Germanic jewellery of this era. ...Another unique feature is the appearance of millefiori enamel inlays... Enamelling of any kind in this period in Western Europe is essentially a Celtic technique...these masterpieces are of English and not of foreign manufacture... The Germanic goldsmith who made the jewellery must have derived this element from native Celtic art...<sup>1</sup>

The significance of the Sutton Hoo discovery has been given full recognition. Many things in Beowulf can now be explained and confirmed as a result of the Sutton Hoo find. The ship funeral of Scyld Scefing<sup>2</sup> and the monument raised on Hronesness<sup>3</sup> in honour of Beowulf inevitably remind us of what took place at Sutton Hoo. The word Hoo, of Sutton Hoo, comes from the Anglo-Saxon "hoh", the dative singular being "hoge" (the Middle English "howe"), and

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1. Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 706-7.

2. Beowulf, ll. 26-7 ff.

3. Ibid., ll. 2802-8.

means, projecting ridge of land.<sup>1</sup> Beowulf's barrow contained a chamber wherein gold and gems taken from the Dragon's hoard were placed.<sup>2</sup> There were drinking vessels in the Dragon's hoard;<sup>3</sup> Sutton Hoo yielded several.

The helmet and shield are definitely like Swedish work of the early sixth century, but of far finer and richer quality;<sup>4</sup> there are numerable references in Beowulf to helmets and shields. There are boars over the cheek-guards protecting the eyes on the Sutton Hoo helmet; the boar is mentioned five times in Beowulf.<sup>5</sup> A.T. Hatto has explained, in "Snake-swords and Boar-helms in Beowulf",<sup>6</sup> the meaning of boar-crests. This has made possible an interpretation of lines 303-6 in Beowulf:

	Eoforlic scionon
ofer hlēorbergan;	gehroden golde,
fāh ond fyrheard,	ferhwearde hēold
gubmōd grimmon. <sup>7</sup>	

1. Magoun, Jr., op. cit., p. 116.

2. Beowulf, ll. 3156 ff.

3. Ibid., ll. 2756 ff.

4. Sune Lindqvist, "Sutton Hoo and Beowulf" in Antiquity, vol. XXII (1948), p. 136.

5. Ll. 303 ff., 1285 ff., 1111-2, 1448 ff., 1326 ff.

6. In ES, vol. XXXVIII (1957), pp. 145-60.

7. A boar's likeness sheen / over their cheeks they bore, / adorn'd with gold; / variegated and fire-harden'd, / it held life in ward / the warlike of mood were fierce.

The helmet after reconstruction was described by Herbert Maryon in "The Sutton Hoo Helmet".<sup>1</sup> The raised ridge or comb which runs over the top, from front to back, would perform the function ascribed to the "wala",<sup>2</sup> rim or tube of iron, D-shaped in cross section, a word whose meaning had remained unknown up to the time of the explanation by Maryon. Klaeber had said that the exact nature of a "wala" was not known.<sup>3</sup> Maryon's description provides also a clear illustration of the phrase "wirum bewunden",<sup>4</sup> with wires bound round, or wound about with wires; that is, the outer surface of the iron tube is inlaid with silver wires. With these details the passage in Beowulf, lines 1030-34:

Ymb þæs helmes hrōf	hēafodbeorge
wirum bewunden	wala ūtan hēold,
þæt him fēla lāf	frēcne ne mehte
scūrheard scep an,	þonne scyldfrega
ongēan gramum	gangan scolde. <sup>5</sup>

comes to light and clarifies the picture in the mind of the

1. Antiquity, vol. XXI (1947), pp. 137-44.

2. Beowulf, l. 1031.

3. Op. cit., note on line 1031, p. 169.

4. Beowulf, l. 1031.

5. Around the helmet's roof (crown) / the head-guard / with wires bound round / the rim (comb, ridge) outside held / that the sword wrought by files / might not severely / hard in the storm of battle, injure / when the shielded warrior / against the enemy / must go forth.

poet. Wrenn has this to say about line 1031:<sup>1</sup>

the hitherto puzzling term "wala" in line 1031 also becomes much clearer after the examination of the reconstructed Sutton Hoo helmet. For this shows traces of that kind of silver wire-work described by Miss Vera Evison in her article on "Early Anglo-Saxon Inlaid Metalwork" (though she expressly excludes the Sutton Hoo helmet as being Swedish); and from the reconstruction we can clearly see that this "wirum bewunden wala" was a tubular hollow ridge of metal extending from the top of the head to the nose, adorned with a delicate<sup>2</sup> decoration of silver wire embroidery.

In his interesting article Anglo-Saxon Poetry and the Amateur Archaeologist,<sup>3</sup> Wrenn establishes a parallel between Sutton Hoo and the cult of Woden, and in his supplement to Chambers' book comments on Karl Hauck's statement about that cult.<sup>4</sup> Woden was the especial god of the East Anglian royal house of the Wuffingas or Wulfingas. The Sutton Hoo standard, the helmet and the shield designs belong to the ritual of the cult of Woden. But at the same time:

these features of pagan warfare could be specifically Christian symbols -

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1. Beowulf.

2. Chambers, op. cit., pp. 519-8.

3. London; The University College Press, 1962, p. 4.

4. Op. cit., pp. 507 ff.

the "Vexilla Regis," the "Shield of Faith" and the "Helmet of Salvation." Thus the cult of Woden - so powerful in ancient Sweden whence the Geatas had come - is linked with Christian transitional art...the royal stag surmounting the standard-holder, which suggests the name Heorot of Hrothgar's hall, could at the same time symbolize the thirsting stag of Psalm 42 and the cult of an ancestral Woden.<sup>1</sup>

The **harp** is most significant. We know the story of Caedmon and how he fearfully watched the approaching harp and would steal away. There are several mentions of the harp in Beowulf, and we know from the poem what use the scop made of it.<sup>2</sup> Wrenn has an interesting comment about the harp:

It seems almost certain that Hrothgar in Beowulf, like the seventh-century East-Anglian king whose personal harp was placed in the ship-cenotaph at Sutton Hoo, himself included skill in accompanying his own verse-recitations on the harp among the liberal accomplishments proper to a Germanic royal hero. For during the day-long feasting in celebration of Beowulf's victory, described by the hero himself to his lord the Geat king Hygelac, the Danish king clearly did recite poetry; and in the context of this description I would definitely agree with Chambers in taking ll. 2107-8 as a statement that Hrothgar the "rum-heort Cyning", also played his harp.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Chambers, op. cit. p. 518.

2. See for example, ll. 2458, 3023, 2107, 2262.

3. Op. cit., p. 5.

The discovery of the harp at Sutton Hoo shows another feature of Anglo-Saxon culture, that is, in the words of J.B. Bessinger, "its musical poetry, of which the harp is a reminder".<sup>1</sup>

The results of the Sutton Hoo discoveries and the conclusions drawn therefrom tend to make the background of Beowulf less primitive and less "pagan". Wrenn describes it this way:

The seemingly ambivalent relationships of pagan Germanic and Christian elements in Beowulf have become natural and intelligible through their material parallels at Sutton Hoo. The so puzzling and basic position of the Swedes and the Geats of southern Sweden in the poem has become convincingly historical. Beowulf is seen, as a result of the Sutton Hoo finds and the immense stimulus to Anglo-Saxon archaeological studies they have provided, to be the product of a civilization of the highest then known cultivation, centuries in advance of the rest of Western Europe.<sup>2</sup>

This chapter has endeavoured to show the almost incredible change of attitude, which has taken place in the last thirty years, concerning the poem Beowulf. Thanks to the unceasing efforts of Beowulfian scholars, Beowulf now

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1. Op. cit., p. 151.

2. Chambers, op. cit., p. 508.

presents itself to us as a poem of great literary character. The explanation for the use of unusual and perhaps unique mixture of pagan and Christian elements in the poem has been the stumbling block of many critics and students of Beowulf. We propose to establish, in the next chapter, the reason for the so-called "ambivalent" mixture of pagan Germanic and Christian elements, by clarifying the nature of the genre to which Beowulf belongs; that is to say, all this falls into place naturally as part of the epic technique.

## CHAPTER III

## GENRE OF THE POEM: HEROIC EPIC

The difficulty in arriving at an understanding of what the poet is trying to do in Beowulf lies, it would seem, for some critics, in their failure to recognize that the poet superimposes the contemporary spirit on an Anglo-Saxon historical background. In this chapter we will attempt to demonstrate that the answer truly lies in the technique of the epic, which infuses contemporary spirit into the historical material, and in the case of Beowulf, fashions it to fit a contemporary Christian audience of the eighth century. Critics have not failed to recognize the epic genre of Beowulf, without perhaps understanding fully the implications of the technique.

As early as 1896, W.P. Ker, examining pieces of literature, was struck by the strong epic flavour of some German and English works, and remarked;

It must be confessed that there is an easily detected ambiguity in the use of the term epic in application to the poems, whether German, English, or Northern... that they are heroic poems cannot be questioned, but that they are epic in any save the most general sense of the term is not clear. They may be epic in character, in a general way...Most of them are short poems; most of them seem to be wanting in the breath of treatment, in

the amplitude of substance, that are proper to epic poetry.<sup>1</sup>

Looking closely at Beowulf, Ker was puzzled over the genre of the poem. He felt it had something of the epic; it had length:

Beowulf, it may be admitted, is epic in the sense that distinguished between the longer narrative poem and the shorter ballad.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of his findings, the literary genre of Beowulf continued to haunt Ker. Examining early Anglo-Saxon poetry, including the fragments of Waldere, and the poem Maldon, he recognized Beowulf as the outstanding piece of "old English epic poetry",<sup>3</sup> and labeled the works "the largest epic works of which we know anything directly".<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, he was of the opinion that Beowulf was lacking in unity, and was lengthened by a sequel.<sup>5</sup>

The question of the unity of Beowulf has been disposed of satisfactorily since by Anglo-Saxon scholars,

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1. Epic and Romance. London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1896, p. 116.

2. Ibid., p. 116.

3. Ibid., p. 117.

4. Ibid., p. 116.

5. Ibid., p. 117.

and it is no longer a point of strong contention. Among those who deal with this matter more thoroughly are Dorothy Whitelock,<sup>1</sup> C.L. Wrenn,<sup>2</sup> Arthur G. Brodeur,<sup>3</sup> and R.C. Chambers.<sup>4</sup> One finds, in addition, many convincing articles and monographs on the unity of Beowulf.<sup>5</sup> The question of the alleged sequel, that is, Beowulf's fight with the dragon and his death, have now passed out of contention since the unity of Beowulf has been established.

In Ker's opinion, Anglo-Saxon poetry falls short in comparison with the greatest epics - that is, it lacks "the proportions of Homer".<sup>6</sup> Ker's difficulty in accepting Beowulf, without reservations, as an epic poem, stemmed in our view from the norm he was using. His sights were turned on

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1. Op. cit., pp. 34 ff.

2. Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment. London: George G. Harrap & Co., Ltd, 1963, pp. 66-7

3. The Art of Beowulf. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960, Chapter III, pp. 71-87.

4. Op. cit., pp. 112-20, 389-400, 533-6.

5. See for example: Arthur E. Dubois, "The Unity of Beowulf", PMLA, vol. XLIX (1934), pp. 374-405; James R. Hulbert, "Beowulf and the Classical Epic", MP, vol. XLIV (1946), pp. 65-75; Peter F. Fisher, "The Trials of the Epic Hero in Beowulf", PMLA, vol. LXXVIII (1958), pp. 171-83; G.V. Smithers, The Making of Beowulf, The University of Durham Press, 1961.

6. Op. cit., pp. 116-7.

the Greek models. He was somewhat blinded by the patterns of the epics of Homer and Virgil, and in appraising other works generically, accepted them as epics only if they conformed precisely to the shape of these great classics of antiquity. In spite of this, Ker persisted in seeing an epic-like structure in Beowulf. Finally, he by-passed the difficulty by stating that while Beowulf is not an epic in terms of the Iliad, the Odyssey, and the Aeneid, it is nevertheless "a complex epic poem".<sup>1</sup>

In his justly famous work on the English epic,<sup>2</sup> Tillyard feels that Beowulf lacks "the true epic amplitude".<sup>3</sup> He is also of the opinion that it is wanting "inner conflict" and "motivation of the actors".<sup>4</sup>

J.R.R. Tolkien sees in Beowulf a "heroic-elegiac poem".<sup>5</sup> In his opinion the poem is not an epic, it is an elegy.<sup>6</sup> He states that the first three thousand one hundred

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1. Op. cit., p. 117.

2. E.M.W. Tillyard, The English Epic. London: Chatto and Windus, 1954, p. 122.

3. Ibid., p. 122

4. Ibid., p. 122

5. "Beowulf; The Monsters and the Critics", London: Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. XXXII, 1936, p.275.

6. Ibid., p. 275.

and thirty-six lines are the prelude to a dirge.<sup>1</sup> Margaret E. Goldsmith brings it close to epic by calling it a heroic elegy.<sup>2</sup> John A. Nist looks upon it as a heroic-elegiac monodrama.<sup>3</sup> C.M. Bowra sees in Beowulf a heroic poem.<sup>4</sup> Like Ker, Wrenn recognizes the epic features of Beowulf, but is puzzled and calls it an elegy "in a sense", and a heroic poem:

Beowulf may best be described as an heroic poem rather than an epic, since the Classical name at once suggests structural qualities which the poet did not aim at.<sup>5</sup> ...In a sense, then, Beowulf must be regarded as a kind of profound and universal elegy. Though not a narrative poem or an epic in any Classical sense, it yet conforms to Aristotle's idea of a poetry more universal than history.<sup>6</sup> ...Beowulf is not in any way an epic in the Classical sense...possibly also an elegiac poetic treatment of Beowulf himself.<sup>7</sup>

Chambers, while not calling Beowulf an epic, recognizes the influence of the classical epic;

It is difficult not to suspect the influence of the classical epic in Beowulf, when we notice how care-

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1. Op. cit., p. 275.

2. "The Christian Theme of Beowulf" in Medium Aevum, XXIX, 1960, p. 84.

3. The Structure and Texture of Beowulf. São Paulo, Brazil, 1959, p. 22.

4. Heroic Poetry. London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd, 1961, p. 30.

5. Op. cit., p. 41.

6. and 7. Ibid., pp. 62 and 65.

fully the rules of the game are observed. The story begins in medias res, but the hero recounts his earlier adventures at a banquet; the poet is not satisfied with telling us that there was minstrelsy at the banquet; he must give us a summary of the lay sung... However that may be, there is a likeness sufficiently strong to challenge comparison, not merely between Beowulf and the Aeneid, but between Beowulf and the Iliad or the Odyssey.<sup>1</sup>

Father Maurice B. McNamee, S.J., does not hesitate to call Beowulf an epic. He makes the point very early in Chapter VI of his book Honor and the Epic Hero,<sup>2</sup> stating "the epic Beowulf, like The Iliad and The Odyssey, ...",<sup>3</sup> and he goes on to show that the hero of Beowulf is a Christian hero, whose qualifications:

are the identical ones enumerated by Saint Paul in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians and by Pope Saint Gregory in his letter to Saint Augustine - the recognition of one's dependence upon God for all one's talents and the employment of those talents not merely or primarily<sup>4</sup> for oneself but for one's neighbor.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Man's Unconquerable Mind, p. 64.

2. New York; Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1959, pp. 86-117.

3. Ibid., p. 86.

4. Ibid., p. 93.

Father McNamee continues the development of his subject to prove that Beowulf is a Christian epic.

Putting aside the question of the particular type, (whether primary, secondary, etc.), let us say at once that Beowulf has all the elements of the epic. This belief is endorsed by several critics. It is put forth, strongly and convincingly, particularly by Stanley B. Greenfield in his article "Beowulf and the Epic Tragedy",<sup>1</sup> and by Hulbert, whose article has already been mentioned.<sup>2</sup> The question then presents itself; why have some critics refused to call it an epic, while others, as we see, have no doubt of its epic nature? The answer is because the technique of the epic has been overlooked. A clear understanding of the basic nature of the epic tends inevitably to the truth that Beowulf is an epic. This was the experience of C.S. Lewis. His findings are contained in the chapters dealing with the epic, in his approach to Paradise Lost.<sup>3</sup> He states:

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1. Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur, University of Oregon Books, 1963, pp. 91-105.

2. Op. cit., p. 1168.

3. A Preface to Paradise Lost. London: Oxford University Press, 1960, pp. 13 ff.

Homer and Beowulf, then, however or whenever they were actually produced, are in the tradition of Primary epic, and inherit both its oral technique and its festal, aristocratic, public, ceremonial tone.<sup>1</sup>

This is also the creed of Peter F. Fisher.<sup>2</sup> He argues that it is not enough to look only for formal characteristics in terms of the Greek and Roman models, for indeed they did not provide for the standard of Beowulf. He says that Homer and his successors exercised economy and selectivity in beginning their stories in medias res, but this did not alter in any way the completeness of the series of heroic adventures. The poet of Beowulf made use of this procedure in disposing of the irrelevant account of Beowulf's fifty-year reign. Fisher classifies the different kinds of epic poetry according to the presentation of the adventures of the hero. He places Beowulf with the Iliad in which:

the emphasis is placed on the trials of the hero with the hero as the central and dominating figure... In all of these, there is a basic struggle between the divine, the natural, and the demonic within the field of the hero's experience.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Op. cit., Chapter III, p. 19.

2. "The Trials of the Epic Hero in Beowulf", in PMLA, vol. LXXIII (1958), pp. 171-83

3. Ibid., p. 172.

Having stated that when the technique of the epic is overlooked Beowulf fails to qualify as an epic, we will now test our stand, pointing out the basic components that go into the making of an epic.

### 1. The Technique of the Epic.

Aristotle discusses the art of epic poetry in Chapters XVIII and XIX of the Poetics. He tells us in the former that epic poetry is "narrative in form", that it employs "a single meter", that it is constructed "on dramatic principles", that it has a "single action" that must be "whole, complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end".<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on Homer's art, Aristotle states that "he admits as episodes many events from the general story of the war, thus diversifying the poem".<sup>2</sup> Aristotle mentions other requirements of epic poetry:

it must be simple, or complex, or "ethical", or "pathetic"... It requires Reversals of the Situation, Recognitions, and Scenes of Suffering. Moreover, the thoughts and the diction must be artistic.<sup>3</sup>

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1. S.H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1951, p. 89.

2. Ibid., p. 89.

3. Ibid., p. 91.

Examining Aristotle's concept of the epic, Paul Marcotte writes in his commentary on the Poetics:

An epic may be as long as its maker may desire provided only that it can be viewed as a whole. The additional length which epic poetry possesses results from the fact that its narrative form allows for the representation of many events simultaneously transacted in reality. Of course, any such event represented must be relevant to the subject. This special capacity of the epic is the principle of its grandeur.<sup>1</sup>

It is this very "capacity of the epic" that has enabled the poet of Beowulf to make use of digressions and episodes of heroic stories. This is developed more extensively later in the section dealing with the handling of historical material.

Having reviewed Aristotle's concept of the epic, we are now ready to offer the following definition of the epic:

The epic, or heroic poem, is a long narrative poem on a serious subject, related in an elevated style, and centered about a heroic figure on whose actions depends to some degree the fate of a nation or a race. Epics were shaped from the legends that developed in a heroic age, when a nation was on the move and engaged<sup>2</sup> in military conquest and expansion.

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1. Notes Towards an Understanding of Aristotle's Poetics. Ottawa: The Runge Press Limited, 1963, p. 75.

2. M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961, p. 29.

Beowulf has all these elements and qualifies as an epic. Its 3,182 lines would seem sufficient to class it as a long poem. It is not so much a historical narration, as a display of the heroic sentiments of courage and self-sacrifice on the part of the protagonist, and the thane or follower's loyalty to his lord. In the epic, the narrative element plays a more important rôle than the descriptive.<sup>1</sup> The account of voyages and fights are geared to incite not so much the curiosity, as the exaltation or awe, of the audience or reader.<sup>2</sup> This is the case with the narration of the Scyldings, Beowulf's arrival in Denmark, his three fights, his last speech, and the funeral.

The tone of Beowulf throughout conforms to Aristotle's concept of the epic:

of all measures the heroic is the stately and the most massive; and hence, it most readily admits rare words and metaphors, which is another point in which the narrative form of imitation stands alone".<sup>3</sup>

The Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse of Beowulf with its unique formulaic diction, with its kennings or picturesque

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1. F. Germain, L'Art de commenter une Épopée. Paris: Les Éditions Foucher, no date, p. 44.

2. Ibid., p. 44.

3. Butcher, op. cit., p. 93.

circumlocutory words and phrases, abundance of compounds, perceptive images, stock words and phrases typical of the oral technique of the time, are devices or ornaments which contribute to its elevated style.<sup>1</sup> This is shown convincingly in Brodeur's book,<sup>2</sup> in the chapter on "The Diction of Beowulf":

In the language of Old English poetry the substantive is preeminent; it is the major element of the poetic vocabulary. In the 3,182 lines of Beowulf I count 903 distinct substantive compounds, 518 of which occur only in no other extant text. And 578 substantive compounds occur only once each in the poem. These figures alone suggest both a high degree of originality and a very wide range in the diction of the work.<sup>3</sup>

He says that the substantival and adjectival compounds are the richest and most meaningful content-words in the poetic vocabulary:

they not only express concepts, often very forcefully or imaginatively; they often contain or imply partial description of concepts as well. Moreover, they play a very important part in the rhetorical devices of variation, enumeration, and progression. From these compounds, more than from other parts of speech, we must form our estimate of the language of Beowulf.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Lewis, op. cit., p. 20. He gives for example Beowulf's last speech to Wiglaf (Beowulf 2794-2820) in which stock expressions occur six times in twenty-eight lines.

2. Op. cit., Chapter I, pp. 1-38.

3. Ibid., p. 7.

4. Ibid., p. 8.

Brodeur points out also that metonymies are widely used in the poetic compounds in Beowulf: "(hilderond for 'shield', maegenwudu for 'spear')", hilde means shield, and rond, border of shield, edge or rim of shield; and maegen means might, power, vigour, or valour, and wudu, wood. In many compounds, says Brodeur:

the base-word, as simplex, is not poetical in itself, but in the compound is elevated by the limiting word, which conveys a pleasant or otherwise special function of the referent. A bench, for example, is a common thing, with no poetical connotations; but a mead-bench is a seat in a royal hall, where the dispensing of good drink symbolizes the warm relationship between lord and retainer.<sup>1</sup>

The poet of Beowulf, according to Brodeur, made a happy selection and combination of his nouns and adjectives, with unique skill, and achieved specific effects.<sup>2</sup> Also, his adjectives:

for the most part, describe persons and things as typically as the substantives express them. A ship is 'broad-bosomed' (sidfaeðmed) - that is, capacious, as a good ship ought to be. It is 'new-tarred', as a ship should be for a voyage. There is beauty in the epithet 'foamy-necked', applied to Beowulf's ship; but the term is equally applicable to any ship breasting a high sea.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 16.

2. Ibid., p. 23.

3. Ibid., p. 22.

Klaeber is of the same opinion regarding the diction of Beowulf.<sup>1</sup> He observes:

In the matter of diction our poem is true to its elevated character and idealizing manner...by reason of its wealth, variety, and picturesqueness of expression the language of the poem is of more than ordinary interest... Generously and withal judiciously the author employs those picturesque circumlocutory words and phrases known as 'kennings,' which, emphasizing a certain quality of a person or thing, are used in place of the plain, abstract designation...<sup>2</sup>

Lawrence also recognizes the skill of the poet of Beowulf in his use of rich poetic diction.<sup>3</sup>

The heroic figure is Beowulf, and on his actions depends the fate of Hroðgar's Heorot, hence the nation, and later on his own, the Geats, when he faces the dragon.

Another important element in Aristotle's concept of the epic is the marvelous:

The irrational, on which the wonderful depends for its chief effects, has wider scope in Epic poetry, because there the person acting is not seen. Thus, the pursuit of Hector would be ludicrous if placed upon the stage -

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1. Op. cit., pp. lviii-lxxi.

2. Ibid., p. lxiii.

3. Op. cit., pp. 34, 3-4, vii, vii-ix.

the Greeks standing still and not joining in the pursuit, and Achilles waving them back. But in the Epic poem the absurdity passes unnoticed. Now the wonderful is pleasing: as may be inferred from the fact that every one tells a story with some addition of his own, knowing that his hearers like it.<sup>1</sup>

According to Germain, not only the characters in an epic may have something of the marvelous; this may extend to the crowds, the beasts, the hero, and the elements.<sup>2</sup> It is there in Beowulf in the account of Scyld's funeral, in Beowulf's strength, in Grendel's appearance and behaviour and that of Grendel's dam, in Grendel's mere, in the Breca episode, in the fight with the Dragon, and in Beowulf's funeral.

The epic is a symbol of solidarity of a nation or a religious group collectively.<sup>3</sup> Beowulf is a guarantee of order and peace. And it is in the midst of troubled times (Hroðgar's Heorot has become deserted, the presence of Grendel has terrorized the Danes, and later the Dragon is causing havoc among the Geatas), that the group must unite in order to insure social order, for a better world. Beo-

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1. Butcher, op. cit., p. 95.

2. Germain, op. cit., p. 44.

3. Ibid., p. 44.

wulf's followers accompanied him. The hero, however, never lost sight of the possibility that a catastrophe, death, might insue.<sup>1</sup> Germain states that the supreme virtue of the hero of an epic is desperate eagerness.<sup>2</sup> Beowulf appears to his audience as a living example of eagerness.

Bowra points out that the hero is not so much he who takes advantage of his innate qualities, but is somehow capable of enlisting supernatural powers. He says:

heroic poetry embodies not a heroic outlook, which admires man for doing his utmost with his actual, human gifts, but a more primitive outlook which admires any attempt to pass beyond man's proper state by magical, non-human means... In such societies the great man is not he who makes the most of his natural qualities but he who is somehow able to enlist supernatural powers on his behalf. ...Of course even the most obviously heroic heroes in Homer and Beowulf...may at times do something of the kind, but it is usually exceptional, and their ability to do it is not their first claim. In more primitive societies this is what really matters, and it presupposes a different view of manhood and of its possibilities and place in the universe.<sup>3</sup>

The poet of Beowulf tells us about his hero's unusual strength; and there exists no doubt in our minds about it. Nevertheless Beowulf acknowledges God's help, directly or indirectly, before or after his three fights.

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1. Germain, op. cit., p. 44.

2. Ibid., p. 44.

3. Op. cit., p. 5.

Beowulf also conforms to other epic requirements laid down by Tillyard.<sup>1</sup> First, an epic must be of superior "quality and high seriousness".<sup>2</sup> Secondly, it must have magnitude embodying "amplitude, breadth, inclusiveness, and so on".<sup>3</sup> This is another way of saying with Ker it is: "one of the complex and comprehensive kinds of literature";<sup>4</sup> Ker also, surely, had inclusiveness in mind when he said that in epic poetry:

most of the other kinds may be included -  
romance, history, comedy; tragical,  
comical, historical, pastoral are terms  
not sufficiently various to denote the  
variety of the Iliad and the Odyssey...<sup>5</sup>

Thirdly, "there must be " in the epic "a control commensurate with the amount included".<sup>6</sup> This implies that events or digressions must be related to the overall picture of the poem, and so organized as to form a coherent enthusiastic and exuberant order. This Tillyard calls "fortuitous concatenations".<sup>7</sup> Finally, the epic must manifest the feelings of

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1. Op. cit., p. 5.

2. Ibid., pp. 5-6.

3. Ibid., pp. 6-8.

4. Op. cit., p. 16.

5. Ibid., p. 16.

6. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 8.

7. Ibid., pp. 8-9.

a group, and represent the spirit of its age. Tillyard calls this quality "choric".<sup>1</sup> As such the epic leaves no room for artificiality. It is built on reality, that is, on the beliefs and ideal of contemporary society of which the epic is a symbol.

Petit de Julleville treats the epic along the same lines in his eight-volume history of the French literature.<sup>2</sup> In his opinion not all races, nations and centuries have the epic temperament. Indeed, the few epics we have in world literature confirm this.<sup>3</sup> It is also interesting to note that Beowulf is Germanic in origin and so is French epic poetry.

We are also aware that, conditions being such, the epic flourished at a certain time only; it is unlikely that Beowulf could have been produced at any other time in the history of England, the reason being the intensity of the human spirit on fire with the new faith. Failure to understand that this strong spirit is at home in the epic induces some critics to call Beowulf an allegory, others an elegy.

De Julleville argues that the epic belongs to an era still primitive, that is, more at the dawn of a particular

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1. Op. cit., pp. 12-13.

2. Histoire de la Langue et de la Littérature française. Paris; Armand Colin & Cie, Éditeurs, 1896, vol. I, pp. 49 ff.

3. Ibid., pp. 51-53.

civilization.<sup>1</sup> Greenfield puts it in the last days of or "in the aftermath of a nation, not in the heyday".<sup>2</sup> Both maintain strangely, in our view, that epic poetry does not flourish in the peak of an era.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that many critics consider the epic essentially a natural and spontaneous product. It comes to life in a country not completely constituted or established.<sup>4</sup> Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth century with its various kingdoms often at war with one another, but striving towards consolidation of its royal houses into homogeneousness, which King Alfred later was to give the country, was fertile ground for the epic.

De Julleville mentions that the Iliad is not found in the age of Pericles. The epic, in his opinion, is an art that corresponds exactly to the birth of heroic times.<sup>5</sup> Historians agree that Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth century was a heroic period in the spreading of the faith. This is

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1. Op. cit., p. 53.

2. Op. cit., p. 105.

3. We are not here entering precisely into the settlement of the exact point at which an epic may or may not be written. We leave that to interested scholars.

4. Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 52.

5. Ibid., p. 52.

confirmed by many scholars including C.J. Godfrey,<sup>1</sup> Bernard F. Huppé,<sup>2</sup> D. Whitlock,<sup>3</sup> R.H. Hodgkin,<sup>4</sup> Peter Hunter Blair,<sup>5</sup> and H.V. Routh.<sup>6</sup> In the opinion of Petit de Julleville, the nation which engenders the epic must be animated by a religious faith, sincere and profound; and the blood life of this nation is faith.<sup>7</sup> We know that the contemporary spirit of Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth century was animated by such great faith that produced Boniface, Willihad, Alcuin, and others.<sup>8</sup>

All these elements are found in the seed of the epic. In order that it may germinate into a fruit-bearing tree, it must be inspired by extraordinary, sad, distressing and sorrowful events. It is said, states de Julleville, that happy nations have no past or history, no heroic times,

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1. The Church in Anglo-Saxon England. Cambridge: The University Press, 1962, p. 188.

2. Op. cit., pp. 99 ff.

3. Audience of Beowulf, pp. 4 ff.

4. Op. cit., pp. 245-355.

5. Anglo-Saxon England. Cambridge: The University Press, 1960, pp. 116-193.

6. Op. cit., vol. ii, p. 85.

7. Op. cit., p. 52.

8. Blair, op. cit., pp. 165-6.

hence no epic poetry. To quote him exactly:

les luttes désespérées et farouches où  
deux races se mordent et se tuent, des  
torrents de sang répandu, des mères en  
larmes sur les corps agonisants de leurs  
fils, la désolation, le massacre, la  
mort, voilà la vie de l'Épopée, qui se  
passionne volontier pour les vaincus et  
n'a point pour devise Vae victis. Elle  
n'a plus désormais besoin pour devenir  
que le héros central qui personnifie  
puissamment toute une nation, toute une  
religion, toute une race. C'était A-  
chille hier, ce sera Roland demain.<sup>1</sup>

And we could add that it was so with the Lusiadas of Luis de Camões of the sixteenth century, and with the anonymous poet of Beowulf of the eighth century.

We have seen so far that Beowulf has the elements necessary to qualify as an epic, and that the period in which it appeared was propitious to an epic. We will now see how the poet of Beowulf handles his historical material.

## 2. Handling of Historical Material.

Our examination of the poet's treatment of his historical material will include historical matter in general,<sup>and</sup> the epic use of "digressions" mistakenly viewed by many

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1. Op. cit., p. 52.

critics as untidy loose ends.

As to the historical quality, we first of all note that the flavour is skillfully historical; enough of active fact or true material is there to give a pinch of seasoning. The plot, or fabric, is created by the poet in keeping with Aristotle's concept of imitation:

it follows that we must represent men  
either as better than in real life,  
or as worse, or as they are...<sup>1</sup>  
The irrational, on which the wonderful  
depends for its chief effects, has  
wider scope in Epic poetry...<sup>2</sup>

Critics, strangely enough, forgetting this part of the poetical recipe, have tried to treat Beowulf as a piece of history, a mine for archaeology, etc., without approaching it as a creation of a living soul - a poem.

Tolkien takes such critics to task in these words:

why should we approach this...poem, mainly as an historical document?...The historian's search is...legitimate, even if it does not assist criticism... To...Nerman as an historian of Swedish origins Beowulf is doubtless an important document, but he is not writing a history of English poetry... To rate a poem...as mainly of historical interest should in a literary survey be equivalent to saying that it has no literary merits, and little

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1. Butcher, op. cit., p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 95.

more need in such a survey than be said about it. But such a judgement on Beowulf is false. So far from being a poem so poor that only its accidental historical interest can still recommend it, Beowulf is in fact so interesting as poetry, in places poetry so powerful, that this quite overshadows the historical content,.. It is indeed a curious fact that it is one of the peculiar poetic virtues of Beowulf that has contributed to its own critical misfortunes. The illusion of historical truth and perspective, that has made Beowulf seem such an attractive quarry, is largely a product of art. The author has used an instinctive historical sense - a part indeed of the ancient English temper, of which Beowulf is a supreme expression; but he has used it with a poetical and not an historical object.<sup>1</sup>

In short, if Beowulf is a piece of literature (the findings of reliable critics agree that it is), then we are not concerned with historical, social, archaeological accuracy, factually speaking, the poet being at liberty to use anything that will enable him to turn his poetic intuition to the creation of a fine artifact.<sup>2</sup> The Beowulf poet was under no obligation, therefore, to follow history. If he did, as we now know he did, it was to give the touch of his-

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1. Op. cit., p. 247.

2. Jacques Maritain, Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry. New York: Pantheon Books Inc., 1960, p. 301.

torical illusion to satisfy the taste of his audience steeped in historical allusions and legends, but alive to the present.

The background material of the story in Beowulf is unmistakably Germanic. Brodeur states that the poet made use of "at least three kinds of material: folk-tale, heroic legend, and historical tradition".<sup>1</sup> The poet touches the note of heroic deeds and traits, which in some instances has its parallel in Germanic history. As Chambers puts it, "they are depicted against a background of what appears to be fact".<sup>2</sup>

The so-called loose ends simply amplify the "sense" of the historical - a reference to a legend here, a name dropped which is historically great, a legendary fight suddenly flashed in, etc.. These do not appear in an outline account of the story; Chambers for instance, very economically compressed Beowulf into a dozen lines.<sup>3</sup> The so-called loose ends are built on a heroic background in which we hear much

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1. Op. cit., p. 132.

2. Op. cit., p. 2.

3. Ibid., p. 2: "Beowulf, a prince of the Geatas, voyages to Heorot, the hall of Hroogar, king of the Danes; there he destroys a monster Grendel, who for twelve years has haunted the hall by night and slain all he found therein. When Grendel's mother in revenge makes an attack on the hall, Beowulf seeks her out and kills her also in her home beneath the waters. He then returns to his land with honour and is rewarded by his king Hygelac. Ultimately he himself becomes king of the Geatas, and fifty years later slays a dragon and is slain by it. The poem closes with an account of the funeral rites."

about the Geatas, the Swedes, the Danes, their kings, their tribes, their wars, and their way of life.<sup>1</sup>

Most of the episodic matter of the early part of the poem contains heroic legends of Sigemund, Heremod, Hama, Ingeld, Finn and Hengest, as well as references to other figures of Germanic antiquity. The history of the Scyldings of Denmark and the cause of their downfall, the wars of the Geatas and the Svear, form the historical tradition and are referred to in the latter part of the poem.

From an examination of the variety of elements in Beowulf, it is evident that the poet used whatever served his theme artistically. As Klaeber puts it, they are;

a record and mirror of historical happenings. What the singers and hearers delighted in was the warlike ideals of the race, the momentous situations that bring out a man's character; and the poet's imagination eagerly seized upon the facts of history to mold them in accordance with the current standards of the typical hero-life.<sup>2</sup>

There is much in Beowulf the hero, therefore, that can be

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1. Both Chambers, op. cit., Chapter I, p. 5, and Klaeber, op. cit., pp. xiv-xvii, mention that the folklore material of Beowulf is found in parallels in stories, situations, references to names, in several tales. For example, the Norse poems, the Ynglinga tal and Ynglinga saga, the German Nibelungenlied, and the Icelandic Volsunga saga, the Grettissaga, and the Þorsteinssaga Vikingssonar. The last tale contains a similarity with Beowulf's submarine contest with Grendel's kin.

2. Op. cit., p. xxix.

related to the historical tradition. Remarks on this, however, will be limited to a few observations only. One of the most noteworthy is the account of the fall of Hygelac in Frisia, which is found in Gregory of Tour's Historia Francorum.<sup>1</sup> The historical Hygelac lived in the sixth century; our Beowulf fought against the Frisians in this sixth century battle - but this does not hold either Beowulf or Hygelac to sixth century. It simply amplifies the historical flavour of the poem and gives an extra sense of magnitude of the hero. In the heroic context, he and his extraordinary deeds could have existed, and this is all that is required.<sup>2</sup> The chronological reading of history, as we have already pointed out, is of no concern to us poetically; the poet is free to use the mode of imitation he desires.

There is also the quality of courage so dear to the Germanic heart. This is exemplified in the poem throughout and particularly in Beowulf's speech before the fight with the dragon. Beowulf is old, but he is willing to face the

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1. See Brodeur, op. cit., p. 133.

2. In fact, taken literally it could be a figure of speech conveying the idea of strength. This we have in the adventures of Richard Coeur-de-Lion. But in keeping with the **epic structure**, the poem shows Beowulf capable of more than human actions, and at the same time remaining a human hero. Wrenn is of this opinion. Op. cit., p. 45.

the monster and **sacrifice** his life to save his people. This spirit prevails in Anglo-Saxon poetry. In The Battle of Maldon, for example, the Saxon chief who is wounded is praised for his courage; in the speech of Byrhtwold, lines 312-3, the same spirit prevails;

Hige sceal þē heardra, heorte þē cēnre,  
mōd sceal þē mare, þē ūre maegen lýtiað.<sup>1</sup>

In addition to historical episodes, there are many individual references and allusions of historical nature. The poet successfully blended these into his story giving his poem more emphasis, life, and reality. We have in particular the reference to the famous smith of Germanic legend, the Germanic hero, artificer in metals and magician; Weland.

Welandes geweorc...<sup>2</sup>

The personality of Beowulf as a Germanic hero is enhanced through a typically Germanic historical spirit, the glorification of the military ideals of the "comitatus". It is the mutual loyalty of chief and retainer, As E.V. Gordon points out in The Battle of Maldon:

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1. Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records. New York; The Columbia University Press, 1958, vol. VI, p. 15, lines 312-3: The will shall be harder, the courage shall be keener / spirit shall grow great as our strength falls away.

2. Beowulf, line 455a ; Weland's work...

## GENRE OF THE POEM: HEROIC EPIC

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The loyal retainers exhort one another to stand by their lord in almost the same words that Wiglaf used to his fellows. They must remember their vows over the mead, and not suffer the disgrace of leaving the battle-field without their lord... Beowulf vowed not to turn back from the Dragon, but to press on until all was ended.<sup>1</sup>

James R. Hulbert points out that historical episodes and legends exist in all long pieces of alliterative literature, and "are hardly more frequent outside Beowulf than in classical poetry".<sup>2</sup> It is realized, of course, that the events in the epic story must be, as W. Hamilton Fyfe remarks, "subordinate and coherent in the whole". He reminds us that Aristotle himself recognizes that the Iliad has a plurality of stories.<sup>3</sup> Butcher is even more specific in his comments on the treatment by Aristotle of diversified episodes in the epic.<sup>4</sup>

While most of the legendary tales enrich the poem

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1. Methuen's Old English Library, London, 1960, p.23.

2. "Beowulf and the Classical Epic" in MP, vol. xliv (1946), p. 69.

3. Aristotle's Art of Poetry. London: The Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 62-3.

4. Cp. cit., p. 286; the epic...can admit many episodes, which serve to fill in the pauses of the action, or diversify the interest. They give...embellishment and variety to the narrative. The epic moreover advances slowly, and introduces 'retarding' incidents, ...by which the Dénouement is delayed, and the mental strain for the time relieved...to be intensified...when the climax comes.

and enhance characterization by way of compliment and complement, comparison, repetition, contrast, and drive home a point, they have little to do with the course of the action. But they are not, as Klaeber argues, a sign of lack of steady advance, of a "rambling, dilatory" method by way of "backward, forward, and sideward movements".<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, the episodes and digressions are part and parcel of the poet's episodic method, they give artistic value to the poem, they are in keeping with the contemporary tradition of oral poetry technique, and as said Sedgefield in his third edition of Beowulf:

without them (the digressions) Beowulf might have seemed to the poet's readers or hearers a story for children or peasants; with them it was fit for kings and courtiers.<sup>2</sup>

The Sigemund legend,<sup>3</sup> for example, has a threefold function. First, it shows the great poetic skill of the scop of Hroðgar's court, and gives an account of the Germanic poet in action. Secondly, it informs how the Danish warriors rejoiced and celebrated the victory over Grendel.

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1. Op. cit., pp. lvii-viii.

2. See Hulbert, op. cit., p. 66.

3. Beowulf, lines 874-99.

They would run their horses in contests, or would listen to a king's retainer, one of eloquence, composing a heroic lay:<sup>1</sup>

Hwīlum heporōfe	hlēapan lēton,
on geflit faran	fealwe mēaras. <sup>2</sup>
...	
guma gilphlaeden,	Hwīlum cyniges þegn,
sē <del>de</del> ealfela	gidda gemyndig,
worn gemunde,	ealdgesegena
sōðe gebunden; <sup>3</sup>	word ōper fand
	...

Thirdly, the lay is a compliment to Beowulf implying his feats are comparable to those of the hero of the legend.<sup>4</sup>

In the opinion of R.M. Wilson, much light has been thrown by Adrien Bonjour on the construction of the poem and the use of episodes. Wilson agrees with Bonjour that each digression:

has its own distinctive contribution to make to the organic structure and artistic value of the poem, and all of them, though in different degrees, are artistically justified.<sup>5</sup>

1. Brodeur, op. cit., pp. 133-4.

2. Beowulf, lines 864-5: at times the warriors let run / in contest go / their bay steeds.

3. Beowulf, lines 867b-71a: at times a king's thane, / a man of eloquence, mindful of songs, / who full many old sagas / a great number remembered, found another theme / with truth turned.

4. Brodeur, op. cit., p. 134.

5. Short Notices, in MLR, vol. XLVI (1951), p. 300.

While some critics accept the episodes, they point out the poet's failure to make clear his transitions from the main story to digressions and back again to it, and to the amount of digressions in relation to the whole.<sup>1</sup> What is more important, in our opinion, is the emphasis on states of mind by the poet of Beowulf. Klaeber emphasizes the point this way:

a mere objective narration is not his chief aim. The poet is not satisfied with reciting facts, heroic and stirring though they be. Nor does he trouble to describe in a clear, concrete manner the outward appearance of the persons, even of the principal hero...But he takes the keenest interest in the inner significance of the happenings, the underlying motives, the manifestation of character. He loses no opportunity of disclosing what is going on in the minds of his actors. He is ever ready to analyze the thoughts and feelings of Beowulf and Hroðgar, the Danes and Geats, Grendel and his kind, even down to the sea-monsters ...and the birds of prey.<sup>2</sup>

This point was made convincingly, as far back as 1908, by the notable German critic Brandl, in a work on the contrast between Germanic poetry and the Homeric epic, in which he considered Beowulf superior in that particular respect.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Hulbert, op. cit., p. 69. This has been rejected satisfactorily by scholars and critics. Hulbert's article is among the best on the subject. He points out that Conrad used similar devices, and Meredith and Browning methods at least as involved.

2. Op. cit., p. lviii.

3. See Hulbert, op. cit., p. 70.

Kemp Malone showed later the effectiveness of the poet's ability to bring out states of mind artfully. His essay, the "Finn Episode in Beowulf",<sup>1</sup> serves as a fine example of how the poet created states of mind. In this episode, the poet infused the Christian spirit into his poem by way of "a poetical exposition of the state of mind of two characters, Hildeburh and Hengest, in a story of adventure and heroic achievement".<sup>2</sup> This, in our opinion, enabled the poet to reach the spiritual centre of the audience. The poet used the same device in dealing with Beowulf's arrival in Denmark, his talk with Hroðgar and Unferð, his fights with Grendel and his dam, his account to King Hygelac upon returning home, his encounter with the Dragon, and his death.

In the art of the poet of Beowulf, the actions of his characters take second place to their frame of mind, the thoughts they entertain, and the motives which animate them. It is not so much what Hroðgar does, as what he thinks, the observations he makes, how he reacts to situations, and what is implied in his homily on pride. The poet's audience

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1. JEGP, vol. XXV (1926), pp. 157-72.

2. Ibid., p. 171; Beowulf, lines 1068-1159.

being familiar with the Bible and the teachings of the Church grasped the allusions and inferences to dependence on Providence, God's will and designs, charity and pity, the origin of Grendel, and the forces of evil.

In the case of the Finn episode, the poet tells us how Hengest felt miserable through the winter passed with Finn, and how he longed for home. He is pictured sunk in gloom and despondency.<sup>1</sup> But no explanation is given why he felt that way, the audience would know. Hengest's conscience troubled him, remorse was at the bottom of his homesickness; he had not been true to his lord unto death, as a good retainer ought to be. What was the reaction of the audience? One of sympathy in Hengest's misery. For the poet "puts the emphasis not on Hengest's sin, but on his repentance",<sup>2</sup> this was meaningful to a Christian audience. In the case of Hildeburh, the poet puts his heroine, the embodiment of innocence and helplessness, against a background of treachery, so significant to the forefathers of the Anglo-Saxons.<sup>3</sup> The poet gives his audience a pathetic figure of an innocent mother, helpless in the hands of an evil destiny.

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1. Beowulf, lines 1125-45.

2. Kemp Malone, op. cit., p. 166.

3. Ibid., p. 161.

Malone concludes his study of the Finn episode pointing out that the interest of the poet:

obviously lies, not in the deeds of heroism, but in the feelings of Hengest and Hildeburh. And he seems to be attracted to these particular characters of the story because they were victims, because they had suffered, not because of their heroism...His heart goes out to them both in their misery and despair and false hope and loneliness and final resignation...Here...are the marks of a Christian poet...we have the old pagan stories seen anew in terms of the religion of the man of sorrows. The Christianity of our poet is deep enough and broad enough to enable him to reinterpret material which one might think would be proof against all attempts to Christianize it.<sup>1</sup>

What Malone has said about the Finn episode represents the art that permeates the poem. We have already mentioned that the audience of Beowulf grasped and understood the Christian allusions in the poem. This was possible because the poet fashioned his work for a people whose Christianity "was neither partial nor superficial".<sup>2</sup> What was the spirit prevailing at the time Beowulf was written? An attempt will be made to show that Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth century was animated by an outstanding Christian faith, and reached a culture without parallel in western Europe of the time.

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1. Op. cit., pp. 171-2.

2. Dorothy Whitelock, op. cit., p. 5.

## 3. Contemporary Spirit.

## Fashioned to Fit

## Mature Christian Audience of the Eighth Century.

In the section immediately preceding, we have endeavoured to demonstrate how the poet of Beowulf handled his historical material. We will now attempt to show that the secret of this art, which is in fact the secret of the epic, consisted in displaying and portraying the spirit of the age; in the case of Beowulf, the Christian spirit of the eighth century.<sup>1</sup>

The epic communicates the feeling of what it was like to be alive at the time it was written, or more exactly, what it was like to be a human being living in a particular community at that time. Furthermore, the epic represents the

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1. Opinion is divided as to the century to which Beowulf belongs. Early critics thought Beowulf belonged to the seventh century. Others were more vague and placed the poem at the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth century; e.g., W.W. Lawrence, Beowulf and Epic Tradition, p. 265, puts it between 675 and 725. Recent scholarship points to the eighth century convincingly; e.g., C.L. Wrenn, (ed.), Beowulf, pp. 36 and 63. A.S. Cook, "The Possible Begetter of the Old English Beowulf and Widsith", Transactions of the Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. XXV (1922), p. 343; Gerald Walsh, Mediaeval Humanism, p. 45; D. Whitelock Audience of Beowulf, p. 105. It is not our intention to establish that point here. We endorse the opinion in favour of the eighth century.

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conviction and habits of a multitude for whom it speaks. It must have:

faith in the system of beliefs or way of life it bears witness to... Only when people have faith in their own age can they include the maximum of life in their vision and exert their will-power to its utmost capacity.<sup>1</sup>

When this happens, the epic becomes the image of a nation's concept of greatness and a people's reflection of their outlook on reality. As Lascelles Abercrombie puts it, it reflects the spirit of the age or zeitgeist. He says, one looks on the epic poet as:

symbolizing, in some appropriate form, whatever sense of significance of life he feels acting as the accepted unconscious metaphysic of the time.<sup>2</sup>

Father McNamee also points out, the epic should be an excellent place to discover the beliefs and ideals of a society, and the outlook and concern of its age.<sup>3</sup> For example, Beowulf exhibits the Anglo-Saxon's veneration for the virtues of courage and self sacrifice in the leader, and the retainer's loyalty to his lord. It is cast in a pagan back-

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1. Tillyard, op. cit., p. 13.

2. See Tillyard, op. cit., p. 12.

3. Op. cit., p. x.

ground made adamant by the faith of eighth century Anglo-Saxon England. It shows:

a picture of a period in which the virtues of the heathen "heroic Age" were tempered by the gentleness of the new belief; and an age warlike, yet Christian; devout, yet tolerant.<sup>1</sup>

We know from Bede's Ecclesiastical History, what was the faith in Anglo-Saxon England in the seventh and beginning of the eighth centuries. Chambers states that Bede has given us enough:

to prove that the combination in Beowulf of valour with mildness and gentleness is no mere idealization... England did produce men of that type, as can be proved from many of Bede's stories, such as that of Oswin, King of Deira... Many different standards and ideals were brought into contact in England in the Seventh Century and the generations following: the civilization of Rome, the loyalties and the violence of the Germanic Heroic Age, the teaching of Christianity. We see these things combining, in different ways, in the historical record of Bede, in Beowulf, in the Old English poetry dealing with definitely Christian topics.<sup>2</sup>

The Christian civilization and culture in Anglo-Saxon England begun in 597, when St Augustine preached in

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1. Chambers, Beowulf An Introduction, p. 128.

2. Man's Unconquerable Mind, p. 62.

Thanet. Soon afterwards, Canterbury became a centre of culture. In 601, a second mission from Rome reached England. Among the scholars newly arrived were Justus, Paulinus, and Rufinianus who were to become first bishops of London, Rochester, and York respectively. Paulinus became the apostle of Northumbria whose King Edwin he converted in 627. In 635 Aidan came from Iona to Northumbria as Bishop of Lindisfarne, the monastery there becoming another centre of culture. At the same time he founded St Hilda's monastery at Whitby. The famous Synod of Whitby in 664, gave greater facilities for the spreading of the faith.<sup>1</sup>

In 668 the great scholar, Theodore of Tarsus, arrived in England. He had studied Greek at Athens. With him was a scholar of African origin, Hadrian, excellently skilled both in Greek and Latin. He became abbot of St Peter's at Canterbury, till about 709 when he died.<sup>2</sup>

Another important figure who contributed greatly to the learning of the time by providing opportunities for others is St Benedict Biscop (or Baducing). A Northumbrian

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1. Blair, op. cit., pp. 116-8.

2. Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 305-12.

noble, he paid six visits to Rome and every time he collected by purchase or gift many books, vestments, altar vessels, relics, paintings for his new foundations. In 674 he established a monastery at Monkwearmouth, which was built by stonemasons brought from Gaul; Gaulish glassmakers were also employed. In 681 he founded Jarrow. On one of his trips he returned to England accompanied by John, the arch-chanter of St Peter's and abbot of St Martin's in Rome. Before his death in 690, he gave rigid instructions that the libraries he had assembled should be kept diligently and not spoiled by neglect or broken up and dispersed.<sup>1</sup>

From the beginning of the seventh century there were intermittent wars between the kingdoms of Mercia, Deira, Bernicia, Northumbria, the Picts in the north, and Wales. It saw the ferocious King of Mercia, Penda, slain in 651.<sup>2</sup>

The heroic age was gradually being brought into contact with Christianity, which was making gains in every direction. The Synod of Whitby opened the road to the Christians of the Continent. It gave an impetus to the civilization of the Mediterranean which had come to England with

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1. Blair, op. cit., pp. 134, 154, 312-14.

2. Ibid., p. 49.

Christianity.<sup>1</sup>

This new faith and learning brought enthusiasm and happiness. For, indeed, in addition to the tenets of religion, it introduced the wisdom and inspiration of antiquity. It produced "an age of learning and enlightenment", and one of "the eminent ages of English scholarship".<sup>2</sup> In 735 a school was established at York. Soon, its library with those already existing at Jarrow and Monkwearmouth, Hexham, Glastonbury, Bradford-on-Avon, Sherborne, Nursling, Frome, and Malmesbury were among the best of the Continent. The library at York had the works of Vergil, Statius, Lucan, Pliny, Cicero, besides nearly all the great Christian apologists.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that Aldhelm, who died in 709, could quote and give illustrations from Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Cicero, Pliny, Sallust, Solinus, Juvenal, Sedulius, Arator, Alcimus, Avitus, Prudentius, Prosper, Crippus, Venantius Fortunatus, Paulinus of Périgueux, and Paulus Quaestor. He could outdo the Grammarian Virgilius Maro Grammaticus in his knowledge of Latin grammar. He knew about the contro-

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1. Chambers, Man's Unconquerable Mind, p. 65.

2. Ibid., p. 53.

3. Routh, op. cit., p. 84; Blair, op. cit., p. 144; Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 323-26.

versy lasting fourteen days between the grammarians Galbungus and Terrentius about the vocative case of ego. He had heard of Virgilius' twelve different kinds of Latin.<sup>1</sup>

There were teachers of Latin and Greek in Anglo-Saxon England of the seventh and eighth centuries. Aldhelm used his skill in rhetoric to impress men about the new schools of learning springing up in England. He would say:

'The fields of Ireland are rich in learners...and yet Britain, placed if you like to say so at almost the extreme margin of the western clime of the orb, possesses as it were the flame-bearing sun and the lucid moon; that is to say, Theodore the archbishop...and Adrian his companion in the brotherhood of learning.' What need to go to Ireland when there were such teachers of Greek and Latin 'here on the fertile soil of Britain'?<sup>2</sup>

The monasteries in Anglo-Saxon England, particularly those of the schools of Canterbury and York, became educational centres for Western Europe. Bede, Egbert, Aldhelm and Alcuin are but a few of the many scholars who owe their fame to those centers of learning.<sup>3</sup>

The copying and reading of books became a religious

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1. G.A. Smithson, "The Old English Christian Epic", MP, vol. I (1910), pp. 303-400; Hodgkin, op. cit., pp.324-25.

2. Cited by Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 325.

3. Routh, op. cit., p. 85.

observance, and the survival today of several Gospel books are among the greatest achievements in manuscript illumination. Books were being copied by English monks in their own scriptoria. Before 678 Wilfrid ordered for his newly dedicated church at Ripon a copy of the four Gospels, to be written in letters of gold on parchment dyed with purple. Jewelers made gold cases set with precious stones to hold them. Other Gospels of importance are the so-called Stonyhurst Gospels, with their binding of dark red African goat leather. The Lindisfarne Gospels with their ornaments of precious metals and gems. The Book of Durrow, the Book of Kells, the Gospels of St Chad also called the Lichfield Gospels, and the Echternach Gospels. All these are living examples of the skill of calligraphers, artists, and jewellers in a blend of Mediterranean, Germanic and Celtic tradition,<sup>1</sup> and represent but to a small extent the culture to which the Anglo-Saxons had risen at that time in that particular field of the arts.

The age was animated by the ideal that inspired Magnus-Aurelius Cassiodorus, the founder of one of the richest and most famous libraries in Europe "unde et anima susciperet aeternam salutem et casto atque purissimo eloquio fidelium lingua commeretur" (whence the soul will receive eternal

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1. Blair, op. cit., pp. 316-18

salvation and the tongue of the faithful be adorned by a chaste and most pure eloquence).<sup>1</sup> In De Virtutibus et Vitiis, Alcuin entertained the contention that true wisdom was to be found only in obedience to God. But he also wrote Libellus de Sancta Trinitate to show the importance of dialectics to the exposition of dogma.<sup>2</sup> All his life was spent in diffusing knowledge. Alcuin's connection with the Gregorian missal is now well acknowledged. Continental historians are now styling him "Alcuin the Great".<sup>3</sup> In 1944 Etienne Gilson dedicated La Philosophie au Moyen Age to Alcuin.<sup>4</sup>

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1. De Institutione Divinarum Artium, Praefatio, cited by Routh, op. cit., p. 85; also by the R.P. Dom Remy Ceillier, in Histoire Générale des Auteurs Sacrés et Ecclésiastiques, Paris: Chez Louis Vivès, Libraire-éditeur, 1862, pp. 235 ff. Cassiodorus lived from 465? to 575. As a scholar, he was the right hand of Theodoric, King of the Goths. He founded a monastery and set up a world famous library. I. Goschler states, in his Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Théologie Catholique, Paris: Gaume Frères et J. Dupréy, éditeurs, 1869, pp. 95 ff.: "quoique âgé de 70 ans, le courageux vieillard se chargea de la direction des moines, ouvrit un pieux et sûr asile aux savants, et acquit le mérite d'avoir uni la vie scientifique à la vie monastique. Il créa une grande bibliothèque, occupa ses moines de la copie des vieux livres, sauva ainsi bien des classiques d'une perte certaine, enseigna à ses religieux les humanités et la philosophie, leur expliqua les saintes écritures et les autres branches de la science ecclésiastique, et rendit le couvent de Viviers, sous le double rapport de la science et de la piété, le modèle des monastères qui s'établirent..."

2. Routh, op. cit., p. 85.

3. Gerard Ellard, S.J., Master Alcuin, Liturgist. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1956, p. vii.

4. See E.S. Duckett, Alcuin Friend of Charlemagne. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1951, p. vii.

This was the atmosphere that surrounded and permeated the religious poetry of Caedmon and his successors from 657 to 680, and that of Cynewulf and his school, now placed by scholars, in the late eighth and beginning of the ninth century. Some of the works produced in this period of literary accomplishments include Juliana, Caedmon's Hymn, Genesis, Exodus, Daniel, Azariah, Judith, Christ and Satan, The Fates of the Apostles, The Ascension, Elene, Guthlac, Andreas, the Phoenix, the Bestiary, the Riddles, The Harrowing of Hell, the Wanderer, the Seafarer, and the Doomsday Poems. It should be remembered that these extant poems survived the Vikings onslaughts on libraries, which began with St Cuthbert's monastery on Lindisfarne in 793, followed by Bede's church at Jarrow in 794, and continued throughout the ninth century until 865 when the micel here - Great Army landed in East Anglia.<sup>1</sup> The quality of the extant literary works is an indication of the greatness of the age in which they were produced, and one may surmise that they came from a period that saw the creation of many more works.

The Psalter held a very important place in Christian devotions of the Anglo-Saxons. Malone mentions that an Anglo-Saxon metrical version once existed, but it has come down to

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1. Blair, op. cit., pp. 55 ff.

us in fragments only.<sup>1</sup>

In the words of Routh, the works produced in that period:

celebrate the triumph of the new religion over the old. On the one side stands the true God or his emissary backed by the hosts of angels; on the other here are the pagans or the Jews supported by Satan. In the end the Divine Power, by whatever means, triumphs over the forces of Evil and the victory rests with Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

The accomplishments in the fields of the arts and literature had a parallel in the great age of missionary activities of the latter part of the seventh century and most of the eighth. It is considered one of the most remarkable achievements of Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>3</sup> One might easily recognize in Beowulf the spirit of determination, self-sacrifice and charity, which animated the Anglo-Saxon missionaries.

The movement began with Bishop Wilfrid, who spent the winter of 678 among the Frisians, when he had considerable success in his conversion work. He was an inspiration to his countrymen who followed so generously in his path. Later Willibrord was sent over by Egbert, reaching Frisia in 690. Others went to Westphalia and Kaiserwerth on the Rhine;

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1. See Baugh, op. cit., p. 85.

2. Op. cit., p. 86.

3. Blair, op. cit., p. 162.

two others, Black Hewald and White Hewald, went into Saxon country and were killed. Later, monasteries were founded, churches built, and Frisians were trained for the priesthood at schools in England. Willibrord died in 739 in his monastery at Echternach. All these missionaries were from Northumbria.<sup>1</sup>

St Boniface is perhaps the greatest figure in this movement. A West Saxon, he became a scholar under the beneficial influence of the learning brought to Canterbury by Theodore and Hadrian, and from the teachings and writings of Aldhelm. He went to Frisia in 716, and again in 718. He was consecrated Bishop in 732, worked among the Germans and the Franks, spending more than twenty years with them, and went back to Frisia in 754, when he was massacred at Dokkum with some fifty of his companions.<sup>2</sup>

Boniface maintained close ties with Anglo-Saxon England, frequently turning to the English clergy for help and advice. Boniface's letters and those of his successor, the Anglo-Saxon Lullus, testify to the continuous intercourse between England and the Continent.<sup>3</sup> Personal contacts were maintained, and many helpers, including women, went out to

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1. Blair, op. cit., p. 163.

2. Ibid., p. 164.

3. Ibid., p. 165.

assist him. Monasteries in England supplied books for the new founded houses on the Continent.<sup>1</sup>

Boniface would send sympathy and encouragement to those under difficulties, as was the case <sup>with</sup> Daniel of Winchester, his old Bishop. On one occasion he sent him a present as a token of his love;

a towel of silk mixed with rough goat's hair and as a solace in his own difficulties he asks the bishop if he will send him the book of the six Prophets which had belonged to his former teacher and which he remembered to have been in a single volume in clear letters.<sup>2</sup>

It was also at the time that the works of Bede were being circulated. News had reached him of this, and:

more than once he wrote to Bede's pupil Egbert, then archbishop of York, and to the abbot at Monkwearmouth asking that copies of some of Bede's Biblical commentaries might be sent to him. On one occasion he sent Egbert a cloak and a towel, and on another two small casks of wine 'for a merry day with the brethren'.<sup>3</sup>

Missionary activities reached their peak late in the eighth century, with two Northumbrians. Willihad went to Frisia about 770, and in 780 Charlemagne sent him to the Saxons. In 787 he became bishop of Bremen, and was buried

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1. Blair, op. cit., p. 165.

2. Ibid., p. 165.

3. Ibid., p. 165.

in the cathedral there, when he died in 789.<sup>1</sup> The other was Alcuin who was personally known to Charlemagne. In 782, while returning from Rome, Alcuin accepted the invitation to settle permanently at the Frankish court as head of the palace school. He became, so to speak, Charlemagne's "minister" of education. He played a vital rôle in the revival of theological and philosophical studies among the Franks.<sup>2</sup>

The English clergy accompanied, as we have seen, the progress of their missionaries on the continent. In addition to Boniface's letters, there survives correspondence with Cuthbert, archbishop of Canterbury, Mildred of Worcester, Daniel of Webster, Torhthelm of Leicester, and Pecthelm of Whithorn. This remains as a convincing proof of the widespread degree of intellectual attainment of the Church at that time.<sup>3</sup>

Hodgkin refers to this period as "The Golden Age" of the conversion.<sup>4</sup> He points to deeds not unworthy of the hero of Beowulf. St Cuthbert's feats of physical endurance when he shut himself off from the world on the island of

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1. Blair, op. cit., p. 165

2. Ibid., p. 166.

3. Ibid., p. 144.

4. Op. cit., pp. 340, 343.

Inerr Farne. His escape from the plague, his fastings, his immersions, and his bodily strength which enabled him to lift rocks on the wall of his cell, which normally would have needed the ordinary strength of four men. There is also the case of bishop Wilfrid. In 702, when he was seventy years of age, he made the whole journey to Rome on foot. Many similar feats were performed as a result of brotherly devotion, and Christian endurance and sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

The aristocracy of the time also had its great men. Bede tells us about Oswin, King of Deira. We also know about the unique accomplishments of Offa, king of Mercia from 757 to 796. He is considered the greatest, after King Alfred, of all Anglo-Saxon kings. He became the father-in-law of one of Charlemagne's sons. He built the great Dyke between England and Wales, issued a new type of currency, a silver penny which continued in circulation after the Norman Conquest.<sup>2</sup>

The Anglo-Saxon period of the Age of Conversion affords comparison with the ages of greatest vitality in mediaeval and modern England. It gave Anglo-Saxons:

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1. Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 340, 343.

2. Blair, op. cit., pp. 52-3.

a new heaven and a new earth...a new language, a new writing...books and an education based on books. It opened to them the literature of Rome, and a civilization...from all the Mediterranean world...What was impossible to a Christian people when old and young had their visions, and when signs and wonders were reported from every quarter? Even the relics of native saints were...as efficacious as those...from Rome. An the other miracles - the stone churches, Aldhelm's Latin style, Bede's Ecclesiastical History, the art of the Lindisfarne Gospels, and of the sculptured crosses - are not these enough to demonstrate that the Anglo-Saxons...were as much alive and as gifted as the Elizabethans?<sup>1</sup>

This spirit was inspired by charity, courage and abnegation.

Is this not the spirit that permeates Beowulf?

In the wake of the spirit that animated the Church in the propagation of the faith, at home and abroad, apostles, missionaries, hermits, martyrs and saints appeared everywhere. Some have referred to that period as the Age of English Saints.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, it was a heroic age, of standards and ideals, brought about by the teachings of Christianity, the influence of Mediterranean civilization, and the loyalties and boldness of the Germanic Heroic Age. These are the

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1. Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 365-6.

2. Chambers, Man's Unconquerable Mind, p. 54.

elements that went into Bede's historical record, in Beowulf and in other Anglo-Saxon poetry;

brought into touch with Christendom, with the Sermon on the Mount, with Catholic theology and ideas of Heaven and Hell...the gigantic foes whom Beowulf has to meet are identified with the foes of God. Grendel is constantly referred to in language which is meant to recall the powers of darkness with which Christian men felt themselves to be encompassed: 'inmate of Hell', 'adversary of God', 'offspring of Cain', 'enemy of mankind'. Consequently, the matter of the main story in Beowulf... is not so far removed from common medieval experience...Beowulf, for all that he moves in the world of the primitive heathen Heroic Age of the Germans, nevertheless is almost a Christian knight... the character of the Christian hero.<sup>1</sup>

The poet of Beowulf was indeed successful in creating a work so vitally Christian and so heroically Germanic, which more than adequately reflects the manners and ideals of the heroic spirit of the time. C.L. Wrenn considers it the supreme example of "heterogeneous assimilateness", which, in his opinion, is the most prominent feature of Anglo-Saxon culture.<sup>2</sup> The most convincing proof of such a blend of culture superimposed on Germanic heroic background

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1. Chambers, op. cit., pp. 66-7.

2. Anglo-Saxon Poetry and the Amateur Archaeologist, p. 4.

is found in the Sutton Hoo ship cenotaph of a mid-seventh century East-Anglian Christian king.

We have seen that the contemporary spirit of the eighth century was heroically Christian and was propitious to the making of an epic such as Beowulf. We know from Anglo-Saxon poetry in general and from other sources<sup>1</sup> the great extent to which the Psalms, the Gospels, and the Bible were available to Anglo-Saxons and known to them. It is to be remembered that the poet of Beowulf was composing for Christians, "whose conversion was neither partial nor superficial".<sup>2</sup> They would readily understand the poet's allusions to the Bible, without expecting explanatory details. If the poet had been more explicit, that is plainer, in his references to Cain, Abel, the flood, the giants, etc., the audience would have considered his explanations superfluous and out of place. As Whitelock puts it, the poet:

assumes their familiarity not merely with the biblical story, but with the interpretation in commentaries... His hearers would not have understood why it was 'the race of giants' that were destroyed by the flood, unless they were aware of the identification of the giants of Genesis vi.4...<sup>3</sup>

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1. Bede's Ecclesiastical History; C.J. Godfrey, The Church in Anglo-Saxon England; several Early English Text Society editions of Psalters; other editions: The Paris Psalter, The Canterbury, The Tiberius, The Salisbury, The Vespasian; The Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus; etc.

2. Whitelock, op. cit., p.5.

3. Ibid., p. 5.

The fact that the poet confined his references to events of the Old Testament need not imply a partially converted audience that knew little about the New Testament.<sup>1</sup> A mature Christian audience in those days would understand not only their faith, but would see it pre-figured in the Old Testament as well as stated in the New. Beowulf's fabulous feats would remind the audience of Samson's unique strength, and the monsters of the powers of evil. They would associate the Dragon with the familiar tradition of representing the fiends of hell as fire-breathing dragons, or with the dragon of the Apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> The answer to absence of allusions to the New Testament lies in some other explanation, which is not our particular concern here.<sup>3</sup>

It is safe to assume that an audience familiar with Biblical allusions will also understand homiletic references and moral applications of the poem. We have in mind, for

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1. Whitelock, op. cit., p. 6.

2. Apocalypse 21:2. And he laid hold of the dragon the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

3. M.E. Goldsmith disagrees that Beowulf refers only to the Old Testament. In her opinion, it contains the essence of the doctrine of St Paul's First Epistle to Timothy, 6:10, 12, 17, 18, 19, namely that cupidity is the root of all evils; fight the good fight; etc.... Op. cit., p.101.

example, Hroðgar's homily on pride,<sup>1</sup> the metaphors of the slayer who shoots wickedly from his bow,<sup>2</sup> and the man who is struck when the guardian of the soul sleeps.<sup>3</sup> These were intelligible to the audience of Beowulf as was the poet's conception of the four last things, namely, death, the judgement, heaven and hell.

It should be pointed out also that if Hroðgar's scop sang of the Creation, he did so because in the experience of the poet this procedure of listening to Christian poetry was carried on at the court of Christian kings. Bede confirms this in his Ecclesiastical History, where he tells us that the traditional native metre was being used in the composition of religious poems in keeping with Caedmon's example.<sup>4</sup>

Whitelock makes an excellent point when she states:

the poet did not himself invent all his poetic expressions for Christian conceptions, but drew them from a common store that had gradually grown up among poets dealing with religious subjects... The poet uses a great number of Chris-

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1687 ff.
  2. Ibid., ll. 1743 ff.
  3. Ibid., ll. 1742, 1745 ff.
  4. Book IV, Chapter 22;24.

tian expressions that are also to be found in surviving religious verse.<sup>1</sup>

This is another indication that the audience of the poet Beowulf was familiar with and could understand the inferences and allusions the poem contained. In other words, the audience deeply Christian, and well versed in the knowledge of Christian tradition, doctrine and the Scriptures.

That this could have taken place in the seventh century is possible but unlikely, since the Church had not made sufficient gains as yet. We know from Bede that the Church in Northumbria as late as 734 was understaffed for effective instruction in the Christian faith.<sup>2</sup> It would seem more likely that a Christian audience of the latter part of the eighth century would be more mature, hence familiar with the doctrine of the Church, the Old and the New Testaments. Such an audience would be able to listen intelligently and appreciate artistically the Christian epic Beowulf. Whitelock is of this opinion, but views are divided.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 9.

2. Op. cit., Book V, Chapter 23.

3. For the age of Bede: Lawrence, Tolkien; Chambers: up to 750; Wrenn; 750; Crawford; 750; Klaeber: from 700 to 750; Girvan; 700; Schücking: the ninth century.

In this chapter we have argued that the difficulty some critics find in recognizing Beowulf as a Christian poem lies in their failure to grasp the technique of the epic; in the case of Beowulf, this is the poet's artistic ability to project the heroic Christian spirit of Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth century into a pagan Germanic heroic past. We have shown that the poet presented his historical material in a fashion acceptable to a Christian audience of his time, namely, Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth century. We have seen also that the heroic Christian spirit permeated the life of the Anglo-Saxons, had its parallel in their culture which reached a high degree in the arts, paved the way for great heroic exploits of Apostolic endeavour unprecedented in the annals of missionary activities in Western Europe; in other words, this was the proper atmosphere for the birth of the epic Beowulf. The following chapter will entail an examination of some parts of the poem containing distinctive Christian allusions, inferences, and statements. Particular care will be taken to give our solution to certain passages which have been a source of difficulty to the critic.

## CHAPTER IV

## CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE POEM

The study that follows will endeavour to outline in particular the most outstanding Christian characteristics of the poem. Special attention will be given to passages concerning Grace and Providence, Genesis, Cain, Grendel and his dam, Grendel's abode, Grendel's mere, Hroðgar's homily, the Dragon, Beowulf's funeral, Fate, feuds and others.

## 1. Grace and Providence.

Grace and Providence play a very important rôle in Beowulf. Early in the poem, the poet speaks of the Providence of God:

Ðāem eafera waes            aefter cenned  
geong in geardum,        þone God sende  
folce tō frōfre.<sup>1</sup>

As Margaret E. Goldsmith says on this point, God took pity on "the plight of the lordless Danes".<sup>2</sup> Then Scyld, who had been sent by God, returns:

Him ā Scyld gewāt        tō gescaephwile,<sup>3</sup>  
felahrōr fēran            on Frēan wāere.

that is, into the protection of the Lord, or to the shelter

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1. Beowulf, ll. 12-14a; To him a son was / afterwards born / a young one in his courts, / whom God sent / as a comfort to his people.

2. Op. cit., p. 91.

3. Beowulf, ll. 26-7: The Scyld went (departed) / at his fated time (hour) / strong (the much strenuous) to go / into the Lord's protection.

of God. This consciousness of Providence is the very mark of a Christian; right from the beginning we have this note of the presence of God in the workings of our poem. Certainly this notion was deeply ingrained in the Anglo-Saxon Christians; the ancient Wyrd was now rightly understood by them as the manifestation of God's will.

Marie Padgett Hamilton puts forth a plausible opinion on this. She says that St Augustine of Hippo probably held a marked influence on the thinking of Anglo-Saxon Christians at a time when religious dogma throughout Roman Christendom was dominated by Augustine,<sup>1</sup> and God's grace being the all-important topic in men's minds.<sup>2</sup> She calls J.D.A. Ogilvy's Books Known to Anglo-Latin Writers from Aldhelm to

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1. Bernard F. Huppé, in Doctrine and Poetry, The State University of New York, 1959, is of the same opinion and shows convincingly Augustine's influence on Old English poetry. Augustine's theory of literature and the enjoyment of literature by the viewer are discussed. In page 24, Huppé states "Aesthetic pleasure derives, according to Augustine, from the very discovery of hidden meanings; the quality of the pleasure has a direct relation to the difficulty of the ambiguities to be resolved. As the mind is exercised it is prepared to receive with warmth and delight the dogmatic truth which stated plainly might be accompanied by no pleasurable movement of the mind". One may hear in this an echo of the stylistic method of the poet of Beowulf in the use he made of kennings, simplices, substantival and adjectival compounds, combinations, etc., (Brodeur, op. cit., pp. 6-8, 13-4, 18, 36).

2. Hamilton, op. cit., pp. 311-2.

Alcuin (670-804) to her support, and says:

'The City of God', Ogilvy concludes, 'must have been known in England from the very beginning of the eighth century at the latest, and probably reached the island as early as the times of Hadrian and Theodore (669). It is continually cited, and quoted without citation', by Anglo-Latin writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin.<sup>1</sup>

Hamilton believes that among Augustine's writings, a prime favourite of the Anglo-Saxons was:

his analysis of the past, viewed sub specie aeternitatis, wherein the principles of predestination and grace are mostly amply described in their effects upon history... By all odds the most popular section of the Civitas Dei in England was Book XV (Ogilvy, p. 14, note 26): Augustine's account of the two societies...the heavenly citizen, as typified by Abel, 'by grace predestined, and by grace elected', and the carnal citizen, as typified by Cain. (De Civitate Dei 15.1)<sup>2</sup>

Hamilton states that Augustine held the concept of Divine Providence as a unifying principle of history, and saw God, the Supreme Ruler of all peoples from the beginning, as bestowing graces upon them.<sup>3</sup> In her opinion, this is the formula for understanding the references which are

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1. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 312.

2. Ibid., p. 312.

3. Ibid., p. 314.

made in Augustine's City of God regarding the past of the heathen nations, the Hebrews, and the Teutonic tribes. She corroborates her statement by referring to the belief that the Germanic peoples were descended from Japheth, and quotes Aelfric's De Veteri Testamento in support. This explains why the poet of Beowulf, she says, recognizes that the hand of the Christian God had always ruled mankind, and places Him in evidence early in the poem. This appears in lines 12-14, 26-27,<sup>1</sup> and further on in:

paet mihtig God wēold wīdeferhð. <sup>2</sup>	Sōð is gecȳped, manna cynnes
gumena cynnes,	Metod eallum wēold swā hē nū gīt dēð. <sup>3</sup>
onwīndeð waelrāpas, saela ond maela;	Faeder on lāeteð, sē gewēald hafað. <sup>4</sup> paet is sōð Metod. <sup>4</sup>
hū mihtig God þurh sīdne sefan eardond eorlscipe;	Wundor is tō secganne, manna cynne sytttru brytta, hē āh ealra gewēald. <sup>5</sup>

1. Vide supra, p. 103.

2. Beowulf, ll. 700b-02a: Truly is shown / that  
mighty God / the race of men / rules for ever.

3. Beowulf, ll. 1057b-58: The Creator ruled all /  
the race of men / as he now yet does.

4. Beowulf, ll. 1609b-11: The Father loosens /  
unwinds the water-fetter (ice), / who has power / of  
times and seasons / that is the true Creator.

5. Beowulf, ll. 1724b-27: Wonderful it is to say /  
how mighty God / to the race of men / through (his) ample  
mind (heart) / wisdom dispenses / land and valour; /  
He possesses power over all.

wold dōm Godes            dāēdum raēdan  
gumena gehwylcum, swā hē nū gēn dēð.<sup>1</sup>

We agree with Hamilton that the poet's emphasis is on Providence, but we question her statement that this attitude towards Providence explains why the poet of Beowulf recognizes also the hand of God in his tales of pre-Christian Scandinavia. We believe that the Beowulf poet could have had in mind God's care of the pre-Christian Scandinavians, but this is not at all necessary; the poet was talking about and to his contemporary Christian Anglo-Saxon audience.

While the idea of God's Providence, as we have seen, was probably paramount in the minds of the Anglo-Saxon Christian audience of Beowulf, they associated Providence also, directly or indirectly, with God's protection, His will, mercy, goodness, power, judgement, and their dependence on His help. Beowulf, for example, can conquer Grendel and his dam only through God's help:

hwaeþre hē gemunde            maegenes strenge,  
gimfaeste gife,            ðē him God sealde,  
ond him tō Anwaldan            āre gelyfde,  
frōfre ond fultum.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Beowulf, ll. 2858-59: The judgement of God / in deeds rule / over every man / as it now yet does.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1270-73b: yet he remembered / the strength of his might, / the liberal gift, / that God had given him, / and in him as Ruler (Lord) / trusted for kindness / for his comfort and support.

## CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE POEM

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weorc geneþde  
 earfoðlice; aetrihte waes  
 guð getwaefed, nymðe mec God scylde.<sup>1</sup>

Brodeur mentions that Beowulf's;

allusions to God, God's mercy, or God's power or judgment...appear in nine of his speeches. One of his speeches contains two recognitions of God's mercy in close succession.<sup>2</sup>

These are lines 1656b-58 which have been already quoted,<sup>3</sup>

and;

ac mē geuðe Ylða Waldend,  
 þæt ic on wāge geseah wlitig hangian  
 ealdsweord ēacen oftost wisode  
 winigea lēasum - , þæt ic ðy wæpne gebræd.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, Beowulf refers to God three times as the arbitrator of critical events:

Dryhtnes dome	ðær gelyfan sceal se þe hine deað nimeð. <sup>5</sup>
on swa hwaepere hond maerðo deme,	ond sipðan witig God halig Dryhten swa him gemet þince. <sup>6</sup>

1. Beowulf, ll. 1656b-58: with pain ventured (I dared the task) / with difficulty; / according to right had been / the contest parted, / had not God shielded me.

2. op. cit., p. 190

3. Vide supra, p. 108.

4. Beowulf, ll. 1661-64: but me granted / the Ruler of men, / that on the wall I saw / hang beautiful / an old powerful sword / often (he) directed / the friendless / that I the weapon drew.

5. Beowulf, ll. 440b-41: there shall trust / in the Lord's judgement (authority) / he whom death shall take.

6. Beowulf, ll. 685b-87: and afterwards the wise God / on whichever hand / the holy Lord / shall glory assign (adjudge), / as to him meet shall see.

## CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE POEM

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ic hine ne mihte,      þā Metod nold,  
ganges getwāeman, nō ic him paes georne aetfeah,  
feorhgeniðlan;      waes tō foremihtig  
fēond on fēpe.      Hwæþere hē his folme forlēt  
tō lifwraþe      lāst weardian,  
 earm ond eaxle;      nō þāer āenige swā þeah  
 fēasceaft guma      frōfre gebohte;  
 nō þy leng leofa      lādgetēona  
 synnum geswenced,      ac hyn sār hafað  
 in nīdgripe      nearwe befongen  
 balwon bendum;      ðāer ābīdan sceal  
 maga māne fāh      miclan dōmes,  
 hū him scīr Metod      scrīfan wille.<sup>1</sup>

Later, Beowulf acknowledges God's help and gives thanks to God:

ic ðāra fraetwa	Frēan ealles ðanc,
Wuldurcyninge	wordum secge,
ēcum Dryhtne,	þē ic hēr on starie,
paes ðe ic mōste	mīnum lēodum
āer swyltðaege	swylc gestrynan. <sup>2</sup>

It is significant that Beowulf recognizes the will of God - Metod, in his inability to prevent Grendel's escape

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1. Beowulf, ll. 967-79: I could not him, / as the Creator willed it not (forbade), / from his course cut off / I did not therefore easily hinder him, / the deadly foe; / was too greatly powerful / the foe on foot. / Yet he his hand has left / to save his life / to mark his track, / his arm and shoulder; / nevertheless / the miserable man / no comfort bought; / nor will the longer live / the evil-doer / harassed (oppressed) by (with) sins / in forceful (coercive) grip / narrowly (closely) seized / with cruel (harm) fetters; / there shall wait / the wretch stained with crime / the great judgement, / how to him the bright (glorious) God / will prescribe.

2. Beowulf, ll. 2794-98: I for those treasures / thanks to the Lord of All, / King of Glory / in words say, / the Lord Eternal, / which I here gaze on / because I have been able / for my people / ere my day of death / such to acquire (win).

from Heorot; and as Brodeur points out, "he couples his mention of the Last Judgment with the term scir Metod";<sup>1</sup> we have this in lines 977b-79 already quoted.<sup>2</sup> Brodeur offers the following comments on the three passages mentioned on page 108, namely, lines 1656b-58:

Beowulf expresses a gratitude to God, and a recognition of His protection and goodness, fully as deep and strong as any of the pious expressions of Hrothgar;<sup>3</sup>

lines 1661-64a;

the second, moreover, contains an explicit recognition of God's special favor to the friendless - a sentiment which no pagan would have been moved to utter in praise of Fate;<sup>4</sup>

and lines 2794-98:

in its threefold designation of God as Lord of All, King of Glory, and Eternal God, is fully as Christian as anything spoken by Hrothgar.<sup>5</sup>

Hrothgar, says Brodeur, "speaks with the piety of a Christian king".<sup>6</sup> Hrothgar expresses Christian sentiments in five of his speeches. When he sees Grendel's arm over the

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1. Op. cit., p. 192.
  2. Vide supra, p. 109.
  3. Op. cit., p. 192.
  4. Ibid., p. 192.
  5. Ibid., p. 192.
  6. Ibid., p. 190.

gable of Heorot, he thanks God no less than five times recognizing, at the same time, God's power and mercy:

Disse ansýne lungre gelimpe! <sup>1</sup>	Alwealdan þanc ā maeg God wyrþan wuldres Hurde. <sup>2</sup>
wunder aefter wundre, þurh Drihtnes miht	Nū scealc hafað <sup>3</sup> dāed gefremede. <sup>3</sup>
efne swā hwylc maegþa aefter gumcynnum, þaet hyre Ealdmetod bearngebyrdo. <sup>4</sup>	Hwaet, þaet secgan maeg swā ðone magan cende gyf hēo gýt lyfað, ēste wāere
gōde forgylde,	Alwalda þec swā hē nū gýt dyde! <sup>5</sup>

Earlier in the poem Hroðgar had observed that God in His mercy had sent Beowulf to deliver the Danes from Grendel:

for ārstafum tō west-Denum, wið Grendles gryre. <sup>6</sup>	Hine hālig God ūs onsende, þaes ic wēn haebbe,
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1. Beowulf, ll. 928-29a: For this sight / to the Omnipotent (Lord) thanks / forthwith take place!

2. Beowulf, ll. 930b-31; ever can God work / wonder after wonder, / glory (heaven) God (Guardian, Keeper).

3. Beowulf, ll. 939b-40; Now this warrior has / through the Lord's might / a deed performed.

4. Beowulf, ll. 942b-46a; Lo! that may say / even (whoever) the woman / who this son brought forth / after human kind, / if she yet lives, / that to her the God of old / was kind (good) / in her child-bearing.

5. Beowulf, ll. 955b-56; May the Omnipotent thee / with good reward (recompense), / as he hitherto has done.

6. Beowulf, ll. 381b-84a: Him holy God / in His mercies (kindness) / to us hath sent, / to the Danes, / as I expect (likely), / against Grendel's terror.

And further on, Hroðgar said that God could easily dispose of Grendel:

þone dolsceaðan	God ēape maeg dæda getwæfan! <sup>1</sup>
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These passages containing Hroðgar's acknowledgement of God's mercy and power are in terms, "no closer to those of Christian devotion".<sup>2</sup> Hroðgar's long moralizing address to Beowulf, 184 lines in all - ll. 1700-1884, contains five references to God. It is considered the most significant and outspoken Christian passage in the poem.<sup>3</sup>

There are other personages who express Christian sentiments in the poem. For example, the concept of God's Providence is implied in the speech of Hroðgar's shore-guard. He hopes that the All-Ruling Father will preserve Beowulf:

Mǣl is mē tō fēran; mid anstafum siða gesunde! <sup>4</sup>	Fæder Alwalda eowic gehealde
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On Beowulf's return to his home in Geatland, Hygelac thanks God he is allowed to see Beowulf safe:

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1. Beowulf, ll. 478b-79; God easily may / the mad ravager / from his deeds sever.

2. Brodeur, op. cit., p. 191.

3. Ibid., p. 190.

4. Beowulf, ll. 316-18a; Time it is for me to go / may the All-Ruling Father / with mercy (kindness) / hold (keep) you / safe (sound) in your journeys (undertakings).



## 3. Grendel and His Dam.

As soon as the monster Grendel appears in the poem it is clear that the spirit animating the writer is a religious and a Christian one: Grendel has all the markings of a devilish fiend; he hates human joys, he wants to crush out happiness as the devil always does. What finally put his rage beyond control and sent him rampaging against Heorot was the scop's beautiful song of creation. The poet tells us that when Grendel is in his abode, envy and anger overcome him on hearing the din of revelry, and the harp ring out:

Ðā se ʒellegāest      earfoðlice  
 þraege gepolode,      sē þe in þystrum bād,  
 þaet hē dōgora gehwām      drēam gehyrde  
 hlūdne in healle;      þāer waes hearpan swēg,  
 switol sang scopes.<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on this passage, Father McNamee draws a parallel between Grendel's motive for descending on Heorot, and Satan's descent into the Garden of Eden, namely, "envy of the happiness of our first parents in contrast to his own misery in hell".<sup>2</sup>

What the scop sang was the song of creation. No extant Anglo-Saxon poem fits this paraphrase precisely; but

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1. *Beowulf*, ll. 86-90a; Then the powerful (bold) demon / with torture (impatiently) / for a time endured, / he who in darkness dwelt, / that he each one of the days / heard joy (bliss, mirth, rejoicing) / loud in the hall; / there was the sound of the harp, / clear (manifest) the scop's song.

2. "*Beowulf*, An Allegory of Salvation?", p. 193.

if we look at Genesis, it is evident that the scop was singing of creation exactly as it is described in the Bible:

frumsceaft fīra	Saegde sē þe cūpe
cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga	feorran reccan,
wlītebeorhtne wang,	eorðan worhte,
gesette sigehrepig	swā waeter bebūgeð,
lēoman tō lēohte	sunnan ond monan
ond gefraetwade	landbūendum,
leorum ond lēafum,	foldan scēatas
cynna gehwylcum	līf ēac gesceōp
	þāra ðe cwice hwyrfab. <sup>1</sup>

Or to paraphrase this passage: he who could tell the original making of man, how the Almighty the earth made, fairest fields encompassed by water, appointed triumphing in power, sun and moon, for earth-dwellers a light to lighten, and with limbs and leaves adorned the breast of the earth, life he breathed into all mortal beings that live and move. The beauty of these lines makes mockery of those who at one time claimed that this was a clumsy monkish interpolation.

The song of creation appears to have been a recurring theme in Anglo-Saxon poetry.<sup>2</sup> One is left with the definite impression that it was particularly so with

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1. Beowulf, ll. 90b-98: He said, who could / the origin of men / from far back relate, / told that the Almighty / wrought the earth, / the beautiful plain (field), / which water embraces (encloses), / set victorious (triumphant) / sun and moon / lamps (beam) for light / land-dwellers, / and adorned / earth's regions / with branches and leaves, / live also created / for every kind / of those livings that move about.

2. Klaeber, op. cit., p. 131, note 90-8.

Caedmon and his followers, after the reading of Malone's treatment of the subject in Baugh's A Literary History of England.<sup>1</sup> Whitelock is of this opinion, and supports the poet in his use of the song of creation. Minstrels, she says, were accustomed to sing of such themes to lay audience, and not only to ecclesiastics.<sup>2</sup> She rests this statement on Bede's Ecclesiastical History,<sup>3</sup> which tells us that several poets had followed in Caedmon's steps and composed other poems of a religious nature in the native metre. Furthermore, it was the poet's choice, and not his necessity, points out Whitelock, to have used the song of creation. For in so doing, he was able to bring his theme to "a discussion of the origin of these creatures of evil", emphasizing that such creatures were non-existent before Genesis, they being in fact the reward of sin, and "the progeny of the first murderer".<sup>4</sup>

We do not know what may have been lost of early Christian poetry. If Bede says that Caedmon sang many songs besides the ones that have been preserved for us, we

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1. Pp. 60-9.

2. Audience of Beowulf, pp. 8-9.

3. Book IV, chapter 24, pp. 246-7, (ed.) Leo Sherley-Price. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1960.

4. Audience of Beowulf, p. 77.

have very good reason to take the word of such a careful historian. We do have of course the extant poetical paraphrases of Genesis and Exodus - how much more of such poetry existed we can only conjecture; sure we are, that the Beowulf poet in speaking lines of the scop knew they would find an ample and abundant echo in the hearts of his audience.

A similarity of theme, is pointed out by Whitelock, between Beowulf, the Latin Life of St Guthlac by Felix, the poems based on this life and the still later Anglo-Saxon prose translation. The saint addresses his demon tormentors as the "seed of Cain", and in the translation, as the "offspring of perdition". The poems have a savor of homes from the ravages of monsters inhabiting "misty moorland" and "fen retreats"; and the Life, a hermit who sets up his shelter on a haunted island, driving devils away. Guthlac girds himself "with spiritual weapons against the snares" of the devil.<sup>1</sup> Whitelock believes the resemblances to be a mere coincidence, but she does not reject the possibility that the poet may have been familiar with these works and may have been inspired by the.<sup>2</sup> She concludes:

The devil first came to attack Guthlac  
as he was singing psalms and canticles;  
Grendel's hostility was aroused by the

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1. Audience of Beowulf, pp. 80-1.

2. Ibid., pp. 80-1.

sound of festivity in Heorot, and the poet has given us as a sample of the entertainment a religious hymn sung by the minstrel.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Cain and the Monsters.

There are two good reasons, artistically, why the poet brings in Genesis.<sup>2</sup> The first one is of course that such singing was customary in Christian assemblies, as we have already indicated;<sup>3</sup> the second, that this provides an opportunity to associate the abode of Grendel with that of hell, and also to establish the genealogy of Grendel - something very important in Anglo-Saxon poetry. The monster is descended from Cain:

waes se grimma gæst	Grendel hāten,
māere mearcstapa,	sē þe mōras hēold,
fen ond faesten;	fifelcynnes eard
wonsāeli wer	weardode while,
sipðan him Scyppend	forscrifen hæfde
in Cāines cynne -	þone cwealm_gewraec
ēce Drihten,	þaes þe hē Abel slōg;
ne gefeah hē þāere fēhðe,	ac hē hīne feor forwraec,
Metod for þy māne	mancynne fram.

1. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 81.

2. Another feature is pointed out by H.G. Wright, in "Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, Joy and Sorrow", p. 5. It affords, he says, the poet to contrast whitebeorhtne wang, the beautiful plain, sunnan ond monan - the sun and the moon, with the lurky, melancholy, dreary, somber haunts of Grendel. Klaeber, op. cit., p. 131, remarks that the unusual note of joy "in the beauty of nature contrasts impressively with the melancholy inspired by the dreary, somber abode of Grendel".

3. Vide supra, p. 100.

ꝥanon untydras            ealle onwocon,  
 eotenas ond ylfe        ond orcnéas,  
 swylce gigantas,        þa wið Gode wunnon  
 lange þrage;            he him ðaes lean forgeald.<sup>1</sup>

The description of Grendel's descent from Cain will be discussed jointly with Grendel's dam and Cain's fratricide:

ides āglāecwif            Grendles mōdor,  
 sē þe waeteregesan      yrmþe gemunde,  
 cealde strēamas,        wunjen scolde,  
 tō ecgbanan              sipðan Cāin wearð  
 faederenmāeþe;        āngan hrēþer,  
 morþre gemearcod        hē þā fāg gewāt,  
 wēster warode.          mandrēam flēon,  
 geōsceaftgāsta;        ꝥanon wōc fola  
 hecrowearh hetelīc.<sup>2</sup>    waes þāera Grendel sum,

1. Beowulf, ll. 102-14: The grim ghost (spirit, demon) was / Grendel called, / boundary-stepper (wanderer in the waste borderland), / that held the moors, / the fen and fastness (stronghold); / home of the race of monsters (estate, land, region) / unhappy man / inhabited a space of time, / after the Creator him / had condemned / on Cain's race / that killing (death) avenged / the eternal Lord, / for that he Abel slew; / he gained not in that hostile act (enmity), / for he him far banished, / the Ruler for that crime / from mankind. / Of him evil progeny (brood) / all sprang forth, / giants and elves / and monsters (evil spirits), / also ogres (giants), / who against God strove / for a long time; / he for that gave them their reward.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1258b-67a: Grendel's mother, / the woman monster of a woman / was of her misery mindful, / she who the water-terrors / must inhabit, / the cold streams, / after Cain became / the murderer / of his only brother, / kinsman of the father's side (his father's son); / he then outlawed (hostile, guilty) departed, / by murder marked / fleeing the joy of man, / dwelt in the waste. / Then arose many / demons sent by fate (fated spirits); / of those was Grendel one, / accursed foe (savage outcast, hateful outcast).

And the destruction of giants by the flood:

Hrōðgār maðelode -	hylt scēawode,
ealde lāfe,	on ðaem waes or writen
fyrngewinnes,	syðþan flōd ofslōh,
gifen gēotende	gīganta cyn,
frēcne gefērdon;	þaet waes fremde þēod
ēcean Dryhtne;	him þaes endelēan
þurh waeteres wylm	Waldend sealde. <sup>1</sup>

Cain stands in the poem for evil in the world represented in the life of Beowulf by monsters and the dragon. This representation has its origin in Genesis,<sup>2</sup> and according to Klae-ner, Hebrew and Christian sources having been adduced.<sup>3</sup>

More than one critic has seen the strife between Grendel, the Danes and Beowulf as a reflection of the feud between God's people and the race of Cain. Goldsmith, for instance, is a case in point. The victory of the hero Beowulf is later symbolized, she says, "by the hilt of the giant-made sword" which Beowulf found in the cave, through

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1687-93: Hrōðgār spoke - / gazed upon the hilt, / the old heirloom (sword), / on which the origin was written / of the ancient strife (war), / after the flood had slain, / direly (terribly) they suffered (bore them); / that was a people alier (estranged) / to the eternal Lord; / to them a final reward (retribution) / through the water's flood (welling, surging) / the ruler (Lord) dealt.

2. James Cardinal Gibbons, The Holy Bible. Baltimore: John Murphy Company, 1914. Chapters iv; vi:2, 4; vii: 5, 7; viii, pp. 8, 10, 11.

3. Op. cit., p. 132.

God's help, and with which he despatched the monsters.<sup>1</sup>

Hamilton also argues that this is reminiscent of Bede's Commentary on the Genesis,<sup>2</sup> and finds here an influence of St Augustine of Hippo:<sup>3</sup>

Augustine's account of the two societies, divisions of God's creatures, which have existed side by side since the Fall of the Angels, and are destined to go on in continual warfare to the last trumpet of doom.<sup>4</sup>

S.J. Crawford states that one verse in particular from the Scriptures seems to have been overlooked.<sup>5</sup> It provides, in his opinion, sufficient basis for the legend of the descent of sea-monsters and evil spirits from Cain. "Ece gigantes gemunt sub aquis, e i habitant cum eis".<sup>6</sup> He says:

Nothing is more natural for the mediaeval theologians, who were acquainted with the Book of Enoch; cf. Fabricius, Codex Pseudepigraphus Veteris Testamenti, I, pp. 179 ff., and the Parva Genesis (ibid., pp. 142-3), than to connect this verse in Job with Gen. IV, 2-4, 5-7, and vii, and to

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1. Op. cit., p. 83.

2. Op. cit., p. 317.

3. Vide supra, pp. 104-6.

4. Op. cit., p. 312.

5. "Grendel's Descent from Cain" in MLR, vol. XXIII (1928), p. 207.

6. Job, 26:5, p. 568; Behold the giants groan under the waters and they dwell with them.

7. Crawford, op. cit., p. 207.

see in the word 'gemunt' scriptural authority for the continuous survival of Cain's descendants, overwhelmed by the Flood, as sea-monsters.<sup>1</sup>

This rapprochement was investigated earlier by Oliver E. Emerson in a detailed and well documented article.<sup>2</sup> He mentions that the classical giants, readily identified by Patristic writers, and thence by English commentators, with the subversive giants of Genesis, were believed to have had their habitation in the watery inferno described in Job. Commenting on Grendel's descent from Cain, he observes:

Grendel is one of a class of beings well recognized as belonging to the evil progeny of Cain, not only here but elsewhere. As is well known the connection of Grendel with Cain is repeated in what is said of Grendel's mother - Beowulf 1258-66... Besides, this connection with the evil progeny of Cain explains effectively many epithets and descriptive phrases applied to Grendel and his mother. Grendel... is called by such names as would be applicable to a monster of evil birth, or a devil.<sup>3</sup>

Further developing the notion of Grendel as evil through his descent from Cain, the poet pictures Grendel and his dam as embodying not only worldly corruption and evil.

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1. Crawford, op. cit., p. 207.

2. "Legends of Cain, Especially in Old and Middle English", in PMLA, vol. XXI (1906), pp. 831-929.

3. Ibid., pp. 879-80.

R.E. Kaske points, in fact, that Grendel represents violence as being a perversion of fortitudo, detached or severed from sapientia, and animated instead by malitia:

Grendel is an embodiment of external evil, or violence, a perversion of fortitudo, completely freed from the restraints of sapientia and directed instead by malitia. This interpretation of Grendel is supported not only by his reckless savagery but also by his relationship to Cain and the giants of the Old Testament - traditionally creatures of strife and violence lacking in sapientia... The classic reference to the giants' lack of sapientia is Baruch 3:26-8, prominently cited by Augustine in De Civitate Dei, XV, 23-4. Emerson cites also Sapientia, 10:3-4 as often applied to Cain.<sup>1</sup>

The poet of Old English Genesis is of the same opinion:

and on deað slea daedum scyldige  
gigantmaecgas, gode unleofe,  
micle mansceaðan, metode laðe.<sup>2</sup>

Grendel is evil, Kaske continues, violently brutal. He is "the outer evil", lurking without rest "on a diminishing fortitudo".<sup>3</sup> The epithets used throughout the poem

1. Op. cit., p. 438.

2. G.P. Krapp, The Anglo-Saxon Poetical Records. New York: The Columbia University Press, Vol. I, The Junius Manuscript, p. 40, ll. 1267-69: To kill in death / in their deeds sinful / sons of giants, / unloved by God, / great monsters, / hateful to God.

3. Op. cit., p. 438.

describe and confirm the permanent violence of the fiend.

For example:

grim ond graedig, rēoc ond rēpe prītig pegna; hūðe hrēmig mid pāere waelfylee	Wiht unhāēle, gearo sōne waes, ond on raeste genam panon eft gewāt tō hām faran, wīca nēosan. <sup>1</sup>
Grendles gūðcraeft. <sup>2</sup>	
wergan gāstes; lað ond longsum! <sup>3</sup> morðbeala māre. <sup>4</sup> hwīle wið Hrōþgar, fyrene ond fæhðe singāle saece. <sup>5</sup> wið færgryrum. <sup>6</sup> nydwracu niþgrim,	waes paet gewin tō strang,   hetenīðas waeg, fela missera,  nihtbealwa māest. <sup>7</sup>

1. Beowulf, ll. 120b-5: Creature evil, / grim (malign) and greedy, / he was soon ready (resolved), / fierce (savage) and cruel (furious), / and in their rest took (snatched) / thirty thanes; / to his home to go, / with his slaughters (corpses) his abode to seek.

2. Beowulf, l. 127a: Grendel's war-strength.

3. Beowulf, ll. 133-34a: the accursed (evil) spirit's (sprite, demon); / that struggle (strife) was too strong / hateful and enduring (long-lasting).

4. Beowulf, l. 136a: greater mortal harms.

5. Beowulf, ll. 152-54a: Long against Hrōðgar, / waged hateful enmities, / crime and feud (hostility) / for many years, / continuous (incessant) strife.

6. Beowulf, l. 174a: against the awful horrors.

7. Beowulf, l. 193: dire distress (violent persecution) cruel (grim), / of night-evils the greatest.

## CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE POEM

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dēogol dāēdhata	deorcum nihtum
ēawēð purh egsan	uncūðne nið,
hynðu ond hrafyl. <sup>1</sup>	
māeg Higelāces,	hū se mānscaða
under fāergripum	gefaran wolde. <sup>2</sup>
rēpe renweardas,	Yrre wāeron bēgen,
	reced hlynsode. <sup>3</sup>
eatol āefengrom. <sup>4</sup>	gāest yrre cwōm
māerum maguþegne	him Grendel wearð,
lēofes mannes	tō muðþonan,
	līc eall forswealg. <sup>5</sup>
Nō ðy aer ut ðā gēn	īdelhende
þona blōdigtoð,	bealewa gemyndig

It is interesting to note that Gregory's book Moralia on the Book of Job was well known to Bede and his

1. Beowulf, ll. 275-7a: a secret deed-hater / in the dark nights / shows through terror, / uncanny of violence, / injury and slaughter.

2. Beowulf, ll. 737-8: kinsman of Hygelac, / how the wicked ravager (evil-doer) / under his sudden grip (attack) / would attack.

3. Beowulf, ll. 769b-70: Angry were both, / fierce, the guardians of the house, / the hall resounded.

4. Beowulf, ll. 2073b-74a: the ghost (demon) came angry, / the terrible (fiendish monster) in the evening.

5. Beowulf, ll. 2078b-80: to him was Grendel, / to my famous young retainer (thane) / one who destroys with the mouth (a devourer) / the beloved man's / body he all swallowed up.

6. Beowulf, ll. 2081-82: not yet for that the earlier out / empty-ended / the bloody-toothed murderer, / of evils mindful.

contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> Bede relates the giants of Job<sup>2</sup> to Isai-  
ah's,<sup>3</sup> emphasizing that because of pride they will not rise  
again; or as in Proverbs,<sup>4</sup> man will abide with the giants be-  
cause of pride.<sup>5</sup> Hamilton thinks that Biblical giants may ex-  
plain the poet's "highly figurative conception of Grendel and  
his abode".<sup>6</sup> Tolkein goes on further. He regards this simi-  
larity as the starting point in the poet's mind between pagan  
lore and the new faith.<sup>7</sup> The analogy between the poet's  
monsters and Cain is maintained. Both are guilty of anger,  
envy, murder, impenitence; they are outcasts from the fellow-  
ship of men, and removed from God's favor. Furthermore, the  
magic which the poet enables them to perform, i.e., the power  
to cast a spell on swords, is not mere fancy of the poet. He  
calls it deofles craeftum - by means of devilish craft.<sup>8</sup> The

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1. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 314.
  2. Chapter 26:5, p. 568.
  3. Chapter 26:9, p. 772.
  4. Chapter 21:16, p. 674.
  5. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 314.
  6. Ibid., p. 315.
  7. Op. cit., p. 270.
  8. Beowulf, l. 2088.

legend that the originator of weapons came from Cain's race,<sup>1</sup> is based on Genesis: "a hammer and artificer in every work of brass and iron".<sup>2</sup>

Father McNamee<sup>3</sup> identifies Grendel with the powers of darkness, and as an inmate of hell. He agrees with White-lock that the audience of Beowulf was definitely Christian. The poet knew that his audience was familiar with the Bible, and would understand his allusions and associate them with Grendel and hell. Like Tolkein he surmises that the allegory is better served with a physical monster than with a theological one. This point is raised over the apparent ambiguity about Grendel's titles. Grendel is called at first, a fiend from hell - feond on helle,<sup>4</sup> and ten other times feond.<sup>5</sup> The poet uses a more significant name for him, feond mancynnes - fiend of mankind, on two occasions.<sup>6</sup> His other

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1. Emerson, op. cit., pp. 915-16.

2. Chapter 4:22, p. 9.

3. "Beowulf, An Allegory of Salvation?", p. 154.

4. Beowulf, l. 101.

5. Beowulf, ll. 143, 279, 439, 636, 698, 748, 962, 970, 984, 1273.

6. Beowulf, ll. 164, 1276.

epithets are:

deorc dēapscua - the dark death shade (shadow);<sup>1</sup>

helrūnan - one skilled in the mysteries of hell;<sup>2</sup>

helle haefton - captive of hell;<sup>3</sup>

helle gāst - ghost from hell (demon);<sup>4</sup>

Godes andsacan - enemy of God;<sup>5</sup>

hāēpene sāwle - heathen soul;<sup>6</sup>

hāēbenes - heathen;<sup>7</sup>

mānscaða - wicked ravager;<sup>8</sup>

lapum...scuccum ond scinum - foes...devils and  
evil spirits;<sup>9</sup>

eoten - giant;<sup>10</sup>

eotenas - giants (descendants of Cain).<sup>11</sup>

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1. Beowulf, l. 160.
  2. Beowulf, l. 163.
  3. Beowulf, l. 788.
  4. Beowulf, l. 1274.
  5. Beowulf, ll. 786, 1682.
  6. Beowulf, l. 852.
  7. Beowulf, l. 986.
  8. Beowulf, ll. 712, 737, 1339.
  9. Beowulf, ll. 938-9.
  10. Beowulf, ll. 668, 761.
  11. Beowulf, l. 112.

dēofla - devils or demons;<sup>1</sup>

geōsceaftgāsta - demon determined of old;<sup>2</sup>

dyrnra gāsta - secret (mysterious) demon;<sup>3</sup>

ellorgāestas - alien ghosts (demons).<sup>4</sup>

Emerson points to a close parallelism between these epithets and the names used to describe devils in such Anglo-Saxon poems as Genesis, the Complaint of the Fallen Angels, and others; in fact, the terms used to describe Grendel and his dam are similar to those chosen when devils and demons are named.<sup>5</sup>

Certain critics comment that the poet of Beowulf does not clarify whether he depicts a full-fledged mediaeval figure, half ogre, half devil, or merely a man-monster. But surely, as long as the physical monster is associated with the powers of hell, the allegorical meaning is clearer to the understanding.<sup>6</sup> Whitelock explains the

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1. Beowulf, l. 1680.

2. Beowulf, l. 1266.

3. Beowulf, l. 1357.

4. Beowulf, ll. 1349, 1617, 1621.

5. Op. cit., p. 881.

6. McNamee, " Beowulf, An Allegory of Salvation?", p. 154.

existence of monsters in the plot as an effort by the poet to show his audience that the Christian universe is faced, like the strife for the Danish throne, with struggles against the forces of evil. But courage and fortitude, springing from faith in God, will enable human beings to win out in the end. The work of Providence is evident here: humanity is not left helpless in the hands of the evil powers.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. Grendel's Abode.

Having traced the origin of the monsters, and shown how the poet used them in his artifact, we now examine the description our poet makes of Grendel's abode:

warigeað wulfhleopu,	Hie dýgel lond
frēcne fengelād,	windige naessas,
under naessa genipu	ðær fyrgenstrēam
flōd under foldan.	niper gewiteð,
mīlgemearces,	Nis þæt feor heonon
ofer þāem hongiað	þæt se mere standeð;
wudu wrytum faest	hrinde bearwas,
ðær maeg nihta gehwāem	waeter oferhelmað.
fyr on flōde. <sup>2</sup>	niðwundor sēon,

1. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 95.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1357b-66a: They that hidden land / inhabit the retreat of wolves (wolf-slope) / windy headlands, / dangerous fen-paths / under the nesses' darkness (mists) / downward flows, / the flood under the earth. / It is not far thence / measured by miles, / that the mere stands; / over which hangs / frost covered groves, / a wood fast by its roots / overshadows the water. / There every night may / fearful wonder (portent) be seen, / fire in the flood.

ƿonon yðgeblond	nis ƿaet hēoru stōw!
won tō walcnum,	up āstigeð
lāð gewidru,	ƿonne wind styrep
roderas rēotað. 1	ōð ƿaet lyft drysmap,

This description sounds like an Anglo-Saxon Christian idea of the very mouth of hell.<sup>2</sup> Klaeber is of the same opinion:

conceptions of the Christian hell have entered into the picture as drawn by the poet. The moors and wastes, mists and darkness, the cliffs, the bottomless deep, the loathsome wyrmas (l.1430) can all be traced in early accounts of hell ...especially close is the relation between this Beowulfian scenery and that described in the last portion of the 17th Blickling Homily which is based on a Visio Pauli.<sup>3</sup>

Whitelock<sup>4</sup> also mentions the Blickling Homilies.<sup>5</sup> The author of the seventeenth homily tells us:

Swa Sanctus Paulus waes geseonde on norð-  
anweardne ƿisne middangeard, ƿaer ealle  
waetere niðergewitað, and he ƿaer geseah ofer  
ðæm waetere sumne harne stán; & waeron  
norð of ðæm stane awexene swiðe hrimige  
bearwas, & ðær waeron ƿistro-genipo, &  
under ƿæm stáne waes micra eardung & wearga  
& he geseah ƿaet on ðæm clife hargodan on  
ðæm is gean hearwum manige swearte saula be

1. Beowulf, ll. 1372b-76a; it is not a safe place! /  
then the surging water / rises up / dark to the clouds /  
then the wind stirs / hateful storms, / until the air /  
(heaven) becomes gloomy, / the heavens weep.

2. Goldsmith, op. cit., p. 95.

3. Cp. cit., p. 183.

4. Audience of Beowulf, p. 67.

5. The homilies are a collection of 19 sermons recorded, circa 979, and named, by modern scholars, after the home of the MS, Blickling Place, Norfolk. They antedate the homilies of Aelfric and Wulfstan.

heora handum gebundne & þa / fynd þara on  
micra onlicnesse heora / gripende waeron,  
swa swa graedig wulf; & þæt waeter waes  
sweart under þæm clife neðan. & betuh þæm  
clife on ðæm waetre waeron swylce twelf  
mila, & ðonne ða twigo forþuston þonne  
gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðæm twigum  
hangodan, & him onfengon ða nicras. Dis  
ðonne waeron ða saula þa ðe her on worlde mid  
únrihte gefyrenode waeron, & ðæs noldan  
geswican aer heora lifes ende. Ac uton nu  
biddan Sanctus Michael geornlice þæt be ure  
saula gelæde on gefean, þær hie motan  
blissian abuton ende on ecnesse. AMEN.<sup>1</sup>

The description of Grendel's abode is simply the evil garden taken anagogically or mystically, with associations going back to the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup> The pool is shaded by hanging trees, excluding from it the "sunshine of God's own

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1. The Blickling Homilies, ed. R. Morris. London: EETS, 1876, Part II, pp. 208-11; As St Paul was looking towards the northern region of the earth, from whence all waters pass down, he saw above the water a hoary stone; and north of the stone had grown woods very rimy. And there were dark mists; and under the stone was the dwelling place of monsters and execrable creatures. And he saw hanging on the cliff opposite to the woods, many black souls with their hands bound; and the devils in likeness of monsters were seizing them like greedy wolves; and the water under the cliff beneath was black. And between the cliff and the water there were about twelve miles, and when the twigs broke, then down went the souls who hung on the twigs and the monsters seized them. These were the souls of those who in this world wickedly sinned and would not cease from it before their life's end. But let us now bid St Michael earnestly to bring our souls into bliss, where they may rejoice without end in eternity. Amen.

2. Robertson, op. cit., p. 33.

justice".<sup>1</sup> It should not be forgotten that the poet tells us that the pool became light after the killing of Grendel's dam, that is, cleansed of the evil it contained:

Sōna waes on sunde	sē þe āer aet saecce gebād
wighryre, wrāðra,	waeter up þurhdēaf;
wāeron yðgebland	eal gefāelsod,
ēacne eardas,	þā se ellorgāst
oflēt lifdagas	ond þās lāenan gesceaft. <sup>2</sup>

This reinforces the argument that the abode is the evil garden taken mystically or spiritually; once sin has disappeared, the garden becomes clean again. The trees, we have noted, are covered with frost. This is another symbolic element, and a recurring word in the Blickling Homilies.<sup>3</sup>

Frost and ice, are "traditional symbols of Satan", and are used by Gregory in his Moralia.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, "the chill of cupidity", an attribute of the garden of evil, is "opposed to the warmth of charity in the good garden".<sup>5</sup>

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1. Robertson, op. cit., p. 33.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1618-22: Soon he was swimming / he who before at strife awaited / the fall in fight of foes, / he swam up through the water; / the surging waves were / all cleansed (purged), / large (mighty) homes, / when the alien spirit (ghost, demon) / left (departed) her lifedays / in this transitory (perishable) creation.

3. Klaeber, op. cit., p. 182.

4. Robertson, op. cit., p. 33.

5. Ibid., p. 33.

## 5. Grendel's Mere.

The attack of Grendel's dam on Heorot gave the poet an opportunity to describe Grendel's abode with further details, and to place particular emphasis on the mere and its surroundings:

Lāstas wāeron  
 aefter waldswapum wīde gesȳne,  
 gang ofer grundas, swā gegnum fōr  
 ofer myrcan mōr.<sup>1</sup>

Oferēode pā aepelinga bearn  
 stēap stānhliðo, stige nearwe,  
 enge ānpāðas, uncuð gelād,  
 neowle naessas, nicorhusa fela.<sup>2</sup>

op paet hē fāeringa fyrgenbēamas  
 ofer hārne stān hleonian funde,  
 wynlēasne wudu; waeter under stōd  
 drēorig ond gedrēfed.<sup>3</sup>

Flōd blōde wēol - folc tō sāegon -,  
 hatan heolfre.<sup>4</sup>

1. Beowulf, ll. 1402b-05a: Traces were / after forest-tracks / widely seen, / her course over the ground / as before them / over the murky moor.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1408-11: Over there went / the sons of thanes / high towering rocky slopes, / a narrow way (road), / a one-by-one path (narrow), / an unknown way / precipitous headlands, / abode of water monsters many.

3. Beowulf, ll. 1414-17a: until he suddenly / mountain trees / over the hoary rock / strive to lean / a joyless wood; / water stood beneath / gory and troubled.

4. Beowulf, ll. 1422-23a: the flood (water) surged (boiled) with blood - / the people (men) looked on - / the hot gore.

Gesāwon	Þā	aefter waetere	wyrmcynnes fela,
sellice	sāēdracan,	sund cunnian,	
svlce on naeshleoðum		nicras licgean,	
Þā on undernmael		oft bewitigað	
sorhfulne sið		on segrāde,	
wyrmas ond wildeor.		Hie on weg hruron	
bitere ond gebolgne. <sup>1</sup>			
		Þa waes hwil daeges	
āer hē pone grundwong		ongytan mehte. <sup>2</sup>	
		Þa se eorl ongeat,	
paet hē (in) niðsele		nāthwylcum waes,	
paer him nāenig waeter		wihte ne scepede,	
nē him for hrōfsele		hrīnan ne mehte	
fāergrip flōdes;		fyrleocht geseah,	
blācne lēoman		beorhte scīnan. <sup>3</sup>	

The poetic diction used by the poet in describing the approach to the pool, the mere itself and its surroundings, with its rocky cliffs, over-hanging trees, dark water swarming with monsters, is consistent with the words and terms in the description of the evil garden of the Scrip-

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1425-31a; They saw along the water of the race of serpents many, / strange sea dragons / swimming (exploring) the deep, / also the slopes of headlands / water monsters lying down, / which at morning-time / often perform (keep) / their sorrowful course / on the sail-road (see) / serpents and wild beasts. / They sped away / bitter and angry.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1495b-96; There was a day's space before he the embrace of the floor (bottom of the mere) / could perceive.

3. Beowulf, ll. 1512b-17; Then the hero perceived / that he in a hostile hall / he knew not what was, / where him no water / in any way could scathe (oppress), / nor him for the roofed-hall / could touch / the flood's sudden attack; / he beheld a firelight, / a brilliant light / brightly shining.

tures.<sup>1</sup> The poet makes certain that his audience will perceive the analogy by mentioning what happens to the hart on reaching the mere:

Ðēah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,  
 heorot hornum trum holtwudu sēce,  
 feorran geflȳmed, ær hē feorh seleð,  
 aldor on ofre, ær hē in will,  
 hafelan (beorgan).<sup>2</sup>

The hart, the poet says, stops short and would turn back to face death rather than move into the grove surrounding the pool. Robertson points to the highly symbolical meaning of this passage. Taken at face value, it makes little sense. For what worse fate can a hart face than death? But the significant part of it is, that in Beowulf, the hart does exactly that in order to avoid Grendel's waters which "will not assuage his thirst".<sup>3</sup> The poet gives us a perfect allegory of the faithful Christian who seeks his Lord in the Living Waters, as we are remembered in the Psalms.<sup>4</sup> The hart, that is the Christian, prefers death to eternal dam-

1. Robertson, op. cit., pp. 33 ff.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1368-72a: Although the heath-stalker (stag) / by the hounds pressed (wearied), / the hart strong of horns (antlers) / the wooden shield (forest) seek, / from far back put to flight, / sooner his life give up, / his life (breath) upon the shore, / rather than will (be about) in it, / to hide his head.

3. Op. cit., p. 34.

4. Chapter 41;2, p. 601.

nation. By contrast, the monsters swim and are at home in the pool and rest on its banks.

Beowulf's descent into Grendel's mere:

Aefter p̄aem wordum	Weder-Gēata lēod
efste mid elne, -	nalas andsware
bīdan wolde;	brimwylm onfēng
hilderince, <sup>1</sup>	

has been interpreted by some critics as symbolizing the liturgy of baptism, and the Harrowing of Hell. Father McNamee endorses this belief, and bring Allan Cabaniss to his support:

However heathen the original story was it is...reasonable to suppose that...Beowulf's descent into the grim fen, his encounter with the demon-brood staining the water with blood, and his triumphant emergence from it into joyous springtime is...a reflection of the liturgy of baptism; at the most, an allegory of it.<sup>2</sup>

McNamee strengthens his case by citing the allegorical elements in the Caedonian Exodus, a work contemporary with Beowulf:

Indeed the Exodus shows precisely the influence of the same twelve Holy Saturday prophecies. And...it reflects a know-

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1492-95a; After these words / the Geatish prince / hastened with courage (valour) - nor answer / would wait; / and the surging waves received / the warrior.

2. "Beowulf and the Liturgy", in JEGP, vol. LIV (1955), p. 200.

ledge of just that portion of Beowulf with which we are here concerned. Since it has been demonstrated that the Exodus shows the effect of the ancient liturgy of baptism and Holy Saturday, one goes not too far afield in presuming that a similar relationship exists in reference to Beowulf.<sup>1</sup>

One cannot read the description of the descent of Beowulf into Grendel's mere, without hearing all sorts of Scriptural echoes. The Holy Saturday ceremony of the blessing of the water, as part of the Easter vigil service, Christ's redemptive death and burial, the sinner's death to sin, were symbolized by the submersion of the catechumen in the baptismal waters. In turn, Christ's resurrection, the new life of grace of the sinner, were symbolized by his emersion from the waters.<sup>2</sup>

McNamee says he had come to this conclusion before being aware of the treatment given the subject by Cabaniss, and can now, with this theme, enlarge his allegorical view to embrace the poem as a whole. From very early in the Church;

the symbolism of the baptismal ceremony by submersion was based on a passage in

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1. Cabaniss, op. cit., pp. 200-1.

2. McNamee, "Beowulf, An Allegory of Salvation?", p. 196.

Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans (6: 3-4): "Know you not that we, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in his death? For we are buried together with him by baptism into death; that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life".<sup>1</sup>

McNamee mentions another work on liturgy to support his assumption of the allegory of baptism having to do with the immersion and emersion of catechumens, the waters, representing death and sin and the power of Satan.<sup>2</sup> This, in fact, is suggested by the prayer following the blessing of the new baptismal water on Holy Saturday.<sup>3</sup> The audience of Beowulf, familiar with the ancient ritual of Holy Saturday, would readily recognize the meaning, much more it would seem, than would a Christian of today,<sup>4</sup> perhaps not so familiar with

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1. "Beowulf, An Allegory of Salvation?", p. 196.

2. Vide, A. Villien, The History and Liturgy of the Sacraments. London: 1932, pp. 34-5.

3. Dom Gaspar Lefebvre, O.S.B., Saint Andrew Daily Missal. St André-near-Bruges: 1937, p. 669: May all unclean spirits, by thy command, O Lord, depart from hence; may the whole malice of diabolical deceit be entirely banished; may no power of the enemy prevail here; may he not fly about to lay his snares; may he not creep in secretly; may he not corrupt with his infection. May this holy and innocent creature be free from all the assaults of the enemy and purified by the removal of all his malice.

4. Understandably with the revival of the Pascal Vigil and the tendency towards the vernacular, this would be less applicable to the rising generation.

the contemporary version of the Easter Vigil service. The prayers, in fact, have not changed much.<sup>1</sup> To Beowulf's audience, Grendel and his dam meant the powers of hell, and Beowulf's descent into the serpent-infested mere and his triumphant ascent from those waters purged of their serpents, would be symbolic of the representation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and in the purification of the waters, Beowulf: lines 1618-22,<sup>2</sup> a symbol of the redemption of man from the poisonous powers of evil.<sup>3</sup>

Father McNamee also argues that Beowulf's descent into Grendel's mere is an allegory of the Harrowing of Hell, the source being the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus, the oldest manuscripts of which date back to the fifth century; it was a work tremendously popular at that time.<sup>4</sup> The description of the cave of Grendel and his mother "as a fiery cavern under the sea" corresponds too, to what was, from the time of the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus on up to the heart of the Middle Ages, the traditional way of representing hell.<sup>5</sup> On William Henry Hulme's authority,<sup>6</sup> he mentions the

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1. McNamee, op. cit., pp. 196-7.

2. Vide supra, p. 133.

3. McNamee, op. cit., p. 197.

4. Ibid., pp. 197 ff.

5. Ibid., p. 197.

tremendous popularity which the work enjoyed in Anglo-Saxon Christianity from early times.<sup>1</sup> Hulme says:

The influence of the Evangelium Nicodemi was felt in English literature long before the period of the religious drama. The Gospel was...introduced into England in the Latin version not very long after Christianity began to flourish there... early English writers like Bede show perfect familiarity with its contents. And the early Christian poets utilize the story and paraphrase it in a number of their productions. An extensive account of the descent of Christ is contained in the so-called Caedmonian poems, whilst the greatest of all Old-English religious poets, Cynewulf, refers to the Harrowing of Hell in several different connections, and he reproduces much of the description in his poem on Christ. Cynewulf...or one of his school of poets, devoted an entire poem to the subject, though only a fragment of it has been preserved (The Harrowing of Hell)...the story of the descent was frequently employed by writers of Old-English homilies and lives of the saints.<sup>2</sup>

It is interesting to note that the seventh Blickling Homily deals with Easter Day. It is an example of the assimilation of the Harrowing of Hell into the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition and gives a good background for the understanding of Beowulf's descent into the pool. This certainly does seem

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1. McNamee, "Beowulf, An Allegory of Salvation?", p. 198.

2. Apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. London: Early English Text Society, New Series, vol. 100, 1907, pp. lxxviii.

to be the effect and force of lines 1618-22, quoted on page 133, the clashing waters were cleas<sup>n</sup>ed now of their evil.

J.S. Westlake<sup>1</sup> parallels lines 1408-11 of Beowulf, quoted on page 134 - the princely band traversed steep rocky slopes, difficult paths and narrow single tracks, uncertain footways and precipitous heights, past many a cavern of the water monsters, with poetical passages on the Harrowing of Hell in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and St Paul's vision,<sup>2</sup> of souls clinging to the cliffs from which the devils sought to drag them away. He states that close similarity exists between this description, the lines of Beowulf under reference, and other versions of this aged legend.<sup>3</sup>

As in the early part of the poem we find God's providential intervention in the handling of Beowulf, God comes again to Beowulf's assistance in his fight with Grendel's dam:

Haefde ðā forsiðod	sunu Ecgpēowes
under gynne grund,	Gēata cempa,
nemne him heaðoburne	helpe gefremede,

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1. "From Alfred to the Conquest", in Cambridge History of English Literature, Cambridge; The University Press, 1960, vol. I, p. 115.

2. Vide supra, pp. 131-2.

3. Westlake, op. cit., p. 115.

herenet hearde, - ond hālig God  
 gewēold wīgsigor; wītig Drihten,  
 rodera Rāeden hit on ryht gescēd  
 yðelice, syðan hē eft āstōd.<sup>1</sup>

That is to say, Beowulf's weapon becomes of no avail against Grendel's dam, and he realizes that his strongest weapon is faith in God. Whitelock's comments on line 1556, satisfactorily clarifies what some critics have called an incongruity lacking in verisimilitude. Others think there was a miracle performed. Not so, says Whitelock. Our weaponless hero suddenly caught sight of a giant sword. What a sense of relief it must have been for him, a sight that gave him heart to stand up.<sup>2</sup> Klaeber endorses this view, and in his opinion, God's help consisted in showing Beowulf the sword; the whole passage, he thinks, goes back to Genesis, 4:22.<sup>3</sup> That God, or Providence, helped him to see the sword, Beowulf tells us in lines 1661-64, already quoted<sup>4</sup> - that the

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1550-56: Had then perished / Ecgpheow's son / under the spacious (wide)earth, / the Goth's warrior (champion), / had not his war-corselet/ help performed (given), / his war-net hard, - / and Holy God / in (war) victory ruled; / the wise Lord, / Ruler of the skies / decided it with justice / easily, / when he again stood up.

2. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 68.

3. Op. cit., p. 187.

4. Vide supra, p. 108.

Creator of mankind permitted that I saw the sword upon the wall and that I drew the blade.

### 6. Hroðgar's Homily.

We have seen so far to what extent Christian thought permeates the poem. But the most significant and outspoken Christian passage in *Beowulf*, according to Brodeur, is contained in Hroðgar's moralizing address to Beowulf, lines 1709-84.<sup>1</sup> In the opinion of Klaeber, this part of the poem is perhaps the bridge, or the means, of blending the heroic and theological motives of the whole poem. There can be no doubt, he states, that the king's address forms an organic element in the structural plan of the poem. It is highly moral in tone, serious in background, and spiritually refined.<sup>2</sup> This homily with its recurrent theme of sic transit gloria mundi may serve to prepare the audience, in the words of Wrenn, from the joys of Beowulf's glorious homecoming to the deepening of death and temporary ruin.

Hroðgar's discourse is often referred to as Hroð-

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1. Op. cit., p. 190.

2. Op. cit., p. 190.

3. Beowulf, (ed.), p. 76.

gar's homily, sermon on pride, or moral discourse. It gives a good example of how the poet makes use of Biblical allusions. Earlier he had not told his audience how Cain slew Abel, and now he drops the circumstances regarding the flood and how the giants were destroyed. The poet used this approach, says Whitelock, because his audience knew what they meant from the teachings of the Church. When he says, in lines 1687-93<sup>1</sup> - Hroðgar gazed upon the hilt, the ancestral sword, on which was etched the start of the far struggle when the surging deep, the deluge, carried off the race of giants; they suffered sore, they were a hostile tribe to the Eternal Lord; by flood of waters the Ruler dealt them final retribution, the audience knew that the reference was to the giants of Genesis, 6:4.<sup>2</sup>

The strongest argument, according to Tolkien, against the view that the "philosophy and religious elements" of the poem is the result of "stupidity or accident", rests in the differentiation of thought and diction the poet has endowed his work of art. For example, we can distinguish "the poet as narrator and commentator, Beowulf, and Hroð-

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1. Vide supra, p. 120

2. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 5.

gar".<sup>1</sup> Nowhere else in the poem is this so true as in the passage under discussion here, and the description of Beowulf's return to Heorot from Grendel's mere; lines 1632-50, his speech to Hroðgar; lines 1651-97, the description of what took place in Heorot following Hroðgar's homily; lines 1785-1806, the return of Unferð's sword; lines 1807-16, Beowulf's farewell speech to Hroðgar; lines 1817-65, and finally the poet's description of Hroðgar's farewell; lines 1866-80a.

The humility of Beowulf is brought out in lines 1661-64<sup>2</sup> - but the Creator of mankind, who oft hath helped the friendless, granted that I saw a beautiful great sword of old time hang upon the wall and that I drew the blade. Beowulf is considered wise in foresight:

Ic hit þē bonne gehāte,	þæt þū on Heorote mōst
sorhlēas swefan	mid þīnra secga gedryht,
ond þegna gehwylc	þīnra lēoda,      þearft,
ðugude ond iogobe,	þæt þū him ondraedan ne/
þeoden Scyldinga,	on þā healfe,
aldorbealu eorlum,	swā þū aer dydest, <sup>3</sup>

1. Tolkien, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

2. *Vide supra*, p. 108.

3. *Beowulf*, ll. 1671-76: I now promise it thee, / that thou in Heorot mayest / sleep free from care / with the band of thy retainers, / and every thane / of thy people, / noble and young, / so that for them thou needest not to fear, / O Lord of the Scyldings, / on that side, / injury to life (death) of thy warriors, / as thou before didst.

predicting accurately the affairs of others.<sup>1</sup> Goldsmith sees in the emphasis given to Grendel's origin earlier in the poem, and Hroðgar's observation upon looking at the hilt,<sup>2</sup> a Holy War Beowulf is fighting against the forces of evil.<sup>3</sup>

The outcome of Beowulf's fight with the Dragon is foreshadowed in Hroðgar's sermon:

Bebeorh þē ðonne bealonð, Bēowulf lēofa,  
 secg betsta, ond þē þæt sēlre gecēos,  
 ēce rāēdas; oferhýda ne gým,  
 mæere cempa! Nū is þines maegnes blāēd  
 āne hwīlc; eft sōna bið,  
 þæt þec ādl oððe ec; eafopes getwāefed,  
 oððe fýres feng, oððe flōdes wylm,  
 oððe gripe mēces, oððe gāres fliht,  
 oððe atol yldo; oððe ēagena bearhtm  
 forsited and forsworced; semninga bið,  
 þæt ðec, dryhtguma, dēað oferswýðed.<sup>4</sup>

1. Kaske, *op. cit.*, p. 429.

2. *Vide supra*, p. 120

3. *Op. cit.*, p. 91.

4. *Beowulf*, ll. 1758-68: Protect (guard yourself) from thee wickedness (pernicious enmity), / dear Beowulf, / best of men (warriors), / and choose for thee the better part, / eternal counsels; / pride (arrogance) care (heed) not / illustrious champion (warrior)! / Now is the glory (renew, vigor of life) of thy night (strength) / for a while; / but soon it will be, / that the disease or sword / from thy strength separates, / or the grip (clutch) of the fire, / or rage of flood, / or grasp (attack) of the sword, / or the flight of the spear, / or terrible old age, / or the brightness of the eyes / fails (diminishes) and becomes dark (dim); / straightway it will be, / that thee, warrior, / death overpowers (overcomes).

This is interpreted as being the contest of life against death, both on the spiritual and physical levels. Hence, it is natural that Hroðgar warns Beowulf that he will grow old, as he himself has. Goldsmith, however, sees in this an important relation between Hroðgar's moral discourse and the cursed treasure. She also discovers a change in Beowulf's character, becoming boastful from line 2510 on.<sup>1</sup> This view is not acceptable. This interpretation would be inconsistent with any heroic reading of the poem, particularly since so many bits of symbolism, and very often, clearly allegorical intention proclaim the goodness and nobility of the hero king. It is not difficult to condemn too strongly this interpretation of the poem.

The theme of sapientia and fortitudo is emphasized in:

Eal þū hit gebyldum healdest,  
maegen mid mōdes snytttrum.

Hroðgar mentions then the case of Heremod:

Ne wearð Heremōd swā  
eaforum Ecgwelan, Ār-Scyldingum;

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1. Op. cit., pp. 84-5.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1705b-06a: Thou guardest (keep, support) it all steadily (patiently), / thy might (strength) with wisdom of mind (heart, spirit).

ne gewēox hē him tō willan, ac tō waelfealle  
 ond tō dēaocwalum Denice lēodum;  
 brēat bolgenmōd bēodgenēatas,  
 eaxlgesteallan, op þæt hē āna hwearf,  
 māere þōden mondrēamum from,  
 oēah þe hine mihtig God mægenes wynnum,  
 eafepum stēpte, ofer ealle men  
 for gefremede. Hwæþere him on ferþe grēow  
 brēosthord blōdrēow; nallas bēagas geaf  
 Denum aefter dōme; drēamlēas gebād,  
 þæt hē þæs gewinnes weorc þrōwade,  
 lēodbealo longsum. Ðū þē lāer be þon,  
 gumcyste ongit! Ic þis gid be þē  
 awraec wintrum frōd,<sup>1</sup>

who although endowed with God's favours, was bloodthirsty and in a long feud with his people. The wise old king entreats Beowulf to learn from the example of Heremod, and unlike him to walk in the ways of sapientia and fortitudo.

Hroðgar's moral sermon now embraces the liberality of Almighty God who sends wisdom, estate, high station, who swayeth all things, letting right fare in the heart of the hero, giving him bliss, a fortress to his folk who place

1. Beowulf, ll. 1709b-24a; Not so was Heremod / to the offsprings of Ecgwela, / the Scyldings; / he grew not for their pleasure (delight, joy), / but for their slaughter, / and for the destruction / of the Danish men (people); / he in angry mood destroyed / his table companions, / his comrades, / until he alone departed (exile and death), / the great lord / from the joys of men, / although him Mighty God / with the pleasures of power, / with energies had exalted, / above all men / forth advanced him. / Yet in his spirit (soul) there grew / a blood-thirsty heart; / he gave no rings / to the Danes according to glory (judgment, honour); / joyless he continued, / so that of war he / the misery suffered, / great affliction enduring. / Teach thou thyself by this man, / understand many virtue (s)! / I this speech to thee / recited in years old and wise.

their trust in him:

hū mihtig God	Wundor is tō secganne,
purh sīdne sefan	manna cwnne
eard ond eorlscipe;	snyttru bryttad,
Hwīlum hē on lufen	hē āh ealra geweald.
monnes mōdgeþonc	lāeteð hworfan
seleð him on ēþle	māeran cynnes,
tō healdanne	eorþan wynne
gedēð him swā gewealdene	hlēoburh wera,
side rice,	worolde dāelas,
his unsnyttrum	þæt hē his selfa ne maeg
	ende geþencean. <sup>1</sup>

Hroðgar continues and tells Beowulf about man's downfall:

Wunad hē on wiste;	nō hine wiht dweleð
ādī nē wīdo,	nē him inwitsorh
on sefa(n) sweorced,	nē gesacu oðwāer
ecghete ēowed,	ac him eal worold
wendeð on willan;	hē þæt wyrse ne con -
cō þæt him on innan	oferhygda dāel
weaxed ond wrīdað, <sup>2</sup>	

and he warns Beowulf not to allow himself to believe that he has become self-sufficient. Obstinate pride will lead

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1724b-34; Wonderful it is to say, / how mighty God / to the race of men / through His great mind / wisdom bestows, / land and rank; / he possesses power of all. / Sometimes He as it likes / lets go (move about) / man's mind (thought) / of the great race, / gives him in his country / joy of earth / to possess / a sheltering town of men, / makes to him subject / the part of the world, / large realms, / so that he himself may not / through his lack of wisdom / think of his end.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1735-41a; He continues in prosperity; / nor him at all afflicts / disease or age, / nor for him sorrow / on his mind becomes dark, / nor enmity anywhere / sword hate (hostility) shows, / but for him all the world / turns at his will; / he the worse (misfortune) knows not - / until within him / a measure (deal) of arrogance (pride) / develops and grows.

man to his downfall.

The metaphor of the spiritual armour against the devil's arrows is used by Hroðgar. He says:

sāwele hyrde;	þonne se weard swefeð,
bisgum gebunden,	bið se slāep tō faest,
sē þe of flānbogan	bona swiðe nēah,
þonne bið on hrepre	fyrenum scēoted.
biteran strāele -	under helm drepen
wōm wundorbebodum	him bebeorgan ne con -
	wergan gāstes. <sup>1</sup>

Whitelock comments that it is too common a metaphor to look for a specific source in Beowulf. We may trace it, however, to Vercelli homily No. IV,<sup>2</sup> and to the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Of particular interest is a passage of Felix's Life of St Guth-

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1741b47; when the guardian sleeps, the soul's keeper; / too fast is the sleep, / by cares bound, / the slayer very near, / who from his arrow-bow / wickedly shoots. / Then is he be in the breast / beneath his protection (guard) stricken / by the sharp arrow (shaft) - / he cannot shield himself - / from the perverse (crooked, wicked) mysterious (strange) commands / of the cursed spirit.

2. Vide Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 8; Die Vercelli-Homilien, ed. M. Förster (Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa, xii, Hamburg, 1932), pp. 103-6.

3. Ephesians, 6:13-17, p. 222; Therefore take unto you the armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; in all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. And take unto you the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit (which is the word of God).

lac, a mid-eighth-century work. St Guthlac:

'girded himself with spiritual weapons,  
against the snares of the foul enemy;  
he turned into weapons for himself the  
shield of faith, the breastplate of hope,  
the helmet of chastity, the bow of pa-  
tience, the arrows of psalmody'; a little  
farther on the arrows of the devil are  
mentioned.<sup>1</sup>

Hroðgar completes the description of man's downfall

in:

pinceð him tō lýtēl,	paet hē lange hēold,
gýt̅sa gromhýdig,	nallas on gylp seleð
fætte bēagas,	ond hē pā forðgesceaft
forgyteð ond forgýmeð,	paes, þe him ær God seal/
wuldres Waldend,	weorðmynda dæel. de
Hit on endestaef	eft gelimpeð,
paet se līchoma	lāene gedreōseð,
fæge gefealleð;	fēhð oþer tō,
sē þe unmunlice	mādm̅as dāelep, x. 2
eorles ærgestrēon,	eges̅an ne gýmeð.

We have, in lines 1748-50, an echo of avaritia,<sup>3</sup> which in early Christian thought was considered the root of all sins.

1. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 80.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1748-57: seems to him too little, / what he too long has held, / he covets angry-minded, / gives not in his pride (proudly) / gold rings, / and he the future state (destiny) / forgets and neglects, / because to him before God has given, / the Lord (Ruler) of glory, / a share (measure) of glory (dignities). / And in the end / after befalls, / that the body / perishable declines, / doomed to die falls; / another succeeds, / who reck- lessly / treasures dispenses, / the hero's (noodleman, warrior) ancient treasures, / fear heeds not.

3. Kaske, op. cit., p. 431.

This would be in accordance with the teachings of St Paul,<sup>1</sup> the theme being probably known to our poet. Also, the fate of unwisely cherished wealth, lines 1755-57,<sup>2</sup> has a familiar sapiential tone;<sup>3</sup> while line 1747,<sup>4</sup> shows man now undefended by conscience from the temptations (shafts) of the devil. According to Gummere the same allegory is found in the Middle English Sawles Warde, - conscience, and in many other places, times and authors.<sup>5</sup>

The climax of Hroðgar's lesson is contained in lines 1758-68.<sup>6</sup> He tells him; þan, then such baleful thought, Beo-

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1. First Epistle to Timothy, 6:10, p. 240: For the desire of money is the root of all evils; which some coveting have erred from the faith, and have entangled themselves in many sorrows.

2. Vide supra, p. 152.

3. Psalms, 38:7, p. 600: Surely man passeth as an image; yes, and he is disquited in vain. He storeth up; and he knoweth not for whom he shall gather these things. Proverbs, 28:8, p. 679: He that heapeth to ether riches by usury and loan, gathereth them for him that will be bountiful to the poor. Ecclesiastes, 6:2, p. 686: A man to whom God hath given riches, and substance, and honour, and his soul wanteth nothing of all that he desireth: yet God doth not give him power to eat thereof, but a stranger shall eat it up. This is vanity and a great misery. Ecclesiasticus, 14:4, p. 725: He that gathereth together by wronging his own soul, gathereth for others, and another will squander away his goods in rioting.

4. Vide supra, p. 151.

5. Op. cit., p. 98.

6. Vide supra, p. 147.

wulf dearest, best of men, and the better part choose, profit eternal; and temper thy pride, warrior famous! Commenting on this passage, Whitelock states that the advice given Beowulf was well taken, and in keeping with line 1760,<sup>1</sup> he had chosen ece raedas - profit eternal. She argues that the poet is bent on emphasizing the temporary nature of this life "even of good actions".<sup>2</sup> Just as Heorot, while rescued by Beowulf from the hands of the monsters, saw the downfall of the Scylding dynasty through the evil of its members, so also Beowulf rescued his people from the fire of the Dragon only to leave them to be destroyed once he is dead. All this breeds the temporal nature of earthly success.

But Beowulf lived the life of a hero:

cwædon þæt hē wære	wyruldcyning(a)
manna mildust	on mon(ðw)ærust, <sup>3</sup>
lēodum lifost	ond lofgeornost.

Whitelock reminds us of the parallel between these words and King Alfred's: "I desired to live worthily...and to leave after my life...my memory in good work".<sup>4</sup>

1. Vide supra, p. 147.

2. Audience of Beowulf, p. 98.

3. Beowulf, ll. 3180-2; said that he was / of earthly kings / of men mildest / and kindest, / of men the gentlest / and of praise (fame) most eager.

4. Op. cit., p. 98.

The last part of Hroðgar's homily deals with his own tribulations and reverses of fortune:

Swā ic Hring-Dena	hund missēra
wēold under wolcnum	ond hig wigge belēac
manigum māægpa	geond þysne middangeard,
aescum ond ecgum,	þæt ic mē aēnigne
under swegles begong	gesacan ne tealde.
Hwaet, mē þaes on ēple	edwenden cwōm,
gyrn aefter gomene,	seþðan Grendel weard,
ealdgewinna,	ingenga mīn;
ic þāere socne. <sup>1</sup>	singāles waeg
mōdceare micle.	

Hroðgar ends his discourse with thanks to the Lord Eternal:

	þæs sig Metode þanc
ēcean Dryhtne,	þæs ðe ic on aldre gebād,
þæt ic on þone hafelan	heorodreōrigne
ofer eald gewin	ēagum starige! <sup>2</sup>

In his interpretation of Hroðgar's moral discourse from a sapientia and fortitudo approach, Kaske states that we have in Hroðgar a sapientia of a kingly sort no longer supported by fortitudo.<sup>3</sup> In fact, one may parallel this with

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1769-78a; Thus I the mail-clad (corselet) Dane / for half a hundred years / had ruled under the clouds / and them from war protected / from many tribes / throughout this mid-earth, / with spears and swords, / so that I me any / under the sky's circuit / adversary counted not. / Lo, to me of this in my country / a reversal (change) came, / grief after joy, since Grendel became, / my old adversary, / my invader; / I for that persecution / continually have borne / great sorrow of soul.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1778b-81; therefore be to the Creator thanks, / to the Eternal God, / for that I have in life remained, / that I on that head / blood-stained / after our old strife / with my eyes may gaze.

3. Op. cit., p. 431.

several examples from the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> In Augustine's De Libero Arbitrio, sapientia is the bonorum operum magistra; it is the greatest defense man has, it may be lost through evil, but righteous living will increase it.<sup>2</sup> In Hroðgar's sermon, the downfall of man is brought about by his unsnyttrum, that is, lack of wisdom; line 1734.<sup>3</sup> He turns away from sapientia through pride: lines 1740-41,<sup>4</sup> established by Augustine as the beginning of sin, that is, sapientia is put

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1. Proverbs, 2:6, p. 659; Because the Lord giveth wisdom; and out of his mouth cometh prudence and knowledge. Ecclesiastes, 2:6, p. 684; God hath given to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy... Jeremias: 9:23, p. 826; Thus saith the Lord; Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, and let not the rich man glory in his riches... Daniel, 2:21-23, p. 951:...giveth wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that have understanding...thou hast given me wisdom and strength... The Acts, 7:10, p. 140:...and he gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh... Ezechiel, 28:3-8, p. 923, is an account of the King of Tyre, which in a general way parallels the story of Hroðgar's sermon; Behold thou art wiser than Daniel; no secret is hid from thee. In thy wisdom and thy understanding thou hast made thyself strong; and hast gotten gold and silver into thy treasures. By the greatness of thy wisdom, and by thy traffic thou hast increased thy strength; and thy heart is lifted up as the heart of God. Therefore behold, I will bring upon thee strangers the strongest of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the beauty of thy wisdom, and they shall defile thy beauty. They shall kill thee, and bring thee down; and thou shalt die the death of them that are slain in the heart of the sea.

2. Kaske, op. cit., p. 432.

3. Vide supra, p. 150.

4. Vide supra, p. 150.

to sleep by pride: lines 1741-42.<sup>1</sup> Then we have avaritia as the dominating theme: lines 1748-50,<sup>2</sup> echoing Gregory's superbia and avaritia.<sup>3</sup> These terms have a necessary mutual connection. Superbia may be considered as the dominating principle of avaritia, including not only amor pecuniae, but a desire for more than sufficient in all things. Kaske looks upon Hroðgar's sermon as a pattern of pride and Augustinian avarice, the two paramount causes of spiritual pride.<sup>4</sup>

#### 7. The Dragon.

Although the Dragon belongs with the monsters Grendel and his dam, we have left him to be dealt with in order of his appearance in the unfolding of the plot. The Dragon was real. He was in the wyrme - serpent form,<sup>5</sup> a hringbogan - coiled creature,<sup>6</sup> in length se waes fiftiges fotgearnearces - he was fifty feet of measure.<sup>7</sup> This, it

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1. Vide supra, p. 151.
  2. Ibid., p. 152.
  3. Kaske, op. cit., pp. 432-3.
  4. Ibid., p. 432.
  5. Beowulf, l. 2519.
  6. Beowulf, l. 2561.
  7. Beowulf, l. 3042.

should be observed, represents an indefinite number, like the fifty years of Beowulf's reign. The nacod niðdraca - naked malicious Dragon<sup>1</sup> had wings. He nihtes flēogeð - flies by night.<sup>2</sup> He was attorsceadan - a venomous foe,<sup>3</sup> with biteran bānum - sharp fangs,<sup>4</sup> and his bite was mortal:

	Ðā sīo wund ongon,
pē him se eorðdraca	āer geworhte,
sweland ond swellan;	hē þæt sōna onfand,
þæt him on brēgstum	bealonīð(e) wēoll
attor on innan. <sup>5</sup>	

He belched fire and was fyre befangen - in fire enveloped,<sup>6</sup> and he bāele fōr, fyre gefýsed - came forth with flame, provided with fire.<sup>7</sup>

The conception of the Dragon was not an innovation on the part of the poet of Beowulf. It was so well known on Germanic soil that the poet did not give him a name.<sup>8</sup> But

1. Beowulf, l. 2272a.

2. Beowulf, l. 2272b.

3. Beowulf, l. 2839.

4. Beowulf, l. 2692.

5. Beowulf, ll. 2711b-15a; Then the wound began, / that him the earth-dragon / before had wrought, / to burn and swell; / he soon found, / that his breast / the poison surged (boiled) / venom within.

6. Beowulf, l. 2274.

7. Beowulf, ll. 2308b-09a.

8. Lawrence, op. cit., p. 205.

there are no precise parallels for comparison, according to Whitelock, although one may find the mention of dragon-fights in Scandinavian tradition.<sup>1</sup> In Felix's Life of St Guthlac there were men not deterred from rifling a heathen barrow by the fear of a guardian dragon.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence states that:

less than a hundred years after Beowulf was composed, the people of Northumbria beheld dragons in the air, and dire misfortunes followed. In the time of Chaucer, so Thomas of Walsingham informs us, a dragon near Ludlow was subdued by the incantations of a Saracen physician, and much treasure extracted from his lair. The grave descriptions of the dragon in mediaeval bestiaries are familiar; there too he appears as a curious but not unauthenticated feature of natural history.<sup>3</sup>

According to Wright, there are many examples given in Old English literature.<sup>4</sup> As additional evidence, he mentions:

Lydgate's Fall of Princes where a dragon is presented as lurking under flowers in order to strike its victim: 'As under floures is shrouded the dragoun'. And in popular tradition the identification of dragon and serpent lingered long. A curious example of this was published in 1614 in True and Wonderfull... In Sussez,

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1. Audience of Beowulf, p. 69

2. Ibid., p. 81.

3. Op. cit., p. 207.

4. Op. cit., p. 3.

2 miles from Horsam, in a wood called St Leonards Forrest...30 miles from London... This beast, 9 ft or more in length emitted poisonous breath, which extended for 4 rods around him.<sup>1</sup>

The audience of Beowulf knew the meaning of the Dragon, and there could have been little doubt in their minds, as to the nature of such a monster. Though more violent and less cunning than the serpent in the Garden of Eden, he was nevertheless evil and dangerous to men. Furthermore, the audience would no doubt associate Beowulf's Dragon with the Scriptures.<sup>2</sup>

Wright points that the Dragon would be quite prepared to attack without provocation.<sup>3</sup> Bearing this in mind, we should not make too much of the so-called injury the Dragon had received. The poet is careful to tell us

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1. Wright, op. cit., p. 3.

2. There are many references to dragons in the Old and New Testaments. For example, Isaias, 34:13-4, p.783; ...and it shall be the habitation of dragons, and the pasture of ostriches. And demons and monsters shall meet, and the hairy ones shall cry out one to another... Job, 30:29, p.571: I was the brother of dragons, and companion to ostriches. The Apocalypse, 12:7-9, p. 288; And there was a great battle in heaven, Michael and his angels fought with the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels... And that great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, who seduceth the whole world; and he was cast unto the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.

3. Op. cit., p. 4.

that the invader who provoked the Dragon did so out of necessity and not of his own free will. Once in the Dragon's lair<sup>1</sup>, the man's action was limited to the taking of a jeweled cup, which was, in fact, for his lord:

Nealles mid gewealdum sylfes willum, ac for prēanēdlan haeleða bearna (aernes) þearfa, secg synbysig. <sup>1</sup>	wyrmhord ābraec, sē ðe him sāre gesceōd, þ(ēow) nāthwylces heteswengeas flēah, on ðāēr inne fealh,  mandryhtne baer friodowaære baed
fāeted wāēge, hlāford sinne. <sup>2</sup>	

The reign of terror, which followed the rifling of the Dragon's hoard, was not the first of its kind. The poet mentions the monster's nocturnal incendiary habits:

eald ūhtsceaða sē ðe byrnende nacod niðdraca, fýre befangen; (swiðe ondræ)ða(ð). <sup>3</sup>	opene standan, biorgas sēceð, nihtes flēoged hyne foldbūend
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1. Beowulf, ll. 2221-26a: Not of his own power (control) / the serpent's hoard break into, / of his own will, / did he who sorely wronged him, / but for distress (necessity) / a certain slave (man) / sons of men / fled from hostile blows, / in want of a house, / and therein penetrated, / the guilty man.

2. Beowulf, ll. 2281b-83a: onto his lord he bore / a gold cup, / besought a compact of peace / of his lord.

3. Beowulf, ll. 2271-75a: old depredator at night / standing open, / naked malicious dragon, / who burning / seeks out barrows, / flies by night / in fire enveloped; / him earth-dwellers / very much dread.

The Dragon, like Grendel, is an enemy of mankind, and Beowulf's audience could not have any sympathy for him, any more than they had for Grendel and his dam.

In the development of the theme of malitia, Kaske argues that in defending his people against the Dragon, Beowulf gives final proof of kingly fortitudo.<sup>1</sup> Grendel and his dam embody external evil or violence, the Dragon represents the greatest of internal evils, the perversion of the mind and will, malitia; the Dragon by contrast represents malitia itself. According to this view;

violence is the perversion of fortitudo and is combatted primarily by fortitudo, so malitia is a perversion or abandonment of sapientia and is combatted by it as in Hrothgar's sermon. That the same idea of external violence and internal malitia as two great poles of evil did exist in the poet's scheme of things, seems evident from their mention by Hrothgar... The association of malitia with dragons is made several times by Gregory. One instance follows an account of how the various sins open the way for one another, much as Hrothgar's sermon... In view of the continual emphasis on the dragon's fire in Beowulf, it is worth noticing that Gregory also gives ignis to signify mentis malitia.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 450.
  2. Ibid., p. 450.
  3. Ibid., p. 451.

The fight with the Dragon would seem to furnish the poet a brilliant device for presenting in a single action, Beowulf's final example of kingly fortitudo, and his preservation to the last of kingly sapientia.<sup>1</sup> One should not forget that in both Germanic and Christian thought, death, or final physical defeat, is inevitable and relatively unimportant. What is of paramount importance is having fought the good fight. The Dragon fight, representing Beowulf's final victory over the monster of malitia, is the climax, or the summary, of Beowulf's life. It is the permanent victory over evil. As Kaske points out:

there is about Beowulf's death, an air of inevitability that tends to remove it from the cause-and-effect of even symbolic dragon's tusks.<sup>2</sup>

Goldsmith offers several comments on the Dragon. In her opinion, it has been much debated whether the monster is symbolic of anything or nothing.<sup>3</sup> Some, she says, even advocate sympathy for the outraged Dragon, but this would be incomprehensible to the Anglo-Saxon Christians. For them the evil of the Dragon is much different from the righteous

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1. Kaske, op. cit., p. 452.

2. Ibid., p. 452.

3. Op. cit., p. 92.

wrath of a man who has been robbed. The Dragon, as we have seen,<sup>1</sup> is called old depredator at night, naked hostile or malicious, who holds the countryside in terror. Like Grendel, he is a malicious destroyer; his life and his hoard spreading suffering and terror. But Goldsmith claims it is difficult to know the extent of the symbolism of the Dragon, and points out, as we have already stated,<sup>2</sup> that water-trolls and fire-breathing dragons were part of the popular belief. The Christian poet, knowing that these fiends were in Genesis, accepted them, not as abstractions of fictional creatures, but as part of God's universe.

Goldsmith argues that wyrm -serpent, and draca -dragon, are interchangeable symbols for the devil, that is, they are creatures of hell in Christian lore. In Old English, wyrm took the form of the tempter in the Garden of Eden, and in Bede's Book of the Apocalypse wyrm is mentioned. Fire-breathing dragons in Anglo-Saxon Christ and Satan were on duty to guard the doors of hell.<sup>3</sup> This would seem to be the correct approach to the Dragon, that is, he is the enemy of God, that of Beowulf and of the Christian

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1. Vide supra, pp. 157-8.

2. Op. cit., pp. 92-3.

3. Ibid., p. 92.

world.

Goldsmith's views, that Beowulf was bent on going after the Dragon's hoard to win fame and gold, that it was his dying eagerness to look upon the buried treasure, and that he sinned by arrogance,<sup>1</sup> must be rejected. Beowulf's kingdom was in peril; he was called upon to defend it, and had no alternative. His motive was the death of the Dragon, first and foremost, the same as he had gone earlier after Grendel and his dam. In dying for his people, he made the supreme sacrifice. Beowulf tells us:

	Ic ðæs ealles maeg
feorhbennum sēoc	gefēan habban;
forðām mē wītan ne ðearf	Waldend fīra, <sup>2</sup>

and further on:

	paet ic ðy sēft maege
aefter māðūmwelan	mīn ālāetan
līf ond lēodscipe,	þone ic longe hēold. <sup>3</sup>

And Wiglaf confirms that God helped Beowulf in his fight with the Dragon:

	hwæðre him God ūðe,
sigera Waldend,	paet hē hýne sylfne gewraec

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1. Op. cit., pp. 92-3.

2. Beowulf, ll. 2739b-41: I for this may / with mortal wounds sick / have joy; / because need not reproach me / the Ruler of men.

3. Beowulf, ll. 2749b-51: that I the softer may / after the wealth of treasure / give up my / life and nation (people), / that I long have held.

āna mīd ecge, pā him waes elnes pearf.<sup>1</sup>

Not greed for gold, but the grace of heaven Beowulf had always kept in view. This was the climax of the story; of right triumphing over might, and good over evil.

The fact that Beowulf was eager to look upon the treasure should not be construed as greed for gold. The love of treasure and gaudy trinkets, which characterized the German peoples,<sup>2</sup> was revealed to the modern eye so convincingly by the Sutton Hoo discovery.<sup>3</sup> Godfrey points out that this passion for costly finery was a characteristic of the Anglo-Saxons throughout their history; in fact, it was the wealth of the monasteries that especially attracted the Vikings.<sup>4</sup> We know that St Wilfrid on his death-bed ordered his treasurer to lay out his silver and gold in his sight:

A short time before his death, he ordered his treasurer to open his treasury in the presence of two abbots and some very faithful brethren...and to put out in their sight all the gold, silver, and precious stones...

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1. Beowulf, ll. 2874b-76; yet did God grant him, / the Ruler of victories, / that he himself avenged / alone with sword, / when he had need of valour.

2. Godfrey, op. cit., p. 187.

3. Vide supra, pp. 37 ff.

4. Op. cit., p. 187.

The emphasis on the acquisition of lands and treasure attributed to Wilfrid by his chaplain is significant...It is a memorable picture, that of Wilfrid, the miles Christi, the old warrior, surveying his hoard as did Beowulf before his death. But if, like Beowulf, he fought till he was an old man, the treasure and the lands...were amassed with a purpose.<sup>1</sup>

In his history of The Church in Anglo-Saxon England, Godfrey describes that when Wilfrid felt the approach of death, in the presence of some of his monks at Ripon:

he opened his hoard of gold, silver, and jewels, which he bade them divide in four parts: the first and second for the churches of SS. Mary and Paul at Rome, and for the poor, respectively, the third for the abbots of Hexham and Ripon to enable them to 'purchase the friendship of kings and bishops', and the fourth part for his faithful companions who had shared his exile with him.<sup>2</sup>

It was therefore in keeping with Germanic tradition that Beowulf expressed the desire to view the treasure he had won for his people.

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1. Hodgkin, op. cit., vol. I, p. 346.

2. Op. cit., pp. 146-7.

## 8. Beowulf's Funeral.

The answer to the understanding of the passage on Beowulf's funeral, lines 3110 to the end, rests with the handling of historical tradition in the epic nature of the poem. In order to give realism and color to the heroic age the poet describes, he keeps the old Germanic burial custom, and puts his hero through the splendor of a pagan funeral by cremation on the pyre. In interpreting this passage, one might call to mind Augustine's De Civitate Dei, in which he advises to take no heed of what is diverse in manners or in laws and institutions.<sup>1</sup> Another explanation to the poet's choice of such a funeral, can be found in the spirit of Pope Gregory regarding pagan myths and practices. Gregory had cautioned Augustine not to make a clean sweep of the native Anglo-Saxon customs, so Bede tells us in his Ecclesiastical History.<sup>2</sup> The poet of Beowulf was probably writing in that spirit.

It was not a simple task for the poet to fit artistically in his poem a pagan Germanic heroic figure like Beowulf, pagan customs, such as Beowulf's funeral, in a Chris-

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1. See Hamilton, op. cit., p. 323.

2. Book I, Chapter 30, p. 86.

tian environment. This was possible through the epic technique of the poem, as we have demonstrated in Chapter III of this work. As long as the epic poet presents nothing offensive to the taste of his audience, he is bound only by the larger outline of his material and the canons of heroic verse. Hamilton argues further that:

by presenting men of Teutonic background relying in general on an overruling Providence these might be acceptable to their Anglo-Saxon kinsmen. Shakespeare displays a similar tact in foregoing historical accuracy as regards the religion of his agents in King Lear. As inhabitants of pre-Christian Britain, in a social order where justice seems to be inactive, they acknowledge only pagan gods; but invoke Roman gods known to Elizabethan audiences, rather than unfamiliar deities of early Britain. At the same time the highly fanciful and romantic cast of his poem gave him leave to add color and a semblance of realism to his picture of the Heroic Age by describing the splendor of pagan funerals.<sup>1</sup>

Similar examples we have in Chaucer. In Troilus and Criseyde, God is placed several times in the mouth of the Trojan <sup>Jan</sup> girl, Criseyde, who prays later to the saints.<sup>2</sup> Brodeur

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1. Op. cit., pp. 322-3.

2. F.N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1961. Book II, lines 113-37, pp. 402-3. Also, Chaucer puts definitely Christian phrases and sentiments into the mouths of his three chief characters; Book I, lines 554-60, p. 395; ll. 1002-08, p. 400; Book II, ll. 381, p. 405, 1638, p. 419; Book III, ll. 260, p. 423, 372-73, p. 425, 925-26, p. 431, 1501, p. 437.

remarks that:

Religious or quasi-religious sentiments in the speeches of the characters in Troilus and Criseyde take, in the fashion of the time, three different forms: that which, making use of Christian imagery, has every appearance of genuine Christian utterance, like the speeches of Pandarus in Book I, lines 554-560 and 1002-08; that which, like the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women, applies the terms of Christian imagery and doctrine to the convention of Courtly Love; and that which deals frankly with, or directly addresses, pagan gods.<sup>1</sup>

It is not mere coincidence, but artistic ability on the part of the poet, that the beginning and the end of his poem are related. The passing away of Scyld, the great hero, has an echo in Beowulf's death, and a parallel at Sutton Hoo. Scyld is carried to brimes faroðe - the seashore<sup>2</sup> at his own request; Beowulf is placed on a mound aet brimes nosan - at the sea's projection (by the shore of the flood)<sup>3</sup> also at his own request. The treasures placed in Scyld's ship, the hoard of Beowulf's barrow, and the finds of Sutton Hoo have an affinity in pagan Germanic tradition. The poet describes the passing of Scyld Scefing in a manner

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1. Op. cit., pp. 206-7.

2. Beowulf, l. 28.

3. Beowulf, l. 2803.

strongly reminiscent of the Sutton Hoo ship-burial, which is probably the best example in Anglo-Saxon times, outside the poem Beowulf, of pagan Germanic tradition used in a thoroughly Christian environment. As Wrenn puts it;

a Christian must have had in this case a private burial with the proper rites of the Church...the public pagan affair was a concession to a still strong Germanic...sentiment for the ancient traditions. A Christian king...received the traditional Germanic pagan funeral and grave-furnishings, with a ship-cenotaph of the kind made familiar to archaeologists by the Swedish boat-burials of Uppland.<sup>1</sup>

Beowulf's cremation meant a great deal, historically, to the tradition minded Anglo-Saxon Christian poet and audience, but nothing beyond that. A case in point is Brodeur's remark regarding the actual pagan cremation and the use<sup>of</sup> this device by Beowulf's poet:

the pagan practice of burning the dead, no longer in use after the conversion to Christianity, had assumed a conventional manner of treatment in poetry. Stjerna and Chambers have pointed out discrepancies between actual pagan practice and the treatment of the cremations in Beowulf.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Chambers, Beowulf An Introduction, p. 511.

2. Op. cit., p. 130.

Chambers is of the opinion that the poet's account of cremations is not altogether accurate. He believes that the poet represented merely what later Anglo-Saxon Christian times remembered by tradition of the rite of cremation.<sup>1</sup>

Whitelock sees no incongruity with the typical Germanic funeral ceremony Beowulf was subjected to. She offers several explanations. For example, the heathen implication may have long been blurred and forgotten; the "trappings" are there, and were familiar to the audience of Beowulf from older Germanic tales; these burial rites belong to a generation long since gone, and the effect made by describing them could no longer have the same impact, nor could the audience accept the implications of these rites. Furthermore, the poet had an enormous treasure to dispose of, and he chose the pomp and splendour of the heathen Germanic burial rites for the grand finale of his poem.<sup>2</sup> Regarding Sutton Hoo, she says:

the finding of a ship-burial on this magnificent scale makes it easier to understand why men of thoroughly Christian generation should still wish to hear of these ancient ceremonies.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Beowulf An Introduction, pp. 121 ff.
  2. Audience of Beowulf, pp. 77, 82, 84.
  3. Ibid., p. 85.

## 9. Wyrð or Fate.

Wyrð, the blind ruler of man's destiny in pagan Germanic times, became identified by Anglo-Saxon Christians as the manifestation of God's will or God's Providence.<sup>1</sup> Discussing the evolution of the word wyrð, A. Keiser, in his The Influence of Christianity on the Vocabulary of Old English Poetry, states that the mythological force of the word has been lost almost completely. Under Christian influence, the word has come to mean God and predestination, and fallen angel or devil.<sup>2</sup>

To the poet of Beowulf, Wyrð is subject to the decrees of a providential God. Wyrð, in relation to the mih-tig God<sup>3</sup> who has governed mankind since the beginning of the world, is the Providence of the Christians. Providence controls much of the narrative in Beowulf. This we already discussed in the first part of this Chapter, under Grace and Providence, and pointed to specific cases.<sup>4</sup> Klaeber states that by the side of heathen Fate is the Almighty God. In

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1. Vide supra, p. 104.

2. See Hamilton, op. cit., p. 312.

3. Beowulf, l. 701.

4. Vide supra, pp. 103 ff.

his opinion, the functions of Fate and God seem parallel.<sup>1</sup> Yet the poet tells us that God controls Fate: nefne him wītig God wyrd forstōde - had not him the wise God, fate, prevented.<sup>2</sup> In his paraphrase of Boethius, King Alfred looks upon Wyrd as obeying a superior power. This would confirm the interpretation given to gæd̄ ā wyrd swā hīo scel! - fate goes ever as it must.<sup>3</sup>

Hamilton makes the observation that Wyrd may have been pressed into the service of the new faith; and it was, and this is how Wyrd must be interpreted in Boethius. She states:

the systems of Boethius does not preclude the narrower view of wyrd as a demon, nor the related conception in Solomon and Saturn. The Boethian Fate, which is but the working out in time of the divine Pre-science, may be executed through the various devices of demons, as well as by divine spirits, the human soul, and the instrumentality of nature (De Consolatione Philosophiae, 4, Pr.6. 36-65). Here Alfred's rendering follows the Latin rather closely, using wyrd to signify both Fortune and Fate. Then he explains that the fickle Fortune we call wyrd merely follows the Providence of God.<sup>4</sup>

Boethius and Alfred, she argues, affirm that not all things

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1. Op. cit., p. xlix.
  2. Beowulf, l. 1056.
  3. Beowulf, l. 455.
  4. Op. cit., p. 325.

in the world are subject to Fate, but that Fate and all that is subject to it are controlled by Divine Providence.<sup>1</sup> Fate, subordinate to the Divine will, is the only theory acceptable. This would be consistent with the frequent references to God made by the poet.

#### 10. Blood-feuds or Vengeance.

Much has been made by exponents of the pagan school of thought concerning the many references to blood-feuds in Beowulf. Indeed, the poet seems to knit the theme of vengeance quite evidently throughout his poem. He tells us that Grendel is the offspring of the fratricidal Cain and that the Dragon is angered by a fugitive from justice. Beowulf accuses Unferð of having murdered his kin: pēah ðū pinum brōðrum tō banan wurde - although you of thy brothers was the murderer.<sup>2</sup> There is a veiled reference that a family feud will break out in the household of Hroðgar:

paet hē mid ðy wīfe	waelfaehða dāel,
saecca gesette.	Oft seldan hwāer
aefter leodhryre	lýtle hwīle
þongār būgeð,	pēah sēo brýd duge! <sup>3</sup>

1. Hamilton, op. cit., p. 325.

2. Beowulf, l. 587.

3. Beowulf, ll. 2028-31; that with the wife he / a great deal of deadly-feuds, / and wars may settle. / Though seldom anywhere / after a people's fall / even for a little while / the deadly spears fall, / although the bride be good.

Beowulf, in his readiness to avenge his uncle and cousin, tells Hroðgar: Sēlre bið aeghwaem, þaet hē his frēond wrece, þonne hē fela murne - better it is for each that he avenge his friend than mourn him much.<sup>1</sup> The poet also tells us that King Hreðel, grandfather of Beowulf, is full of grief and desolation because he is deprived of the consolation of exacting vengeance, since his son was killed accidentally.<sup>2</sup> There are many references in the poem to family feuds. Because vengeance was current in Germanic heroic times, and was based on pure heathen ethics, some critics look upon family feuds and vengeance in Beowulf as a convincing sign of its paganism. These critics fail to see the poet's artistic handling of historical material, as well as the problem that was real to the Christian poet's contemporaries.

In Anglo-Saxon England, vengeance was by no means the expression of a spirit purely pagan.<sup>3</sup> Throughout the Christian Middle Ages, revenge for one's kin, or one's lord was the duty of the warrior.<sup>4</sup> Action by the relatives, or by a person empowered to act in their place, was the only means by which Anglo-Saxon law dealt with homicide until

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1384b-85.

2. Beowulf, ll. 2444-62.

3. Brodeur, op. cit., p. 184.

4. Ibid., p. 184.

after the arrival of the Normans.<sup>1</sup> We know from the codes of King Edmund, who reigned from 939-46, that he attempted to curb the blood-feud.<sup>2</sup> In Anglo-Saxon times the duty of exacting retribution from the murderer and his kindred, if any of these were killed, was not superseded by Christianity.<sup>3</sup> We have many examples of this.

In 801 Alcuin wrote to Charles the Great in recommendation of a nobleman from Northumbria, called Thorhtmund, who had bravely avenged the blood of his lord.<sup>4</sup> The statutes of the Cambridge Thanes' Guild stated that financial help was to be given by each guild-brother if any member of the guild slew a man, and did so by necessity as an avenger, and to remedy the insult to him. If, however, the slaying was foolish or wantonly, no help was to be forthcoming. These men were faithful sons of the Church, but they recognized that any member of the brotherhood might become an avenger by necessity, and they saw nothing unusual or blameworthy in such an act.<sup>5</sup> What is considered the most remarkable

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1. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 13.

2. Ibid., p. 15.

3. Ibid., p. 13.

4. Ibid., p. 14.

5. Ibid., p. 14.

family feud in Anglo-Saxon history of the eleventh century, is that involving the Earl Aldred of Northumbria. Uhtred was killed by Thurbrand the Hold, who in turn was killed by Uhtred's son Aldred, earl of Northumbria; Aldred was then killed by Carl, Thurbrand's son. Aldred's death lay long unavenged, but in 1073 his grandson Waltheof, son of Earl Siward, whose mother was Aldred's daughter, sent a party that slew all, but one, the sons and grandsons of Carl.<sup>1</sup>

The Church, naturally, discouraged the taking of vengeance in the family feuds constantly breaking out. The new Christian doctrine of brotherly love was taught and advocated. The Church also supported the practice of settling feuds by the payment of wergild, that is compensation, instead of by the taking of vengeance.<sup>2</sup> The poet of Beowulf in speaking of the despair of the Danes over the distress caused by Grendel, and the monster's strife waged against Hroðgar, mentions that the question of compensation, that is, the payment of a wergild, could not arise with that type of

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1. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, pp. 16-17; and F.M. Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1955, pp. 384-85.

2. McNamee, Honor and the Epic Hero, p. 107; and Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 13.

foe:

wið manna hwone                      sibbe ne wold  
feorhbealo feorran,                    maegenes Deniga,  
feorhbealo feorran,                    fea þingian,<sup>1</sup>

that is to say, did not wish to remove the deadly enmity,  
to compound with money. McNamee remarks that:

the many references to the instinct for  
...fratricidal feuds throughout the poem  
put us in touch with a very barbaric  
aspect of these Nordic races; but their  
presence gives greater point to the  
refining and civilizing influence of  
the new Christian ideal of gentleness  
and charity that is so admirably ex-  
emplified in both Hrothgar and Beowulf.<sup>2</sup>

The poet tells us that the many battles fought by Hroðgar  
and Beowulf were for the security and welfare of their own  
peoples, and not merely for honor and glory, and personal  
exhibitions of strength and courage.<sup>3</sup> The teaching of the  
Church has its echo in Beowulf's dying words: fordām mē  
wītan ne ðearf Waldend fīra morðorbealo māga - because re-  
proach me need not the Ruler of men with murder of kinsmen.<sup>4</sup>  
Beowulf's great source of comfort at the end of his life is

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1. Beowulf, ll. 154b-56; peace would not have /  
with any man / of the Danes' power, / life-bale (deadly  
evil, death) remove, / with money compromise.

2. Honor and The Epic Hero, p. 108.

3. Ibid., p. 108.

4. Beowulf, ll. 2741-42a.

that he has not been guilty of murdering his own kin. But Beowulf's audience would find nothing incompatible with Christian ethics in the killing, for the sake of vengeance, which was allowed to take its course.<sup>1</sup> Whitelock puts it rightly:

the audience of Beowulf was a Christian company and one which admitted that vengeance, in unavoidable circumstances and carried out in accordance with the law, was a binding duty.<sup>2</sup>

#### 11. Other Comments.

##### a) The Idol-worship of the Danes.

Some critics, including Tolkien<sup>3</sup> and Klaeber,<sup>4</sup> interpret the idol-worship of the Danes as a temporary relapse: this is not so. The poet says:

Hwīlum hie gehēton	aet haergtrafum
wīgweorbunga,	wordum bāedon,
paet him gastbona	gēoce gefremede

1. Whitelock, Audience of Beowulf, p. 13.

2. Ibid., p. 19. Whitelock touches on this again in her work The Beginnings of English Society, in The Pelican History of England, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1959, vol. 2, p. 39; Vengeance was no mere satisfaction of personal feeling, but a duty that had to be carried out even when it ran counter to personal inclination, and a favourite theme in Germanic literature was provided by any situation when this duty clashed with other feelings, such as friendship or marital affection. The duty was incumbent on all close parents.

3. Op. cit., pp. 287 ff.

4. Op. cit., p. 135.

## CLOSE EXAMINATION OF THE POEM

181

wið peodþreum. Swylc waes pēaw hyra,  
 haepenra hyht; helle gemundon  
 in mōdsefan, Metod hīe ne cūpon,  
 dāēda Dēmend, ne wiston hīe Drihten God,  
 nē hīe hūra heofena Helm herian ne cūpon,  
 wuldres Waldend.<sup>1</sup>

Hroðgar and his people were pagans. They offered sacrifices at pagan shrines, and were in the habit of doing so. The poet is specific about it. He states in line 178b: swylc waes pēaw hyra - such was their practice. Brodeur adds:

the poet tells us in the plainest terms that the Danes - all of them - were heathens; that their sacrifices to their heathen gods were 'their custom, their hope,' and that they 'did not know the Lord.' We are, then compelled to the conclusion that the poet knew the<sup>2</sup> Danes were, and always had been, pagan.

The answer to this passage in Beowulf we find in the explanation given earlier concerning Beowulf's funeral and parallels drawn from Chaucer and Shakespeare.<sup>3</sup> There are no more inconsistencies here, than we have in Shakespeare.<sup>4</sup> The explanation,

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1. Beowulf, ll. 175-83a; Sometimes they offered / at the heathen temples / sacrifices, / in words prayed, / that him the devil (soul-slayer) / would aid give / against the great calamities. / Such was their custom, / the hope of the heathens; / hell they remembered / in their mind, / the Creator they knew not, / the Judge of deeds, / they knew not the Lord God, / nor, indeed, the heavens' Protector, / knew they how to praise, / the Ruler of glory.

2. Op. cit., p. 199.

3. Vide supra, p. 169.

4. Brodeur, op. cit., 186.

therefore, is to be found in what Brodeur calls, the "Christian coloring" of Beowulf. The poem:

does not reveal itself in the action of the poem, except as that action is the expression of character. It appears in the words and the conduct of those personages whom the poet, drawing on older story, conceived as noble, and whom he was concerned to represent as acting nobly by the standards of his own Christian age.<sup>1</sup>

b) Lines 3058-60a.

Goldsmith argues that the foremost guiding principle of the poet of Beowulf is found in The Gospel of St Matthew.<sup>2</sup> She claims it gives a key to our understanding of the poem. In her opinion, gold is the setting for death and destruction from the origin of the Scyld dynasty to Beowulf's funeral pyre, and the poem warns that buried treasures lead to death.<sup>3</sup> She sees this summed up in:

þā waes gesyne,                    þæt se sið ne ðāh  
þām ðe unrihte                    inne gehyðde  
wraete under wealle.<sup>4</sup>

1. Op. cit., p. 185.

2. Chapter 6:19, p. 9; lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth; where the rust, and moth consume and where thieves break through and steal.

3. Op. cit., pp. 92-3.

4. Beowulf, ll. 3058-60a; Then was seen, / that venture (fortune) turned to profit not / him who unrighteously (wrongly) / within had hidden / hoard (treasure) under the the cave.

The laying up of treasure is transgressing Christ's command: Nolite thesaurizare vobis thesauros in terra. It is the legend of the cursed heathen gold.<sup>1</sup> Goldsmith quotes the Psalms, St Paul's Epistle to Timothy, and refers to the teachings of Gregory and Augustine, in support of her belief in a twofold theme in Beowulf, namely: the desire for money is the root of all evil, and we must fight the good fight.<sup>2</sup> While we concur that the poet was more than familiar with these tenets of the Scriptures, and the teachings of the Church, and that Christian thought permeates the poem, the essence of the doctrine he brought home is not what Goldsmith claims, but rather, it is trust in God and submission to His will in the struggle of good over evil, with the underlying principle that God's foreknowledge and God's will control all things.<sup>3</sup>

c) Lines 1386-89.

These lines have given rise to the supposition that the poet thought of his hero as in any sense a heathen. Beo-

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1. Goldsmith, op. cit., p. 95.

2. Ibid., p. 95.

3. Brodeur, op. cit., pp. 185, 245.

wulf asserts that the achievement of glory is what counts when we no longer live:

Ure <u>ā</u> ēghwylc sceal	ende gebīdan
worolde līfes,	wyrce sē þe mōte
dōmes <u>ā</u> ēr dēape;	þeat bið drihtguman
unlifgendum	aefter sēlest. <sup>1</sup>

Goldsmith is of the opinion also that the sentiment expressed here is heathen. But, she says, since we have the very same parallel in The Seafarer, line 76 - deorum daedum deofle togeanes - "great deeds against the malice of fiends", the ideal of earthly glory is merged with the hope of heavenly reward for the hero. In other words, both poets seem to agree that the ideal life is that spent fighting the unending feud against the devil and the enemies of God.<sup>2</sup> Brodeur remarks that although the passage may sound pagan to the modern ear, it did not sound so to the Anglo-Saxon audience.<sup>3</sup>

#### d) Beowulf's Fear.

When Beowulf heard that the Dragon had burnt his royal hall, and was the cause of a conflagration in the

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1386-89; Each of us must / an end await / of this world's life, / let him who may achieve / glory before death (honour); / to the warrior that will be / not alive / afterwards best.

2. Goldsmith, op. cit., p. 90.

3. Brodeur, op. cit., p. 195.

countryside, it caused him:

hrēow on hreōre,	hygesorga māest;
wēnde se wīsa,	þæt hē Wealdende
ofer ealde riht	ēcean Dryhtne
bitre gebulge;	brēost innan wēoll
þēostrum geþoncum,	swā him geþywe ne waes. <sup>1</sup>

This passage has been interpreted by some critics as showing heathen and unchristian fear on the part of Beowulf, even with hell in his heart. This is not so, says Brodeur.

It is:

rejected by the two Catholic theologians whom I have had the privilege of consulting. Beowulf's state of mind here is not attrition, but readiness for contrition: in his last speech (lines 2794 ff.) he manifests "a lively sense of the infinite goodness of God." It is only right and proper that a man visited by affliction should search his heart for evidence of sin, lest he incur the peril of questioning God's justice.<sup>2</sup>

#### e) Scriptural Allusions.

In his argument in favor of interpolations of Christian passages, Blackburn remarked that Scriptural allusions in Beowulf are to the Old Testament only. There are

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1. Beowulf, ll. 2328-32; sorrow of spirit, / the greatest heartbreaks; / the wise prince feared, / that he with the Almighty / against the ancient law / with the eternal God / should be bitterly offended; / his breast (heart) boiled within / with dark thoughts, / as it was not his wont.

2. Op. cit., p. 193.

no references to Christ, to the cross, the the Virgin and the saints, and to any doctrine of the Church.<sup>1</sup> This, says Brodeur, is in harmony with the theme and purpose of Beowulf.<sup>2</sup> The poet was not attempting a Genesis, or composing the life of Christ or that of a saint. In his poem, the hero is a warrior and king, who lives among men in a heathen age. He wrote for a Christian audience that loved the old pagan Germanic heroic past, but one also that sought eternal salvation in the Church. As puts it Brodeur, the poet faced the difficult challenge of:

reconciling his hearers not to the story, but to his personages. His audience was, of course, prepared to accept heroes of pagan antiquity as protagonists in a heroic action; but they must also be induced to accept the nobler characters - Beowulf and Hrothgar above all - as exemplars of an ideal and a course of conduct in harmony with both the best traditions of antiquity and the highest ideal of Christian Englishmen.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Op. cit., p. 216.

2. Op. cit., p. 184.

3. Ibid., pp. 184-85.

## CHAPTER V

## CONCLUSION

After a detailed and careful investigation of the opinions of scholars and critics on Beowulf, and a close examination of the poem, we have demonstrated that the belief in multiple authorship and in the artificial nature of the Christian elements in Beowulf was based on a false assumption that a poem about Germanic heroes of pagan times must be a pagan poem. Against this, we have argued that the nature of the epic **genre** was the passport which enabled the poet to arrive at a happy blend of heroic ideals of Germanic paganism and of Anglo-Saxon Christendom, so fused that the hero exemplifies the best of both, in a poem created for a Christian audience of the eighth century.

That the epic poem Beowulf is a Christian piece of literature, made by a Christian poet for a Christian audience is now accepted by the most prominent critics. Our investigation has confirmed for us that the roots of Beowulf are to be found in pagan times and thought. The poet, being a good Christian, treated his material, which was originally heathen, in a way acceptable to the Christian audience of his time. The heathen times he represented, that is, a pagan Germanic heroic past, were pagan and hopeless. But

the Christianity of his audience could not accept a consistent representation of such times. What the poet did, was to admit the paganism of the forefathers of his audience, this he does in lines 175-83,<sup>1</sup> and then leaves aside all that was pagan in the story, the personages appearing as if they had been Christians. This necessitated the exclusion of any specific reference to dogma. Grendel and his dam represent the evil in the world, in which they have their roots. It was necessary that the poet, says Brodeur:

present both Danes and Geats as Abraham and his descendants were presented in the Old Testament. It was essential that they retain the sympathy of his hearers; therefore, once the early admission of their paganism had been made, they must speak and act as Abraham or Isaac might have done.<sup>2</sup>

The Christianity of the poem, moreover, manifests itself throughout in a principle constantly recurring in God's dealings with mankind. The sin of the fallen angels in heaven was pride; so was the first sin of man. Through pride, Heremod is brought low:

ellendaedum                    - he paes aer oncah - ,  
 sibban Heremodes            hild sweōrode;  
 eafoō ond elle.<sup>3</sup>

1. Vide supra, p. 181.

2. Op. cit., p. 219.

3. Beowulf, ll. 900-02a: by valiant deeds / therefore at first he prospered -, / but after Heremod's / war had ceased / his strength and courage.

## CONCLUSION

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Through pride Hygelac suffers death in Frisia:

syððan hē for wlenco faehðe tō Frysum. <sup>1</sup>	hyne wyrd fornam, wean āhsode,
heard wið Hūgas, faran flotherge	Waes sīo wrōht scepen syððan Higelāc gwōm on Fresna land. <sup>2</sup>

The raids of Grendel are attributed to Hroðgar's confidence in self-sufficiency:

Hwaet, mē paes on ēple edwenden cwōm.<sup>3</sup>

Hroðgar warns Beowulf against the sin of pride:

Beborh þē ðone bealonīð, Bēowulf lēofa.<sup>4</sup>

The envy of Unferð is incited by the same sin:

onband beadurūne - mōdges merefaran, forþon þe hē ne ūpe, āēfre māērða þon mā gehede under heofonum	waes him Bēowulfes sīð, micel aefpunca, þaet āēnig oðder man middangeardes þonne he sylfa. <sup>5</sup>
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1. Beowulf, ll. 1205b-07a; him fate took, / after he for pride / sought his own trouble, / war with the Frisians.

2. Beowulf, ll. 2913b-15: The feud was formed / fierce against the Hugas, / after Hygelac came / faring with a naval force / to the Frisian land.

3. Beowulf, l. 1774: Lo, to me of this in my country a reverse came.

4. Beowulf, l. 1758: Guard against that pernicious enmity, / dear Beowulf.

5. Beowulf, ll. 501-5: unbound a fight (picked a quarrel) - / to him was Beowulf's journey, / the bold seafarer, / a great vexation (chagrin), / because he begrudged / that any other man / ever more glories / of mid-earth / held under heaven / than he himself.

## CONCLUSION

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Pride motivated the usurpation and murder of kin of Hroðulf:

ƿēod-Scyldingas	nalles fācenstafas penden fremedon. <sup>1</sup>
aāeton suhtergefraederan;	pā gýt waes hiera sib aetgaedere,
aēghwylc oðrum trywe. <sup>2</sup>	
maelgesceafta,	Ic on earde bad heold min tela,
ne sohte searoniðas,	ne me swor fela
aða on unriht. <sup>3</sup>	

In Beowulf's world the will of God rules all creation: lines 700b-02a, 1057b-58, 1609b-11, 1724b-27;<sup>4</sup> and the foreknowledge of God determines his victories: lines 1656b-58,<sup>5</sup> failures and death:

wunde waelblēate; wisse hē gearwe,  
paet hē daegghwīla gedrogen haefde,  
eorðan wynn(e).<sup>6</sup>

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1. Beowulf, ll. 1018b-19; no treacheries / the Danes / the while practised.

2. Beowulf, ll. 1164-65a; uncle and nephew sat; / as yet was their peace together, / each to other true.

3. Beowulf, ll. 2736b-39a; In my land I have held / my time-allotments (destinies, vicissitudes), / held my own well, / sought no crafty enmities (treacherous quarrels). / nor swore many / oaths unrighteously (false oaths).

4. Vide supra, p. 106.

5. Ibid., p. 106.

6. Beowulf, ll. 2725-27a; his wound deadly; / he knew full well, / that he his days / had passed through, / his joy of earth.

## CONCLUSION

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In the words of Brodeur:

Beowulf, in his expressions of gratitude to God and acknowledgment of God's mercy, speaks as the human agent of God for noble ends. His soul is saved in virtue of those finer qualities in which, as in his strength, he exceeds other men; courage, loyalty, and love, and willing self-sacrifice.<sup>1</sup>

It should be emphasized that Beowulf is not a religious poem.<sup>2</sup> Its Christianity is made up of specific, but restricted references to God, heaven, hell, devil, and judgment. The poetic diction used by the poet to express these Christian concepts are few and simple, whereas in the Anglo-Saxon religious poems Juliana, Elene, Andreas, and Guthlac they are numerous and well developed. Furthermore, there is a lack of unessential references to dogmatic or theological matter in Beowulf.<sup>3</sup>

Much work still needs to be done to show the great merit of Beowulf, which is, in the opinion of Chambers:

that it shows us a picture of a period in which the virtues of the heathen "Heroic Age" were tempered by the gentleness of the new belief; an age warlike, yet Christian; devout, yet tolerant.<sup>4</sup>

Beowulf gives us a deeply pervasive infusion of Christian

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1. Op. cit., p. 246.

2. Ibid., p. 31.

3. Ibid., p. 31.

4. Op. cit., p. 128.

spirit coloring thought and judgment, and governing motives and actions.<sup>1</sup> The interest in Beowulf should extend to convert those critics who still consider Beowulf a pagan poem, and to bring about a correction of the erroneous views expressed about Beowulf in many textbooks used for the teaching of English literature, and in encyclopaedias, etc. Much progress has been achieved already in that direction. It is a good sign to note that the 1963 issue of Beowulf in the Penguin Classics carries the famous Sutton Hoo mask, in color, on the front cover, and the important following description on the back cover:

Beowulf (probably composed in the eighth century A.D.) is our only native English heroic epic. It is written by a Christian poet addressing a Christian audience, but in the figure of Beowulf, the Scandinavian warrior, and his struggles against monsters, he depicts the life and outlook of a pagan age. The poem is a subtle blending of themes - the conflict of good and evil, and an examination of heroism. Its skilful arrangement of incidents and use of contrast and parallel show it to be the product of a highly sophisticated culture.<sup>2</sup>

It is hoped that many editors and writers will follow in these steps. When this is done, Beowulf will eventually be given its merited place among the great literary creations of English Christian civilization.

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1. McNamee, Honor and the Epic Hero, p. 89.

2. David Wright. Harmondsworth; Penguin Books Ltd, 1963.

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## ABSTRACT

This work has for its object to show that Beowulf is a Christian poem, written by a Christian poet, for a Christian audience of the eighth century. We believe that an understanding of Beowulf demands an understanding of the technique of the epic poem, particularly in the handling of historical material, which reflects the contemporary spirit, presenting it in such a way as to be acceptable to a contemporary audience.

Our approach consists in examining and analyzing the views expressed about Beowulf in earlier, more recent, and present scholarship, and rendering our judgment upon them. This leads to a close analysis of the poem's right to be considered a Christian poem. We argue that the poet superimposes the contemporary Christian spirit on a pagan heroic past, and that the characters, while pagan, speak and behave like Christians, just as some characters in Chaucer's works and Shakespeares's plays do later on. Special attention is given to certain passages in the poem. These are analyzed, and their Christianity, stated or implied, taken note of. The topics particularly outstanding in the poem and upon which our attention is centered, are Grace and Providence, the monsters and their descent from Cain, the allegorical representation of Grendel's mere and

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his abode, King Hroðgar's sermon on pride, the significance of the Dragon, Beowulf's funeral, Wyrd, the vengeance theme in Beowulf, money as representing the root of all evil, the achievement of glory understood by some critics as heathen, the understanding of Beowulf's alleged fear, and the complaint that references to the Scriptures are limited to the Old Testament.

Chapter I deals in detail with the coming to light of the Beowulf manuscript in the sixteenth century, to the time, in the early seventeenth century, when it adorned the bookshelves of Sir Robert Cotton's library at Westminster, to Humfrey Wanley's record of it, in 1705, and finally to the transcript of the MS by Thorkelin, in 1787, and his edition of it, in 1815. This is followed by a survey of the history of other editions, and the scholarship and criticism which they brought. The second part of the Chapter has to do with the so-called German school of thought, which represents Beowulf as a pagan poem, with multiple authorship, and Christian interpolations by monks.

Chapter II examines the later Beowulfian scholarship concluding in many cases with the rejection of the views of the German school. Authors of the nineteen-twenties, and contemporary writers and critics are mentioned, and their works referred to. A definite change of attitude

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is noted towards a rejection of all the tenets of the so-called German school, and an affirmation that Beowulf is the work of a single author, who was Christian, wrote a Christian poem for a Christian audience of the eighth century.

Chapter III states and develops our thesis, that the understanding of Beowulf depends upon a clear concept of traditional epic technique, particularly in its "contemporary" handling of historical background and facts. The second part of this Chapter analyzes the handling of the poet's historical material, or what some critics have pejoratively called digressions. We show that the various episodes which the poet brought to the fore, belong essentially to the epic technique. We point out that these so-called loose ends have caught the eye of the archaeologist, the historian and other scientists, who have dissected the poem for its by-products, instead of searching and plumbing for the living work of art, the poem. Finally, we show that the converts to Christianity of the eighth century were imbued with the new faith and inspired by it to seek the propagation of Christ's doctrine beyond the borders of Anglo-Saxon England, in the conversion of Saxon tribes on the Continent. The pervasive influence of the Church we show as being reflected in the high degree of culture and

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intellectuality attained in Anglo-Saxon England of the eighth century.

Chapter IV is devoted to the examination of specific points, some contentious in nature, in the poem. We show how pagan Wyrd was transformed into God's foreknowledge and Providence, and the rôle God plays in the life of the characters. The raison d'être of Genesis is explained, the origin of Grendel and his dam is established. We discuss the Dragon's embodiment of malice, Beowulf's cremation on the pyre, and various other points including blood feuds, and /the worshipping of idols by the Danes.

Chapter V contains the conclusion. It reviews our position, that is, accepting Beowulf as a Christian poem, written by a Christian poet, for a Christian audience of the eighth century, and states that this view is now generally accepted. We reinforce these views by showing that the Christianity of the poem can be detected further through a constantly recurring principle throughout the work, PRIDE, a topic which in Arthur G. Brodeur's valuable book, The Art of Beowulf, is given particular prominence. We clarify that Beowulf is not a religious poem per se. Finally, we point out the need for more Beowulfian scholarship in order to give Beowulf its proper recognition as a great work of

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art, and one which in the words of Aquinas belongs to those things which are beautiful when perceived - pulchra sunt quae visa placent.