

SOME ANGLO-SAXON POETRY TERMS AND LITERARY DEVICES

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alliteration--a figure of speech in which consonants, particularly at the commencement of words, or stressed syllables, are reiterated. One of the primary means by which Anglo-Saxon poetry achieves its metrical effect. Also called *initial-rime*.

comitatus--warrior band. The king's body guard and comrades who were duty bound to stand up for their king and avenge his death. A warrior who managed to live following his king's demise in battle was considered a disgrace. The tight and unmitigating alliance of loyalty between king and comitatus is the subject of much Anglo-Saxon literature.

kenning--a metaphor. Produced by compounding two separate words (generally two nouns or a noun and an adjective) into a new linguistic unit in which the relationship between the concept and the verbal compound expressing it is metaphorical or covert. e.g.: 'world-candle'= sun, 'whale pathway'= sea, 'slaughter wolves'=Viking warriors

litotes--an understatement or negative statement which creates irony. e.g.: 'with few companion' for 'alone'

mail-coat--warrior's coat made of small interlocking iron rings for protection--also referred to as a "ring net," "breast net," "battle garment"

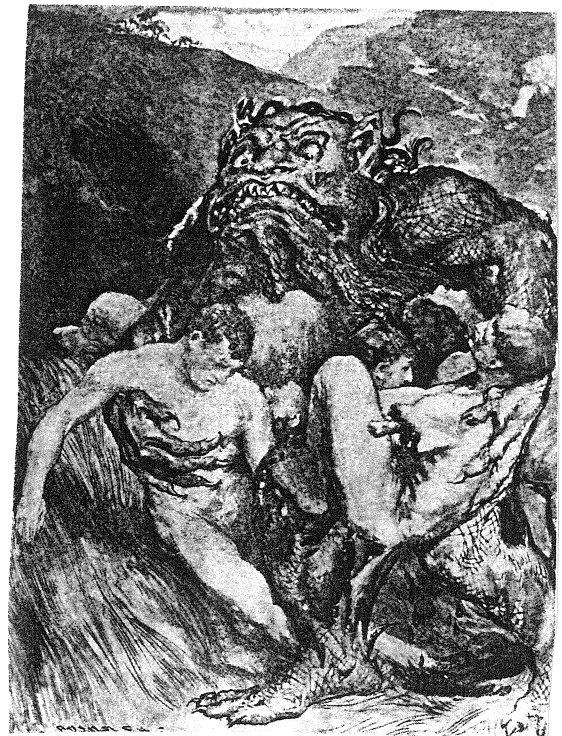
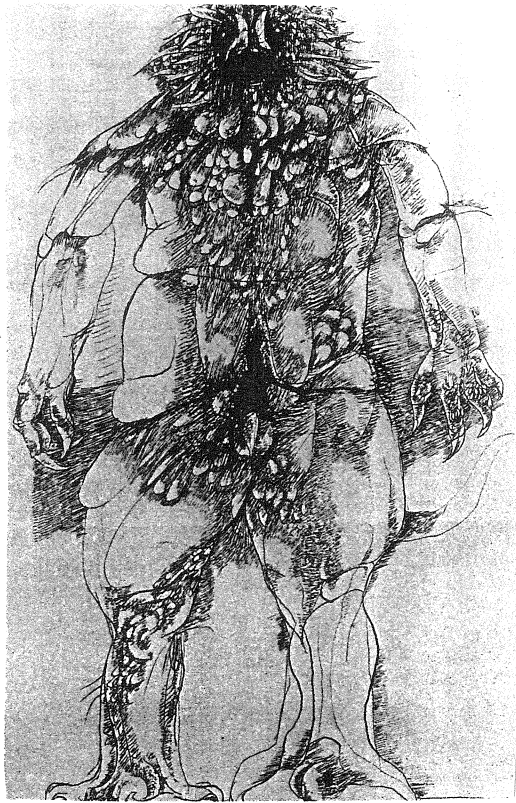
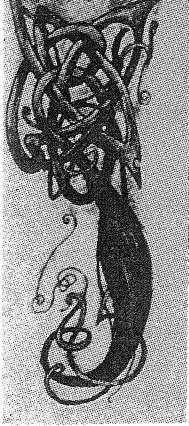
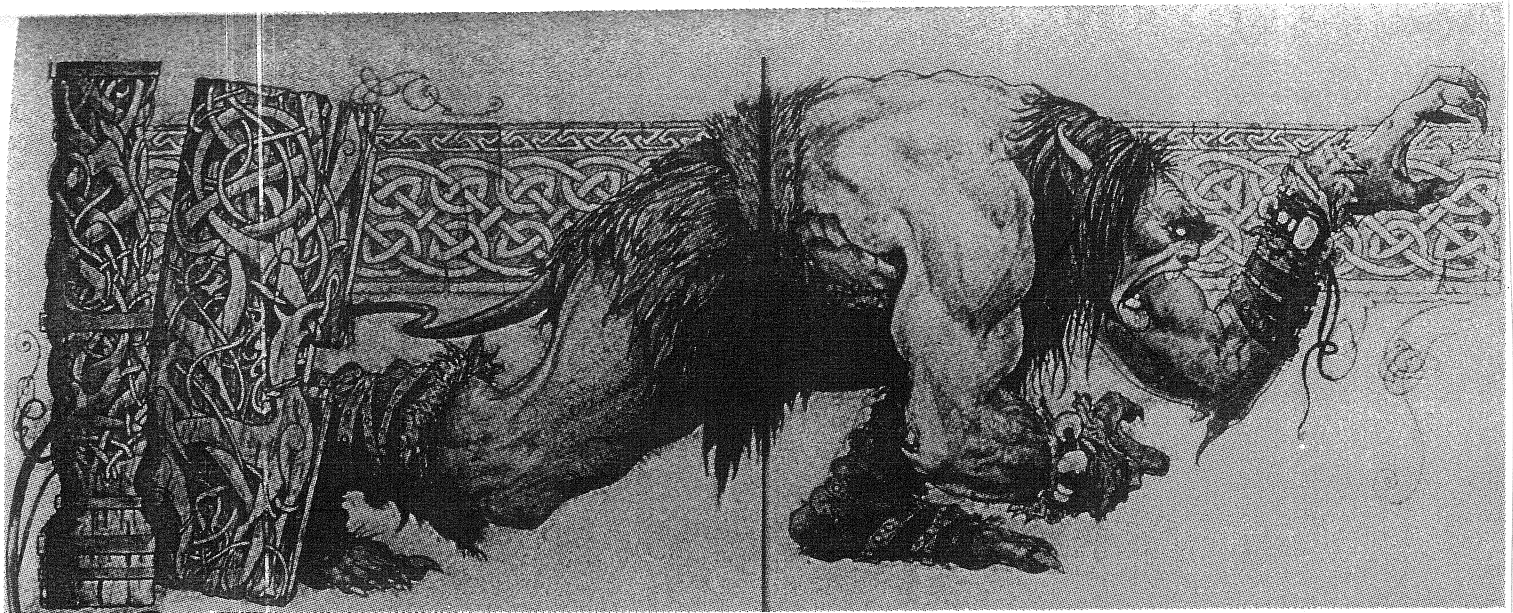
mead-hall--the locus of the Anglo-Saxon household, where meals were consumed and the entire household convened. Also, a large hall where the lord's thanes ate and slept. Location for gift-giving, entertainment, royal festivals.

scop, or *gleeman*--pronounced <<showp>>; a minstrel or singer, typically connected to a court. Served as a tribal historian who remembered stories from the past and retold them on repeated occasions. Listening to the brave deeds of former heroes, the lord and his thanes' feeling of pride was augmented.

thane--a landowner who owed specific duties to the king. He was next in hierarchy of significance to the king and his family. He served as the king's personal comrade in war, and was rewarded by the king with allocations of land or the privilege of residing in the king's household.

ubi sunt theme--a particular kind of poem that dwells on and laments the transitory nature of life and beauty. So-called from the opening words 'where are' of a number of medieval Latin poems. Often appears within a poem as a refrain. Employed to express the mutability of things, "where are the snows of yesteryear." Sometimes the words open a poem, begin each stanza, or serve as a refrain. They are keynote in elegiac poems.

variation--one of the most pervasive stylistic features in Old English poetry. Uses different words to say the same thing in order to avoid repetition. Expands the semantic field of a given concept by expressing it in several different ways. For ex., concept of a deity expressed as father of glory, eternal lord, holy shaper, guardian of mankind within one work.



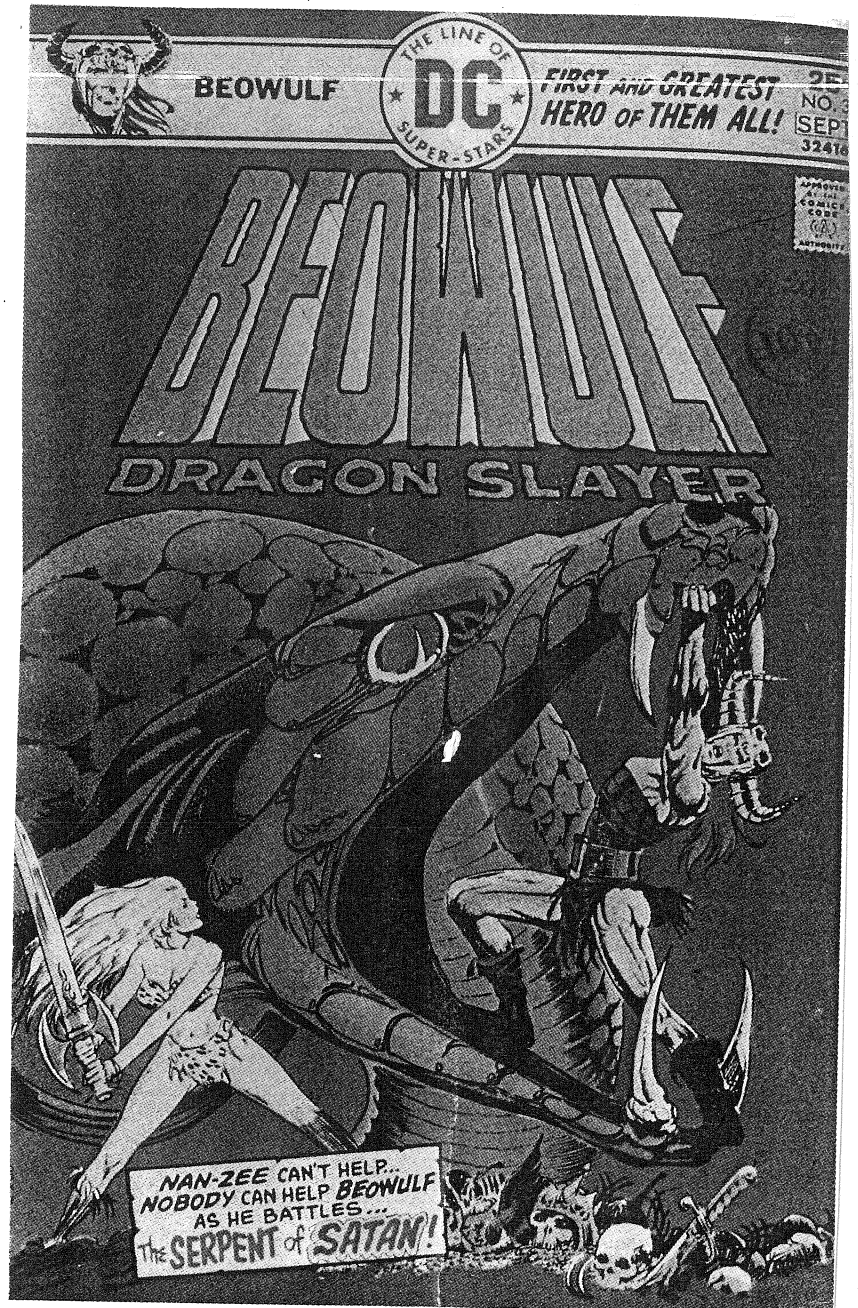
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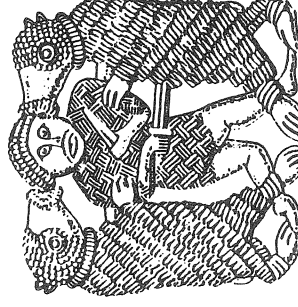


Grendel's Mother. Lithograph by Virgil Burnett for *Beowulf*, trans. Kevin Crossley-Holland (London: Folio Society, 1971)

PRIDE AND PRODIGIES

Studies in the Monsters
of the *Beowulf*-Manuscript

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1995

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CHAPTER II

Psychology and Physicality: The Monsters of *Beowulf*

The central importance of the monsters in *Beowulf* has been underlined many times since J. R. R. Tolkien first highlighted their significance, arguing that in the struggles of Beowulf against his various monstrous foes the poet wished to portray the noble image of 'man at war with the hostile world, and his inevitable overthrow in Time'.¹ Kenneth Sisam took a more sanguine view, suggesting that 'the monsters Beowulf kills are inevitably evil and hostile because a reputation for heroism is not made by killing creatures that are believed to be harmless or beneficent — sheep for instance'.² Both scholars, however, shared the now-common opinion that the monsters in *Beowulf* are crucial to the very structure of the poem, and in his investigation of larger rhetorical patterns in *Beowulf*, John Niles similarly suggests that the poet produced a complex ring-composition focusing in turn on each of the three main monster-fights, which he characterises as 'the most important events of [the poet's] story'.³ The same notion is implicit in Dorothy Whitelock's suggestion that the poem 'could easily have been delivered in three sittings'.⁴

Equally important, moreover, is the poet's clear intention to connect each of the three main monster-fights through shared themes and structure. As Sisam has noted, Beowulf's battle with Grendel is a one fall, one submission, and one knock-out bout, whilst the fight with Grendel's mother has quite a different pace.⁵ Here we have a two-fall fight, with first the monstrous female, and then the man (quite literally) on

¹ Tolkien, 'Beowulf, the Monsters, and the Critics', p. 260.

² Sisam, *The Structure of "Beowulf"*, p. 25.

³ Niles, 'Ring Composition and the Structure of *Beowulf*', p. 925; cf. Rogers, 'Beowulf's Three Great Fights', especially pp. 340–3. Others have proposed a much more complex structural patterning, notably Carrigan, 'Structure and Thematic Development in *Beowulf*', especially pp. 49–51; Leyerle, 'The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*', especially pp. 15–17. For a useful review of suggestions concerning the structure of the poem, see Hume, 'The Theme and Structure of *Beowulf*', pp. 2–5.

⁴ Whitelock, *The Audience of "Beowulf"*, p. 20; by comparison, Kemp Malone's rather stately reading of the entire poem, 'Beowulf' (*Complete*): *Read in Old English* by Kemp Malone, 4 discs (Caedmon Records, TC 4001, 1967), takes just over four hours.

⁵ Sisam, 'Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon', p. 136.

top.⁶ Likewise Beowulf tries two swords, and Grendel's mother two weapons also, her cruel knife (*seax*) and her hideous nails. The dragon-fight, by contrast, is in three rounds, clearly marked off by narratorial enumeration of each phase of the attack, as the dragon surges forward a second time (*oðre siðe*, line 2670) and a third (*þriððan siðe*, line 2688).⁷ The level of difficulty experienced by Beowulf increases with each battle; Grendel causes comparatively few problems, whilst his mother, whom we are explicitly told had less terrible might (lines 1282–4), very nearly succeeds in killing Beowulf, and the dragon finally proves fatal. There is a commensurate increase in the amount of armoury brought to bear against the male (no weapons), the bestial female (two swords), and the serpent (two swords and a shield), as Beowulf steadily shifts from a primarily defensive role to an aggressive one, motivated to varying degrees in each of his battles by thoughts of glory, vengeance, and treasure.

These structural and thematic links between each of the three main monster-battles are underpinned by further parallels between successive conflicts which bind the individual episodes together. Thus Grendel and his mother are closely connected not simply by the family relationship between the monsters, but by their human shape, their cannibalistic acts, their shared dwelling, and their decapitation; just as Grendel attacks Heorot by night, and fatally seizes Hondsio, so too does his avenging mother undertake a nocturnal raid to Heorot to carry off Æschere to his doom.⁸ In the same way that Beowulf's wrestling-match with Grendel takes place within the confines of the hall, Grendel's mother comes to grips with Beowulf inside her own cavernous guest-hall.⁹ Similar narrative parallels connect the episode of Grendel's mother and the dragon; in both it is the monster who initially is the aggrieved party, and who suffers loss; in both the monsters inhabit a waterside home, from which light shines; in both Beowulf requires two blades to despatch his foe; and in both Beowulf is accompanied by a group of retainers, only some of whom prove faithful.

Moreover, despite the clear antagonism between the worlds of monsters and men, there is, as in the *Passion of Saint Christopher* and *Judith* in the same manuscript, something deeply human about the 'monsters'. All are given human attributes at some stage, and the poet even goes so far as to evoke our sympathy for their plight. We might illustrate this first with reference to perhaps the least human of the monsters, the dragon.¹⁰ When the unprovoked theft of treasure from the barrow by an unwelcome visitor is reported, we are presented with events from the dragon's perspective (*Beowulf*, lines 2287–9):

⁶ See further the analysis of Nietzsche, 'The Structural Unity of *Beowulf*', pp. 293–4.

⁷ Cf. Sisam, 'Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon', p. 138.

⁸ Cf. Carens, 'Hondsioh and Grendel', pp. 39–45.

⁹ See further below, p. 30.

¹⁰ The dragon is certainly the least human in terms of shape, notwithstanding the often-noted possibility, most fully argued by Tripp, *More about the Fight with the Dragon*, especially pp. 13–17, that, as in a number of Norse analogues, the dragon was originally a man transformed.

corla ofer corþan, Næfre ic maran geseah
 secg on searwum; ðonne is eower sum,
 wæpnum geweorðað, næfre him his wlite leoge,
 ænlic ansyn. 250

*Never have I seen a mightier noble on earth, a warrior in armour,
 than is one of you; he is no hall-retainer made worthy with weapons,
 unless his appearance belies him, his peerless face.*

An intriguing number of intimate links between Beowulf and his most famous foe may be suggested. We hear that in one of Grendel's raids on Heorot he had carried off thirty men (lines 122–3);¹⁷ likewise Beowulf is described by Hrothgar as having the strength of thirty men in his hand-grip (lines 379–81), and in escaping from the scene of Hygelac's death he swims away carrying the armour of just this number of men (lines 2361–2).¹⁸ In this same incident Beowulf is described as a 'wretched and solitary figure' (*earm anþaga*, line 2368), a term which might well have been used of Grendel, the 'wretch' (*earnisceapen*, line 1351) twice described as a 'solitary traveller' (*angenga*, lines 165 and 449).¹⁹ So, Grendel on his murderous trips to Heorot is described as a 'hall-thegn' (*healdþegn*, line 142), just like Beowulf and his men (*healdþegnas*, line 719), and in their fighting both Beowulf and Grendel are linked as 'hall-dwellers', equally enraged (*yrre wæron begen*, *l reþe renweardas*, lines 769–70).²⁰ The fury experienced by both Beowulf and Grendel is a further factor which links the combatants; Beowulf waits for Grendel's arrival 'furious at heart' (*bolgenmod*, line 709), while the door of Heorot collapses at Grendel's touch 'since he was furious' (*ða (he ge)bolgen was*, line 723); it might be noted that precisely the same reason is given for Beowulf's ability to overwhelm Grendel's mother in their first grappling (*þa he gebolgen was*, line 1539), and that throughout *Beowulf* the only figures who are described as 'furious' in this way (*gebolgen* or *bolgenmod*) are Beowulf, in each of his three monster-battles (lines 709, 1539, 2401, and 2550), Grendel (line 723), the monsters at the mere (line 1431), the fallen prince Heremod (line 1713),²¹ and the dragon (lines 2220 and 2304). Beowulf, moreover, is described on his visit to the home of Grendel's mother as a 'hall-guest' (*selegyst*, line 1545), who in his encounter with the monster is 'despairing of his life' (*aldres orwena*, line 1565), much as Grendel the 'hall-thegn' (*healdþegn*, line 142) in Heorot is equally 'despairing of his life' (*aldres orwena*, line 1002).²² Beowulf fights monsters because only then is he well-matched. When he does face human champions, like the Frankish Dæghrefn,

¹⁷ See further lines 1582–3.

¹⁸ See Puhvel, 'Beowulf' and the Celtic Tradition, pp. 82–5, for an argument that the *Beowulf* poet was influenced in his depiction of these episodes by Irish models.

¹⁹ On the description of Grendel as *angenga*, cf. Lapidge, 'Beowulf' and the Psychology of Terror', pp. 381–2.

²⁰ Cf. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf*, pp. 231–3; Rosier, 'The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in Beowulf', p. 8.

²¹ On whom see further below, pp. 48–53.

²² Cf. Rosier, 'The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in Beowulf', p. 12.

his methods are distinctly inhuman, one might almost say monstrous; Dæghrefn is simply crushed to death (lines 2498–508).

Again, it has often been noticed that the poet explicitly links Beowulf and the monsters that he fights by the description *aglæca* (or *aglæca*), for which Klaeber offers the creative series of translations 'wretch', 'monster', 'demon', 'fiend', 'warrior', 'hero',²³ and which is used of Grendel (lines 159, 425, 433, 592, 646, 732, 739, 816, 989, 1000, and 1269), his mother (who is described as an *aglæcwif*, line 1259), the dragon (lines 2520, 2534, 2557, and 2905), the sea-monsters (line 556), and Sigemund the dragon-slayer (line 893).²⁴ In his account of Beowulf's descent into the monster-mere the poet uses the term ambiguously (line 1512), to designate either the monsters inhabiting the mere or (more likely) Beowulf himself, whilst during the description of the dragon-fight the poet speaks in one half-line of Beowulf and the dragon together as *ða aglæcean* (line 2592). Sherman Kuhn has suggested that the word *aglæca*, which occurs perhaps thirty-six times in extant Old English verse, derives from a very early borrowing of the prehistoric form of the Irish *óclach*, *óclach*, and meant 'fighter', 'warrior'.²⁵ A perhaps more likely proposed etymology connects the first element of *aglæca* with a Gothic cognate *agis* ('terror', 'fright'), Old High German *agiso*, Old English *age* and *egesa* ('awe', 'terror'),²⁶ and the second element with Old English *lacan* ('to move quickly').²⁷ The meaning of the term would therefore be 'the awe-inspiring one', 'the formidable one',²⁸ and this sense best answers to the sole example of the word in Old English prose, where Byrhtferth of Ramsey, with no apparent trace of irony, describes the Venerable Bede as *Beda, se aglæca lareow* ('Bede, the awe-inspiring teacher').²⁹ Whatever the precise connotations of the term, the fact that the poet employs the word to designate not only monsters but monster-slayers clearly underlines the linked contrasts between the worlds of monsters and men which run throughout the poem and the manuscript.

The conflict and comparison between monsters and men is far from being the only such thematic contrast which runs through *Beowulf*; Tolkien believed that the entire structure of the poem was predicated on the contrast between Youth and Age which is so apparent in Beowulf's own biography,³⁰ and such a technique of apposition, Tolkien argued, is implicit in the very structure of the Old English poetic line.³¹ A similar kind of contrast has been perceived in the way in which the explicit action in *Beowulf* is matched by a graphic series of interior conflicts, leading Michael

²³ Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 298.

²⁴ Cf. Gillam, 'The Use of the Term *aglæca* in *Beowulf* at Lines 813 and 2592', pp. 145–69.

²⁵ Kuhn, 'Old English *aglæca* – Middle Irish *ochlach*', pp. 213–30.

²⁶ Cf. Huffines, 'OE *aglæc*: Magic and Moral Decline', pp. 71–81.

²⁷ Mezer, 'Goth. *Aglaits*: "Unchastity", OE *Aglaec* "Disstress"', p. 69; Lonspeich, 'Old English Etymologies', p. 1; Kuhn, 'Old English *aglæca* – Middle Irish *ochlach*', pp. 214–20; Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', pp. 380–1.

²⁸ Cf. Dobbie, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 160.

²⁹ Crawford, ed., *Byrhtferth's Manual*, p. 74/15; cf. Nichols, 'Bede "Awe-Inspiring"', pp. 147–8.

³⁰ The contrast is most effectively stressed by Tolkien, 'Beowulf, the Monsters, and the Critics', for example, pp. 271–2.

³¹ Cf. Tolkien, 'Beowulf, the Monsters, and the Critics', pp. 273–4.

Then there came in the dark night the shadow-walker stalking. The warriors slept, who ought to hold that gabled hall, all except one. It was known to men that the fiendish [or 'sinful'] destroyer could not drag them under shadow against the Creator's will; but he, vigilant, in malice against the foe, awaited with swollen heart the joining of battle. Then there came from the moors, under misty

slopes, Grendel approaching: he bore God's anger; the wicked destroyer intended to ensnare one of mankind in that high hall. He walked under clouds until he could most clearly perceive the wine-building, the gold-hall of men, adorned with plate. That was not the first time that he had sought out Hrothgar's home; but never

harsher fate! Then there came travelling to that building the man deprived of joys. The door promptly sprang apart, secure with forged bands, when he touched it with his hands. The one intent on evil, since he was swollen with rage, tore open the building's mouth. Swiftly after that, the fiend stepped onto the decorated floor, advanced angry in spirit; from his eyes there stood, most like a flame, an unlovely light.

What is most intriguing about this passage, as Alain Renoir has argued, is the way in which the poet produces a growing sense of terror by offering alternatively the viewpoint of the approaching monster and the waiting warrior.³⁶ It is important to the purpose of the poem that up to this point we can have no clear idea what Grendel looks like, since nothing in the preceding verses has offered any substantial physical depiction at all; as Michael Lapidge has argued: 'it is because the monster lies beyond our comprehension, because we cannot visualise it at all, that its approach is one of the most terrifying moments in English literature'.³⁷ Each repetition of *com* (lines 702, 710, and 720) brings Grendel closer, a shadowy figure stalking out of the darkness, away from the misty moors, and up to the hall. A similar method of (in cinematic terms) zooming in on the subject is employed elsewhere in *Beowulf* to describe the approach of Beowulf and his men both to Denmark, after their sea-voyage (lines 221–3),³⁸ and to Heorot, after their trip to the monster-mere (lines 1623–44).³⁹ The same cinematographic technique is employed elsewhere in the *Beowulf* manuscript, notably in *Judith* (lines 200–35), where the advance of the Jews into battle is ominously depicted by repetition of the word *stopon* (lines 200, 212, and 227).⁴⁰

³⁶ Renoir, 'Point of View and Design for Terror', pp. 160–5.

37 Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', p. 384.

38 Here the poet describes the successively more detailed view of approaching land from the sailors' point of view; 'they saw land, sea-cliffs shining, steep hills, broad sea-promontories' (*land gesawon, / brimclifu blican, beorgas steape, / side sennessas*, lines 221–3). The term 'cinematographic' in this context was first suggested by Renoit, 'Point of View and Design for Terrot', p. 162.

³⁹ Cf. Rosier, "The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in *Beowulf*", p. 12.

⁴⁰ Cf. Campbell, 'Schematic Technique in *Judith*', p. 169. The passage in question is discussed with characteristic insight by Renoir, '*Judith* and the Limits of Poetry', pp. 147–8, although, somewhat curiously, the repetition of *stopon* is not discussed.

³² Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', pp. 373–4.

33 Kaske, 'The Sigmund-Hermod and Hama-Hygelac Passages', p. 489; Kaske, 'Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme', especially pp. 423–8.

³⁴ Brodeur, *The Art of 'Beowulf'*, p. 90.

³⁵ The passage has been discussed many times; see particularly Brodeur, *The Art of 'Beowulf'*, pp. 88–94; Greenfield, 'Crendels Approach to Heorot', pp. 275–84; Renoir, 'Point of View and Design for Terror', pp. 154–67; Storms, 'Grendel the Terrible', pp. 427–36; Irving, *A Reading of 'Beowulf'*, pp. 101–3; O'Keefe, 'Beowulf', Lines 720b–836', pp. 487–8; Lapidge, 'Beowulf' and the Psychology of Terror', pp. 383–4.

Grendel is initially depicted here as a 'shadow-walker' (*scadugenga*, line 703), a description which recalls his earlier portrayal as a 'spirit' (*gast*, line 133) or 'death-shadow' (*deapscua*, line 160), and his later depiction as an 'alien spirit' (*ellorgast*, line 807).⁴¹ The word may well also signify, as Stanley Greenfield has suggested, 'Grendel's outcast state, as one deprived of God's light';⁴² such a state is specified later in the same passage, with the chilling statement that Grendel 'bore God's anger' (*Godes yrra ber*, line 711). Indeed, the emotions of anger and malice are most explicit throughout this passage;⁴³ the unspoken terror is implicit. But as Grendel comes closer to Heorot, he becomes identified in successively more concrete and corporeal terms. The precise sense of the term *scynscapa* (line 707) in this passage is a matter for debate; the alliteration seems to demand the otherwise unattested *scynscapa*,⁴⁴ deriving from the noun *scinna* ('sprite'),⁴⁵ and presumably meaning 'demonic foe', a designation which, like his description both earlier and later in the poem as a 'giant' or 'ogre' (*gyrs*, cf. line 426; *eoten*, line 761), identifies Grendel with the wicked creatures of popular Germanic legend, but the manuscript clearly reads *synscapa*, as at line 801, a word which may carry the double sense of 'persistent destroyer' or 'sinful destroyer'.⁴⁶ Like *scynscapa*, the related term *manscaða* (line 712), which is used in turn of all three of Beowulf's main monstrous foes,⁴⁷ carries a clear physical threat, and it is at precisely this point in the passage when we are first made conscious of Grendel's thoughts and impressions: he has intentions (*mynte*, line 712) and perceptions (*gearwost wiste*, line 715; *gesohte*, line 717; *fand*, line 719) of which we are increasingly aware as he approaches the hall. That Grendel is a sentient human(-shaped) being is made still more apparent when he finally reaches Heorot, and is described as a 'man', albeit one 'deprived of joys' (*rinc . . . dreamum bedeled*, lines 720–1). As with his portrayal as a spirit and a sprite in this passage, the depiction of Grendel as a man is not unique; elsewhere he is described with a range of words which align him with men, such as *wer* (line 105), *guma* (lines 973 and 1682), *hilderinc* (line 986), and *halep* (cf. line 2072).⁴⁸ What is important here is the effect; the threefold repetition of *com* marks off the passage into individual sections where we are progressively offered the perspective of the external narrator, the monster himself, and the people inside the hall, as Grendel glides closer, becoming ever more physically real and apparent until, ripping open the mouth of the hall in a fitting prelude to his own cannibalistic frenzy,⁴⁹ he stands, eyes blazing,

⁴¹ Cf. O'Keefe, 'Beowulf', Lines 702b–836', p. 486.

⁴² Greenfield, 'Grendel's Approach to Heorot', p. 280.

⁴³ So in this short passage we learn of the vicious anger of Grendel (*bealotrydig, gebolgen*, and *yrrmod*; lines 723 and 726), Beowulf (*on andan / bad bolgenmod*, lines 708–9), and God (*yrra*, line 711).

⁴⁴ Dobbie, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 151.

⁴⁵ Cf. the collocation *scuccum ond scinnum* ('demons and sprites', line 939).

⁴⁶ Cf. O'Keefe, 'Beowulf', Lines 702b–836', p. 485, who points out that 'Grendel is described frequently by words compounded in *sin-* or *syn-*'.

⁴⁷ Cf. above, pp. 31–3; the term *manscaða* refers to Grendel at lines 712 and 737, to Grendel's mother at line 1339, and to the dragon at line 2514.

⁴⁸ See further above, pp. 30–1.

⁴⁹ Irving, *A Reading of 'Beowulf'*, p. 104.

on the decorated floor. What bursts into Heorot is not a nightmare,⁵⁰ but a monstrous terror made flesh. As Tolkien notes: 'in *Beowulf* the weight is on the physical side: Grendel does not vanish into the pit when grappled. He must be slain by plain prowess'.⁵¹

The description of Grendel's approach to Heorot introduces him as a physical character within the poem; previously he had been little more than a shadowy wanderer (*scadugenga*, line 703), while subsequently we learn much about his physical traits, notably his enormous size (line 1353), so much so that it takes four men to carry his head (lines 1634–9), his steely nails (line 985), his feasting on human flesh and blood (lines 742–5), his habitat (lines 1345–72), and his invulnerability to iron weapons (lines 802–3 and 987–9).⁵² Certainly his fight with Beowulf is undeniably physical. The hall is wrecked, joints crack, fingers burst, sinews spring apart, and Grendel, screaming in agony, flees.⁵³ The syntax and diction of the portrayal of the fight itself is suitably brisk and vivid, and serves to emphasise still further the link between the antagonists; as Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe notes: 'not only does the poem predicate a connection between Grendel and the men he approaches, but as he comes closer to Beowulf, the language, syntax, and management of perspective in the scene blur the distinction between the two adversaries'.⁵⁴

Grendel and Beowulf meet in an atmosphere in which the distinctions between man and monster have been deliberately obscured, and in a twilight domain where the mark of the assailant is measured as much in terror and anger as in corporeal harm. An identical contrast between the physical and psychological worlds is implicit elsewhere in the poet's depiction of the monsters, for example in Hrothgar's vivid description of the monster-mere (lines 1357–79):

Hie dygel lond	1360
warigeað, wulflheobu, windige næssas,	
frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream	
under næssa genipu niþer gewitedð,	
flod under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon	
milgemeaces þæt se mere standeð;	
ofer þam hongiað hrinde bearwas,	
wudu wyrutum fæst wæter oferhelmað.	
Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,	1365
fyr on flode. No þæs frod leofað	
gumena bearna, þæt þone grund wite.	
Deaþ þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,	

⁵⁰ Cf. Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', pp. 383–5.

⁵¹ Tolkien, 'Beowulf, the Monsters, and the Critics', p. 280.

⁵² Lapidge, 'Beowulf and the Psychology of Terror', p. 375.

⁵³ One might contrast the very physical aspects of Beowulf's later adversary, the dragon, of which we are made aware long before the combatants clash. See further Sisam, 'Beowulf's Fight with the Dragon', p. 134.

⁵⁴ O'Keefe, 'Beowulf', Lines 702b–836', p. 488.

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heorot hornum trum, holtwudu sece, 1370
 feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,
 aldor on ofre, ær he in wille,
 hafelan [beorgan]; nis þæt heoru stow!
 þonon yðgeblond up astigēð
 won to wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ,
 lað gewidru, oð þæt lyft drysmap,
 roderas reotað. Nu is se ræd gelang
 eft æt þe anum. Eard git ne const,
 frecne stowe, ðær þu findan miht
 sinnigne secg; sec gif þu dyre!

*They dwell in a secret land, wolf-slopes, windy headlands, dangerous
 fen-tracts, where the mountain-stream goes down under the head-
 lands' mists, the flood under the ground. It is not far from here in
 the tally of miles, where that mere stands, over which hang frosty
 groves, a wood firm-rooted overshadows the water. There one can
 see each night a dreadful wonder, fire on the flood. No one lives so
 wise of the sons of men that knows the bottom. Even though a
 heath-stepper, driven by the hounds, a hart, strong in its horns, may
 seek the wooded forest, chased from afar, he will give up his life, his
 spirit on the brink, rather than plunge in to save his head; that is
 no pleasant place! From there the tumult of the waves rise up dark
 to the clouds, when the wind stirs up hateful storms, until the sky
 turns grim, the heavens weep. Now once again is a solution to be
 sought from you alone. You do not yet know the dwelling-place, the
 dangerous spot where you can find the sinful creature. Seek if you
 dare!*

The poet adds further details to this picture in a later description of the expedition undertaken to the mere (lines 1408–17):

Oferode þa æþelinga bearn
 streap stanhlīðo, stige nearwe,
 enge anpaðas, uncuð gelad,
 neowle næssas, nicorhusa fela;
 he feara sum beforan gengde
 wisra monna wong sceawian,
 oþþæt he færinga fyrgenbeamas
 ofer harne stan hleonian funde,
 wynleasne wudu; wæter under stod
 dreorig ond gedrefed. 1415

*Then the sons of princes passed over steep, rocky, slopes, thin courses,
 narrow single tracks, unknown paths, precipitous crags, many
 dwellings of water-monsters; [Beowulf] went on ahead with a
 few wise companions to view the place: until suddenly he
 perceived mountainous trees towering over the grey rock, a joyless
 wood; water stood beneath, bloody and disturbed.*

THE MONSTERS OF BEOWULF

Richard Morris was the first to point out that this combined description is remarkably close to that found in Blickling Homily XVI,⁵⁵ where Saint Paul has a vision of Hell:⁵⁶

Swa sanctus paulus wæs geseonde on norðanweardne þisne middangeard þær ealle wætero niðergewitað 7 he þær geseah ofer ðæm wætere sumne hárne stán 7 wæron norð of ðæm stáne awexene swiðe hrimige bearwas 7 ðær wæron þystrogenipo 7 under þæm stáne wæs niccra eardung 7 wearga 7 he geseah þæt on ðæm clife hangodan on ðæm ísgean bearwum manige swearte saula be heora handum gebundne 7 þa fynd þara on nicra onlicnesse heora gripende wæron swa swa grædig wulf 7 þæt wæter wæs sweart under þæm clife neoðan 7 betuh þæm clife on ðæm wætre wæron swylce twelf mila 7 ðonne ða twigo forburston þonne gewitan þa saula niðer þa þe on ðæm twigum hangodan 7 him onfengon ða nicras.

So Saint Paul was looking at the northern part of this world, where all the waters go down, and he saw there above the water a certain grey rock, and there had grown north of that rock very frosty woods, and there were dark mists, and under that rock was a dwelling-place of water-monsters and wolves; and he saw that on that cliff there hung in those icy woods many black souls, tied by their hands, and their foes, in the guise of water-monsters, were gripping them like greedy wolves, and the water was black underneath that rock, and between that cliff and the water was a drop of twelve miles, and when the branches broke, the souls who hung on those branches went down, and the sea-monsters snatched them.

That several of the physical features of the home of Grendel and his mother should match those of the Otherworld is scarcely surprising, given the poet's constant identification of Grendel with demonic forces. Elsewhere he is described as a 'fiend in hell' (*feond on helle*, line 101), a 'captive of hell' (cf. *helle hefren*, line 788), and a 'hellish spirit' (*helle gast*, line 1274); he and his mother are together called 'devils' (cf. *deofla*, line 1680), while Grendel, desperate to escape from Beowulf's clutches, is said to want 'to flee into darkness, to seek the company of devils' (*wolde on heolstor fleon, / secan deofla gedrag*, lines 755–6).⁵⁷ Many of Grendel's titles, moreover, recall those of the devil, such as 'enemy of mankind' (*feond mancynnes*, lines 164 and 1276), 'God's opponent' (*Godes andsaca*, lines 786 and 1682), and 'ancient foe' (*ealdegewinna*, line 1776).⁵⁸ More importantly, Grendel is called by the poet, although not by the characters in the poem, a 'heathen' (*heþen*, cf. lines 852 and 986), whose proper domain, in Christian eyes, is hell, as is made plain by the poet's bald statement that 'joyless in the fen-refuge, he laid aside his life, his heathen soul: there hell received him' (*dreama leas / in fenfreoðo feorh alegeð, / heþene sawle; þær him hel onfeng*, lines

⁵⁵ Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies*, pp. vi–vii; the homily in question is in fact no. XVII in Morris's edition, but the fragment which Morris numbers XVI has been identified as a part of his Homily IV, causing a renumbering of Morris's Homilies XVII–XIX as XVI–XVIII. See further the facsimile by Willard, ed., *The Blickling Homilies*, pp. 38–40.

⁵⁶ For the text, cf. Collins, 'Blickling Homily XVI and the Dating of *Beowulf*', p. 62; for the translation, cf. Malone, 'Grendel and His Abode', pp. 304–5.

⁵⁷ Cf. Malone, 'Grendel and His Abode', pp. 298–9.

⁵⁸ Whitelock, *The Audience of Beowulf*, pp. 10–11; Malone, 'Grendel and His Abode', p. 298.

850–2).⁵⁹ What makes the association particularly striking are the verbal similarities between the two descriptions in the homily and the poem, which have been noted many times, and might be summarised as follows:⁶⁰

Blickling XVI

þær ealle wætero niðergewitað ðær fyrgenstream . . . niþer gewiteð (lines 1359–60)
ofer ðæm wætere sumne hárne stán fyrgenbeamas ofer hárne stan (lines 1414–15)
of ðæm stáne awexene swiðe ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas
hrimige bearwas (line 1363)
ðær wæron bystrogeþenipo under næssa gēniþu (line 1360)
nicra eardlung nicorhusa fela (line 1411)
7 þæt wæter wæs sweart under wæter under stod dreorig ond gedrefed
þæm clife neoðan (lines 1416–17)

Several scholars have seen a direct literary link between the two passages;⁶¹ debate has continued over whether the *Beowulf*-poet borrowed from the Blickling Homily,⁶² or vice versa.⁶³ Most recently the old notion that both authors were drawing on a third, intermediary, and vernacular source, originally favoured by Klaeber, amongst others,⁶⁴ has found increasing support; Charles D. Wright, in the course of a comprehensive discussion, considers a series of minor details in the descriptions in *Beowulf* and Blickling Homily XVI, and concludes that both authors were drawing independently on a vernacular version of the *Visio S. Pauli*.⁶⁵ Hildegard Tristram argues that the description in *Beowulf* ‘is wholly traditional and probably borrowed from homiletic writings’, but considers that the purely descriptive elements have been deliberately separated from their religious context,⁶⁶ and Wright concurs, noting of the *Beowulf*-poet that: ‘while retaining the essential configuration, he divests particular elements of their explicitly eschatological reference by literalizing them: his “hell” is still in the north, because that is where the Danes live; his frosty trees, bereft of the souls that once were suspended from their branches, are left to

⁵⁹ Tolkien, ‘Beowulf, the Monsters, and the Critics’, pp. 278–80.

⁶⁰ The list derives from Brown, ‘Beowulf and the *Blickling Homilies*’, p. 908; cf. Collins, ‘Blickling Homily XVI and the Dating of *Beowulf*’, p. 65; Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, p. 119.

⁶¹ A notable exception is Peter Clemoes, ‘Style as a Criterion’, p. 181, who argues against any such direct literary link, preferring instead to see the passages as reflecting oral and memorial traditions based on preached material.

⁶² Cf. Morris, ed., *The Blickling Homilies*, p. vii; Brown, ‘Beowulf and the *Blickling Homilies*’, p. 909.

⁶³ Collins, ‘Blickling Homily XVI and the Dating of *Beowulf*’, pp. 67–8.

⁶⁴ Klaeber, ‘Die christlichen Elementen im *Beowulf*’, pp. 185–7; Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 183; Hoops, *Kommentar zum Beowulf*, p. 164.

⁶⁵ Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, pp. 116–36, at pp. 133–6. For further indications that the author of *Beowulf* drew on vernacular traditions ultimately drawn from the *Visio S. Pauli*, see further below, pp. 47–51.

⁶⁶ Tristram, ‘Stock Descriptions’, p. 111.

“hang” over the water below; and his water-monsters have been exorcised of their demons’.⁶⁷ As we shall see, however, this is not the whole story; the poet of *Beowulf* also introduces eschatological elements into his description, albeit providing them with a naturalistic setting.⁶⁸

In a similar way, it has been suggested that the description of the monster-mere can be compared to a vernacular poetic type-scene, fully integrated into Old English verse, which Donald Fry calls the ‘Cliff of Death’, and which he traces in three other poems, including ‘four basic elements: cliffs, serpents, darkness, and deprivation, and occasionally wolves and wind’.⁶⁹ As an example of the theme, Fry cites the account from *Judith*, elsewhere in the *Beowulf*-manuscript, of the fate of Holofernes, who is despatched to damnation in the Old English poem immediately upon decapitation, in a scene which has no parallel in the Vulgate account (lines 111–21):

Læg se fula leap
gesne beāftan, gæst ellor hwearf
under neowelne næs ond ðær genyðerad wæs,
susle gesæled syððan æfre, 115
wyrnum bewunden, witum gebunden,
hearde gehæfted in hellebryne
æfter hinside. Ne ðearf he hopian no,
bystrum forðylmed, þæt he ðonan mote
of ðam wyrmsele, ac ðær wunian sceal 120
awa to aldre butan ende forð
in ðam heolstran ham, hyhtwynna leas.

The foul trunk lay dead behind, the spirit turned elsewhere under the deep cliff; and was there brought low, tied with torment for ever after, wound round with worms, bound with punishments, cruelly captive in hell-fire after death. He need not hope, enveloped in darkness, that he might pass from there, out of that worm-hall, but he must dwell there for ever henceforth without end in that dark home, bereft of hopeful joys.

The abrupt transition from Holofernes’ tent in the midst of a desert plain, to a dark, seething hell of fire and serpents at the bottom of a cliff can be matched by remarkably similar descriptions of hell in *Christ and Satan* (lines 24–32, 89–105, and 132–6).⁷⁰ Of course, the account in Blickling Homily XVI demonstrates all of the same elements too, unless the *nicras* which the homily shares with *Beowulf* are held to be distinct from the more obviously serpentine ‘multitude of worm-kin, wondrous sea-dragons’ (*wyrmyncnes fela, sellice sædracan*, lines 1425–6) whom *Beowulf* and his men encounter at the mere.⁷¹ But such an association would only serve to underline

⁶⁷ Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, p. 135.

⁶⁸ See further below, pp. 42–5.

⁶⁹ Fry, ‘The Cliff of Death’, p. 215.

⁷⁰ Fry, ‘The Cliff of Death’, pp. 216–18.

⁷¹ The precise sense of *nicras* is uncertain; apart from *Beowulf* and Blickling Homily XVI the term is only found in the *Letter of Alexander* (§ 15) and in a prose Life of St Margaret

the essential terror of an imaginary and psychological landscape whose different physical features can scarcely be harmonised;⁷² Eric Stanley memorably describes the scenery as 'a gallimaufry of devices, each of which is horrific in its associations'.⁷³

It is clear that if the poet did borrow part of his conception of the monster-mere from a description of hell as given in a vernacular version of the *Visio S. Pauli*, he has overlaid the original with a number of extra details which lend extraordinary vividness, both physical and psychological, to his own particular depiction. In mentioning that each night a fire is seen on the turbid waters beneath the icy grove, the poet at once goes beyond the *Visio S. Pauli* (and Blickling Homily XVI), and aligns his own picture still further with a number of Insular visions of the Otherworld, where lost souls flit between fire and ice.⁷⁴ The particular collocation *fyr on flode* (line 1366) demonstrates further the artistry of the *Beowulf*-poet, who later on in the poem is able to exploit the same alliterative pairing both in his account of Beowulf's descent in the mere itself, when he emerges into the fire-lit hall of Grendel's mother (line 1516), and in Hrothgar's lengthy 'sermon' to Beowulf on his return from the mere, when he is warned of the insecurity of a prosperous earthly life, which can be cut short by a number of unforeseen circumstances, including 'fire's grip and flood's surge' (*oððe fyres feng oððe flodes uylm*, line 1762).⁷⁵

Outside *Beowulf*, combined reference to 'fire and flood' is largely restricted to homiletic prose, specifically apocalyptic visions of the end of the world.⁷⁶ In poetry the alliterative pair is found in the Paris Psalter (LXV.11), and in the eschatological *Judgment Day II* (line 166, rendering *fluvius ignivomus*),⁷⁷ where again the notion of mingled fire and flood seems particularly suited to Judgment Day themes, as, most spectacularly, in the following passage from *Christ III* (lines 972–88):

(Cockayne, ed., *Narratiunculae anglie conscriptae*, p. 39), in both of which texts the required sense seems to be 'hippopotamus'. Cf. Davis, "Hippopotamus" in Old English', p. 141; Fry, 'The Cliff of Death', p. 222. See too further below, pp. 234–5, 294–5, and 298–9. Hippopotami were certainly regarded as bestial, rather than serpentine, by the compiler of the *Liber monstrorum* (II.9 and II.17); it is possible that the *Beowulf*-poet meant to make a similar distinction in describing the *sadhracan* and *nicras* as 'worms and wild beasts' (*wyrmus ond wildeor*, line 1430).

⁷² Cf. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 183; Lawrence, 'The Haunted Mere in *Beowulf*', p. 225, who states that 'it is impossible to reconcile all these [aspects of the description] so as to give a single consistent picture of natural scenery'.

⁷³ Stanley, 'Old English Poetic Diction', p. 441; cf. Burts, 'The Analogical Mere', pp. 113–21.

⁷⁴ Cf. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England*, pp. 243–72; Tristram, 'Stock Descriptions', p. 111.

⁷⁵ The theme of the multiplicity of things which can cut short one's life is found, for example, in *The Seafarer*, lines 66–71, as well as in an earlier section of Hrothgar's sermon (*Beowulf*, lines 1735–9), although in none of the parallel passages is there any mention of fire or flood, which appear to have been deliberately introduced by the *Beowulf*-poet. See further, Gordon, ed., *The Seafarer*, pp. 42–3.

⁷⁶ Most notably, of course, in the Old English version of the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, where a 'fiery flood' (*fyren flod*) is mentioned twice; cf. Willard, *Ten Apocrypha in Old English Homilies*, pp. 4 and 6, and *Beowulf*, lines 1359 and 2128.

⁷⁷ See further Caie, *The Judgment Day Theme in Old English Poetry*, pp. 194–5.

Swa se gifra gæst grundas geondseceð;
hipbende leg heahgetimbro
fyllend on foldwong fyres egsan,
widmære blæst woruld mid ealle,

975

hat, heorogifre. Hreosað geneahhe
tobrocene burgweallas. Beorgas gemeltað
ond heahcleofu, þa wið holme ær
fæste wið flodum foldan sceldun,

980

stið ond stæðfest, stapelas wið wæge,
wætre windendum. Þonne wihta gehwylce,
deora ond fugla, deaðleg nimeð,
færceð æfter foldan fyrswearta leg,
weallende wiga. Swa ær wæter fleowan,

985

flodas afysde, þonne on fyrbaðe
swelað sæfiscas; sundes getwæfde
wægeþora gehwylc wering swelteð,
byrneþ wæter swa weax.

So the greedy spirit searches through the depths; the ravaging flame casts down the high duellings to the ground through the terror of conflagration; the widely notorious blast, hot and greedy for gore will destroy the whole world. Shattered city-walls will collapse outright; mountains will melt, and high cliffs, which kept the land safe against the floods, firm and stable bulwarks against the waves, the breaking water. Then the death-flame shall take every single creature, beasts and birds; the fire-dark flame shall stalk the land, a seething warrior. Just as water had stirred the floods, then in a sea of fire sea-fishes will scorch, stopped from swimming; every sea-creature will fail and die; the water will burn like wax.

The motif of the burning sea presented here is not very common, but clearly signifies apocalypse; amongst Insular sources its occurrence has been noted in the pseudo-Bede *Collectanea*,⁷⁸ as well as in several Irish texts, such as the 'Ochtfozchlach Choluim Chille'.⁷⁹ In a number of the prose accounts which link the concepts of fire and flood, the punishing conflagration at the end of the world is explicitly compared to the Flood which previously swept the earth,⁸⁰ a notion which may ultimately derive from Luke XVII.26 (*Et sicut factum est in diebus Noe, ita erit in diebus Filii hominis*);⁸¹ Wulfstan makes the point succinctly:⁸²

⁷⁸ Printed by Migne, PL 94, col. 555: *quinta die ardebunt ipsae aquae ab ortu usque ad occasum* ('on the fifth day the very waters shall burn, from their rising until their fall'); Cf. Lapidge and Sharpe, *Bibliography of Celtic-Latin Literature*, no. 1257. See further Hill, 'The Old World, the Levelling of the Earth, and the Burning of the Sea', pp. 323–5.

⁷⁹ Quin, ed., 'Ochtfozchlach Choluim Chille', p. 144; Biggs, *The Sources of Christ III*, p. 15. Cf. the parallel passages from *Christ II*, lines 805–7 and *Judgment Day II*, lines 166–70; Caie, *The Judgment Day Theme in Old English Poetry*, pp. 194–5.

⁸¹ Cf. Matthew XXIV.37; Heist, *The Fifteen Signs Before Doomsday*, pp. 27–9.

⁸² Bethurum, ed., *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, p. 12217–9; cf. Napier, ed., *Wulfstan*, no. XLIII (*Summandages spell*), 206/14–19 and 207/22–3; no. XLIV (*Summandages spell*), 216/24–217/2.

And witodlice ealswa flod com hwilum æt for synnum, swa cymð eac for synnum
fyr ofer mancynn, 7 ðærto hit nealæcð nu swyðe georne.

*And truly, just as the Flood came before because of sins, so too because of sins a fire
will come over mankind, and now the time is approaching very soon.*

The image of apocalyptic cleansing flood and flame in the context of Grendel and his mother is particularly appropriate; they were, after all, of the doomed kin of Cain, whom God had purged in the Flood.⁸³

Outside homiletic literature, reference to 'fire and flood' are notably rare; in a land dispute of 968,⁸⁴ one party condemns the contentious property *to fyre oððe flode*, rather than that it should pass to the other claimant, while, more intriguingly, Cnut's second law-code (set down not long after the compilation of the *Beowulf*-manuscript) explicitly forbids heathen worship, which it defines as follows (II Cnut V.1).⁸⁵

Hæðenscipe byð, þæt man deofolgyld weorþige hæðene godas 7 sunnan oððe
monan, fyr oððe flod, wæterwyllass oððe stanas oððe æniges cynnes wudutreowa.

*Heathen practices include the worship of devilish idols, heathen gods, the sun or
moon, fire or flood, water-surges or stones or any kind of trees.*

The description of Grendel's mere, combining as it does a number of the natural elements (fire, flood, water-surges, stones, and trees) which apparently lent themselves to animistic practice, is a most suitable dwelling for a such a devilish and heathen spirit; as Richard Schrader has suggested: 'the imaginary scene in *Beowulf* is not hell itself but a place meant to suggest the familiar locale of "devil-worship"'.⁸⁶

In this context the possibility of influence from pagan Latin verse on the *Beowulf*-poet has also been raised with respect to the description of the monster-mere, particularly since almost every aspect of the portrayal can be matched elsewhere. Vergil gives a picture of a deep cave by a dark and turbulent lake in a gloomy grove no bird will fly over at the entrance to the Otherworld (*Aeneid* VI.131–9, 236–42, and 296),⁸⁷ and elsewhere compares the fleeing pagan warrior Turnus to a stag pursued by a hound and trapped by a deep-banked river (*Aeneid* XII.749–55).⁸⁸ The pagan grove at Massilia is described by Lucan as dark and cold, with gore-spattered and snake-entwined trees where birds would not perch, and into which no wild animals would enter (*Pharsalia* III.399–425 and VI.642–51); Claudian depicts a dark and steaming lake at Aponus (*Carmen* XXVI), in whose

⁸³ See further below, pp. 58–85.

⁸⁴ Recorded in Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, no. 1447, and Wormald, 'Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits', nos. 38–40.

⁸⁵ Liebermann, ed., *Die Gesetze*, I, p. 312.

⁸⁶ Schrader, 'Sacred Groves, Marvellous Waters', p. 81.

⁸⁷ The similarities between this passage and Hrothgar's description of the mere are discussed by Habert, *A Comparative Study*, pp. 92–6; Renoit, 'The Terror of the Dark Waters', pp. 147–60; Andersson, *Early Epic Scenery*, pp. 145–59; Cornelius, 'Palus Inamabilis', pp. 321–5.

⁸⁸ Cf. Schrader, 'Sacred Groves, Marvellous Waters', pp. 77–8, who also offers some other, less convincing, parallels.

depths from time to time can be seen 'ancient spears, royal offerings' (*veteres hastae, regia dona*), as well as a thick grove on the slopes of Erna filled with the victory-spoils of the gods, including giants' heads and the bones of huge serpents, where no Cyclops dares graze his sheep (*De raptu Proserpinae* III.332–56).⁸⁹ The works of Vergil and Lucan were certainly known and imitated in Anglo-Saxon England from the time of Aldhelm on; less compelling evidence may imply that some of Claudian's work was also available.⁹⁰ The direct or indirect influence of these poets on the *Beowulf*-poet may not be entirely out of the question, though the possibility is remote. The vigour of this Latin poetic tradition is perhaps further reflected in the closest analogue to part of the description in *Beowulf* that has been suggested to date: a much later Latin account of a magical lake into which no wild beast will enter, even if pursued by hounds, which is found in Alexander Neckham's *De laudibus divinae sapientiae*.⁹¹

Within the *Beowulf*-manuscript itself, of course, and ultimately derived from Latin tradition, we have yet another detailed description of a heathen sacred grove, in the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* (§ 36), where Alexander visits the sacred trees of the Sun and the Moon, and is told that:

þær næfre in þæm londum regnes dropa ne cwome ne fugel ne wildeor, ne nænig
ætern wyrn þæt her dorste gesecean ða halgan gemæro sunnan 7 monan.

*no drop of rain ever came in that land, nor bird, nor wild beast, nor did any poisonous
snake dare to seek out the holy precincts of the Sun and the Moon.*

The *Beowulf*-poet may have had a similarly marvellous grove in mind, although there, of course, there were serpents and dragons in abundance (lines 1425–6). Nor, as we shall see, is this the only aspect in which *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle* can be seen to match certain elements of the description of the monster-mere in *Beowulf*. On the edge of a large river full of undrinkable water in the wilderness, Alexander and his men find a cliff edged with huge and towering trees (§ 12);⁹² marching along the river, they come to an island, but when some of Alexander's men attempt to swim across, disaster strikes (§ 15):

þa hie ða hæfdon feorðan dæl þære ea geswummen, ða becwom sum ongrislic
wise on hie. Þæt wæs þonne nicra mengo on onstone maran 7 unhylicran
þonne ða elpendas in ðone grund þære ea 7 betweoh ða yða þæs wæteres þa men
besencte 7 mid heora muðe hie sliton 7 blodgodon 7 hie ealle swa fornamon,
þæt ure nænig wiste hwær hiora æni cwom. Ða wæs ic swiðe yre þæm minum
ladþeowum, þa us on swylce freccennissa gelæddon. Het hiera ða bescufan in þa
ea .L. 7 .C. 7 sona þæs ðe hie inne wæron, swa wæron þa nicoras gearwe tobrudon

⁸⁹ Schrader, 'Sacred Groves, Marvellous Waters', pp. 78–9.

⁹⁰ Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 130–5, 139–41, and 152–5.

⁹¹ Rigg, 'Beowulf 1368–72: An Analogue', pp. 101–2; Burts, 'The Analogical Mere', p. 118.

⁹² Particularly striking here is the emphasis in the Old English on the cliff-edge (*On þære ea ofre stod brood 7 pintreow 7 abies þæt treowcyn ungemetlice gryto 7 micclnyse þy chyfe weox 7 wiridode*), which has no parallel in the Latin. On the alliterative doublet *weox 7 wiridode*, which occurs in *Beowulf*, line 1741 in the form *weaxað ond wiridæð*, see Clemons, 'Style as Criterion', p. 180, and below, pp. 132–3.

hie swa hie þa oðre ær dydon, 7 swa þicce hie in þære ea awcollon swa æmettan
ða nicras, 7 swilc unrim heora wæs. Þa het ic blawan mine byman 7 þa fyrd
faran.

And when they had swum about a quarter of the river, something terrible happened to them. There appeared a multitude of water-monsters [hippopotami], larger and more terrible in appearance than the elephants, who dragged the men through the watery waves down to the river bottom, and tore them to bloody pieces with their mouths, and snatched them all away so that none of us knew where any of them had gone. Then I was very angry with my guides, who had led us into such danger. I ordered that one hundred and fifty of them be shoved into the river, and as soon as they were in the water-monsters were ready, and dragged them away just as they had done with the others, and the water-monsters seethed up in the river as thick as ants, they were so innumerable. Then I ordered the trumpets to be sounded, and the army to head off.

The sudden appearance of this 'multitude of water-monsters' (*nicra mengo*), which drag men down to the bottom, is intriguing partly because of the rarity of the term *nicras* in Old English, which, outside *Beowulf* and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* is only found in a prose Life of St Margaret,⁹³ and in the account of the vision of Saint Paul in *Blickling Homily XVI*,⁹⁴ noted above, but also partly because in *Beowulf*'s accounts of his own exploits, which include killing *nicras* (line 422), 'water-monsters' of the same kind attempt to drag Beowulf himself down to the depths (lines 553–75). Even the trumpets, which Alexander sounds to mark the end of the episode (§ 17), have an echo in the horns blown at the monster-mere in *Beowulf*, which, however, introduce the action there (lines 1423–5 and 1431–2).⁹⁵ Eventually, Alexander and his men are directed to a 'large lake' (*mere*), not far from human habitation,⁹⁶ thickly overgrown with trees, and infested with serpents and reptiles (§§ 16–18); the general resemblance to the monster mere is again intriguing. Still further parallels link the 'monsters' of *Beowulf* and the *Letter of Alexander*; at one point Alexander and his men are surprised by a fearsome creature attacking suddenly from the fens, which is impervious to any weapon, and which devours two of his companions with its sharp teeth (§ 27):

Ða was þæt lond eall swa we geferdon adrugad 7 fen 7 cannon 7 hreod weoxan.
Ða cwom þær semninga sum deor of þæm fenne 7 of ðæm fæstene, wæs þæm
deore eall se hrycg acægloð swelce snoda hæfde þæt deor seonowealt heafod
swelce mona 7 þæt deor hatte *quasi caput luna* 7 him wæron þa breost gelice
nicces breastrum 7 heardum toðum 7 miclum hit was gegyred 7 geteþed. Ond

⁹³ Cockayne, ed., *Narratiunculae angliae scriptae*, p. 39.

⁹⁴ Davis, '“Hippopotamus” in Old English', pp. 141–2.

⁹⁵ In both cases, the effect of the horn-blowing is to make the assembled troop sit down. Whilst such an action is quite natural for Alexander and his men, who promptly begin to eat, the action of the foot-soldiers accompanying Beowulf is decidedly curious, and may indicate that here the *Beowulf*-poet is the borrower. For an alternative explanation of the horns, see Braswell, 'The Horn at Grendel's Mere: *Beowulf* 1417–41', pp. 466–72.

⁹⁶ Cf. the proximity of the monster-mere in *Beowulf* to Heorot (lines 1361–2): *nis þæt feor heoton / miðgearnas þæt se mere standeð*.

hit þa þæt deor ofslōh mine begnas twegen. Ond we þa þæt deor nowþer ne
mið spere gewundigan ne meahste ne mið nænige wæpne, ac we hit uneaþe mið
isernum hamerum 7 slegum gefyldon 7 hit ofbeoton.

Then all the land through which we passed was dried up and marshy, and canes and reeds grew there. Then there came suddenly out of the fen and fastness a beast, and the beast's back was all studded with pegs like a snood, and the beast had a round head like the moon, and the beast was called Quasi caput luna [‘moon-head’, crocodile], and it had a breast like a sea-monster's breast and it was armed and toothed with hard and large teeth. And that beast slew two of my thegns. And we were unable to wound that beast with spears in any way, nor with any kind of weapon, but with difficulty we beat it and subdued it with iron mallets and sledge-hammers.

What is particularly striking about this account, which in general terms might apply as well to Grendel, who is equally impervious to weapons (lines 801–4), is the description of the assailant coming 'out of the fen and fastness' (*of þæm fenne 7 of ðæm fæstene*), the more so since Grendel's own domain is described in exactly the same terms (*fen on fæsten*, line 104), in what is the only other example of the alliterative doublet extant in Old English literature. There is, as we have seen, orthographical and morphological evidence that the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* and *Beowulf* were both copied from the same exemplar;⁹⁷ other parallels of theme may strengthen the case for a still closer connection.⁹⁸

Hrothgar's description of the monster-mere, then, whether drawn from the *Letter of Aristotle to Alexander* or from some vernacular rendering of the *Visio S. Pauli* (or both), may represent a significant blend of imported Latin and native germanic elements, the whole strongly influenced by the Christian homiletic tradition. In keeping with the wisdom and dignity which characterise his appearances throughout the poem, Hrothgar's longest speech to the victorious Beowulf on his return from the same monster-mere, bearing the grisly booty of the giant sword-hilt and Grendel's severed head (lines 1700–84), combines many of the same elements in much the same way. Ettmüller was the first person to describe the speech as a 'sermon',⁹⁹ and its very length and position at the heart of the poem have led a number of commentators to stress its importance in the wider structure of the poem; G. V. Smithers considered the passage 'a hinge on which the two halves of the poem are set'.¹⁰⁰ In fact Hrothgar's lengthy speech consists of much more than homiletic advice; Klaeber reckoned the speech 'conspicuous for the blending of heroic and theological motives',¹⁰¹ and the 'sermon' has been sub-divided in various ways.¹⁰² The opening undoubtedly establishes Hrothgar's authority as an old and experienced

⁹⁷ See above, pp. 2–3.

⁹⁸ 'See further below, pp. 132–9.

⁹⁹ Ettmüller, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 136; cited by Stanley, *In the Foreground: 'Beowulf'*, p. 240.

¹⁰⁰ Smithers, 'The Meaning of *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*', p. 8; cf. Goldsmith, *Made and Meaning in 'Beowulf'*, pp. 183–209.

¹⁰¹ Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 190.

¹⁰² Cox, *Cruces*, p. 132; Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 190; Hansen, 'Hrothgar's "Sermon" in *Beowulf*', p. 62.

judge of the deeds of men (lines 1700–9), a theme to which he returns towards the end of his speech, where he muses on the length and success of his own career, before Grendel appeared on the scene (lines 1769–84).¹⁰³ But Hrothgar's is but the last of a series of *exempla* which warn of the dangers of complacency and overweening pride. After fulsome praise of Beowulf as a figure at the height of his powers, with considerable promise, Hrothgar posts a warning of the dangers ahead, by citing the case of Heremod, who at one time had seemed equally blessed (lines 1709–24):

Ne wearð Heremod swa
 eaforum EcgweLAN, Arscýldingum; 1710
 ne geweoX he him to willan, ac to wælfecalle
 ond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum;
 breat bolgenmod beodgencatas,
 ealxgesteallan, oppæt he ana hwearf,
 1715
 mære þeoden mondreamum from,
 ðeah þe hine mihug god mægenes wynnum,
 eafepum steppe, ofer ealle men
 forð gefremede. Hwæpere him on ferþe grew
 breosthord blodreow; nallas beagas geaf
 1720
 Denum æfter dome; dreamleas gebad
 þæt he þæs gewinnes weorc prowade,
 leodbealo longsum. Ðu þe læt be þon,
 gumcyste ongit! Ic þis gid be þe
 awrac wintrum frod.

Not so was Heremod to the children of Ecwela; he did not flourish for the happiness, but for the slaughter and massacre of the Danish people. Swollen with rage he shattered his hearth-companions, his close comrades, until he alone, famous prince, turned from the joys of men, even though mighty God had steeped him with the joys of strength and with powers promoted him beyond all men. Yet in his heart there grew a bloodthirsty spirit; he did not give the Danes rings according to judgment; joyless he endured so that he suffered pain for that struggle, long-lasting grief for his people. Learn from that, and recognise many virtue. I, experienced in years, have uttered this speech for [or 'about'] you.

Just as the warning example of Heremod is invoked here, after Beowulf's great victory against Grendel's mother, so too his shadow is first raised after the fight with Grendel (lines 901–15). There it is stressed that Heremod had been the equal of Sigemund (as is Beowulf) before his temperament led him to the bad. Heremod's fate, to turn away in lonely exile from the joys of men, recalls that of Grendel himself, the more so since his exile takes place among giants, as Heremod, just like Grendel, passes "into the power of enemies" (*on feonda gewæld*, lines 808 and 903).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Müllenhof, 'Innere Geschichte', pp. 213–14, believed that the two parts of the speech were entirely incompatible, and ascribed the first to his hypothesized interpolator B, as cited by Stanley, *In the Foreground: 'Beowulf'*, p. 241.

¹⁰⁴ See further Blake, 'The Heremod Digressions in *Beowulf*', p. 282.

Heremod is but one of a number of figures in *Beowulf* whose names carry psychological connotations remarkably appropriate to their characters, leading some commentators to see their plight as in some sense allegorical, and Müllenhof duly recognised in Heremod's activity the kind of zest for conflict suitable to one named 'war-spirit'.¹⁰⁵ Likewise, Kemp Malone demonstrated that the Geatish Queen Hygd ('sense') "is consistently characterised in terms of her name",¹⁰⁶ while R. E. Kaske and Fred Robinson both contrast her sensibility with the rashness of Hygelac, her husband, whose behaviour they see defined by the sense 'instability of mind'.¹⁰⁷ The same implicit contrast between the physical and psychological worlds runs throughout the remainder of Hrothgar's 'sermon', a pivotal section of the poem, in which homiletic elements are rife, and which requires quotation in full (lines 1724–68):

Wundor is to secganne,
 hu mihug God manna cynne 1725
 purh sidne sefan snyttru bryttað,
 eard ond eorlscipe; he ah ealra gewæld.
 Hwilum he on lufan læteð hworfan
 monnes modgeþonc mæran cynnes,
 seleð him on eple corþan wynne 1730
 to healdanne hleoburh wera,
 gedede him swa gewældene worolde dælas,
 side rice, þæt he his selfa ne mæg
 his unsnyttrum ende gebencean.
 Wunað he on wiste; no hine wiht dweleð 1735
 aÐ ne ylðo, ne him inwitsorþ
 on sefa(n) sweorceð, ne gesacu ohwær
 ecghete eoweð, ac him eal worold
 wendeð on willan; he þæt wyrse ne con –
 1740
 oð þæt him on innan oferhygda dæl
 weaxeð ond wriðað; þonne se weard swefeð,
 sawele hyrde; bið se slæp to fæst,
 bisgum gebunden, bona swiðe neah,
 se þe of flanbogan fyrenum sceoteð.
 1745
 þonne bið on hreþre under helm drepen
 biteran stræle – him beorgan ne con –
 wom wundorbebodum wergan gastes;
 pinceð him to lyrel þæt he lange heold,
 gytsað gromhydig, nallas on gylp seleð
 1750
 fætte beagas, ond he þa forðgescaft
 forgyrteð ond forgymede, þæs þe him ær God sealde,
 wuldres Waldend, weorðmynda dæl.
 Hit on endestæf eft gelimpeð

¹⁰⁵ Müllenhof, *Beowulf*, p. 51; Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, pp. 162–3; Robinson, *The Tomb of Beowulf*, pp. 212–13.

¹⁰⁶ Malone, 'Hygd', p. 358.

¹⁰⁷ Kaske, "'Hygelac' and 'Hygd'", pp. 200–6; Robinson, *The Tomb of Beowulf*, pp. 213–17.

þæt se lichoma læne gedreoseð,
 fæge gefealleð; fēhð ofer to,
 1755
 se þe unmunlice madmas dæleþ,
 eorles ærgestreon, egesan ne gymeð.
 Bebeorh þe ðone bealonið, Beowulf leofa,
 secg betsta, ond þe þæt selre geceos,
 1760
 ece rædas; oferhyda ne gym,
 mære cempa! Nu is þines mægnes blæd
 ane hwile; eft sona bið
 þæt þec adl oððe ecg eafopes getwæfeð,
 oððe fyres feng, oððe flodes wylm,
 1765
 oððe gripe meces, oððe gares fliht,
 oððe atol yldo; oððe eagna beahtm
 forsiteð ond forsworced; semninga bið
 þæt dec, dryhtguma, deað oferswyðeð.

*It is wondrous to tell how mighty God, through his magnanimity
 deals out to mankind wisdom, land, and rank; he has control of all
 things. Sometimes he lets a well-born man's thoughts turn to
 pleasure, grants him in his homeland to possess the joys of the earth,
 a sheltering stronghold of men, makes subject to him areas of the
 world, broad kingdoms, so that he himself cannot in his folly
 perceive any end. He dwells in prosperity; not at all do old age or
 sickness harm him, nor does grim sorrow darken his spirit, nor does
 malice cause sword-hatred anywhere, but the whole world moves at
 his whim; he knows nothing worse until a portion of pride grows
 and flourishes; when the keeper sleeps, the guardian of the soul; that
 sleep is too sound, fastened with worries, the slayer very close, who
 shoots wickedly from his bow. Then under his covering he is struck
 in the heart with a bitter arrow, with the crooked commands of
 wonder of the accursed spirit: he cannot defend himself; what he
 has long held seems to him too little, angry at heart he grows
 niggardly, not at all honourably dispenses plated rings, but he forgets
 and neglects the world to come, the portion of glories that God, Ruler
 of Glory, had granted him. Finally it turns out that the frail body
 droops and falls doomed, and another succeeds, who doles out
 treasure recklessly, the ancient heirlooms of the warrior, does not
 reckon of terror. Guard yourself against that dread horror, my dear
 Beowulf, best of men, and choose for yourself the better part, eternal
 rewards; care not for pride, famous warrior! Now the glory of your
 might lasts for a time; but soon it will turn out that sickness or sword
 will separate you from your strength, or the fire's embrace or the
 flood's surge, or the bite of a blade, or the flight of a spear, or dreaded
 old age, or the brightness of your eyes shall fail and grow dim; finally
 it shall be that death, noble warrior, shall overpower you.*

The implied contrast between worldly success and spiritual decay, between the physical world and the psychological, is explicit in the direct comparison between the 'portion of pride' (*oferhygda dæl*, line 1740) and 'portion of glories' (*weorðmynða dæl*,

line 1752) which represent the changing fortunes of mankind, and here, after Beowulf has successfully defeated Grendel's mother, the poet reiterates the message implicit in the contrasting fortunes of Sigemund and Heremod (lines 874–915) or Hygelac and Hama (lines 1197–1214),¹⁰⁸ to which attention is drawn after Beowulf's defeat of Grendel; in each case the moral and didactic approach seems the same, an essentially exegetical technique familiar from vernacular homilies.

The style and content of Hrothgar's speech, moreover, may well owe something to homiletic technique.¹⁰⁹ As Peter Clemoes has pointed out, within the space of a few verses the poet employs no fewer than three alliterative couplings of synonymous or nearly-synonymous finite verbs: *weaxeð ond wridað* (line 1741),¹¹⁰ *forgytedð ond forgymedð* (line 1751), and *forsitedð ond forsworcedð* (line 1767), whereas only seven such pairs are found in the whole of the rest of the poem put together; such alliterative doublets were a frequent adornment of vernacular preaching from the earliest period.¹¹¹ Equally significant, perhaps is the reference to the 'soul's keeper' (*sawele hyrde*, line 1742), since the phrase is relatively rare in Old English, being largely confined to homiletic prose, where it is used on several occasions to describe Saint Michael in his role as psychopomp,¹¹² and no less than three times in the Old English translation of the *Visio S. Pauli*, in each case without warrant in the Latin.¹¹³

The sleep of such a 'guardian of the soul' is, of course, relatively commonplace within patristic and homiletic tradition; one author, for example, borrowing a motif from a Hiberno-Latin source,¹¹⁴ notes that 'Almighty God teaches us vigils and prayers; the devil teaches us sleep and slackness' (*God Ælmihtig us lerað weccan and gebedu, diofol us lerað sleep and slæcnese*).¹¹⁵ The 'slayer' (*bona*, line 1743), whose arrows cause such spiritual harm, is presumably to be identified with the devilish 'slayer of the spirit' (*gastbona*, line 177) to whom the poet disapprovingly notes the Danes sacrificing at their heathen shrines. The figure of the arrows of sin is doubtless ultimately indebted to the biblical rhetoric of Ephesians VI.11–16, the influence of which passage on Anglo-Saxon literature is remarkably widespread,¹¹⁶ but it is still striking that the Beowulf-poet, by introducing the figure of the less than reliable

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Kaske, 'The Sigemund-Heremod and Hama-Hygelac Passages in Beowulf', pp. 491–4.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, Hansen, 'Hrothgar's "sermon" in Beowulf as Parental Wisdom', pp. 54–6.

¹¹⁰ Cf. the parallel doublet *weox 7 wridode* in the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* (§ 12) in the Appendix below, pp. 232–3. See further above, pp. 44–5.

¹¹¹ Clemoes, 'Style as a Criterion', pp. 180–1; cf. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 192.

¹¹² See, for example, Bazire and Cross, ed., *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, III. 144–5, p. 53.

¹¹³ Healey, ed. *The Old English Vision of St Paul*, lines 91, 104, 131; pp. 67 and 69. Such links further strengthen the possibility that the Beowulf-poet was influenced by a vernacular rendering of the *Visio S. Pauli*; cf. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, pp. 132–4.

¹¹⁴ Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, p. 244.

¹¹⁵ Healey, ed. *The Old English Vision of St Paul*, p. 325, lines 79–80; cf. Fadda, ed. *Nuove omelie anglosassoni*, p. 169, lines 72–3, who, however, reads *slaw* for *slæp*. See also Assman, ed. *Angelkächische Homilien und Heiligleben*, XIV.106–7, p. 168: *deofol us lerað slæpnese and sent us on slæwde*, and Wright, 'Doct Deus, docet diabolus', pp. 451–3.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Hermann, *Allegories of War*, pp. 39–42.

'guardian of the soul' come close to the extended homiletic treatment of the theme most fully explored by the author of Vercelli Homily IV (lines 308-10 and 337-42).¹¹⁷

Ponne hæfð þæt dioful geworht bogan 7 stræla. Se boga bið geworht of ofermettum, 7 þa stræla bið swa manigra cynna swa swa mannes synna bioð . . . Ælce dæge hæbbað [we] twegen hyrdas: oðer cymð ufan of heofonum, þe us sceall gode bysene onstellan 7 us gode beawas tæcan, 7 hæfð him on handa þa scyldas þe ic ær nemde 7 þæt sweord, 7 wyle us forstandan æt þam awyrگردen diofle, þe of þære stylenan helle cymð mid his scearpum strælum us mid to scottiane.

Then the devil has made a bow and arrows. The bow is made of pride, and the arrows are of as many kinds as man's sins . . . Each day we have two guardians, and one comes from the heavens above, who is to establish a good example for us and teach us good virtues, and he has in his hand the shields which I mentioned earlier, and the sword, and he wants to defend us against the accursed devil, who comes from steely hell with his sharp arrows, with which to shoot us.

The 'bow of pride' described here seems remarkably close to the figure depicted in Hrothgar's 'sermon', whilst the notion of a 'guardian of the soul', both here and in the 'sermon', presumably derives ultimately from the biblical *custos animae* of Proverbs XVI.17 and XXII.5,¹¹⁸ and indeed the extent to which both passages relate to the specific concerns of Hrothgar's 'sermon' is quite striking (Proverbs XVI.16-18 and XXII.4-6):

posside sapientiam quia auro melior est et adquire prudentiam quia pretiosior est argento. semita iustorum declinat mala custos animae suae servat viam suam. contritionem praecedit superbia et ante ruinam exaltatur spiritum . . . finis modestiae timor Domini divitiarum et gloria et vita. arma et gladii in via perversi custos animae suae recedit ab eis.

Possess wisdom, because it is better than gold: and gette prudence, because it is more precious than silver. The path of the just avoideth evils: the keeper of his soule kepeth his way. Pride goeth before destruction, and before ruine the spirit shal be exalted . . . The end of modestie the feare of our Lord, riches and glorie and life. Armour and swordes in the way of the perverse: but the keeper of his owne soule departeth far from them.

Apart from the general admonition concerning the value of wisdom and the dangers of pride alongside mention of the 'keeper of [the] soule' (*custos animae*), the reference here to 'the feare of our Lord' (*timor Domini*) is intriguing in the context of the curious phrase in Hrothgar's 'sermon' in which we are told of a spiritual successor to Heremod who 'does not reckon of terror' (*egesan ne gymeð*, line 1757). Elsewhere

¹¹⁷ Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies*, pp. 102 and 104; cf. Wright, *The Irish Tradition in Old English Literature*, pp. 260-1.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf*, p. 192.

in *Beowulf* the word *egesa* signifies 'terror',¹¹⁹ but in this one passage may contain a sense approaching 'awe', as Vickrey has argued,¹²⁰ and can be compared not only with the phrase *timor Domini* from Proverbs already noted, but also in this context of a call to wisdom by the specific admonition in the Psalms that 'the beginning of Wisdom is the fear of the Lord' (*initium sapientiae timor Domini*, Psalm CX.10). Certainly, precisely such a notion was adopted and underlined in various Old English homiletic texts, for example Vercelli Homily XII (lines 64-7):¹²¹

Se egesa us gelædeð fram helwarum, 7 he us onfehð to þam uplican rice, 7 he drifeð fram us ælce ungleawnesse, 7 he us læreð geðeodscype 7 snyttro, 7 he us cenneð wisdom. He is se egesa.

Fear leads us from the inhabitants of Hell, and brings us to the kingdom above, and drives from us every folly, and instructs us in learning and understanding, and teaches us wisdom. That is fear.

By dealing sympathetically with the terror (*egesa*) implicit in the heroic life, the *Beowulf*-poet gently directs us to the benefits of Christian reverence (*egesa*), benefits which even a virtuous pagan, such as Heremod's generous successor, are, as we shall see, emphatically denied.¹²²

In this context, of course, of Christian and heroic terminology apparently deliberately manipulated and obscured by the *Beowulf*-poet, the closing words of the poem, in which a eulogy to Beowulf is delivered in the course of what some have seen as a ceremony of pagan apotheosis (lines 3180-2) are particularly striking:¹²³

cwædon þæt he wære wyruld cynning[a]
mannum mildust and mon[ð]wærust,
leodum liðost and lofgeornost.

They said that he was of worldly kings the mildest to men, and the most gentle, the kindest to his people, and the keenest for fame.

The allusion to 'worldly kings' (*wyruld cynninga*, line 3180) effectively delimits the extent of Beowulf's endeavours, by its implicit reference to the heavenly king, knowledge of whom is denied to the dead hero, just as earlier in the poem Beowulf has twice been described as 'strongest in might in that day of this life' (*mægene strengest / on þam dæge þysse lifes*, lines 789-90),¹²⁴ in a twin reference which puts Beowulf

¹¹⁹ The simple form *eg(e)sa* occurs in various morphological forms in lines 276, 784, 1827, 2736, and 3154; the compounds *gledegesa* (line 2650), *ligegea* (line 2780), and *wateregea* (line 1260) are also attested, all bearing the same basic sense of 'terror' or 'horror'.

¹²⁰ See further Vickrey, *Egesan ne gymeð* and the Crime of Heremod, pp. 295-300.

¹²¹ Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies*, p. 230.

¹²² See further below, pp. 170-1.

¹²³ Robinson, *The Tomb of Beowulf*, pp. 3-19; the text I have adopted here is that given by Richards, 'A Reexamination of *Beowulf* ll. 3180-3182', p. 165.

¹²⁴ Cf. lines 196-7 (*mægenes strengest / on þam dæge þysse lifes*), or the description of the death of Grendel on *þam dæge þysse lifes* (line 806).

firmly in his place, as it were: a hero of a bygone and strictly secular age.¹²⁵ In contrast to that secular praise, there may well be, as Mary P. Richards has indicated, a strongly religious flavour to the description of Beowulf as 'the mildest to men, and the most gentle' (*mannum mildust ond monðwerust*, line 3181), since the alliterative pair *milde ond monðwere* (or equivalent) is of rather frequent occurrence in Christian contexts, being used to describe, amongst others, Christ, Saint Neot, Bishop Eata, and the Archangel Gabriel.¹²⁶ There seems no good reason, however, to doubt that the same words can also be taken in a strictly secular sense, to denote, for example, praise for the prodigality of a generous prince,¹²⁷ and it is striking that in *Beowulf* itself Wealhtheow uses very similar terms to praise the Danes (lines 1228–31, my italics):

Her is æghwylc eorl oþrum getrywe,
 modes *milde*, mandrihtne hol[d];
 þegnas syndon *geþware*, þeod ealgearo
 druncne dryhtguman doð swa ic bidde.
 1230

Here is each warrior true to the other, mild of spirit, loyal to their lord. The thegns are united, a people fully prepared, the retainers have drunk [loyally]: they do as I bid.

That the same words denoting positive Christian virtues should seemingly be attributed to the pagan hero Beowulf only serves to underline the ambiguity of the final word of *Beowulf*, *lofgeornost* ('most eager for praise', line 3182), the dual associations of which were presumably equally apparent to Christian ears in the period when the *Beowulf*-manuscript was being copied.¹²⁸ The concept of *lof* ('praise') within *Beowulf* as a positive heroic and secular value to be gained by noble deeds is made clear by gnomic utterance both at the very beginning of the poem, when we are assured that 'it is by deeds of praise that one must prosper in every nation' (*lofledum sceal / in megha gewere man geþeon*, lines 24–5), and in the middle, during Beowulf's near-fatal conflict with Grendel's mother, when the poet notes that 'so must a man do who intends to gain long-lasting praise in war: he must have no care for his life' (*swa sceal man don, / þonne he æt gude gegan þenceð / longsumne lof; na ymb his lif cearað*, lines 1534–6). The word *lofgeorn* and its morphological variants, however, are found only twelve times in the extant Old English corpus, of which the example in *Beowulf* represents the sole attestation of the word in verse. In prose, the term is found in three versions of a passage on the seven deadly sins by Ælfric,¹²⁹

¹²⁵ See further Robinson, '*Beowulf*' and the *Appositive Style*, p. 54; Frank, 'The *Beowulf* Poet's Sense of History', pp. 54–5.
¹²⁶ Richards, 'A Reexamination of *Beowulf* ll. 3180–3182', pp. 165–7. Her evidence can be greatly supplemented: I note around twenty collocations of the two words.
¹²⁷ This is a common meaning for the cognate adjective *mildr* in Old Norse verse; see further Wieland, '*Manna mildost*: Moses and Beowulf', pp. 86–93.
¹²⁸ Cf. Richards, 'A Reexamination of *Beowulf* ll. 3180–3182', pp. 163–7; Rosier, 'The Two Closings of *Beowulf*', pp. 1–6.
¹²⁹ Skeat, ed., *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, I, p. 356, line 302; Morris, ed., *Old English Homilies*, p. 297; Warner, ed., *Early English Homilies*, p. 17, line 19.

once in the sermons of Wulfstan and once more in his *Institutes of Polity*,¹³⁰ and six times in the various versions of the Benedictine Rule.¹³¹ In all these cases, the word carries unreservedly negative connotations.¹³² By contrast, the word *domgeorn* ('eager for glory'), which occurs only five times, and always in verse, carries a positive sense on all occasions.¹³³

The tension between Christian and heroic diction is, of course, fully exploited by a range of Old English poets, and several commentators have focused on a passage from the *Seafarer* which appears to suggest that worldly *lof* can have heavenly benefits (lines 72–80):¹³⁴

Forþon þæt bið eorla gehwam æftercweþendra
 lof lifgendra lastworda betst,
 þæt he gewyrce, ær he onweg sceyle,
 fremum on foldan wið feonda niþ,
 deorum dædum deofle togeanes,
 þæt hine ælda bearn æfter hergen,
 ond his lod sibban lifge mid englum
 awa to ealdre, ecan lifes blæd,
 dream mid dugepum.
 80

Therefore it is for all noble men the best memorial and praise of the living who remember him after death, so that before he must go hence, he should merit and achieve on earth by heroic deeds against the enmity of foes, opposing the devil, that the children of men may praise him afterwards, and his praise may live with the angels for ever and ever, the glory of eternal life, joy among the hosts.

This is but one of a series of passages throughout the *Seafarer* which consciously play on the twin sense of certain terms, both Christian and heroic,¹³⁵ most notably *drihten*, which in the space of three lines refers to lords both secular and spiritual.¹³⁶ Such passages amply demonstrate the way in which Anglo-Saxon audiences were well-attuned to the dual sense of certain terms, and to the twin values implied. Even while employing words like *milde*, *monðwere*, and *liðe*, which have morally positive

¹³⁰ Bethurum, ed., *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, *Sermo* 10c, p. 207/128; Jost, ed., *Die Institutes of Polity. Civil and Ecclesiastical*, p. 262.
¹³¹ Schröter, ed., *Die angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen der Benediktinerregel*, pp. 18/18, 54/9, and 55/3; Schröter, ed., *Die Wintener-Version der Regula S. Benedicti*, pp. 71/22 and 73/9. The word *lofgeorn* also occurs in the appropriate place in the variant texts of the vernacular Rule in Durham, Cathedral library, B. IV. 4 and London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius A. iii; see further Frank and Cameron, ed., *A Plan for the Dictionary of Old English*, no. B.10.3.2, and Venezky and Healey, *A Microfiche Concordance. On lofgeorn*, see further below, pp. 56–7.
¹³² Cf. Stanley, 'Hæzthenra Hyht in *Beowulf*', pp. 147–9.
¹³³ Cf. Andreas, line 693, 878, 1308; *Elene*, line 1291; *The Wanderer*, line 17.
¹³⁴ See further Tolkien, 'Beowulf, the Monsters, and the Critics', pp. 280–7; Richards, 'A Reexamination of *Beowulf* ll. 3180–3182', pp. 166–7.
¹³⁵ Greenfield, 'Attitudes and Values in *The Seafarer*', pp. 18–20.
¹³⁶ Cf. Gordon, ed., *The Seafarer*, pp. 26–7.