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University of Leeds
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BEOWULF AND THE WORLD OF HEROIC ELEGY

By RAYMOND J.S. GRANT

Beowulf has justifiably attracted much critical opinion, some of which is valuable, some irrelevant, some absorbing, some tedious. I should like now to give some further reconsideration to the poem itself as it survives in BM MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv. I propose to discuss the text as a unified work of art by one poet and with a Christian colouring which is no mere interpolation. By "the poet" I mean the author who gave the poem its present form and heroico-elegiac tone.

The excavations at Sutton Hoo in 1939 and the subsequent work of numismatists dated the ship-burial as about 650-60 AD (although following re-excavation the current dating is somewhat earlier, around 625-30),² and this strengthened the impression that the poem was written in the age of Bede (c. 672-735). Dorothy Whitelock³ has shown that Lawrence, Tolkien, Chambers, Klaeber and Girvan all argue for a date around 700; she herself, however, argues persuasively that a date in the eighth century, even in the late eighth century, is to be preferred on cultural, religious and historical grounds. A compromise such as c. 750 serves my purposes well enough. Although scholarly disagreements also centre round the poem's sources, origin, dialect, textual readings and historicity of persons,⁴ these are irrelevant to the poem as a work of literature.

Looking at the text itself, *Beowulf* takes us back to an age of heroes and valiant deeds. We behold a hero in action, moving on an elemental plane, combatting the powers of darkness, seeking to define his existence as a human being, performing deeds of valour with an epic grandeur that is nevertheless described in elegiac mood. Beowulf is a Geat, a hero set in the heroic past of the Anglo-Saxons in their original homeland among their Germanic forebears, yet there is little point in a map of seventh-century Scandinavia, for the background against which symbolic heroic deeds are performed is an equally symbolic one - Middanġeard, Middle Earth. The main action concerns Beowulf's slaying of two supernatural beings, Grendel and his Dam, in Denmark, and later, in his old age, of the fire-dragon in his own kingdom. The poet alludes also to many other stories from the heroic age, two of which, the Scylding dynastic struggles and the Geats' wars with the Swedes and Franks, are given special

prominence, but the main action, which is to be viewed against a traditional, heroic, pseudo-historical background, is fantastic, elemental and primal, and can also be viewed artistically and philosophically against the archetypal backcloth of Middle Earth.

The cosmology of *Beowulf* is the normal Germanic one of the human world as an enclosure defended against Chaos. In Norse sources, better preserved than Old English ones on this point,⁵ we read of the human Miðgarðr, contrasted with Ásgarðr, the citadel of the Æsir rising in the centre of the circle of Miðgarðr, and with Útgarðr, the outer circle, the icy barrier of the world, the home of the giants, one remove from Niflheimr and the gulfs of Chaos. In *Beowulf*, the work of a Christian poet, there is no Ásgarðr, but we deal with the same Middle Earth of man and listen with the heroes to the sea crashing on the rocks and the surges of Chaos booming on the dykes of the world. As J.R.R. Tolkien⁶ wrote:

. . . we may still, against his great scene, hung with tapestries woven of ancient tales of ruin, see the *hæleð* walk. When we have read his poem, as a poem, rather than as a collection of episodes, we perceive that he who wrote *hæleð under heofenum* may have meant in dictionary terms 'heroes under heaven', or 'mighty men upon earth', but he and his hearers were thinking of the *eormengrund*, the great earth, ringed with *garsecg*, the shoreless sea, beneath the sky's inaccessible roof; whereon, as in a little circle of light about their halls, men with courage as their stay went forward to that battle with the hostile world and the offspring of the dark which ends for all, even the kings and champions, in defeat. That even this 'geography', once held as a material fact, could now be classed as a mere folk-tale affects its value very little. It transcends astronomy. Not that astronomy has done anything to make the island seem more secure or the outer seas less formidable.

This is the primal world of nature, and early interpretations of *Beowulf* were along the lines of nature myth. K. Müllenhof⁷ tells us that Grendel and his Dam represent the North Sea flooding the coastal regions in the spring while Beowulf represents a friendly divinity who seeks to combat their onslaughts; summer peace is seen in Beowulf's long reign over the Geats, the attacks of autumn are seen in the fire-dragon and the cold of winter is seen in the hero's death. Chaos then is come again.

While it is too simplistic to view the poem thus purely as nature myth, there is no doubt that primitive myths of creation and of the cosmic battle between Chaos and Righteousness are behind some of the symbolic patterns of *Beowulf*. F. Klaeber⁸ points us to the landscape of *Beowulf* in his introduction:

Elements of nature are introduced as a background for human action or as symbols of sentiment. Nightfall,

dawn, the advent of spring signalize new stages in the narrative. The storm on the wintry ocean accompanies the struggle of the courageous swimmers. The swirl of the blood-stained lake tells of deadly conflict (847 ff., 1422, 1593 ff.). The funeral ship is covered with ice (33), and frost-bound trees hang over the forbidding water (1363). The moors of the dreary desert, steep stone-banks, windy headlands, mist and darkness are fit surroundings for the lonely, wretched stalkers of mystery. 'Joyless' (821) is their abode. Strikingly picturesque and emotional in quality is the one elaborate landscape picture representing the Grendel lake (1357 ff.), which conveys all the horror of the somber scenery and forcefully appeals to our imagination - a justly celebrated masterpiece of English nature poetry.

In *Beowulf*, then, Chaos and Unreason are represented by images of fire, the sea, and darkness, all encroaching upon the land and the light, upon the created human world.

Let us first consider the image of fire. In Old Norse and Germanic mythologies, the Ragnarøkkr or Götterdämmerung - the Twilight of the Gods - is attended by fire; Surtr, the fire-god, raises his flaming sword, and the earth and the heavens are consumed by discreating fire.⁹ In the Christianized *Beowulf*, fire stands for hell-fire and the Apocalypse; we are told of the Danes:

	wā bió þām ðe sceal	
þurh sliðne nið	sāwle bescūfan	
in fýres fæþm,	frōfre ne wēnan	
wihte gewendan!		(ll. 183-6)

When Grendel arrives in Heorot to devour the sleeping Geats, fire flares in his gaze:

	Rape æfter þon	
on fāgne flōr	fēond treddode,	
ēode yrre-mōd;	him of ēagum stōd	
ligge gelīcost	lēcht unfāger.	(ll. 724-7)

By defeating Grendel, *Beowulf* purges Heorot of the forces of destruction, if only for a while - we are made conscious that Heorot will eventually be consumed by flames in the fatal feud with the Heathobards (ll. 81-5). In the underwater cave of Grendel and his Dam, a flame burns perpetually, by the light of which *Beowulf* perceives Grendel's mother (ll. 1516-17); the dragon slain by Sigemund (l. 897) melts in its own fiery heat, and *Beowulf*'s final enemy, who wounds him mortally, is a fire-dragon. Finally, *Beowulf* himself is consumed by flames - the forces of Chaos which he was able to stave off for so long finally have their way with the hero:

Him $\delta\bar{a}$ gegiredan G \bar{e} ata l \bar{e} ode
 \bar{a} d on eor \bar{o} an unw \bar{a} cl \bar{i} cne,
 helm/[um] behongen, hilde-bordum,
 beorhtum byrnum, sw \bar{a} h \bar{e} b \bar{e} na was;
 \bar{a} legdon $\delta\bar{a}$ t \bar{o} middes m \bar{a} rne p \bar{e} oden
 h \bar{a} le \bar{o} h \bar{i} ofende, hl \bar{a} ford l \bar{e} ofne.
 Ongunnon p \bar{a} on beorge b \bar{a} l-f \bar{y} ra m \bar{a} st
 w \bar{i} gend weccan wudu-r \bar{e} c \bar{a} st \bar{a} h
 sweart ofer swio \bar{o} ole, sw \bar{o} gende l \bar{e} g,
 w \bar{o} pe bewunden -- wind-blond gel \bar{a} g --
 o \bar{o} p \bar{a} t h \bar{e} $\delta\bar{a}$ b \bar{a} n-h \bar{u} s gebrocen h \bar{a} fde,
 h \bar{a} t on hre \bar{o} re. (ll. 3137-48)

The next archetypal image is the sea, which is inhabited by Grendel and his mother, by vicious sea-monsters and by the giants who were destroyed in the Flood of *Genesis* (cf. vi. 4, 12, 17), reference to which is made in the inscription engraved on the blade of the ancient sword which Beowulf brings from the cave of Grendel's Dam:

Hr \bar{o} \bar{o} g \bar{a} r ma \bar{e} lode, hylt sc \bar{e} awode,
 ealde l \bar{a} fe. On $\delta\bar{a}$ m was \bar{o} r writen
 fyrn-gewinnes, sy \bar{o} pan fl \bar{o} d ofsl \bar{o} h,
 gifen g \bar{e} otende, g \bar{i} ganta cyn;
 fr \bar{e} cne gef \bar{e} rdon; p \bar{a} t was fremde p \bar{e} od
 \bar{e} cean Dryhtne; him p \bar{a} s ende-l \bar{e} an
 purh wateres wylm Waldend sealde. (ll. 1687-93)

It is in the waters that Beowulf fights monsters in the company of Breca. Unferth,¹⁰ whose name means "Un-peace", "Discord", is here a Chaos figure, giving a false account of Beowulf's swimming-contest with Breca (ll. 506-24). Beowulf, in a long description (ll. 530-81), gives the correct version of the story and tells how he slew sea-monsters by night. Beowulf thus establishes his credentials as a hero and is accorded the hero-worship he deserves, just as in the *Odyssey* Book VIII Odysseus, the guest of the Phaeacians, is insulted on purpose by Euryalus while observing an athletic contest and is thus given an opportunity of showing his mettle.¹¹

It is, then, the duty of heroes in this mythical, archetypal world to combat evil beasts in the waters. Beowulf battles with the sea-beast, Grendel's Dam, in the mere; the wounded Grendel goes home to the waters; Hrothgar's guards watch the sea, for it is thence attacks come, not from the land. And when Beowulf is buried after being consumed by fire, it is beside the sea.

The third archetypal image of Chaos is darkness. When we first meet Grendel, we are given a description of his origin from Cain, the original murderer and begetter of giant broods, then see him setting off for Heorot in the darkness (ll. 115-17); he keeps up his attacks for twelve years, in the night (ll. 159-63). In like manner, the fire-dragon, infuriated by the theft of a goblet from

his barrow, waits for night in order to take vengeance:

Hord-weard onbād
 earfoðlice, oððæt æfen cwōm.
 Wæs ðā gebolgen beorges hyrde,
 wolde se lāða līge forgyldan
 drinc-fæt dýre. Ðā wæs dæg sceacen
 wyrme on willan; nō on wealle læ[n]g
 biðan wolde, ac mid bæle fōr,
 fýre gefýsed. (11. 2302-09)

These evil and monstrous deeds have to take place at night, for such evil cannot stand the light of common day, the light of God.

Light is used throughout the poem as an image of creation. Immediately after the building of Heorot, the scop sings a song of creation, a song about God's rescuing of Middle Earth from the waters and lighting it with the sun and the moon to create life:

Dā sē ellen-gāst earfoðlice
 þrāge gebolde, sē þe in þýstrum bād,
 þæt hē dōgora gehwām drēam gehýrde
 hlūðne in healle þær wæs hearpan swēg,
 swutol sang scopes. Sægde, sē þe cūþe
 frumsceaft fīra feorran reccan,
 cwæð þæt sē Ælmihtiga eorðan worhte,
 wlite-beorhtne wang, swā wæter bebūgeð:
 gesette sige-hrēpig sunnan ond mōnan
 lēoman tō lēohte land-būendum,
 ond gefræt Wade foldan scēatas
 leomum ond lēafum; lif ēac gesceop
 cynna gehwylcum, þāra ðe cwice hwyrfab. (11. 86-98)

This is the usual picture of the Anglo-Saxon world, painted by means of images of light and of warmth, fire under control. It is a commonplace to compare this passage with the famous passage in the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*¹² containing the description of life presented to Edwin of Northumbria by one of his thegns in 627 in favour of the new religion being preached by Paulinus:

Dyslic me is gesewen, þu cyning, þis andwearde
 lif manna on earðan to wiðmetenesse þære tide, þe
 us uncuð is, swylc swa þu æt swæsendum sitte mid þinum
 ealdormannum 7 þegnum on wintertide, 7 sie fýr onælæd
 7 þin heall gewyrmed, 7 hit rine 7 sniwe 7 styrme ute;
 cume an spearwa 7 hrædlice þæt hus þurhfleo, cume þurh
 oþre duru in, þurh oþre ut gewite. Hwæt he on þa tid,
 þe he inne bið, ne bið hrinen mid þy storme þæs wintres;
 ac þæt bið an eagan bryhtm 7 þæt læsste fæc, ac he sona
 of wintra on þone winter eft cymeð. Swa þonne þis
 monna lif to medmiclum fæce ætyweð; hwæt þar foregange,

oððe hwæt þær æfterfylige, we ne cunnun. Forðon gif
þeos lar owiht cuðlicre 7 gerisenlicre brenge, þæs
weorpe is þæt we þære fylgen.

So, in Heorot, light, warmth and a hymn of creation stand for a human society attuned, for a brief while at least, to cosmic order and God's will. Heorot is splendid, decked with gold; its radiance now gleams over many lands. It is a Jerusalem on earth, such as is described in *Solomon and Saturn*; similar descriptions of Biblical cities occur in *Genesis A*, *Judith* and *Andreas*.¹³ In *Beowulf*, the treasure shines; the standard which Wiglaf takes from the fire-dragon's barrow to the dying Beowulf, reminiscent of that first standard by which Scyld is buried, shines as an image of kingship giving light to men. Irving¹⁴ points to the use of light as an image of human life and hall-joy in *The Wanderer*, and the archetypes of such images are those in *Genesis* i., 3, 4, 9 and 10.

Let us consider how these images of Chaos and Order operate throughout *Beowulf*. The circle of light representing human life is constantly under attack by Chaos - there is frost on the funeral boat that is to carry Scyld back to the waters whence he came; there is frost on the bough of the tree by the mere; Grendel, his Dam and the fire-dragon attack the land and the hall of light in the darkness, trying to extend the field of influence of Chaos; Grendel's Dam drags Beowulf down into the depths of the mere; the episode of Finn has treachery in the dark; winter and storm oppress Hengest and prevent his taking action; and the battle of Ravenswood traps the lordless Geats for a long, miserable night.

Beowulf's first journey to Denmark and his return thence are both easy because they take place during the day, on the surface of the water; the hero is described as *lazu-cræftig mon* (l. 209) nevertheless. The land reached after the first voyage is a splendid one, with a fine road leading to the shining Heorot.

In the Breca episode, Beowulf is assailed by sea-monsters, storm, wind, and darkness:

Ða wit ætsomne on sǣ wǣron
fīf nihta fyrst, oppæt unc flōd tōdrāf,
wado weallende, wedera cealdost,
nīpende niht, ond norþan wind
heaðo-grim onðhwearf. Hrēo wǣron yþa. (ll. 544-8)

Note the images of cold, darkness and tumultuous ocean, followed by the description of victory:

ac on mergenne mēcum wunde
be yð-lāfe uppe lāgon,
sweordum āswefede, þæt syðþan nā
ymb brontne forð brim-līðende
lāde ne letton. Lēoht ēastan cōm,

beorht bēacen Godes; brimu swaþredon
 þæt ic sǣ-næssas gesēon mihte,
 windige weallas. (11. 565-72)

The sun comes up, after the battle, and the seas calm.

Similarly, the mere where Grendel and his mother dwell (11.1357-76) is worth noting,¹⁵ with its impression of water, wind and darkness, with fire glowing under the water; the hart (OE *heorot*) will not enter the waters - the light of the hall (*Heorot*) or of God will not yet penetrate Chaos. When Beowulf jumps in, he is assailed by all sorts of sea-beasts seeking to rend him, the worst of them all being, of course, Grendel's Dam. When Beowulf slays her, however,

Līxte sē lēoma lēoht inne stōd,
 efne swā of hefene hādre scīneð
 rodores candel. (11. 1570-2)

When Beowulf swims back up through the waters, they are ordinary waters once more and now purged of monsters. The whole picture of the mere is reminiscent of the lake of Hell in the apocryphal *Visio Pauli* (and in the vernacular version of the *Visio Pauli* contained in the seventeenth Blickling Homily of the tenth century)¹⁶ and the parallel confirms the interpretation of this part of *Beowulf* - Beowulf has harrowed Hell.

wāron yð-gebland eal gefǣlsod,
 ēacne eardas, þā sē ellor-gāst
 oflēt līf-dagas ond þas lānan gesceaft. (11. 1620-2)

To emphasize this, we learn:

þā þæt sweord ongan
 æfter heapo-swāte hilde-gicelum,
 wīg-bil wanian. þæt wæs wundra sum,
 þæt hit eal gemealt īse gelīcost,
 ðonne forstes bend Fæder onlāteð
 onwindeð wāl-rāpas, sē gewæld hafað
 sǣla ond mǣla; þæt is sōð Metod. (11. 1605-11)

When Beowulf and the Geats ride back from the mere after Grendel's flight, morning joy pervades the poem, and when Beowulf sails home again to the land of the Geats, the sun again shines brightly.

In this dark world of *Beowulf*, then, the function of a hero is to aid God in his maintenance of creation. God's powers are strangely limited in this poem; we have references to the Old Testament, but not to the New Testament except for the *Apocalypse*. D. Whitelock has argued that such a limited position is unlikely since conversions usually begin with the major doctrines of New Testament Christianity and pass later to the detailed stories of the Old Testament. Yet

Beowulf does not mention Christ at all, let alone the great Christian dogmas of the Incarnation, Passion, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Salvation of Mankind.¹⁷ K. Sisam has pointed out that the Old English taste was for the Old Testament and *Revelations*; Bede tells us that when Caedmon sang the first-ever Anglo-Saxon religious poem at Whitby, he sang further of *Genesis* and of the future judgment as well as of the life of Christ.¹⁸ It is to the point to consider to which parts of scripture the *Beowulf* poet has restricted himself, and why.

The Anglo-Saxons were almost obsessed, in their homiletic writings and poems, with the Day of Judgment and the ways of death of men who have gone before. Lines 80-4 of *The Wanderer*, for example, list the ways of death, and similar passages occur in four Old English homilies.¹⁹ They are all based on the Biblical account of the Apocalypse:

And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and
death and hell gave up their dead that were in
them; and they were judged every one according to
their works.

[*Apocalypse* xx. 13]

The New Testament continues with a note of hope:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes:
and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor
crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former
things are passed away.

[*Apocalypse* xxi. 4]

But until that Day, the powers of darkness will prevail, and it is precisely these powers mentioned in the *Apocalypse* that *Beowulf* must combat. The circle of light that is human life is constantly under attack by the powers of Chaos and darkness, and the hero fends them off as well as he can, purging Heorot and Grendel's mere, fighting monsters in the waters, harrowing Hell in order that God's light may shine the more clearly upon His creation.

But man appears on earth, almost by accident, for a short time only. At the end of the poem, the images of Chaos all turn upon *Beowulf*: a fire-dragon flying by night brings fire to the land, fire which eventually devours the hero's corpse; the only light comes from the treasure of an earthly king and will not succour the dying hero; and the land he dies on is a headland near the sea. In a world where God is little more than *wyrd*, nothing is left for the hero save death.²⁰ *Beowulf*'s last action is to command that his barrow be built on the headland as a beacon to guide other mariners across the ocean.

In a world which knows not the Christ who walks upon the waters, who preaches peace and mercy, who makes gentle jokes about little sparrows or the lilies of the field, life is brief and transitory -

lif is lāne. This is the true theme of the poem, and underlies its entire elegiac aspect. For example, in the Finnsburg episode, the reference to the return of spring is not trite, but vital:

holm storme wēol,
 won wið winde; winter ȳpe belēac
 Is-gebinde, oþðæt oþer cōm
 gēar in geardas, swā nū gýt dō/i]ð. (ll. 1131-34)

Whatever men do in the slaughter-stained winter, the cycle of the seasons is not at all disturbed. The regular order of nature is not affected by monsters or *by men* - that is the pity of it.

It is, I think, valuable in studying this poem of monsters and men to consider their functions in turn, to view them against the background of the heroic world I have delineated and then attempt a final assessment of the poem.

Any study of the archetypal imagery of *Beowulf* must come to grips with the problem of the monsters and what they represent. The poem has come under attack in the past because of its concentration on monsters when in actual fact monsters are precisely what the poet chose to write on. The attack was launched by W.P. Ker:²¹

In construction it is curiously weak, in a sense preposterous; for while the main story is simplicity itself, the merest commonplace of heroic legend, all about it, in the historic allusions, there are revelations of a whole world of tragedy, plots different in import from that of *Beowulf*, more like the tragic themes of Iceland. Yet with this radical defect, a disproportion that puts the irrelevances in the centre and the serious things on the outer edges, the poem of *Beowulf* is unmistakably heroic and weighty. The thing itself is cheap; the moral and the spirit of it can only be matched among the noblest authors.

Tolkien quotes the charge made by R.W. Chambers²² in his discussion of the Ingeld allusion:

Nothing [Chambers says] could better show the disproportion of *Beowulf* which 'puts the irrelevances in the centre and the serious things on the outer edges', than this passing allusion to the story of Ingeld. For in this conflict between plighted troth and the duty of revenge we have a situation which the old heroic poets loved, and would not have sold for a wilderness of dragons.

C.S. Lewis,²³ too, seizes on this point:

Hengest, who ought to have been the Aeneas of our epic if the poet had had Virgil's notion of an epic subject, is mentioned only parenthetically.

All such critics seem to regret the fact that the *Beowulf* poet has not told some of the heroic tales mentioned in *Widsith* or *Deor* instead of talking at length about monsters. Their question is, 'Why did he not tell the whole Scylding story and not put the irrelevant monsters to the outer edges?' To sum up, they assume, of course, that what is important to them was what was important to the poet; the real problem, surely, is to decide what the poet's purpose was.

Tolkien's famous paper is very important in this regard, for it was the first strong claim that the main theme of *Beowulf* is the important one and that the background has been kept, quite correctly, in the background. One must suspend disbelief in monsters when reading *Beowulf* and accept that the poet is *not* telling a fairy-story but treating of a theme worth taking trouble over. In a world lacking our modern communications and our scientific knowledge, and which seems to be centred on a tiny explored area surrounded by forests and wastes, the Anglo-Saxons might well peer fearfully into the darkness and imagine all sorts of monsters lurking in the shadows.

Once again, the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*²⁴ is helpful. In Book III, Æthelwald of Northumbria gives Bishop Cælin land on which to erect a monastery:

Ða gefultmode se biscop þæs cyninges willan, 7 him
 stowe geceas mynster to getimbrigenne in heawum
 morum uppe, in þam wæs má gesegen sceaðena deagolnesse
 7 wildeora fernisse þonne monna eardungstow. Ða
 æfter Esaies witedome, in þam cleofum, þe ær dracon
 eardodon, wære úpyrnende grownes hreodes 7 rixa:
 þæt is to ongeotonne, þætte acende wæron wæstmas
 godra dæda, þær ær oðpe wildeor eardedon oððe mæn
 wunedon wildeorlice lifigan.

This is allegory, but a less sophisticated people would take it literally. Similarly, in Felix's mid-eighth-century Latin *Life of St. Guthlac*, translated into Old English in the 11th century, Guthlac goes to the fens on the Granta River near Cambridge in emulation of the Christian martyrs setting off into the desert, and he is assaulted by portents and terrors of unknown shape, by monsters and the phantoms of demons; men could not inhabit an island there 'on account of the unknown monsters of the wasteland and terrors of diverse shapes'.²⁵ Conversion to Christianity did not kill belief in monsters, but then, why should it?²⁶ It is not education so much as the spread of settlements that eventually killed belief in

monsters. The poet probably set his tale in Denmark and the land of the Geats to lend verisimilitude to his monsters through distance in the same way as later ages were able to conceive of Dracula and Frankenstein in places remote from civilisation such as Transylvania.

It is worth considering for a few moments the contents of the *Beowulf* manuscript, BM Cotton Vitellius A. xv.²⁷ It starts with the latter part of a homily on St. Christopher, who is described in the Latin original as twelve cubits high and in the Anglo-Saxon version as twelve fathoms! He is not only a giant, but a monster with a dog's head. The *Old English Martyrology*²⁸ tells us that 'he had a dog's head, and his locks were extraordinarily long, and his eyes gleamed as bright as the morning star, and his teeth were as sharp as a boar's tusks.'

Christopher is thus described as one of the race of dog-headed cannibals, the *Cynocephali*, and the *healfhundingas* are also dealt with in the next two (prose) works in the manuscript, *The Wonders of the East* and *Alexander's Letter to Aristotle*.²⁹ A lively interest in monsters is therefore continued in *Beowulf*. The history of Beowulf's lord, Hygelac, in the (eighth-century?) *Liber Monstrorum*³⁰ helps to confirm this conjecture:

Concerning King Huiglaucus of the Getae, and his amazing hugeness.

Now there are also these monsters of amazing hugeness, namely, King Huiglaucus, who ruled the Getae and was slain by the Franks. Even when he was twelve years old, no horse could carry him. His bones are preserved on an island in the Rhine, where it flows into the sea, and are shown as a prodigy to people who come from afar.³¹

It would distort *Beowulf* to take this idea of Hygelac as a monster too far, but there is surely in BM MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv and in this description of Hygelac sufficient to suggest that the manuscript was compiled by someone interested in the theme of monsters.

Granted the suspension of disbelief and granted a genuine belief in monsters by the audience of *Beowulf*, one must ask, 'Why are there monsters and dragons in a divinely-created world?' The poet is surely attempting to answer the one great problem of philosophy - the existence of evil in the world.

The Cotton gnomic poem³² tells us:

Draca sceal on hlāwe,
frōd, frætsum wlanc.

_ byrs sceal on fenne gewunian
ana innan lande.

The *Beowulf* dragon thus runs true to type, for he is old, likes treasure and stays in a barrow. On the other hand, Grendel is a *þyr*s and also runs true to type, living in the fens and feeling alone. The poet of a Christian era would have to explain to his audience how such animals came about in a Christian creation, and it is therefore no accident that early in the poem, just after the introduction relating who the Scyldings were, the scop sings a song of creation in Heorot. Human happiness of this sort would annoy any self-respecting monster, for spirits who lurk in darkness envy human happiness, but we notice that Grendel does not simply attack Heorot because he is the archetypal party-pooper; he attacks when he hears a song of creation. This is quite deliberate on the part of the poet; other bards in the poem sing of the heroes of the past, but this scop sings of creation, thus indicating that the Danes are Christians and that it is *this* that annoys Grendel:

Ðā sē ellen-gāst earfoðlice
 þrāge geþolode, sē þe in þystrum bād,
 þæt hē dōgora gehwām drēam gehyrde
 hlūdne in healle; þār wæs hearpan swēg,
 swutol sang scopes. Sægde, sē þe cūpe
 frumsceaft fīra feorran reccean,
 cwæð þæt sē Ælmihtiga eorðan worhte,
 wlite-beorhtne wang, swā wæter bebūgeð:
 gesette sige-hrēþig sunnan ond mōnan
 lēoman tō lēohte land-būendum,
 ond gefræt Wade foldan scēatas
 leomum ond lēafum; līf ēac gesceōp
 cynna gehwylcum, þāra ðe cwide hwyrfap. (ll. 85-98)

This is based ultimately on the Vulgate version of *Genesis* i. 20 and 30, and this is the question stated directly - God made all creatures that move alive and thought it good; the monsters are not good, so God did not make them. Where, then, did they come from?

The early English church offered three answers to the problem. The first is based on an early interpretation of *Genesis* vi. 2 by Justin Martyr, who took the words *fili*i dei to refer to the fallen angels. According to this view, the fallen angels produced demons and evil broods; the Flood destroyed their bodies, but their spirits lived on. In *Guthlac A* the saint struggles with demons in his fenland retreat, and the demons are described as the descendants of Lucifer, the warriors of the ancient enemy, who had been using the area as a rest-home. In *Guthlac B* the saint's tormentors are devils, sometimes in the form of beasts, sometimes in human form, sometimes dragons.³³ This explanation, however, it not used by the *Beowulf* poet.

The second, the view of the *Beowulf* poet, is that the monsters were the brood of Cain, the archetypal murderer. This was the view of the Irish church, and it was Irish monks who first converted the English in the north.³⁴ So, having introduced us to the story of

Genesis and creation in the song sung in *Heorot*, the poet introduces us to the first villain of the poem, Grendel:

Wæs sē grimma gāst Grendel hāten,
 mære mearc-stapa, sē þe mōras hēold,
 fen ond fāsten; fīfel-cynnes eard
 won-sālī wer weardode hwīle,
 sipðan him scyppend forscriften hæfde
 in Caines cynne -- þone cwealm gewræc
 ēce Drihten, þæs þe hē Ābel slōg.
 Ne gefeah hē þære fāhōe, ac hē hine feor forwræc,
 Metod for þy mæne, man-cynne fram.
 nō hē þone gif-stōl grētan mōste,
 mārþum for Metode, nē his myne wisse.
 Ðanon untýdras ealle onwōcon,
 ectenas ond ylfe ond orcnē-as,
 swylce gīgantas, þā wió Gode wunnon
 lange þræge; hē him óæs lēan forgeald.

(ll. 102-14, 168-9)³⁵

The poet backs up this descent from Cain by referring to it again when Hrothgar finds the tale of the ancient strife when flood destroyed the race of giants written on the sword which *Beowulf* brings up from the mere (ll. 1687 ff.). The other specific reference to Cain occurs in the passage which introduces us to Grendel's Dam:

Grendles mōdor,
 ides, āglāc-wif yrmþe gemunde,
 sē þe water-egesan wunian scolde,
 cealde strēamas, sipðan Cain wearó
 tō ecg-banan āngan brēþer,
 fāderen-mæge; hē þā fāg gewāt,
 morþre gemearcod, man-drēam flēo[ha]n,
 wēsten warode. Ðanon wōc fela
 geósceaft-gāsta; wæs þæra Grendel sum
 heoro-wearh hetelīc, sē at Heorote fand
 wæccendne wer wīges bīdan. (ll. 1258-68)

The *Beowulf* poet would seem to assume that his hearers are familiar with Biblical stories just as much as they are familiar with heroic legends. This belief in the monsters' descending from Cain is based upon another interpretation of *Genesis* vi. 2: 'The sons of God seeing the daughters of men, that they were fair, took to themselves wives of all which they chose.' This was taken to refer to the union of the descendants of Seth with those of Cain, and *Genesis* vi. 4, 'Now giants were upon the earth in those days', implied that the giants destroyed by the flood were to be identified with the descendants of Cain. Only the giants were destroyed by the flood, and the evil broods of sea-monsters lived on; a flood, after all, would not particularly distress Grendel and his Dam. This

interpretation of *Genesis* is given in Bede's commentary on *Genesis*³⁶ and in the Old English poem *Genesis*.³⁷

The third answer is that Noah's wicked son Ham was the first person to be cursed after the flood; Irish sources suggest that he then gave birth to all the monsters. The deluge drowned the descendants of Cain, but then the monsters descended from Ham were conceived. This descent from Ham is not, as I have shown, the view of the *Beowulf* poet, but it seems to have been the view of the *Beowulf* scribe, for both of the references in the poem to Cain are blundered; l. 107 reads *caines*, altered from *comes*, and l. 1261 reads *camp* - obviously the scribe was familiar with the Ham theory.³⁸

The poet, then, has the minstrel in Heorot sing of creation, partly to raise this matter and partly to illustrate the theme that creation is God's. The monsters 'were not coeval with God; they did not exist before the creation of the world; they were not part of that creation; they were the offspring of sinful humanity, the progeny of the first murderer'.³⁹ Heroes like Beowulf do God's work by combatting such monsters:

Ðær him āglāca atgrāpe wearó;
 hwæpre hē gemunde mægenes strenge,
 gim-fæste gife, ðe him God sealde,
 ond him tō Anwaldan āre gelyfde,
 frōfre ond fultum; ðy hē þone fēond ofercwōm,
 gehnægde helle-gāst. (ll. 1269-74)

Tolkien⁴⁰ points out that:

At this point new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited. It is for this reason that these elements of Scripture alone appear in a poem dealing of design with the noble pagan of old days. For they are precisely the elements which bear upon this theme. Man alien in a hostile world, engaged in a struggle which he cannot win while the world lasts, is assured that his foes are the foes also of Dryhten, that his courage noble in itself is also the highest loyalty: so said thyle and clerk.

Grendel is described in terms used elsewhere to describe the devil, for example, *3odes andsaca, se ellenjæst, wiht unhælo, fēond mancynnes, helle hæfton, atol āglāca, deorc dēapscua, helrunā, synscaða, mānscaða*. This does not, of course, mean that he is the devil, for that would make Beowulf Christ and we know where that can lead. Grendel is simply the enemy of God and the antithesis of Beowulf.

Grendel's Dam is of the same order of evil as her son, but she is not described in such terms of theological guilt as Grendel. She comes to Heorot to take revenge for her son's death when she carries

off the Danish counsellor *Æschere*, and this gives her a small excuse. She is to be regarded as a monster too, representing evil and descended of Cain, as we are specifically reminded. *Beowulf* has more trouble dispatching the female of the species as one might expect, and artistically a worse battle is required to avoid anticlimax.

The problem is the dragon. Tolkien⁴¹ seems to think all three monsters are of a similar order and kindred significance. T.M. Gang⁴² objects that the dragon is of a different order altogether from Grendel and his Dam; the dragon is never specifically named as the enemy of God, rather he is a figure of impending doom at the end of the poem. The vexed question is whether or not the dragon is an *untýdre*, whether or not he, too, is descended of Cain. Sisam points out that in some passages of Scripture and Christian writings the devil is represented by a dragon, but the fire-dragon is not very like the dragon of the Apocalypse; Sisam⁴³ draws our attention to Augustine of Hippo's view that the devil is represented by the lion *propter impetus* and by *draco propter insidias*, thinking of the traditional wiliness of the serpent rather than the fiery breath of the *Beowulf* dragon.

Tolkien⁴⁴ maintains that the conception of the dragon approaches *draconitas* rather than *draco*. Pace Tolkien, the dragon here is *draco* rather than *draconitas*, for the dragon is simply the animal dragon of the Cotton gnome. After the poignant lay of the last survivor and the burial of the treasure of the ancient people, the dawn-flier finds the barrow and settles on it as he should by his very nature. The dragon is all animal in *Beowulf*; his feelings and emotions are not analysed as in the cases of Grendel and his mother, for he has not thoughts, only animal behaviour. Look how he acts when he wakes and finds the thief's footprints:

Hord-weard sōhte
 georne æfter grunde, wolde guman findan,
 þone þe him on sweofote sare getēode;
 hāt ond hrēoh-mōd hlāw oft ymbe-hwearf,
 ealne ūtanweardne; nē oðr ænig mon
 on þære wēstenne; hwæðre wīges gefeh,
 beaduwe weorces; hwīlum on beorh æthwearf,
 sinc-fæt sōhte. (ll. 2293-2300)

This is a dog who has lost his bone.

When considering the use of monsters in *Beowulf*, I am not at all convinced that the study of parallels in other Germanic literatures⁴⁵ is particularly relevant or helpful, for none of them are of the same date as the *Beowulf* poem and in none of them are the monsters what W.P. Ker would call 'in the centre.' For example, the dragon-slayings in the O.H.G. *Nibelungenlied* and the corresponding O.N. sources do describe Sigurór (Siegfried) gaining an immense treasure by killing a dragon, but the heroes are not renowned principally for the dragon-control service they offer - that emphasis comes only with Wagner. Nothing of import is gained by a consideration

of Sigurðr's fights in *Fáfnismál*, *Völsunga saga*, *Þiðreks saga* or Snorri's *Edda*, of Ragnar's matter-of-fact serpent slaying in *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar* or of Frotho's exploits in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*. It is similarly a critical commonplace to compare the Grendel fight with Grettir's struggle with Glam in *Grettis saga* or the parallel battles of Orm, Böðvarr Bjarki, Þorstein, Gull-þórir or Samson. Yet even with the closest parallel from a much later century, we see that the fight with Glam is not central to *Grettis saga* as the fights are in *Beowulf* and that Grettir is cursed for his success where Beowulf is praised for a task seen in quite a different light. The best thing to do is to rely on the descriptions of the monsters given us in *Beowulf* itself.

It might be objected that the poet's descriptions of the monsters are rather vague, but, after all, the early mediaeval taste was for conceptualisation rather than for visualisation along the lines of the Renaissance poets. Closeness of detail helps one to visualise the monsters in Spenser,⁴⁶ Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost*, Ariosto's Hippogriff, Drayton's monsters in *PolyAlbion*, and so forth, monsters influenced perhaps by the art of the Renaissance in heraldry, emblem books or the paintings of Giotto. The Renaissance response becomes an intellectual one where the *Beowulf* poet by his deliberate lack of such detail elicits an emotional response; he leaves the monsters vague, suggesting that in the primal darkness one may see two weird creatures of damnation in human shape and a fire-dragon breathing flame - the rest is left to the imagination of an audience that believes implicitly in monsters and their monstrosity.

The function of the monsters is, I think, now clear. We can answer the question 'Why does the *Beowulf* poet not have his hero fight other champions of other nations to get glory?' The answer is that the poet wants him to fight monsters and dragons. The monsters represent the offspring of Cain and are Chaos figures, belonging to the sea and the darkness, so a hero has no alternative but to aid God in the maintenance of His creation by opposing such creatures of damnation; the dragon, a fire image of Chaos, represents the final enemy, death, which no-one, not even Beowulf, can defeat. He is not Christ. As Tolkien⁴⁷ has put it:

We do not deny the worth of the hero by accepting Grendel and the dragon. Let us by all means esteem the old heroes: men caught in the chains of circumstance or of their own character, torn between duties equally sacred, dying with their backs to the wall. But *Beowulf*, I fancy, plays a larger part than is recognized in helping us to esteem them . . . But though with sympathy and patience we might gather, from a line here or a tone there, the background of imagination which gives to this indomitability, this paradox of defeat inevitable yet unacknowledged, its full significance, it is in *Beowulf* that a poet has devoted a whole poem to the theme, and has drawn the struggle in different proportions, so that we may see man at war with the hostile world, and his inevitable

overthrow in Time. The particular is on the outer edge, the essential in the centre.

C.S. Lewis⁴⁸ also gets to the heart of the matter:

The fall of Virgil's Troy is a catastrophe, the end of an epoch. *Urbs antiqua ruit* - "an ancient city, empress of long ages, falls." For Homer it is all in the day's work. *Beowulf* strikes the same note. Once the king is dead, we know what is in store for us: that little island of happiness, like many another before it and many another in the years that follow, is submerged, and the great tide of the Heroic Age rolls over it . . . In Homer the background of accepted, matter-of-fact despair is, after all, a background. In *Beowulf* that fundamental darkness comes out into the foreground and is partly embodied in the monsters. And against those monsters the hero fights. No one in Homer had fought against the darkness.

Thus the world of *Beowulf* is a tiny circle of light on land surrounded by darkness and the restless, relentless ocean, an island universe rescued from Chaos by creation but only temporarily, an uneasy equilibrium between the forces of evil, represented by images of the sea, darkness and discreating fire, and the forces of good, represented by the land, the light and the warmth of the hearth-fire, an unstable stability, a fixity that is infixity, a portion of time wrested from eternity and thereby made miserable.

The God of the poem, the God only of the Old Testament and the Apocalypse, does not seem to care particularly about man, an experiment gone wrong which should, perhaps, be abandoned. The function of a hero (as mentioned more briefly above) is to aid the limited power of God in the maintenance of creation by battling against God's adversaries, the Chaos monsters Grendel and his Dam, and inevitable death in the shape of the fire of the fire-dragon and of the funeral pyre. In this mighty endeavour, a hero gets himself no real reward and ultimately no real success; *līf is lāne: eal scæceð lēoht and līf somod*, 'life is transitory: light and life together all hasten away'.⁴⁹ The tone is aptly dignified, for the poem is an elegy.

J.C. Maxwell⁵⁰ tells us that *King Lear* is 'a Christian play about a pagan world'; the setting and the actions are pagan, but the values are Christian. *King Lear*, morally blind and spiritually depleted at the beginning of the play, learns sanity through madness and gains the Christian values of humility, brotherhood, love and mercy. In Marlowe's phrase, he is, at the end of the play, 'on the way to heaven'. He is permitted to learn Christian patience through suffering. *Beowulf* is also a Christian work of a Christian poet about a pagan world, but here the values of the poem are pagan. The God of the New Testament is missing from the poem, so *Beowulf* cannot

learn Christian patience; yet, since the poem is Christian in that we have in it the God of the Old Testament and of the Apocalypse, Beowulf is denied even stoic patience. All that is left for him is pessimism and death after a heroism of uncertain value.

Throughout the poem we are given to understand that beyond the instability of this world there is stability, outside time there is eternity. After the fearful winter at Finnsburg, spring returns as usual, *swā nū gýt dō[i]ð* (l. 1134). Compare also

Metod eallum wēold
gumena cynnes, swā hē nū git dō[i]ð (ll. 1057-8)

Wolde dōm Godes dādum rādan
gumena gehwylcum, swā hē nū gēn dō[i]ð (ll. 2858-9)

and Beowulf's last words - 'Ic him æfter sceal!'

Those critics who try to insist that *Beowulf* is purely a Christian poem point to the following facts. The universe is God's, and men on earth recognize this. The Danes in the newly-built Heorot listen to a song of creation (ll. 90-100); Beowulf, in the Breca episode, calls the sun *beorht bēacen Godes* (l. 570); a son Beowulf is sent to Scyld by God (l. 13); glory in fight is granted to Beowulf against Grendel by God (l. 819); and Hrothgar's speech points out that Heremod was given strength by God but misused the gift (ll. 1716-20). This long speech of Hrothgar's to Beowulf is often with justification referred to as Hrothgar's sermon. Gazing on the sword-hilt Beowulf brings from Grendel's cave, with its message about the giants drowned in the flood of *Genesis*, Hrothgar proceeds to a mediaeval *exemplum* in which comparison with Sigemund praises the hero, comparison with Heremod warns him about the dangers of pride (ll. 1761-8).

The poet himself preaches us a sermon when the Danes pray to idols for help against Grendel. We have seen the Danes listen to a song of creation, and we have heard Christian speeches from the coast-guard, Wealhtheow and Hrothgar, referring to a God they now seem not to know:

Hwīlum hīe gehēton æt hæg-trafum
wīg-weorþunga, wordum bādon,
þæt him gāst-bona gēoce gefremede
wið þēod-þrēaum. Swylc wæs þēaw hyra,
hāpenra hyht; helle gemundon
in mōd-sefan, Metod hīe ne cūpon,
dāda Dēmend, ne wiston hīe Drihten God
nē hīe hūru heofena Helm herian ne cūpon,
wuldres Waldend. (ll. 175-88)

Such reversion to heathen habits by Christians sometimes happened in times of stress; compare, for example, the following account

from the Old English version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*⁵¹ of the relapse to paganism of the East Saxons during a pestilence in AD 665:

Seo ilce mægð þa Eastseaxna mid þy heo wæced wæs mid þy wæle þære foresprecenan deaðlicnesse, ða Sighere mid þy dæle his folces, þe he heold, forlet þa gerynu þæs Cristnan geleafan 7 to hæðenisse wæs gehwyrfed. Forðon þe se seolfa cyning 7 his aldormen 7 monige of his folce lufodon þis deaðlice líf 7 þæt towearde ne sohton, ne þæt furðum gelefdon, þæt hit ó wære. Þa ongunnon heo þa heargas edniwian, þa ðe ær forlatene wæron, 7 deofolgild weorþian 7 gebiddan, swa swa heo þurh þas þing meahton from þam woole 7 fram þære deaplicnesse gescilde beon.

Trust in God and gratitude to Him is expressed several times in the poem. The coast-guard entrusts Beowulf and his companions to God (ll. 316-18), and Hrothgar's immediate reaction to the news of the hero's arrival is that Beowulf must have been sent by God to aid the West Danes. Wealhtheow, Hygelac, Wiglaf, and Beowulf (during his escape from the mere) make similar remarks. All these observations might be dismissed as merely the commonplace of conversation, but it is not so easy to dismiss Beowulf's speech before his fight with Grendel (ll. 685-8), telling us that the holy God may decree the triumph to whichever side seems meet to him, or his speech after the battle (ll. 977-9), pointing out that God will sentence Grendel at the Last Judgment.

Beowulf does not make as many references to God as Hrothgar does until the second part of the poem when he is himself the leader of a people facing disaster. He wonders what he has done to so sorely anger the Almighty (ll. 2329-32) in much the same way as the Old English homilists Ælfric and Wulfstan were to do later. Such instances could be multiplied easily, for the poet tells his audience quite clearly that Beowulf, Hrothgar and their peoples are Christians and that what one does in this world determines one's fate in the next. Klaeber⁵² even argues that Beowulf is a Christ figure and others tell us that the poem is a psalm about redemption in which Beowulf is Christ and Grendel is the Devil.⁵³ Such critics in my opinion go to absurd lengths to examine only part of the evidence supplied in the poem on this matter; for an allegorical Christ, Beowulf surely does and says some very strange things! Here, we are told, we have a Christian poem written for Christians by a Christian poet and including frequent references to God in the person of the poet and in the speeches of the characters, a psalm about creation, a sermon about heathenism from the poet and a sermon on pride from Hrothgar.

I maintain, however, that *Beowulf* cannot be interpreted as a Christian poem in the fullest sense, for its values are pagan; by these values Beowulf is judged, and it is these values that are found wanting and lend the poem its elegiac tone. The poem equates

the pagan idea of Fate, of Wyrð, with Old Testament Christianity, which it would be quite impossible to do with New Testament Christianity. Admittedly there is a stability and order in eternity, but not here on earth; whatever takes place on earth, in Heorot, in Grendel's cave, in Finnsburg, does not affect the divine order one way or another. Men and monsters may do as they may - the universe shrugs. There is a song of creation, but it is Grendel, not God, who hears it. Light from God shines on the waters after the Breca episode and light lances through the waters of Grendel's mere after the slaying of his mother, but only *after* Beowulf has done all the work; there is not yet a Christ to harrow Hell - man has to do it himself. There is not yet a Christ to conquer death.

Again, Hrothgar preaches a sermon against pride and urging humility, but these values are not specifically Christian. They are part of the gnomic wisdom of the comitatus. I have already pointed out that such a list of ways of death is Apocalyptic and may be paralleled in several Judgment Day homilies and Biblical passages, and also that a similar list is contained in the Old English elegy, *The Wanderer*. Tolkien points to a parallel in another elegy, *The Seafarer*,⁵⁴ and this so-called *sum* figure is developed in great elaboration in *The Fates of Men*⁵⁵ in the Exeter Book, a terrifying *danse macabre* in which we have listed for us all the possible ways of death - falling from a tree, war, plague, murder, old age, being torn by the wolf or the eagle, being burned on the funeral pyre or drowned at sea, being hanged for a crime, and so on. These I regard also as the gnomic wisdom of the comitatus. Beowulf himself, towards the end of the poem, in an elegiac passage just before his final battle, considers the feelings of the bereaved father looking on the hanging body of his son (ll. 2444-59). Hrothgar's sermon exhorts the hero to accept knowledge of human limitation, as signalled by death. In the *Iliad*, Achilles goes out at last to avenge Patroclus by killing Hector, knowing he will thus bring about his own early death; Beowulf sets off to face the fire-dragon knowing he will die - what makes him heroic is the fact that he still goes, not any knowledge of pride.

It is common practice to regard the poet's sermon about the Danes' lapse from Christianity to paganism as an interpolation; both Tolkien and Whitelock adopt this solution.⁵⁶ But I take it to be an expression of the fact that the Danes cannot really distinguish between God and Wyrð. Their song of creation and their prayers to God have not dispatched Grendel, so why not try an appeal in another court, at another shrine? Scarcely encouraging Christianity is the fate of one of Beowulf's men; the hero's troop go to sleep in Heorot, secure in their faith in the protection of God, yet Grendel enters and devours Hondscio without any objection from the Deity or his representative, Beowulf.

Finally, it is true that Beowulf and the other characters in the poem make frequent references to God and utter Christian gnomes, but they utter an equal number of gnomes about Wyrð and see no contradiction therein. For them, Wyrð and God are the same thing. For example, Beowulf tells Hrothgar,

ðær gelyfan sceal
 Dryhtnes dōme sē þe hine dēað nimeð. (ll. 440-1)

and later:

Gæð ā wyrd swā hīo scel! (l. 455)

Beowulf refers to the sun as *bēacen Godes*, 'the beacon of God', then utters a pagan gnome:

Lēoht ēastan cōm,
 beorht bēacen Godes; brimu swaþredon
 þæt ic sǣ-næssas gesēon mihte,
 windige weallas. Wyrð oft nereð
 unfǣgne eorl, þonne his ellen dēah. (ll. 569-73)

Beowulf attributes his victory over the sea-monsters to fate, saying, *Hwæpere mē gesælde*, 'Yet it was granted me (l. 574), and in telling Hygelac about his survival in Grendel's mere remarks, *næs ic fǣge þā gýt*, 'I was not doomed as yet' (l. 2141). The poet himself comments on the man who escaped the dragon:

Swā mæg unfǣge ēaðe gidīgan
 wēan ond wrǣc-sīð, sē ðe Waldendes
 hylðo gehealdeþ. (ll. 2291-3)

This is in a world in which God and Wyrð are equated; this is Christianity, but without Christ. Therefore, in this sense, *Beowulf* is not a Christian poem. 'What is it, then?', one might ask, and my reply must be Tolkien's; it is a heroic elegy.

Despite incidents, speeches and motifs which bring to mind corresponding parts of the epics of Homer and Virgil, *Beowulf* is not an epic. The scale is correct, the speeches are long enough in all conscience, and we follow the fortunes of a hero with whose destiny that of an entire people is inseparably linked, but we have no gods and goddesses, no divine intervention, no romantic interest; for example, Beowulf is not given a hero's reward by Wealhtheow. Above all, we do not have battles between armies or champions as the main theme. Nor is the poem heroic in the usual sense of the word, for the same reasons. Our hero's monster fights are central to the poem where they would normally be mere incidents in a long list of battles. The heroic world is present, but only in the background (the family strife within the Scylding dynasty, the wars between the Geats and the Swedes, the wars between the Geats and the Franks, the story of Sigemund, the stories of Heremod, Finnsburg, Ravenswood) and this is what differentiates *Beowulf*.

The things that are heroic, however, are vitally important - the social structure based on the *comitatus*, the exaggerated rituals of courtesy, the traditional knowledge of the people and their

values, the concept of the hero. We first read of the comitatus in chapters 14 and 15 of Tacitus' *Germania*,⁵⁷ and it is the basis of all Germanic heroic societies. The king or chieftain gives the *gesiths* and *geneatas* of his comitatus rings, food, shelter and protection; *hlāford* derives from *hlāfweard*, 'the protector/provider of the bread.' In return for these bounties, the thanes of the comitatus serve their lord in time of war, honour his name, and die by his side if they must; Byrhtnoth's men stand firm at Maldon, Harold's at Senlac Hill. So in *Beowulf* Hrothgar is the lord of the Danes, the protector of earls, the giver of rings. Hygelac, then Beowulf, perform the same function among the Geats. Gnomes throughout the poem point to the concept of the comitatus:

Swā sceal *geong* guma gōde gewyrcean,
 fromum feoh-giftum on fæder bearme,
 þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen
 wil-gesīpas, þonne wīg cume,
 lēode gelæsten; lof-dædum sceal
 in mægpa gehwæm man gepēo[ha]n. (ll. 20-5)

And when Beowulf has killed the fire-dragon, the poet remarks:

Swylc sceolde secg wesana,
 þegn æt ðearfe! - (ll. 2708-9)

Absence of the comitatus is a common motif in elegy; *The Ruin*, *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* are all put on the lips of those who are outside their comitatus, and *Beowulf* includes the lay of the last survivor who is bereft of his comitatus. Grendel has no such comitatus, since God threw Cain far from mankind, so when he is referred to in terms usually reserved for exiles the poem has great irony; when the figure of Chaos takes over Heorot, we similarly get an inversion pattern - he cannot approach the throne, he will not pay *wergild* for those he has slain, but when he controls Heorot he is ironically described as *healðegen* (l. 142).

Beowulf's comitatus accompanies him over the sea to Denmark and his thanes try uselessly to aid their lord against Grendel. During the second fight, they simply wait for Beowulf by the mere, and during the third battle they desert Beowulf altogether. The only person to help him against the dragon is Wiglaf, who is bound to him also by the bond of kinship. Wiglaf's speeches to the deserters show how the comitatus *should* have behaved (ll. 2633-91) while his second speech ends with a gnome:

Dēað bið sēlla
 eorla gehwylcum þonne edwīt-līf! (ll. 2890-1)

Anglo-Saxon verse has two collections of such gnomes in the Cotton manuscript and the Exeter Book. These pieces of traditional wisdom record the knowledge of the comitatus and define its values.

The names of things are important; when you can name something, you can say something about it and add to the store of knowledge. The Norse god Óðinn hung nine days and nine nights over the gulf of Chaos for knowledge; he stole the mead of poetry from the giants; he gave his right eye to Mimir to drink from her well of knowledge, and in the guise of the Wanderer he travelled the earth in search of knowledge and a true love. The *Völuspá*, or *Prophecy of the Sibyll*, which tells of the Ragnarøkr, the Doom of the Gods, has the refrain, *Vitu þér enn eða hvat?* 'Know ye more, or what?'⁵⁸

So in *Beowulf* the gnomes define the poet's world. The gnomes about the nature of a *draca* or a *pyrs* explored earlier showed that the dragon and Grendel and his Dam fitted the Cotton definitions. We can see now that Beowulf and Hrothgar fill the definitions of a good king, the comitatus does not meet the definition of a true comitatus, and so on. Towards the climax of the poem, gnomes come thick and fast:

swā sceal æghwylc mon
ālātan lān-dagas. (11. 2590-1)

Sinc ēaðe mæg,
gold on grunde, gum-cynnes gehwone
oferhīgian hýde sē ðe wylle! (11. 2764-6)

swā hit gedēfe bið
þæt mon his wine-dryhten wordum herge,
ferhðum frēoge, þonne hē forþ scile
of līc-haman læded weorðan. (11. 3174-7)

Gnomes and genealogies put together give us the heroic code and define the roles of heroes and kings and their elaborate behaviour. When Beowulf and his men arrive in Denmark, they have to declare their lineage to the coast-guard, who shows them the way to Heorot. There they have to declare their lineage to Wulfgar to ask permission to enter when surely there is nothing Hrothgar wants more than the coming of a hero. Beowulf and his thanes must leave their spears and shields outside the hall, but are permitted to take their short swords with them into the presence. Hrothgar finds it necessary now to point out that he was a benefactor of Ecgtheow, father of Beowulf, and the ruffled feathers of Unferth, the local champion who has failed to fight Grendel, have to be soothed. To save Hrothgar's face, Hrothgar is described as a valiant battle warrior, most famous of fighters. When Wealhtheow later brings in the cup of beer, she offers it first to Hrothgar, for she is *cynna gemyndig* (l. 613), 'mindful of courtly etiquette'.

Based on all these points, the code of the comitatus is quite clear and simple - be mindful of the obligations of kin and of comitatus. Loyalty and bravery are valued above all else. Since death comes to all but the gnomes tell no more that is certain, an honourable death is the highest morality of the heroic honour-value.

The gnomes of the *Battle of Maldon* give this code its finest expression:

Hize sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre,
mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægen lytlað.⁵⁹

These gnomes express the limit of the knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon comitatus, and its honour-value was capable of turning the greatest of defeats, death itself, into a virtue. In this connection Tolkien⁶⁰ quotes in part W.P. Ker on the code of the Vikings:

The last word of the Northmen before their entry into the larger world of Southern culture, their last independent guess at the secret of the Universe, is given in the *Twilight of the Gods*. As far as it goes, and as a working theory, it is absolutely impregnable. It is the assertion of the individual freedom against all the terrors and temptations of the world. It is absolute resistance, perfect because without hope. The Northern gods have an exultant extravagance in their warfare which makes them more like Titans than Olympians; only they are on the right side, though it is not the side that wins. The winning side is Chaos and Unreason; but the gods, who are defeated, think that defeat is not refutation.

But applied to *Beowulf* this is a distortion. This is where Tolkien starts to go wrong, for the Old Norse *Völuspá* ends with the coming of a new earth, Gimle, and all the gods will live again with men in a new Paradise. *Beowulf* dies alone, without gods or men by his side, and cannot hope for any such future Elysium.

This is where the heroic poem shades into elegy, for all the heroic matters discussed fail *Beowulf* in the end. Just as the archetypal images of water and fire turn on him as he is burnt on a headland within sight of the sea and with Wiglaf ironically bathing his face with water, so all the values of the comitatus desert *Beowulf*. His men let him down and will not fight the dragon alongside him; he turned up as a hero to help Hrothgar, but no hero is at hand to help him in his extremity.⁶¹ The gnomes tell him that he must die, and that earthly glory must pass away, but no more than that. His ancestral weapon lets him down, for his sword snaps as he smites the dragon. Genealogy lets him down, for he has no son; he must die childless since succession on earth would be a substitute for that immortality which belongs to elegy:

Nū ic suna mīnum syllan wolde
gūð-gewādu, þār mē gifeðe swā
ænig yrfe-weard æfter wurde,
lice gelenge.

(ll. 2729-32)

Further, Wiglaf is the last of the race, paralleling the last survivor of the previous human race:

Ðū eart ende-lāf ūsses cynnes,
 Wægmunðinga; ealle wyrd forspēon
 mīne māgas tō methodsceafte,
 eorlas on elne; ic him æfter sceal. (ll. 2813-16)

This is the final gnome Beowulf has to tell.

Beowulf pathetically asks to see and touch the dragon's treasure, but he can do this only for an instant, and it is a sign of the frailty of mortality and the vanity of human wishes in any event. His honour-value as a person is intact but valueless if the context for it, the comitatus, is finished. For Beowulf there will be no Gimle; this brave man, dying for a comitatus that does not appreciate him, has nothing left. Faced with the onrush of the powers of darkness and the relentless flood of Chaos, all he can do is face death with dignity.

This is the very stuff of heroism, but no-one in the poem knows what heroism is. We learn of Beowulf's unhappy life when his special qualities were not appreciated (ll. 2177-89). This man, who is the strongest of men in might in this life's day, who is so powerful that he breaks every sword he uses, is no ordinary man - he has to go where the clarion call of glory summons him. Hygelac does not understand this, however:

Hū lomp ēow on lāde, lēofa Bīowulf,
 þā ðū fāringa feorr gehogodest
 sæcce sēcean ofer sealt wæter,
 hilde tō Hiorote? Ac ðū Hrōðgāre
 wīd-cūðne wēan wihte gebēttest,
 mærum ðēodne? Ic ðæs mōd-ceare
 sorh-wylmum sēað, siðe ne truwoðe
 lēofes mannes. Ic ðē lange bæd,
 þæt ðū þone wæl-gæst wihte ne grētte,
 lēte Sūð-Dene sylfe geweorðan
 gūðe wið Grendel. Gode ic þanc secge,
 þæs ðe ic ðē gesundne gesēon mōste. (ll. 1987-98)

But Beowulf has to go. His final battle, however, is for his people, not for glory; the concept of the hero itself is now out of date. The whole poem ends ironically:

Swā begnornodon Gēata lēode
 hlāfordes hryre, heorð-genēatas;
 cwādon þæt hē wære wyruld-cyninga,
 manna mildust ond mon-þwærust,
 lēodum liðost ond lof-geornost. (ll. 3178-82)

'The most eager for fame' - they simply do not understand. Beowulf has to die, as he has done everything else, alone. As Tolkien puts it, 'He is a man, and that for him and many is sufficient tragedy'.⁶²

If this is the stuff of heroism, it is also the stuff of elegy, heroic elegy. The opening of the poem sets the tone of dignity and elegy for the whole. The funeral of an ancestor, surrendered once again to the Chaos whence he came for a brief sojourn, looks forward to the end of the poem, to the funeral of Beowulf himself. Scyld's name means 'shield', and Beowulf is the 'shield of his people' against the fire-dragon; to emphasize this, he makes a special shield of metal for the combat.⁶³ Further, Scyld is buried beneath a standard, and from the dragon's barrow Wiglaf brings Beowulf a standard. To clinch matters, the half-line formula describing Scyld Scefing, 'þæt wæs gōd cyning' (l. 11), is repeated of Beowulf before his final battle (l. 2390).

To summarize my previous arguments, we are constantly reminded how transitory is earthly glory. Heorot, the moment it is built, is described being destroyed by flames. When Beowulf slays Grendel, a minstrel sings of the death of Sigemund, the dragon-slayer; when Beowulf kills Grendel's Dam, Hrothgar preaches him a sermon on the theme 'remember thou art mortal!' Costly treasure, symbol of mortality, is given to Beowulf after both victories, and before the final battle we have the interlude of the lay of the last survivor burying treasure no longer of use to his race:

Heald þū nū hrūse, nū hæleð ne mōstan,
 eorla æhte. Hwæt hyt ær on ðē
 gōde begēaton. Gūð-dēað fornam,
 feorh-bealo frēcne, fýra gehwylcne
 lēoda mīnra, þāra ðe þis [līf] ofgeaf,
 gesāwon sele-drēam; nāh, hwa sweord wege
 oððe feormie fāted wāge,
 drync-fæt dēore duguð ellor scōc. (ll. 2247-54)

Once this tone has been set, it is maintained for the last part of the poem until it finally comes to rest after Beowulf's funeral:

Þā ymbe hlāw riordan hilde-dēore,
 æþelinga bearn, ealra twelfe,
 woldon ceare cwīðan, kyning mēnan,
 word-gyð wrecan ond ymb wer sprecan. (ll. 3169-72)

But this is not just the funeral of one hero; it is also the funeral of what he represents - a secular society or at least a Christian society that knows not Christ. It is a Ragnarǫkr without Oðinn; an Apocalypse without a God of love; an elegy for man. Thus the world of *Beowulf* comes to an end with elegiac dignity and a reminder that *līf is lāne*.

NOTES

- 1 This article is a re-working of three public lectures sponsored by the Graduate Students of English Association of the University of Alberta, Edmonton, and delivered on December 6th, 8th and 10th, 1971. It is now dedicated to Mareika Lynn Grant, b. April 14th, 1975.
- Throughout, quotations from *Beowulf* are taken from the edition by C.L. Wrenn (London, 1953, rev. 1958, reprint 1959).
- 2 See R. Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship-Burial: A Handbook* 2nd ed., (London, 1972), pp. 54-9.
- 3 *The Audience of Beowulf* (Oxford U.P., 1951, reprint 1967), pp. 22 ff. See also Wrenn, *Beowulf*, pp. 32-7, and R.W. Chambers *Beowulf - An Introduction* with a supplement by C.L. Wrenn 3rd ed., (Cambridge U.P., 1963), pp. 486 ff., 531 ff.
- 4 On, for example, the historicity, see Wrenn, *Beowulf*, pp. 47-9.
- 5 For a convenient diagram of Norse cosmography, see E.V. Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, 2nd ed., (Oxford, 1957, reprint 1966), p. 196. More detailed information may be found in E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North* (London, 1964).
- 6 "Beowulf - the Monsters and the Critics", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 22 (1936), 245-95; (O.U.P. reprint 1958, 1960), p. 3. Reprinted also in *The Beowulf Poet*, ed. D.K. Fry, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1968), pp. 8-56, and *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. L.E. Nicholson, (Notre Dame U.P., 1963, reprint 1971), pp. 51-103.
- 7 *Beowulf: Untersuchungen über das angelsächsische Epos und die älteste Geschichte der germanischen Seevölker* (Berlin, 1889).
- 8 *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (3rd ed., Boston, 1922, reprint 1950), p. lx.
- 9 See Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, pp. 17-20 for the relevant portions of *Voluspá* as quoted by Snorri in *Gylfaginning*, the first part of his *Prose Edda* of 1223. For a modern English translation, see *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson*, trans. J.I. Young, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966), pp. 86-90.
- 10 Some uncertainty attends the etymology of the name 'Unferth' and the role of *pyle*; see, for example, J.L. Rosier, "Design for Treachery: The Unferth Intrigue", *P.M.L.A.* 77 (1962), 1-8; N.E. Eliason, "The *Thyle* and *Scop* in *Beowulf*", *Speculum* 38 (1963), 267-84; J.L. Baird, "Unferth the *pyle*", *Medium Evum* 39 (1970), 1-12; F.C. Robinson, "Personal Names in Medieval Narrative and the Name Unferth in *Beowulf*", in *Essays in Honor of Richebourg Gaillard McWilliams*, ed. H. Creed, *Birmingham-Southern College Bulletin* 63, (1970), 43-8; and M.W. Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth", *Traditio* 7 (1949-51), 410-15.
- 11 This parallel between Beowulf and Odysseus is noted by E.B. Irving, Jr., *A Reading of Beowulf* (Yale, 1968), pp. 67-8. On this and other parallels between the two heroes, see A.B. Lord, "Beowulf and Odysseus", *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honor of Francis Peabody*

- Magoun, Jr., ed. J.B. Bessinger, Jr., and R.P. Creed (New York U.P., 1965), pp. 86-91.
- ¹² *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of The English People*, ed. T. Miller, EETS, OS 95 (1890, reprint 1959), I., i., pp. 134-7.
- ¹³ See D.K. Crowne, "The Hero on the Beach - An Example of Composition by Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 61 (1960), 362-72, and G. Clark, "The Traveler Recognizes his Goal: A Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *J.E.G.P.* 64 (1965), 645-59.
- ¹⁴ *A Reading of Beowulf*, pp. 204-5, quoting *The Wanderer*, ll. 94-6.
- ¹⁵ Such an extended description of landscape is rare in Old English poetry; that of the Happy Land in *The Phoenix* comes to mind as the only parallel. It is also rare in Old Norse literature, where the one example I can think of is Grettir's sojourn in winter beneath the Geitland glacier in ch. 61 of *Grettis saga*. For editions of *Grettis saga* see R.C. Boer, *Altnordische sagabibliothek* (Halle, 1900) and G. Jónsson, *Íslensk Fornrit* 7 (Reykjavik, 1936); and translation by G.A. Hight, *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* (London 1914, reprint 1929).
- ¹⁶ See Wrenn, *Beowulf*, p. 210.
- ¹⁷ *Audience*, pp. 6 ff.
- ¹⁸ *The Structure of Beowulf* (Oxford, 1965, revised ed. 1966), pp. 75 ff.
- ¹⁹ See the list of passages in J.E. Cross, "On *The Wanderer* Lines 80-84", *Vetenskaps-Societetens i Lund Arsbok* (1958-9), 85 ff., and add the unpublished homily in praise of St. Michael in the margins of pp. 402-17 of Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41. One stanza relevant here reads, in part: "7 wonne arisað ealle ða deaðan ðe eorðe forswearþ, oððe sæ bescente, oððe fir forbærnde, oððe wildeor abiton, oððe fuþlas on lande tobæren, oððe wirmas on eorðan fræten. I hope to publish this homily in full. See also M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), p.512, the Ethiopic *Apocalypse of Peter* and the following, more extended passage on p. 522 from *The Second Book of the Sibylline Oracles* of the late second or third century and, according to James, based on the *Apocalypse of Peter*: "Then shall the great angel Uriel break the monstrous bars framed of unyielding and unbroken adamant, of the brazen gates of Hades, and cast them down straightway, and bring forth to judgment all the sorrowful forms, yea, of the ghosts of the ancient Titans, and of the giants, and all whom the flood overtook. And all whom the wave of the sea hath destroyed in the waters, and all whom beasts and creeping things and fowls have feasted on: all these shall he bring to the judgment seat; and again those whom flesh-devouring fire hath consumed in the flames, them also shall he gather and set before God's seat".
- ²⁰ For a less pessimistic view than my own, see B. Mitchell, "'Until the Dragon Comes . . ." Some Thoughts on *Beowulf*", *Neophilologus* 47 (1963), 122-38, especially 131-3. The joys of which Mitchell speaks are certainly present in the poem but for me render it more poignant. I can see only one conclusion to draw and only one interpretation of the final word of the poem, *lofgeornost*; the heroic *summum bonum* of the impermanent bubble reputation comes a poor second to Christian eternal life.
- ²¹ *The Dark Ages* (Edinburgh and London, 1923), p. 253.

- ²² *Widsith: A Study in Old English Heroic Legend* (Cambridge, 1912), p. 79.
- ²³ *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (London, 1942, 9th impression 1956), p. 28.
- ²⁴ Miller, *Old English Bede*, I, ii., pp. 230-1.
- ²⁵ See *Audience*, pp. 75-6, for the quotation from B. Colgrave, *Felix's Life of St. Guthlac*, (p. 88).
- ²⁶ There are plenty of Biblical references to monsters; the Apocalypse, the story of Jonah and the whale, Behemoth, the Leviathan, and so on. I am grateful to a colleague, Dr. Jean MacIntyre, for bringing to my attention Job xxxi: 21-2, which contains an interesting parallel to the fight with Grendel: "Si levavi super pupillum manum meam, etiam cum viderem me in porta superiore: Humerus meus a junctura sua cadat, et brachium meum cum suis ossibus confringatur". "If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, even when I saw myself superior in the gate: Let my shoulder fall from its joint, and let my arm with its bones be broken." For the inability of modern science to help *Beowulf* scholars with the monsters see S.M. Garn and W.D. Block, "The Limited Nutritional Value of Cannibalism", *American Anthropology* 72 (1970), 106.
- ²⁷ See *Audience*, p. 51, and Sisam, "The Beowulf Manuscript" in *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford U.P., 1953, reprint 1962), pp. 65-8; detailed description by N.R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 281-3.
- ²⁸ Ed. G. Herzfeld, EETS, OS 116 (1900), p. 66 and note (p. 229).
- ²⁹ See *Three Old English Prose Texts in MS. Cotton Vitellius A xv*, ed. S. Rypins, EETS, OS 161 (1924) for editions of *The Letter of Alexander the Great to Aristotle* (pp. 1-50), *The Wonders of the East* (pp. 51-67) and *The Life of St. Christopher* (pp. 68-76).
- ³⁰ See *Audience*, pp. 46-53. The history of Hygelac may also be found in Saxo Grammaticus' *Danish History* (c. 1200), Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* (c. 1223-35), *Ynglinga saga* in Old Norse and two other earlier Frankish works - Gregory of Tours's (d. 594) *History of the Franks*, the *Book of the History of the Franks (Gesta Francorum)* c. 727. For the relevant extracts from these works, see *Beowulf and its Analogues*, ed. G.N. Garmonsway and J. Simpson, (London and New York, 1968), pp. 112-15.
- ³¹ Garmonsway and Simpson, *Beowulf and its Analogues*, p. 113.
- ³² *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Reader*, rev. D. Whitelock, (Oxford, 1967), p. 175, ll. 26-7, 42-3.
- ³³ See *Audience*, pp. 80-1. In *Felix's Latin Life of St. Guthlac* the saint addresses his tormentors as 'the seed of Cain', but the Old English poems omit this reference altogether.
- ³⁴ On the Irish tradition, see further O.F. Emerson, "Legends of Cain, especially in Old and Middle English", *P.M.L.A.* 21 (1906), 831-929, especially 878-83, 888-94, 916-26, and J. Carney, "The Irish Elements in *Beowulf*", *Studies in Irish Literature and History* (Dublin, 1955), pp. 102-12.
- ³⁵ I accept the suggestion of Wrenn, *Beowulf*, p. 69, that ll. 168-9 are out of place and I follow him in inserting them between ll. 110 and 111.

- ³⁶ *Venerabilis Bedae Commentaria in Scripturas - Sacras Genesis*, ed. J.A. Giles, I., p. 92, and in *Pentateuchum Commentarii*, Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, XCI, cols. 210 ff, 219 ff.
- ³⁷ *Genesis A in The Junius Manuscript*, ed. G.P. Krapp, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* 1 (New York, Columbia U.P., 1931, reprint 1964), pp. 39-40, ll. 1248-62.
- ³⁸ Wrenn misses the error in l. 107 (Klaeber, *Beowulf*, p. 5). On the *Cham/Cain* confusion, see further Emerson, "Legends", 925, who discusses Alcuin's *Interrogationes et Responiones in Genesis* and other examples.
- ³⁹ *Audience*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁰ "Monsters and Critics", p. 27. On pp. 36-8, Tolkien gathers the epithets for Grendel and discusses them fully. See also J.L. Baird, "Grendel the Exile", *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 67 (1966), 375-81.
- ⁴¹ "Monsters and Critics", p. 33.
- ⁴² "Approaches to *Beowulf*", *R.E.S. N S* 3 (1952), 1-12.
- ⁴³ Sisam, *Structure*, p. 25, n.1. For the most recent extensive argument for aligning the *Beowulf* dragon and the Christian dragon-devil see M.E. Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of 'Beowulf'* (London, 1970), pp. 124-45.
- ⁴⁴ "Monsters and Critics", p. 17.
- ⁴⁵ The relevant extracts from the parallels cited in this paragraph may be found in R.W. Chambers, *Beowulf - An Introduction*, and in Garmonsway and Simpson, *Beowulf and its Analogues*.
- ⁴⁶ Compare, for example, Spenser's description of the dragon in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (Oxford U.P., London, 1912, reprint 1959), p. 58, I., xi., 10-12, and his descriptions of Corflambo, Orgoglio, Discord, Lust, Error, Duessa stripped.
- ⁴⁷ "Monsters and Critics", pp. 17, 18.
- ⁴⁸ Preface to *Paradise Lost*, pp. 29, 30.
- ⁴⁹ Quoted by Tolkien, "Monsters and Critics", p. 18. I am grateful to Professor Whitelock for identifying his source for me as *Widsith*, ll. 141-2.
- ⁵⁰ "The Technique of Invocation in *King Lear*", *M.L.R.* 45 (1950), 142.
- ⁵¹ Miller, *Old English Bede*, I., ii., pp. 250-1.
- ⁵² *Beowulf*, pp. cxx-cxxi.
- ⁵³ For the most extreme views, see G.G. Walsh, *Medieval Humanism* (New York, 1942), pp. 54 ff.; A. Cabaniss, "Beowulf and the Liturgy", *J.E.G.P.* 54 (1955), 195-201; M.B. McNamee, S.J., "Beowulf - An Allegory of Salvation?", *J.E.G.P.* (1960), 190-207.
- ⁵⁴ "Monsters and Critics", pp. 39-40, Appendix B. See further J.E. Cross,

- "'Ubi Sunt' Passages in Old English - Sources and Relationships",
Vetenskaps-Societetens i Lund Arsbok (1956), 26-44.
- ⁵⁵ *The Exeter Book*, ed. G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* 3 (New York, Columbia U.P., 1936), pp. 154-5, ll. 10-63.
- ⁵⁶ "Monsters and Critics", pp. 45-7, Appendix C, and *Audience*, pp. 78-9.
- ⁵⁷ Cornelii Taciti, *De Origine et Situ Germanorum*, ed. J.G.C. Anderson (Oxford, 1938, reprint 1970), pp. 12-13. See also L.L. Schücking, "Das Königsideal im *Beowulf*", *Englische Studien* 67 (1932), 1 ff.
- ⁵⁸ See Gordon, *An Introduction to Old Norse*, p. 19.
- ⁵⁹ Ed. E.V. Gordon (London, 1937, reprint 1967), p. 61, ll. 312-13.
- ⁶⁰ "Monsters and Critics", p. 21.
- ⁶¹ True, Wiglaf comes to his aid, but his action is in no way similar to Beowulf's coming from overseas to take over the fighting completely from Hrothgar. That concept of the hero is now out of date, and Wiglaf's heroism is certainly not of the same order.
- ⁶² "Monsters and Critics", p. 18.
- ⁶³ See Irving, *A Reading of Beowulf*, p. 217, on the parallels between Beowulf and Scyld and the play on *Scyld/scyld*.