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## FIGURES OF EVIL IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

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One of the ways, according to the Church Fathers, in which those guilty of mortal sin manifested their spiritual corruption was in their perverted imitation of the good. Their motivation for this behaviour was envy, and pride in their own worth. Satan imitated God, but subsequent sinners imitated Satan himself, and if unrepentant, earned for themselves the same fate as him: a state of everlasting exile and perpetual banishment from God's sight. Anglo-Saxon poets followed Christian tradition in presenting Satan, Adam and Eve, and Cain in varying degrees as imitators, and the *Beowulf* poet added a fifth in Grendel.

In the first section the treatment of biblical figures is examined to show that although the poets conformed closely to the Christian tradition, they were yet able to convey the nature of the sinners' perversion with great vividness through their exploitation of the secular *topoi* of *comitatus* and exile. These they used, at least in part, to describe respectively the community of heaven and the sinner's state of perpetual banishment. In the second section it is shown how the epithet "deapscua", describing Grendel in *Beowulf* 160, is probably derived from texts dealing with the Christian concept of the imitative sinner-exile; thus the imitative characteristics of Grendel the exile are manifestations of his spiritual corruption, as in the case of the biblical figures.

### I

Satan's exile, which follows naturally upon his rebellion against his lord, and his rejection of the code of service in the community of heaven, is wholly understandable from the secular point of view. God establishes a society that he trusts will be willing to offer him loyal service (*Genesis* 248-50), but Satan rejects these requirements, "Ne wille ic leng his geongra wurþan" (*Genesis* 291).<sup>1</sup> He, and all the devils who follow him in preference to God, their rightful lord, are exiled to hell, "forþon hie þegnscipe / godes forgyndon" (*Genesis* 326-27). The moral values of the *comitatus* clearly have no significance for Satan. He is concerned only with outward show, the possession of a throne and of power, and having rejected one society, he yet paradoxically tries to set up a rival one, claiming to base it on the very ideals that he and his followers have repudiated. All that happens is that this hellish society becomes a corrupt and perverted imitation of the heavenly ideal. Despite the generous lip-service paid to *þegnscip*, and Satan's

evident obsession with the idea, as seen in his speeches during the rebellion and in hell (*Genesis* 278-91; 403-41), its values are acceptable to him only when he is in control.

Reciprocal service, one of the essential features of the relationship between lord and thane in the *comitatus*, is wholly lacking. Instead of generously rewarding his followers for brave deeds performed under his leadership, Satan bribes them beforehand with mere promises of treasure, and an honoured seat next to him, in the hopes that one of the devils will act against God on his behalf (*Genesis* 408-41). There is evidence of a similar breakdown of the ideal relationship in *Andreas*, where Satan rebukes the devils for achieving very little (1343-44), and is faced with the insolent retort that he might do better if he tried fighting for himself (1347-51). In *Juliana* 325-44, the devil who comes to tempt the saint complains that he and his companions are Satan's unwilling thralls. But the contrast between the actual conditions of Satan's society, and what those conditions are claimed to be, is most pointed in *Genesis B*. There God trusts that the angels will be willing to serve him whereas Satan wins and retains service by bribery and force. As A. Renoir<sup>2</sup> has pointed out, the devils are quite self-deceived. Heaven is green, spacious, and lofty, but the place where Satan sets up his society is narrow and dark. God in heaven has Lucifer sit highest next to him, but when Satan offers rewards, he offers a share of the deepest despair and darkness of hell: "This is no tempting reward, except, of course, to such as have not yet realized that the scale of infernal values is an inversion of that of heaven" (p. 54).

The inversion of values, so emphatically demonstrated in OE poetry by the appeal, through the language, to the associations and expectations aroused by the *comitatus*, serves a didactic purpose by giving an easily comprehensible illustration of the constantly repeated statements in patristic literature that the beginning of all sin is pride, and that pride may lead to envy and to the condition of utter perversion, and empty imitation, exemplified, above all, in the figure of Satan.

Christian tradition teaches that all men since the Fall have been born into the world as involuntary exiles from God. Even while suffering in this condition, the Christian longs to reach his native land in heaven, and to experience the *drēam* of the angels. He serves God humbly and willingly, as do the angels, and his choice as to whether to perform this service is made freely (*Christ and Satan* 203; *Exhortation to Christian Living* 78-82). The will of Satan and the devils, on the other hand, is totally corrupt. They are cut off from the joy of the angels through the exercise of their own will, "Farað nu, awyrge, willum biscyrede<sup>3</sup> / engla dreames" (*Christ* 1519-20), and instead of experiencing the joy of heaven, they find joy in sin, "Gefeoð in firenum, frofre ne wenað, / þæt se wræcsiða wyrpe gebiden" (*Guðlac* 508-509).

This wilful, determined persistence in sin makes their alienation from God so much more severe than the state of spiritual exile

experienced by most men on earth, for this kind of sin is against the Holy Spirit (Matt. xii. 32). No forgiveness for that sin is possible, as Ælfric carefully explains in one of his homilies.<sup>4</sup> Anglo-Saxon poets were just as aware as the homilists that these permanent spiritual exiles could not hope for mercy and consolation.<sup>5</sup> Man, however, was prompted to sin by the devil, and although, in many ways, Adam and Eve imitate Satan, and even think of imitating God, they are less culpable because they are victims of deception, and their exile will not last for ever. The distinction is neatly made by Alcuin.<sup>6</sup> In reply to the question asking why man is to be saved, while the fallen angels are not, he answers:

[Quia] angelus sui sceleris inventor fuit; homo vero alterius fraude seductus [fuit]. Item, quanto sublimior angelus in gloria, tanto major in ruina: homo vero quanto fragilior in natura, tanto facilior ad veniam.

(Because the angel was the deviser of his own crime; but man was led astray by the deceit of another.

Likewise, the more exalted the angel was in glory, the greater shall be his ruin; but the weaker man is in nature, the more easily shall he be pardoned.)

The major biblical source for Satan's rebellion is Isaiah xiv. 12-15, which describes how Lucifer plots to set up a rival throne higher than God's. Gregory the Great<sup>7</sup> interprets the throne as the symbol of divine authority that Satan, motivated by perverse pride, wishes to usurp. In OE poetry also, pride is either mentioned, or clearly implied as the cause of this rebellion, for example *Christ and Satan* 50, 69, 226; *Guðlac* 663-65; *Juliana* 424; *Resignation* 56; and *Vainglory* 57-64. St Augustine sees it as the origin of all sin and characterizes it as follows:

Quid est autem superbia nisi peruersae celsitudinis appetitus? Peruersa enim est celsitudo derserto eo, cui debet animus inhaerere, principio sibi quodam modo fieri atque esse principium.<sup>8</sup>

(But what is pride except a desire of perverted height? For height is perverse when, having deserted the originator, the one to whom the mind ought to cleave, it in a sense becomes and is its own originator.)

Later in the same work, Augustine points out that the devil's voluntary perversion does not destroy his originally good nature, considered as nature, but rather depraves it (*CCSL*, XLVIII, pp. 679-80).

"Peruerse" is several times repeated in Augustine's careful explanation of the nature of pride and vainglory as sins "contra ordinem naturarum" (*CCSL*, XLVIII, p. 362, p. 363). Ironically, therefore, those who reject God's order set up a rival, corrupt order that is a perverted imitation of the good, just as Satan does

in *Genesis B*:

Sic enim superbia peruerse imitatur Deum. Odit namque cum sociis aequalitatem sub illo, sed inponere uult sociis dominationem suam pro illo. Odit ergo iustam pacem Dei et amat iniquam pacem suam. Non amare tamen quaecumque pacem nullo modo potest. Nullius quippe uitium ita contra naturam est, ut naturae debeat etiam extrema uestigia. (CCSL, XLVIII, pp. 677-78).  
 (For in this way pride perversely imitates God. For it hates equality with its fellows under him, but wishes to impose its own despotism on its fellows in place of him. Therefore it hates the just peace of God and loves its own unjust peace. Indeed, no one's vice is so contrary to nature that it destroys the last traces of nature.)

The sin of Adam and Eve is very similar to that of Satan. They too are driven by pride to renounce their loyalty to God, and Eve's proud dissatisfaction with her own lot shades into envy as, prompted by the tempter, she entertains thoughts of emulating God. Again, through the medium of the traditional *comitatus* concept, but in accordance with orthodox Christian teaching, the imitativeness and perversity of pride are revealed.

The tempter claims to be an angel of God (*Genesis* 497-98), and tempts Adam and Eve by appealing to the very standards of loyalty to the lord that he and all the other devils have repudiated. J.M. Evans<sup>9</sup> has discussed at length the various traditions of the device of the tempter masquerading as an angel. This device (which may depend on a number of Latin sources) and the devil's syllogistic arguments, are wholly consistent with the self-deception of the inhabitants of hell, evidenced most clearly in OE poetry in their perverted imitation of the *comitatus*.

More striking are Eve's thoughts of imitation, which repudiate the moral code as firmly as Satan's acts do in heaven and hell. Not only does the devil in *Genesis B* tempt Eve by referring to Adam's apparent refusal to be loyal to God; he promises that if she will eat the apple, she will have the god-like ability to see the lord's throne<sup>10</sup> and the whole world, and will feel secure in her lord's friendship:

Et bysses ofetes! þonne wurðað þin eagan swa leoht  
 þæt þu meahst swa wide ofer woruld ealle  
 geseon siððan, and selfes stol  
 herran þines, and habban his hylde forð.

(*Genesis* 564-67)

At the same time, this temptation by the devil is wholly consistent with Christian teaching. In *Genesis* iii. 5, the serpent offers Eve the prospect of becoming like a god, and this was naturally followed by later prose writers both in Latin and the vernacular, as for

example Augustine early in the fifth century, and Ælfric at the end of the tenth. The difference in the OE poetic account is that part of the attention focuses on God's throne.<sup>11</sup> Eve's imitativeness thus has two aspects. In her pride she aspires to god-like status, and in so doing she imitates the devil, who also sought to imitate God.

It is clear from surviving Latin and OE texts that the Anglo-Saxons were taught the orthodox lessons concerning the nature, importance, and close relationship of the sins of pride and envy. Alfred's OE version of the *Pastoral Care*<sup>12</sup> from the ninth century teaches that envy and pride reveal themselves in imitation, just as in Satan's case:

Ac sua he wierð self to ðæs onlicnesse ðe awriten is  
 ðæt gesio ælce ofermetto, se is kyning ofer eall ða  
 bearn oferhygde. Se wilnode synderlices ealdordomes,  
 & forsieh ða geferræddene oðerra engla and hira lif,  
 ða he cuað: Ic wille wyrcean min setl on norðdale, &  
 wielle bion gelic ðam hiehstan, ond ða wunderlice dome  
 gewearð ðæt he gearnode mid his agne inngeðonce ðone  
 pytt ðe he on aworpen wearð, ða he hine his agnes  
 ðonces upahof on sua healicne anwald. Butan tweon  
 ðonne se monn oferhyð ðæt he beo gelic oðrum monnum,  
 ðonne bið he gelic ðam wiðerweardan & ðam aworpnan  
 diofule.

At the end of the period the eleventh century *Penitential* of Theodore<sup>13</sup> was still within the patristic tradition when it stated:

"Invidia diaboli," dicit Scriptura, "mors intravit in orbem terrarum;" imitantur autem illum, qui sunt ex parte ejus.  
 ("By the envy of the devil," says Scripture, "death entered into the world;" for those who are of his party imitate him).

The same degree of orthodoxy is also apparent in the *Durham Ritual*.<sup>14</sup> The statement there that the imitation of God is the desirable form of behaviour must be understood in relation to the well-established concept of the sinful state resulting from the imitation of the devil.

Although the sin of Cain reveals itself in a different way from that of Satan, and Adam and Eve, the origins and nature of his sin are the same as those of Satan and Eve. Homilists attribute Cain's murder of Abel to envy, which developed out of his pride in his own worth and dissatisfaction with how he felt he was being treated by God. God's question, "Ubi est Abel frater tuus?" (Gen. iv. 9) was thought by some commentators to provide an opportunity for Cain to repent, but when he persists in sin, adding falsehood to the crime of murder, there is no hope for him.<sup>15</sup> Once he has sinned deliberately and not repented, Cain's spiritual condition is similar

to that of Satan's, and his punishment is likewise similar; perpetual banishment from God's sight:

Ne þearf ic ænigre are wenan  
 on woruldrice, ac ic forworht hæbbe,  
 heofona heahcyning, hyldo þine,  
 lufan and freode; forþon ic lastas sceal  
 wean on wenum wide lecgan . . .  
 . . . . .  
 . . . . . Ic awyrgeð sceal,  
 þeoden, of gesyhðe þinre hweorfan.

(Genesis 1023-35).

He suffers exile from God and humankind, but his social exile, though in itself part of the punishment, is also symbolic of his more serious spiritual alienation.

## II

To the great sinner-exiles of Christian tradition, OE poetry adds the figure of Grendel in *Beowulf*, a descendant of Cain, and an imitator of the devil in a variety of ways. Some of Grendel's imitative characteristics have already been identified by a number of scholars. These characteristics include his general mode of life, his place of habitation, his existence as a social and spiritual exile, and the fact that his attacks are motivated by envy.<sup>16</sup> As J.L. Baird<sup>17</sup> has pointed out, this envy drives him to masquerade as a "healþegn" (142), as an "atol angengea" (165) who has returned to the hall after having been successfully engaged on raids. The normal outcome of such activities is that the retainer should approach the throne, present gifts to his lord, and receive gifts from him in return. But Grendel's imitation of the human order is as empty and perverted as Satan's imitation of the divine. The hall in which Grendel tries to become a þegn is far from being the centre of companionship and joy. It lies "idel ond unnyt" (413) as a result of his incursions, in a manner quite contrary to what was intended when the hall was built. This "healþegn" who cannot approach the "gifstol" (168-69) plunders and rules by force, and even kills, within the hall in which he attempts to set himself up, men from the very *comitatus* that he envies.

Such imitative characteristics are only to be expected of one who is descended from Cain, and who is several times designated by epithets used for the devil.<sup>18</sup> "Deaþscua", describing Grendel in l. 160, is generally agreed to be equivalent to the Latin "umbra mortis", and must be included in this group of epithets, even though this compound is unique in extant OE literature. Most important for this present study is the fact that, in addition to the use of "the shadow of death" for the devil himself in ecclesiastical texts, the phrase is also used in Latin, and in OE prose and poetry for those who are condemned to eternal exile from God's mercy because they are guilty of imitating the devil.

F. Klaeber<sup>19</sup> notes the occurrence of phrases for "the shadow of death" in OE ecclesiastical and homiletic literature, and points to possible biblical sources such as Matt. iv. 16 (a quotation of Isa. ix. 2); Luke i. 79; Jer. xiii. 16; Pss. xxii. 4; xliii. 20; lxxxvii. 7; cvi. 10, 14; Job iii. 5. In connection with Job, he refers to Gregory's interpretation in the *Moralia*:

Per umbram mortis, oblivio debet intelligi; quia sicut mors interimit vitam, ita oblivio exstinguit memoriam. Quia ergo apostata angelus æternæ oblivioni traditur, umbra mortis obscuratur. Dicatur igitur: 'Obscurent eum tenebræ et umbra mortis': id est, sic eum erroris sui cæcitas obruat, ut nequaquam ulterius ad lucem penitentia per divini respectus memoriam resurget. (PL, LXXV, col. 642).

(By the shadow of death, one must understand oblivion; because just as death cuts off life, so oblivion extinguishes memory. Therefore because the apostate angel is given over to eternal oblivion, he is clouded over with the shadow of death. Therefore let it be said: 'Let darkness and the shadow of death cloud him over': that is, so let the blindness of error overwhelm him that he may never again rise up to the light of repentance by God calling him to mind again.)

But later, in his edition of *Beowulf* (p. 134), Klaeber seems less confident of its relationship to ecclesiastical literature, and is more ready to relate it simply to the light/darkness motif. C.L. Wrenn<sup>20</sup> rather favours Klaeber's earlier idea, and summarizes the findings of Cook that "deorc deapscua" (160) and "mistige moras" (162) may echo Jer. xiii. 16, which in some versions has "umbra mortis" and "montem caliginosum". Cook noted that the *Durham Ritual* had "mistig mor" for the latter. In the second edition of *Beowulf* Wrenn cautiously added that the expressions could have arisen independently of biblical influence,<sup>21</sup> but this note of reservation was omitted from Bolton's revision.

Despite the hesitation of some commentators, most seem agreed that "deapscua" is likely to have an ecclesiastical origin. The Latin equivalent, "umbra mortis", would probably have been most familiar to the Anglo-Saxons through the Psalms and Canticles, which would therefore have provided it with contextual associations. In these texts it refers unmistakably to those guilty of mortal sin, and to the damned, who have turned away from God. Phrases such as "deapes scua" and "deapes sceadu", which translate "umbra mortis", are used with exactly the same referents in OE homiletic literature. Similar phrasal variants of the *hapax legomenon* "deapscua" are not common in extant poetry, but where they do occur, they are in contexts of the Christian imagery of exile, and of light and darkness, and are clearly related directly to the use of "umbra mortis" in the Psalms and the Benedictus. In *Christ and Satan*, having explained that the devils cannot approach God or ever escape from their present condition (447-50), the poet states:

Him wæs drihten god  
 wrað geworden, sealde him wites clom,  
 atole to ahte, and egsan gryre,  
 dimne and deorcne *deaðes scuwan*,  
 hatne helle grund. (450-54)

In *Christ* 118 "*deaþes sceaðu*" translates "*umbra mortis*" in the antiphon of the Magnificat for December 21st.:<sup>22</sup>

. . . . . ond þe sylf cyme  
 þæt ðu inleohte þa þe longe ær,  
 þrosme beþeahte ond in þeostrum her,  
 sæton sinneahtes synnum bifealdne  
 deorc *deaþes sceaðu* dreogan sceoldan. (114-18)

"The shadow of death" was clearly a phrase rich with significance, and fairly frequently used. The full range of its significance is explained in detail in Gregory's *Moralia*, but in a passage later than that noted by Klaeber.<sup>23</sup> Gregory gives "*umbra mortis*" three meanings: "*mors carnis*", "*imitatio diaboli*", and "*oblivio mentis*":

*Umbra mortis tripliciter in Scriptura accipitur. In Scriptura enim sacra umbra mortis aliquando oblivio mentis accipitur, aliquando imitatio diaboli, aliquando mors carnis. Umbra enim mortis, oblivio mentis accipitur; quia, ut superius diximus, sicut mors hoc quod interficit, agit ut non sit in vita; ita et oblivio hoc quod intercipit agit ut non sit in memoria. Unde et recte, quia Joannes Hebræorum populo eum, cujus obliti fuerant, Deum prædicare veniebat per Zachariam dicitur: "Illuminare his qui in tenebris et in umbra mortis sedent" (Luc. I, 79). In umbra enim mortis sedere, est a divini amoris notitia in oblivione lassescere. Umbra mortis imitatio antiqui hostis accipitur. Ipse enim quia mortem intulit, mors vocatur. Joanne attestante, qui ait: "Et nomen illi mors" (Apoc. VI, 8). Per umbram igitur mortis ejus imitatio designatur; quia sicut umbra juxta qualitatem corporis ducitur; ita actiones iniquorum de specie imitationis ejus exprimuntur. Unde recte Isaias cum gentiles populos in antiqui hostis cerneret imitatione defecisse, eosque ad veri solis ortum resurgere, quæ certo futura considerat, quasi ex præteritis narrat, dicens: "Sedentibus in tenebris et umbra mortis, lux orta est eis" (Isa. IX, 2). Umbra etiam mortis mors carnis accipitur; quia sicut vera mors est, qua anima separatur a Deo, ita umbra mortis est, qua caro separatur ab anima. Unde recte voce martyrum per Prophetam dicitur: "Humiliasti nos in loco afflictionis, et cooperuit nos umbra mortis" (Psal. XLIII, 20). Quos enim constat non spiritu, sed sola carne mori, nequaquam se vera*

morte, sed umbra dicunt mortis operiri. (PL, LXXV, cols. 652-53).

(The shadow of death is understood three ways in scripture. For in holy scripture the shadow of death is understood sometimes as oblivion of the mind, sometimes as imitation of the devil, sometimes as death of the flesh. For the shadow of death is understood as oblivion of the mind; because, as we have said above, just as death causes what it kills to be no longer in life, so oblivion causes what it seizes to be no longer in memory. And hence, because John was coming to preach to the Hebrew people the God whom they had forgotten, it is justly said by Zacharias: "To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Lk. i. 79). For to sit in the shadow of death is to languish in oblivion, apart from the knowledge of divine love. The shadow of death is taken to mean imitation of the ancient enemy. For he is himself called death because he introduced death. As John is witness, who said: "And his name is death" (Rev. vi. 8). Therefore by the shadow of death is signified the imitating of him; because just as the shadow is shaped according to the character of the body; so the actions of the wicked are expressive of their manner of imitating him. Hence, when Isaiah saw that the Gentiles had fallen away and were imitating the ancient enemy, and that they rose up again at the rising of the true sun, he justly records, as though in the past, what he considered as certain in the future, saying: "A light has arisen for those who were sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Isa. ix. 2). For the shadow of death is understood as the death of the flesh, for just as it is true death whereby the soul is separated from God, so the shadow of death is that whereby the flesh is separated from the soul. Hence it is rightly said by the Prophet in the words of the martyrs: "You have humiliated us in the place of affliction, and the shadow of death has covered us" (Ps. xliii. 20). For it is agreed that those who do not die in the spirit, but only in the flesh, cannot in any way say that they are covered with true death, but with the shadow of death.)

The distinction that Gregory makes between physical death ("mors carnis"), and the far more serious spiritual death ("oblivio mentis"), was not an abstruse, scholarly distinction, but was taught in vernacular homilies. Ælfric makes clear the basic distinction:

Seo sawl soðlice is þæs lichoman lif. and þære sawle lif is god. Gif seo sawul forlæt þonne lichoman þonne swælt seo lichoma. and gif god forlæt þa sawle for ormættum synnum. þonne swælt heo on þam sælran dæle swa þæt heo bið for-loren on þam ecan life. and swa þeah næfre ne ge-endað on þam ecan wyrstum.<sup>24</sup>

his being called "deapscua". In common with other sinners who earn perpetual exile, he feels no remorse for what he does (136-37) and he refuses the opportunity for settlement (154-61). The settlement offered is admittedly a social one, but in view of the fusion between the social and spiritual states of exile seen in the figure of Grendel, it is hard to believe that ll. 136-37 and 154-61 would not have suggested something of the determined resistance to God's offer of mercy shown by Grendel's forbears. The lesson of the homilist was that the sinner on earth remains in a state of exile from the mirth of heaven until reparation is made, and that persistence in this state of sin leads to damnation.<sup>28</sup> The lesson recalls the scene near the beginning of *Beowulf* where Grendel suffers most in his exile when he hears the mirth in the hall (86-90), and the poet's warning in 183-86:

Wa bið þam ðe sceal  
 þurh sliðne nið      salwe bescufan  
 in fyres fæþm,      frofre ne wenan,  
 wihte gewendan!

Grendel is personally damned ("fag wið Goð" (811)), and comes of a race which is alienated from God (1691-93). It would hardly be disputed that his personal spiritual exile is of the same kind, and as complete as that of his sinful predecessors.

But a further, more precise indication that Grendel the "deapscua" experienced "oblivio mentis" may have been intended in the notoriously ambiguous lines 168-69.<sup>29</sup> If "metode" refers to God, as is most commonly argued, and as is implied by the initial capital in most editions, it is most likely that "his" in 169b also refers to God. If we follow Bosworth-Toller<sup>30</sup> in translating "myne" as "love", a possible translation of l. 169b would be, "nor did he [Grendel] know his [God's] love". If instead we follow T.P. Dunning and A.J. Bliss<sup>31</sup> and interpret "myne" as "thought", the translation would be, "nor did he [Grendel] know his [God's] thought". In either case, we arrive at an interpretation of ll. 168-69 which shows Grendel to be suffering from "oblivio mentis". He has rejected God, and has been shut out of his mind, like Satan and Cain. His social exile, in which he suffers so acutely, and which is epitomized by his inability to approach the "gifstol" is, like Cain's social exile, part of God's punishment, and at the same time symbolic of his more serious spiritual alienation.

Lines 168-69 imply that Grendel wished, and probably attempted, to approach the "gifstol". If the spiritual implications of these lines are recognized alongside the social, Grendel's act imitates that of Satan, and reveals the same kind of perversity resulting from pride and envy that made Satan covet the throne of God and, when that imitation failed, made him set up a rival society in hell that inverts what it claims to rival. Neither sinner grasps the essence of the *comitatus* spirit. Both rule by force, both desire the outward manifestations of power, and both are guilty of self-deception. Grendel's perverse, imitative act, so similar in kind to

A rather more sophisticated account is given in one of the anonymous homilies in British Museum MS Cotton Tiberius A III:

Wa la þam mannum þe mid deoflum sculon habban hyra eardungstowe! Þær bið sar butan frofre, and ermba butan are, and weana ma þonne æniges monnes gemet sy þæt hit asecgean mæge, swa hit awriten stondeþ and þus cweden. Se salmscop us sang þysne cwide be deapes onlicnesse and be helle gryre. Ðonne syndon þreo deapes leornod(e) on bocum: an þara deapa bið þæt mon swelte on his synnum; ðonne bið oðer deap þæs lichoman and þære saule gedal; ðonne bið se ðridda deap þæt he bið on helle cwylmed. Þær ne mæg nænig sawl hire waldend herian for þon sare þe hire on siteð. Ðonne sindon þreo lif leornode on bocum be soþfastum monnum. An lif him bið be flæsce, and oðer him bið be Godes willan, and him bið þæt ðride lif on þære towardan worulde mid eallum halgum.<sup>25</sup>

Ælfric, who often deals with this topic, explains that Christ can save men from spiritual death unless they persist in sinning against the Holy Ghost.<sup>26</sup> The distinction between physical and spiritual death was so commonplace in the homilies that it is often referred to simply by qualifying the noun "deað" by "lichamlice" for physical death, and by "ece" for spiritual death. The latter is a state of utter hopelessness, and is what Cain, Satan, and the sinners in hell experience because they cannot come into God's sight, nor approach his throne in the hope of receiving mercy or forgiveness. In the Psalms, those who are forgotten by God are the people who sit in the shadow of death, as in Vulgate Ps. lxxxvii. 6-7, 13. One of the vernacular homilists explains that those cast into hell are those whose names are not written "on ðære liflican bec . . . on þam ecan gemund."<sup>27</sup>

The same concepts are found in OE poetry. In *Christ* and *Elene*, spiritual death and eternal banishment from God take the form of exclusion from his "gemynd", and may be compared with the Gregorian concept of "oblivio mentis":

Nales dryhtnes gemynd  
siþpan gesecað, synne ne aspringað.  
(*Christ* 1536-37)

Gode no syððan  
of ðam morðorhufe in gemynd cumað  
wuldorcyninge, ac hie worpene beoð  
of ðam heaðuwylme in hellegrund,  
torngeniðlan.

(*Elene* 1302-1306)

Grendel likewise experiences "oblivio mentis", and so once again shows his imitative characteristics and the justification for

that of Satan, reveals emphatically his total corruption of spirit, from whatever viewpoint it is judged, and his complete alienation, in body and mind, from the *comitatus* of man and God.

This study of five important figures of evil in OE poetry shows how completely certain Anglo-Saxon poets understood the Christian concept of perverted imitation as a manifestation of evil, and how they utilized secular traditions for its expression. Investigation of the underlying Christian concepts deepens our appreciation of the characterization of these figures, but this does not in any way diminish the importance of the secular concepts of *comitatus* and exile, which are seen to coalesce with the Christian. Response to both traditions is essential if we are to avoid the distortion caused by too exclusive an emphasis on the influence of Christian theology on OE poetry. Such a distortion, found in the work of some modern scholars, is as limiting as that of an earlier period of scholarship, which emphasized the Germanic tradition to the exclusion of the Christian.<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 With the exception of *Beowulf*, OE poetic references and quotations are from *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records: a Collective Edition*, ed. G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, 6 vols. (New York and London, 1931-53). All references to *Beowulf*, unless otherwise stated, are to *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3rd ed. (Boston, 1950).
- 2 "The Self-Deception of Temptation: Beothian Psychology in Genesis B", in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. R.P. Creed (Providence, Rhode Island, 1967), pp. 47-67.
- 3 The statement that they are cut off by their own will is an addition to the poet's paraphrase of Matt. xxv. 41.
- 4 *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholicici, or Homilies of Elfric*, ed. B. Thorpe, I (London, 1844), p. 500.
- 5 Andreas 1689-94, 1702-05; *Beowulf* 183-86; *Christ* 1536-40, 1609-19; *Christ and Satan* 48-50, 114-24, 137-39, 167-71, 373-78, 395-97, 447-50, 632-33; *Elene* 201-11, 759-71, 939-52, 1302-06; *Exhortation to Christian Living* 25-8; *Genesis* 1023-24; *Guðlac* 479-80, 612-17; *Judith* 112-21; *Solomon and Saturn* 462-76.
- 6 *Interrogationes et Responsiones in Genesin*, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, C, col. 517.
- 7 *Moralium Libri sive Expositio in Librum B. Job*, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, LXXVI, col. 740. See also his comment on Isa. xiv. 12-15 (PL, LXXVI, col. 1215). All subsequent references are to this text.
- 8 *De Civitate Dei*, ed. B. Dombart, and A. Kalb, *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, XLVIII (Turnholt, 1955), p. 434. All subsequent references are to this text.
- 9 "Genesis B and its Background", *RES*, NS 14 (1963), 7-9. See also R. Woolf, "The Fall of Man in Genesis B and the *Mystère d'Adam*", in *Studies in Old English Literature in Honor of Arthur G. Brodeur*, ed. S.B. Greenfield (Eugene, 1963), pp. 187-99.
- 10 For a possible background to this temptation, see J. Vickrey, "The Vision of Eve in Genesis B", *Speculum* 44 (1969), 86-102.
- 11 This survives in the ME "Norwich Play B" in *Non-Cycle Plays and Fragments*, ed. N. Davis, EETS, SS1 (1970), p. 14, "To be as God indede and in his place to sytt, / Thereto for to agre my lust conceyve somewhat".
- 12 *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, ed. H. Sweet, EETS, OS 45 (1871), pp. 111-13.
- 13 *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England*, ed. B. Thorpe, (London, 1840), p. 280.
- 14 *Rituale Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*, ed. A.H. Thompson and U. Lindelöf, Surtees Society, 140 (Durham and London, 1927), p. 12.

- 15 O.F. Emerson, "Legends of Cain, especially in Old and Middle English", *PMLA* 21 (1906), 869.
- 16 F. Klaeber, "Die christlichen Elemente im *Beowulf*", *Anglia* 35, NF 23 (1912), 257-59; M.P. Hamilton, "The Religious Principle in *Beowulf*", *PMLA* 61 (1946), 315, 320; K. Malone, "Grendel and His Abode", in *Studia Philologica in honorem L. Spitzer*, ed. A.G. Hatcher and K.L. Selig (Berne, 1958), pp. 297-308; O.F. Emerson, "Grendel's Motive in Attacking Heorot", *MLR* 16 (1921), 113-19. The blurring of distinctions between Grendel and Satan in *Beowulf* 99-101 is pointed out by C.J.E. Ball, "*Beowulf* 99-101", *N & Q* 216, NS 18 (1971), 163.
- 17 "'for metode': *Beowulf* 169", *ES* 49 (1968), 418-23. See also Baird's paper on the poet's fusion in the figure of Grendel of the elements of man and monster, social and spiritual exile, "Grendel the Exile", *NM* 67 (1966), 375-81.
- 18 Klaeber, *Anglia* 35, 250-56.
- 19 Klaeber, *Anglia* 35, 255.
- 20 Ed. *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment*, 3rd ed., rev. W.F. Bolton (London, 1973), p. 103.
- 21 Ed. *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment*, 2nd ed., rev. (London, 1958), p. 188.
- 22 The full text of the antiphon, as given in *The Christ of Cynewulf. A Poem in Three Parts*, ed. A.S. Cook (Boston, 1900), p. 88, is, "O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol iustitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris et umbra mortis."
- 23 For other similar explanations of "umbra mortis" in the *Moralia*, see *PL*, LXXV, col. 912; LXXVI, cols. 62-3, 672, 675.
- 24 *Elfric's Lives of the Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, EETS, OS 76, 82 (1881, 1885; reprinted as one vol., 1966), I, p. 18.
- 25 Enid M. Raynes, "Unpublished Old English Homilies Mainly from MSS. C.C.C.C. 188, Hatton 114, 115 and Junius 121, together with Vercelli Homily IX with variants from other MSS. in Oxford and Cambridge", D.Phil. Diss. Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford 1955, pp. 58-9. On the evidence of a parallel passage from the Vercelli Book, it is clear that after "cweden" is omitted the quotation of Ps. vi. 6 (Raynes, p. 105), "Quoniam non est in morte qui memor sit tui: in inferno autem quis confitebitur tibi". It is one of the Psalms that express the concept of "oblivio mentis".
- 26 *Homilies of Elfric: A Supplementary Collection*, ed. J.C. Pope, EETS, OS 259 (1967), I, pp. 319-22.
- 27 Raynes, p. 37.
- 28 *Wulfstan*, ed. A.S. Napier, Sammlung englischer Denkmäler, 4 (Berlin, 1883), p. 204.
- 29 Discussion has centred around four problems: (a) whether "he" is Grendel or Hroðgar; (b) the meaning of "gretan"; (c) whether the "gifstol" is

God's or Hroðgar's; (d) the meaning of "ne his myne wisse". It is now generally accepted that "he" refers to Grendel, and that "gretan" means "to approach". A summary of arguments was provided by E.V.K. Dobbie, in *Beowulf and Judith*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 4 (New York and London, 1953), pp. 125-26. Dobbie omitted the useful comments of O.F. Emerson, *PMLA* 21 (1906), 863 and of M.P. Hamilton, *PMLA* 61 (1946), 321. Comment on these lines since 1953 includes, in addition to the papers by Baird: A.E. Du Bois, "Gifstol", *MLN* 69 (1954), 546-49; M. Pepperdene, "Grendel's Geis", *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 85 (1955), 188-92; R. Howren, "A Note on Beowulf 168-69", *MLN* 71 (1956), 317-18; A.G. Brodeur, *The Art of Beowulf* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959), pp. 200-205; N.D. Isaacs, "The Convention of Personification in Beowulf", in *Old English Poetry: Fifteen Essays*, ed. R.P. Creed (Providence, Rhode Island, 1967), pp. 234-35; M.E. Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of Beowulf* (London, 1970), p. 109; B. Cox, *Cruces of Beowulf* (The Hague and Paris, 1971), pp. 56-79; A.A. Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry*, (New Haven and London, 1972), pp. 185-87; and Wrenn, *Beowulf*, 3rd ed., rev. Bolton, pp. 64-5, 103-104. S.B. Greenfield, " 'Gifstol' and Goldhoard in Beowulf", in *Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope*, ed. R.B. Burlin and E.B. Irving, Jr. (Toronto, 1974), pp. 107-17.

<sup>30</sup> J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (1898-1921; reprint Oxford U.P., 1972), s.v. *myne*.

<sup>31</sup> Eds. *The Wanderer*, Methuen's Old English Library (London, 1969), pp. 61-5.

<sup>32</sup> I should like to thank Mr S.A.J. Bradley of the University of York, and my colleagues at Leeds for their many helpful suggestions in the preparation of this article.