

Borders and Blood:

Creativity in *Beowulf*

by

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## Abstract

In *Dimensions of Creativity*, Margaret A. Boden defines a bordered, conceptual space as the realm of creativity; therefore, one may argue that the ubiquitous presence of boundaries throughout the Old English poem *Beowulf* suggests that it is a work about creativity. Since Beowulf creates stories from his exploits, and since those exploits consist of shedding blood as a result of both geographic and corporeal crossings, the blood must be seen as the inspiration for his narratives from the border. Not only does he prove himself to be a maker because of the stories he generates, but Beowulf also fits both the personality profile and behavior pattern of creators. Although Grendel also kills, he absorbs the blood rather than making something from it and thereby becomes a representation of the evil creative act. Beowulf, however, is a man with social and political duties, and his struggle with these as they conflict with his need for personal and private creativity culminates in his experience in the creative realm itself, the cave in the mere with the mother and the sword of the giants. Using Dorothy L. Sayers' arguments from *The Mind of the Maker* that humanity mirrors God in one major aspect, the need to create, and that culture is at odds with this need, Beowulf may be viewed as heeding his social responsibilities and out of necessity negating his creativity. In doing so, he suppresses violence and bloodshed, trying to find a way to negotiate between them and public duty. The result is tragic: he becomes almost non-productive in order to preserve his kingdom. As a work that regards creativity ambiguously, *Beowulf* may also be seen to speak to the concerns of the monastics who produced it and their struggles with the problem of trying to determine when the creative act is worship and when it is idolatry.

## Acknowledgements

Dorothy L. Sayers in her discussion of creativity notes that the trinitarian structure of the Godhead is the model for almost everything else; the world operates on a principle of three, and when each part of the trio does its part well, all runs smoothly, especially for those of us who incur benefits by proximity to it. Sayers would be gratified to see her theory in operation where my graduate committee is concerned; each one of them has offered a separate and distinct contribution to the work I have done, yet all have supported the whole. Dr. Ted Sherman has provided guidance and insight into the text of *Beowulf* itself; his knowledgeable teaching of Old English and his ability to make the Anglo-Saxon culture come to life are the reasons that I was first inspired to write this dissertation. Dr. Rhonda McDaniel has focused much energy on suggesting sources and ideas, and above all, she has helped me to structure, organize, and limit the topic. I cannot thank her enough for the times she sent lengthy emails in answer to questions I had. It was she who suggested Sayers as a possible source and thereby added immensely to the depth of this study. Although she agreed to be the second reader, Dr. McDaniel has gone far beyond this role. Finally, Dr. Martha Hixon has offered advice especially in the technical areas of grammar, diction, and smoothness of expression. In addition, she was the first to offer positive feedback when I finally started to pull it all together. To these three, thank you for the many hours of your time and for your knowledge and expertise.

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## Chapter I: THE PERIMETERS OF THE STUDY

*Beowulf* has long been the site of contention between those who want it studied historically as an Anglo-Saxon document and those who interpret it in the light of various literary theories. This contention is good for the longevity of the poem; when a work ceases to be controversial and capable of generating varied reactions from the reading public, it often begins a slide into obscurity. Such is not the fate of *Beowulf*, which has steadily generated new analyses. This dissertation is yet another attempt to add a new dimension to the poem: it offers a twenty-first century interpretation that sees the work as a thematic study of creativity. In this study, Beowulf himself represents the artist who must determine, first, what his actions as creator mean for the society in which he is a member, and, second, to what extent he will alter or suppress his ability to create for the sake of that society if the two are in conflict with each other.

This thesis – that *Beowulf* is a study of creativity and creator—is made difficult for yet another reason besides the fact that it applies literary theories both unknown to the original Anglo-Saxons who produced the poem and often strongly resisted by historical critics: the term “creativity” is extremely fluid and slippery. No one seems able to define it in such a way as to explain all aspects of it, either as a term or as a process, despite the fact that humans have tried to do so since at least the days of the ancient Greeks, who believed that the only person capable of making something freely, without imitating, was the one they called a poet. Plato, for example, argues in *The Republic* that the poet creates because he loses his reason and is the victim of a sort of divine seizure. At the other extreme, opposite those who view creativity as a visitation on a human by a godlike force, are those who argue that creative acts are merely the results of physiology, for example,



because a person contains “certain levels of a particular neurochemical” (Eysenck 200). Even the term “creator” is vague; I have also used “artist,” “poet,” “storyteller,” and “maker” to describe Beowulf as one who creates.

This dissertation faces these two obstacles—the resistance to interpreting *Beowulf* in terms of modern literary theory and the difficulty in determining what constitutes creativity—as well as a third, that of the issue of authorship of the poem. While I contend that Beowulf is a creator, he is also a created character in a created work. Therefore, much of what is argued to be true for him as an artist has implications beyond him; it suggests theories about artists in general, and in particular, about the two scribes<sup>1</sup> who wrote down his story and the people who may have told it orally before the text was created.<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps the most controversial aspect of my dissertation because, as Allen Frantzen and

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Kiernan’s close examination of the manuscript using fiber optics, detailed in his book *Beowulf and the Beowulf Manuscript*, proves conclusively that two scribes wrote down the poem.

<sup>2</sup> As Roy Luizza notes in the “Introduction” to his *New Verse Translation of Beowulf*, “Most scholars assume that the surviving manuscript is a copy of an earlier written text, and is probably the last in a long chain of copies” (20). The one most notable exception in recent study of the poem is Kiernan, who bases his argument on the fact that his examination of the manuscript proves that the second scribe went back and edited the work of the first as well as completed the writing of the poem from line 1939 to its end.

Gillian Overing have noted, no “complex model of subjectivity [has] been constructed for Anglo-Saxon culture” (1177). Even if it had been, problems would still abound because of the fact that *Beowulf* tells of a non-Christian culture but was copied down and edited by Christian monks, who added their own perspective to it.<sup>3</sup> To whom, then, should I attribute my conclusions about creation?

Considering all these problems, it is perhaps not surprising that the current study did not begin as an effort to explain creativity. Rather, it originated with a single description, that of Grendel as a “mearcstapa,” or, as Bosworth-Toller defines it, “one who wanders around a desolate borderland” (674) and, as Klaeber explains it, “a wanderer in the waste borderland” (373). This term is one of the few connected to Grendel which is not obviously negative or monstrous. It suggests instead his lack of place in the Anglo-Saxon world. He who walks a border is one who is aware of it as something excluding him from whatever is beyond it. To be excluded from the Anglo-Saxon world was far worse than exclusion from a social group today; to be without a place in their communal

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<sup>3</sup> Again quoting Luizza, “Most critics agree that the heroic action of the poem is thoroughly accommodated to a Christian paradigm; they disagree, however, on the meaning and purpose of that accommodation” (32). One of the best explanations as to how and why works like *Beowulf* were probably given to and copied by monks is found in John Niles’ “Understanding *Beowulf*: Oral Poetry Acts,” which is listed in the Works Cited section of this dissertation.

society was to have no identity.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the image of someone pacing along demarcated perimeters evokes an emotional and sympathetic response in the reader because it suggests a yearning by the pacer to be a part of a realm which forbids entry and denies him the right to belong. Yet sympathy vanishes when Grendel crosses these borders. Extreme violence and bloodshed, horrific killings, ensue from his actions.

However, just as readers are about to develop a strong antipathy for the monster, they are confronted with the news that Grendel, the monstrous eater of men, has a mother. The sudden positioning of him as the child of someone conjures up images of him as a mother might see him, as a helpless baby, a curious and innocent toddler, a teen desiring to belong and to have friends. Perhaps these are as much twenty-first century ideas as the interpretation which follows, but even if more than a thousand years has passed since the writing down of *Beowulf*, motherhood has not changed in one way: No emotion is stronger than that of the mother for a child. The grief of Grendel's mother suggests that readers are expected to feel an answering emotion for both her and her son, no matter how

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<sup>4</sup> The importance of comitatus, or the warrior band, is a major theme in *Beowulf*; however, a new social order is emerging in the poem, as evidenced by the stress placed on military kingship. Craig Davis in *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England* (New York: Garland, 1996) points out both of these facts and notes the effect that the emerging societies had on the older ones. The Old English poem "The Wanderer" offers an even better look at what happens to an individual who has no identity because he has no place in the band.

horrifying his or her actions. Why is the reader given these subtle hints that Grendel is not just a monster, that he is three-dimensional, that he has been created to be ambiguous?

One way to attempt an answer to these last questions is to examine other characters in the poem to see if the pattern of ambiguity surrounding the monster is found in connection with any of them. Surprisingly, if Grendel is like anyone in his role as once-a-child, it is Beowulf. The hero is connected to childhood in at least four instances: when he sits with Wealhtheow's two little sons at a banquet, when Hrothgar desires him for a son, in a story about the Geats and their pessimistic view of him when he was a boy, and in one of the last passages of the work when Beowulf remembers the grandfather who took him in as a child in the years before that same grandfather mourned himself to death over the fates of two of Beowulf's uncles. Yet even while we are affected by these views of the warrior as a misunderstood and perhaps lonely child, we also confront another aspect of him: like the monster, he kills. In order to do so, he—again like Grendel—has to cross boundaries. In fact, his journeys across a “mearc” (limit, mark, border) are the reason for most of the poem and result in death and bloodshed just as Grendel's border crossings do.

But the blood which Beowulf sheds is unlike that shed by Grendel in the most crucial way: his violence is approved by his society because it protects and preserves order and kingdoms. This fact is not unusual nor is it surprising. Approved killing is a constant in heroic tales, just as are questions on the part of readers and critics about what constitutes such killing. What is the distinction between good violence and evil? Rarely is a clear answer available. But one crucial dissimilarity does emerge when Beowulf and Grendel's actions are examined for parallels: Grendel absorbs the blood he spills, while

Beowulf makes stories from that which he sheds, ones that he may tell many times, embellishing and changing them as he repeats them. He uses violence and blood, normally the marks of destruction, to produce artistry such as the narrative of his killing of the sea monsters in the swimming match with Brecca.

Since the blood is spilled because of the transgressing of borders, all acts of crossing them, even peaceable ones, are fraught with tension. In fact, as I began to extend my concept of “mearc” metaphorically, in the same way that the poet does when he refers to the dividing line between life and death (for example, in line 2384, where “mearc” is used to speak of the limit of life in regards to Heardred--“Him þæt to mearce wearð”), I began to see that he also invades a different kind of border, that of the corporeal body, more times and in more ways than other warriors do. Thus, he is a borderwalker in a different sense than just the geographic: the borders through which he slices are corporeal as well. Because he crosses geographical boundaries that no one else does in the course of the story, because he tears open corporeal ones that others cannot, Beowulf creates what no one else can. He is the symbol of the radically and uniquely creative spirit.

Grendel’s acts of drinking blood are, for many readers, the most horrifying part of his killing. If the murders he commits and the blood he sheds are not transformed creatively into art forms such as stories (in fact, he seems to be unable to speak in such a way as to communicate complex ideas to the Danes and the Geats), his cannibalism suggests a reason why: he is a deviant, a work himself of radical and socially unacceptable art. Kristen Guest points out that cannibalism represents an attempt on the part of the outcast to obtain a oneness with his victim (2). We are repulsed, she notes, not because Grendel eats his prey (we kill and eat deer, for example) but because what he eats

is human, like us. Cannibalism is also the marker between what is acceptable to humanity and what is not: for one to eat another is to note “border instability” (1), to identify the act that marks the forbidden. Acceptance of cannibalism would mean a radical change in the boundaries of the conceptual space. Using this argument, Grendel becomes a symbol for a dark side of creativity, in particular, art which is perverse or has the capacity to destroy.

It is at this point that an understanding of creativity becomes imperative to this study. Most dictionaries define it generically as “to bring into being,” or in some cases, “to combine old things or ideas in new and novel ways.” On the most basic level, Beowulf “brings into being” stories. To modern readers, Beowulf’s stories are not particularly unique; we are used to all sorts of movie effects that make the impossible seem to happen. And even to Beowulf’s contemporaries, stories of fights with giants, dragons, and fantastic monsters were not unusual. Consider, for example, the story told by a scop on the way back from the lake, where the men have followed Grendel’s bloody footprints to make certain that he has gone home to die. Its hero is Sigemund, who kills a dragon by pinning him to a wall with a sword and then takes the dragon’s treasure. This story matches any deed of Beowulf’s. Why, then, should Beowulf be considered creative—or for that matter, why does the public find any writer creative? Has it not all been told before?

These questions are the very ones which Margaret A. Boden attempts to answer in her essay “What Is Creativity?” The article is part of a larger work which she edited entitled *Dimensions of Creativity*. Using her study and that of other writers in the book, each from a different academic field but united in the belief that creativity is connected to borders and that it can be analyzed to at least some degree, a definition applicable to *Beowulf* may be formulated. Boden argues that two kinds of creativity are possible, P and

H. The first is defined as occurring when what is discovered or made is new to one person, the discoverer, but not necessarily new to others; the second is the type of discovery or object that has never been made before in all human history (76). Boden develops an analogy which explains the two types in terms of the motif with which I am most concerned, the border, because creativity is seen by her as occurring inside a “conceptual space”:

The dimensions of the conceptual space are the organizing principles that unify and give structure to a given domain of thinking. [. . .] Conceptual spaces can be explored in various ways. Some exploration merely shows us something about the nature of the relevant space that we had not explicitly noted before. [. . .] Some exploration, by contrast, shows us the limits of the space, and perhaps identifies points at which changes can be made in one dimension or another. (79-80)

She concludes that the type of creativity which explores the space, the P-creativity, is not as original as the type which transforms it by shifting, moving, or destroying the very borders of the space, the H-creativity (82). “A merely novel idea,” she writes, “is one that can be described and/or produced by the same set of generative rules as are other, familiar, ideas. But a genuinely original or radically creative idea is one that cannot” (78). The latter is threatening to the very foundations from which it originated, until if or when it is accepted and accommodations are made for or by it. And in Boden’s analogy of creativity as a testing of space, I found the reason that the border seems so inextricably bound up with the idea of art: there is no space to define without boundaries, or, as she puts it,

It follows that the ascription of creativity always involves tacit or explicit reference to some specific generative system. It follows, too, that constraints—far from being opposed to creativity—make creativity possible. To throw away all constraints would be to destroy the capacity for creative thinking. Random processes alone can result only in first-time curiosities, not radical surprises. (78-79)

In other words, boundaries *must* be present in order for creativity to occur. The more restrictive the boundary, the greater the opportunity for creativity.

Most of what Beowulf creates is of the novel-but-not-radical variety; he experiences for himself a battle with the sea monsters and with Grendel and, even though others such as Sigemund have done the same, he produces his own stories made unique—creative—by his word choice and his own sense of humor, as we see, for example, when he describes his killing of the sea monsters who plague him in his swimming match with Brecca:

	Me to grunde teah
fah feondscaða,	fæste hæfde
grim on grape;	hwæþre me gyfeþe wearð,
þæt ic aglæcan	orde geræhte,
hildebille;	heaporæs fornam
mihtig meredeor	þurh mine hand.



Swa mec gelome      laðgeteonan  
 þreatedon þearle.      Ic him þenode  
 deoran sweorde,      swa hit gedefe wæs.  
 Næs hie ðære fylle      gefean hæfdon,  
 manfordædlan,      þæt hie me þegon,  
 symbel ymbsæton      sægrunde neah;  
 ac on mergenne      mecum wunde  
 be yðlafe      uppe lægon,  
 sweordum aswefede, þæt syðþan na  
 ymb brontne ford      brimliðende  
 lade ne letton.

(553B-569A: A terrible enemy dragged me to the floor of the sea, he held me tightly in his deadly grip, whereupon it was given to me [the ability] to kill the great monster with my sword, my war-weapon. The mighty sea beast was killed by my own hand in the midst of the battle. So frequently the evildoers harassed me severely. I served them with the edge of my sword, as was appropriate. Their feast did not bring joy to them, wicked destroyers, when they partook of me, their feast, as they sat at the bottom of the sea but on the morrow they lay on the sand of the shore, turned up. My

sword had put them to sleep, and afterwards they did not hinder seafarers nor anyone else on the high waterway.)<sup>5</sup>

The use of litotes contributes to the tone of the story; it is a deliberate alteration from what must have originally been experienced by Beowulf, meant to inject lightness into a tale of death and terror so as to appeal to, and make himself trustworthy and likeable in the eyes of, his audience. He changes the facts with a definite goal in mind rather than simply repeating them; such activity is evidence of creativity. His listeners respond to his tale because they are familiar with the techniques of the typical scop; other than the fact that he is the hero of his own story, that he has personally experienced the events of which he tells, there is nothing radical about his performance. Rather, it is reassuring.

Just because his creativity here is the P variety is no reason to suggest that it does not exist nor to denigrate it. Boden, in fact, points out that since the vast majority of literature is concerned with human motivation, stories must focus on “psychological structures that are possible and intelligible within human action and interaction” (94). In other words, it is the job of most literature to tell of a character’s reaction to a given and familiar situation, those exemplified in P-creativity, or the kind that does not challenge the border. But Beowulf has the ability and is given the opportunity to create in the sense of H-creativity as well. That opportunity is represented by his confrontation with something

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<sup>5</sup> The Old English text is from Fredrich Klaeber’s *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Third Edition; the translation here and on following pages is my own unless otherwise noted.

at the edge of human experience, something so completely original that it is inexplicable in many ways in both his day and in ours: a great sword.

Swords themselves are common in this poem and in other Old English writings. Beowulf uses several of them as the instruments by which he creates/sheds blood. He is, indeed, an artist of the sword. The one, however, that alone allows Beowulf to shed the blood of the mother and to decapitate Grendel is depicted as unique in its own right. In fact, it is one of the most memorable found in the literature of the period for several reasons: it is so massive that no ordinary man can lift it; it was created by giants; it was endowed by them with magic; its blade melts like frost in a fire; and its hilt is engraved with story of a great flood and with runes that are apparently unreadable to Beowulf. The teller of the story apparently means for this sword to be viewed as extraordinary; he does not seem to have copied it from any known weapon, as Catherine M. Hills notes: “Elaborate golden sword hilts, inlaid with garnets, can be found from the fifth century onward, and occur at Sutton Hoo. . . . There are, however, no hilts with Biblical scenes” (305) like the one apparently engraved on the sword Beowulf uses in the cave at the bottom of the lake.

I would argue that, given all these factors, the sword of the giants hanging on the wall of the mother’s lair may be seen as something beyond a mere weapon. It may be seen as a symbol of radical creative ability, the kind that pushes and challenges borders. As both object and text, the supplier of the means to shed blood and the artifact which is an indicator of the ability to do so, it is indicative of art on many levels. As object, it can cut borders and bring blood as all acts of creation do in Beowulf: as a text written in runes on the hilt, it tells a story. It generates a didactic narrative (a created thing) from

Hrothgar, who is the only person in the poem other than Beowulf to hold it. Its presence in the cave contributes to the idea of the monsters as being connected to creativity and to the idea of the underwater lair as being the place where Beowulf encounters the real power of his own artistic ability.

In explicating this idea in the chapters that follow, I first examine the poem itself and note its preoccupation with the created object. Then I look at aspects of Beowulf's character that suggest he himself is an artist, an originator, a maker. By using the tools which David N. Perkins and Harold Gardner (two of Boden's collaborators) insist are the only means that we have to determine who is likely to create—biographical inventories and personality profiles—it is possible to obtain a measure of Beowulf's creativity. As part of this assessment, the words of the narrator of the poem and of the other characters to describe the warrior are analyzed, in particular, their use of the term "cræft" (the Old English word for both "art" and "strength") as it is used in the poem. In order to give validity to my contention that the obsession with borders in the poem is directly related to its obsession with creativity, I locate the border as a historical, metatextual, corporeal, and geographic symbol that was accepted by the Anglo-Saxon as being a place of remarkable creative energy. The particular history of the object and the artist as it relates to borders which has heavily influenced my reading of the poem is Herbert R. Broderick's "Some Attitudes Toward the Frame in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts of the Tenth and Eleventh Century." The discussion of the metatextual treatment of the border in the poem is underpinned by the work of Manish Sharma. And in explaining how blood buys narratives, no work has been more helpful than Seth Lerer's essay "Grendel's Glove."

All of this is necessary in order to prove that creativity arrives in a borderland where bloodshed has occurred and leads to an act of making that is often treated ambiguously as both good and bad. These activities must be found to exist in the poem in order to ask two crucial questions: what is the process that Beowulf as creator endures and what is his response to his realization of the anti-social implications of the act of making and the made object?

And as I reread the poem in light of these questions, the tragedy of the story took on a new light. After Beowulf's exposure to pure creativity, he becomes introspective, nostalgic, and eventually inactive, at least until the last hours of his life when he is forced to confront the dragon. He stops testing and crossing borders, adds no new territory to his kingdom, stops shedding blood or finding new ways to work with it, and tells a different type of story, one markedly different from those he told in Heorot. One is a brooding prophecy; the others are backward, lonely glances at his distant past. Why?

One reason is a paradox grounded in historical reality: the warrior who rids his world of evil in battle finds eventually that he has no reason to exist any more. A peaceful society has no place for the man who destroys peace and sheds blood; yet without bloodshed, there are no stories. Thus, Beowulf brings about his own demise. On another level, however, the one that is explored in this study, it is because something traumatic happens to him in the cave. He discovers the borders of his society and his own ability to wreck them. Boden observes that creativity is considered such only when what is created is seen to be of value to its world and time ("Introduction" 5); as a consequence, creativity may be stifled because the artist seeks a place in his culture and negates his potential for radical thought, or because he is made an outcast, a borderwalker, when he persists in

creating that which is either not relevant or is threatening to his contemporaries. This is exactly the type of creativity that Beowulf possesses: he has the ability to cross and tear borders. As such, he has the potential to threaten his society. This potential is of more concern to him than it might be to other makers because, unlike the typical artist,<sup>6</sup> he is at the center of the political and social structure of his world, a member of a noble ruling family. The realization that his creativity has the potential to destroy his world and that it carries with it a demand for introversion and isolation is only part of his dilemma. As Micheal Near proves in his essay “Anticipating Alienation,” such introspection is also death to the comitatus of the Geats, and it is something that they—the warriors he leaves behind when he crosses boundaries to encounter the monsters—will never be able to comprehend. What he finds when he travels to the cave at the bottom of the lake leaves him, as the protector of his civilization, with only one viable option, and he takes it: he suppresses most of his creative activity in order to maintain his culture. The peace that he has established becomes his personal downfall as a maker. He gains a social identity but loses his own soul.

The definitive event that marks the slow death of his artistic ability is the episode in the cave at the bottom of the lake which is the home of Grendel and his mother. This is made clear because it is the last time in the poem that Beowulf sheds blood without help.

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<sup>6</sup> The characteristics and traits of the “typical” creator will be discussed in the third chapter; asociality and/or birth to a family that is not socially prominent is often one of them.

Furthermore, the place itself is remarkable in terms of borders—it is in a bordered lake which itself is in the interior of another bordered world, an island—and the death of the mother that occurs here is unlike any other killing in that it is marked by three unique circumstances: she is the only enemy which he kills using the sword found on the cave’s wall, a great (and physically impossible) light spills into the underground lair as Beowulf cuts into her throat and sheds her blood, and the churning water around the cave is found by the warrior to have calmed and stilled when he reenters it on his journey to the surface. It is not remarkable at all, therefore, to find critics such as John D. Niles offering convincing arguments that the battle with the mother is the structural center of the poem (“Ring Composition” 924-35), Jane C. Nitzsche positing that she is all that holds the poem together “on a thematic level” (para. 27), and Jacqueline Vaught determining that the “decisive moment occurs when Beowulf stands against the dam” (para. 11). What happens to him in the cave is the single greatest experience of his life: it is his recognition of the moral dimension—the implications—of art. He is forced to confront the fact that evil can arise from creativity and to try to find a way to deal with the realization.

This process is, if anything, more undefined than creativity itself; what we have as explanations of what happens when we create is theoretical and controversial. Complicating the situation even more is the fact that creativity in the arts is not problem-specific; indeed, there is no problem to be solved in the sense that science defines it. What is discovered by writing and reading or by working in other aspects of art is interior, psychological, cultural. Rather than talking about the process as one of discovery and implementation as is the case in the physical sciences, Colin Martindale, another of Boden’s collaborators, suggests that the process of creativity for writers of literature is one

first suggested in 1952 by psychoanalytic critic Ernst Kris, a “biphasic” one of “inspiration and elaboration” (163). In any act of literary creativity, what occurs first is an inspiration which results from the poet’s regression to the level of primary thought, the kind which is concrete, irrational, and autistic, the kind we experience in dreams or reveries (163). Here, on this primordial level, the poet’s thought is “free associative” (164). In other words, ideas and words that we might normally associate with one another are applied in new and different ways to other ideas and words, in associations that we might never have made under “normal,” or secondary thought, processes. “Regression” is a fitting term for what occurs when Beowulf makes his trip to the cave at the bottom of the lake, one made by sinking steadily into the depths of the water, beyond time and breath. It becomes a regression into his own depths and abilities. He moves steadily into an area which is more and more restrained by borders and thus one where the possibility of creating is exponentially increased according to the depths to which he falls.

What follows after the regression is a far more conscious activity, that of taking the substance of the regressive primary thought and making it conform to the rules of rationality, or, in other words, making it socially acceptable (164). This is Kris’s “elaboration phase.” Creators in the literary sense which are recognized as “radical” are those who have increased the depths of regression and have made less effort to elaborate on the ideas generated by the autistic, dreamlike state of inspiration.<sup>7</sup> In other words, the

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<sup>7</sup> Those whom we usually designate “modern” writers deepen the regressive phase and do not elaborate to any great extent in an effort to achieve originality. However, the writers before and during the Renaissance did not value originality in the same way that we today



poet who is genuinely in control of his own art, who is highly disciplined, has at least some choice as to how socially acceptable his work will be; he can “elaborate” on it to great extent, or at least to the extent that he feels he has communicated his idea without sacrificing it to values and mores.

This is what Beowulf confronts: how much of his creativity can he explore and employ in his society, made up of the thanes waiting for him above, at the edge of the lake? And what will his exploration mean for both them and for him personally? His bent for free association reveals itself when he abandons the sword Hrunting and does what no other human warrior has ever been capable of doing before: he breaks the chain on the sword on the wall and uses it to cut into Grendel’s mother, the other creative spirit of the poem. What he gets is a moment when he might choose to ally himself with her power,

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do. The Anglo-Saxons themselves did not look for new and novel words to express their ideas as modern poets do when they attempt to increase perception and arouse attention by deforming usages. Because the language was largely unwritten, the Anglo-Saxon emphasis was on the joy found in using recognizable patterns in speaking and on the use of “stock” phrases to move an oral performance along; this is the very reason for the kennings, in fact.

her creative energy—to partake of her blood. The great light that breaks over the underwater hall and the wild surge of his own emotions indicate the momentous nature of his killing of her. Had Beowulf chosen to emerge from the water at that moment, he would still have had an intact and magical sword. What could he have done with such a tool for creativity? Had he dared to take the radical step beyond the bounds of the expectations of his society—had he taken the head of a woman and a mother back to the surface rather than the head of another male—what could he have *not* done?

The questions remain unanswered. Beowulf holds his tribe’s future in his hands, and he cannot maintain it and pick up a sword so massive that he must lay down the lives of his people for it. Instead, he explores known territory, finding his way to the corner where Grendel lies and cutting off his head. In the process, the blade of the sword disintegrates, making it an artifact only—no longer magic or even useful to him. Other, less extreme swords may lead to other, less extreme stories, but in this instance, Beowulf chooses to tell Grendel’s narrative in a way that demystifies the creature and undoes his evil, that turns him into something ugly and harmless rather than radically monstrous. The conflict between *comitatus* and creativity inside Beowulf is over almost before it begins. It is impossible for him, being who and what he is, to do anything other than to “symble [. . .] on feðan beforan wolde / ana on orde” (lines 2498-97: “always on foot [. . .] go before, alone in the front line”) to defend his family, his people, and his world by defining rather than by challenging the pathways. The rest of his life becomes a negotiation between his need to create and his duty to protect the Geats.

As I reached this conclusion, I asked myself a final question: is this a theme that the scribes who wrote down *Beowulf* might have considered, or is it only my own desire to

find it in the poem that makes it seem so prevalent? Much of modern theory holds that I do not necessarily have to prove that the original tellers of the poem had this theme as their conscious intention, but I keep running into the same problem with which I began: *Beowulf* is also a product of its historical time, and somehow it seems academically unsound to dismiss the fact. It helps that I think that perhaps those who produced the work themselves considered the issue, although perhaps not to the same extent symbolically and mythologically that I have. The problem of creativity is, after all, at the very heart of religious thought. The monks who wrote (or even perhaps composed) the poem believed in creativity as an aspect of theology; as Rhonda McDaniel points out, “the first line of the ancient Apostle’s Creed to which they adhered proclaims their belief in God as Father and *Creator*.”

In order to deal with this concern and to address many of questions raised about the moral component of art that is unavoidable in the context of monastic Christian literature, I have used Dorothy N. Sayers’ *The Mind of the Maker*. On a theoretical level, it is particularly relevant because of her extensive research both into the early church and into Anglo-Saxon culture. While her goal is not to find evidence of commentary on creativity in such writing, she concludes that God’s activity itself is creating, that our purpose on earth is to respond in kind by creating as well, and that in confronting our creative natures, we experience a three-part process of making which corresponds to the Trinity of the Godhead. She designates the trinity of creativity as the Idea, the Energy, and the Power. Using her ideas, I explore *Beowulf*’s experience in the mere as a process of making that is affected by concerns like those addressed by every religion, in particular, what is evil and how might men deal with it creatively?

As I move out of this introduction and into the work of proving my dissertation, the reader needs to be forewarned that I do not discover the meaning of creativity. I simply argue that Beowulf comes to know what it means for him, and in achieving that understanding, he justifies his role as a mythic hero even while he proves his very human limitations.

Chapter II: *BEOWULF'S* THEME OF CREATIVITY

*Beowulf* as a work is obsessed with creativity—the very idea of *making*, the energy involved in creating and producing, and the powerful effects of the making act. Such a statement is justifiable from the very beginning of the poem. The society of *Beowulf* is essentially one mesmerized by the act of creation. The creator and his objects are everywhere, even in some of the earliest lines, when we are told of the beautiful objects departing from the Danish shore with their dead king, Scyld:

Ðær wæs madma fela

of feorwegum      frætwa gelæded;

ne hyrde ic cymlicor      ceol gegyrwan

hildewæpnum      ond heaðowædum,

billum ond byrnum;      him on bearme læg

madma mænigo,      þa him mid scoldon

on flodes æht      feor gewitan.

Nalæs hi hine læssan      lacum teodan,

þeodgestreonium,      þon þa dydon,

þe hine æt frumsceaft forð onsendon

ænne ofer yðe      umborwesende.

þa gyt hie him asetton      segen gyldenne

heah ofer heafod,      leton holm beran,  
 geafon on garsecg;      him wæs geomor sefa,  
 murnende mod.      (36b-50a)

(There was great treasure of gold and silver fetched from far away loaded with him. Never have I heard of a ship so nobly loaded with weapons of war and war-dress, swords and mail shirts: on his chest there lay a heaped horde of jewels that were to go far over the waves with him, floating away. No less were these gifts than the ones they had provided for him who had set him over the seas when he was only a child, friendless and cold. High over his head his men raised the standard, a golden banner, then let the waves take him, gave him to the ocean with sad hearts, mourning in their minds.)

Nor is the death of Scyld the end of the matter. At the moment that we enter the scene of the first encounter with the monsters, the idea of creation is stressed three times over. The scop—a creative force in his own right—is singing his creation, a song, and that song is, in turn, about the ultimate act of creation, that of God shaping the world:

   þær wæs hearpan sweg,  
 swutol sang scopes.      Sægde se þe cuþe  
 frumsceaft fira      feorran reccan,  
 cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga      eorðan worhte,  
 wlitebeorhtne wang,      swa wæter bebugeð,

gesette sigehreþig	sunnan ond monan
leoman to leohte	landbuendum,
ond gefrætwaðe	foldan sceatas
leomum ond leafum,	lif eac gesceop
rynna gehwylcum	þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.--- (89b-98)

(There was heard the harp music, the clear song of the poet. He sang the story of the creation, often told and well-known to men. He told the story of the Almighty who made the earth, a beautiful place, with water encompassed, who set triumphant the sun and the moon as lights to light the earth-dweller, who adorned the earth corners with branches and with leaves, these also He gave to his creation, the human race, the living who move about [upon the earth].)

The intense scrutiny placed on the artist and his art is made further significant when the act of singing—and perhaps the subject matter of the song—proves immediately to be the catalyst that generates the fury of Grendel and thus begins the first of the three battles.

Additional proof of the prevalence of the theme of creativity abounds: in terms of the poet as storyteller, the scop is not alone in his efforts to create a narrative. In fact, much of *Beowulf* is preoccupied with story-telling-as-creation. Other tales crop up repeatedly, including the story of Sigemund, the story of Heremod, and several told by Beowulf himself. It has been the tradition to view many of the side-stories such as the one concerning the evil queen Modthyrth as “digressions,” but the vast number of them which are present in the poem suggests instead that they serve a different purpose, to function as

a metaphor for the art made by a creative power.

Furthermore, no one who has read even a small portion of *Beowulf* can deny the overwhelming, smothering omnipresence of art in the form of more traditional material pieces like those mentioned earlier as surrounding Scyld: the object as art and artifact is heavily embedded into the fabric of the entire story. Every sword is treated as treasure; the great necklace which Wealhtheow gives Beowulf produces awed commentary at three different points in the poem, including remarks from the narrator, just as Scyld's gold-laden death ship does, and for that matter, almost every important artifact/creation of the story; even Heorot in its gold, ivory, and iron glory is regarded as a masterful piece of art. The warriors' weapons and their clothing are as much artifacts and revered heirlooms as they are the regalia of the battlefield.

Even given the prominence of the warrior, society in the sixth century Germanic world—Beowulf's world—is peopled by notable creators: the poet who sings the songs, the smith who makes the weapons, the king whose desire is to build a memorable meadhall, the queen who weaves peace, God himself. As the poem begins with art, so it also ends: a vast treasure of jewels and swords and golden cups—a cursed one—destroys the old king. Uttered by an anonymous messenger, one of the final proclamations deals with the created object: “. . . nalles eorl wegan / maððum to gemyndum, ne mægð scyne / habban on healse hring-weorðunge” (3015-17). (“Nor shall lords wear jewels in memory; no beautiful maiden shall wear on her neck a noble ring.”)

Understanding the Anglo-Saxon attitude toward creativity and creators helps in understanding both their love of material objects and of narratives-as-art. Issues



complicating any study of this attitude are the same ones that complicate discussion of the poem on any level, the same ones I mentioned in the first chapter: *Beowulf* is set in a Germanic sixth-century world but was written down by two Anglo-Saxon scribes who lived anywhere from two hundred to five hundred years later. They were literate and Christian; *Beowulf* was neither. To what degree the manuscript is faithful either to their world or to the Geat warrior's is highly debatable. For that reason, and because the poem itself is syncretic, it is necessary to determine as much as possible what the attitudes of both cultures toward creativity were.

The Anglo-Saxons began to appear in Britain, where *Beowulf* was copied down, in the fifth century after Christ, when the Roman departure from the island left it open to them and other similar pagan Germanic tribes. During this Age of Migration, which took place for the next two centuries, the Angles, the Saxons, the Jutes, and other northwestern European groups brought their culture and thus their art and their attitudes about it with them to the island. Their material creations were usually mobile, like their nomadic lifestyle had been up to this point, and served utilitarian purposes, but many of the artifacts from this period feature gold, silver, bronze, and iron, as well as amber, rock crystal, amethyst, bone, shell, coral, garnet, and glass, "which was often recycled from one piece to another" (Megaw 9).

Art historians have designated three types of art as arising from the Germanic culture, but the only one of importance when considering Britain during the fifth through the eighth centuries after Christ is the one classified as "animal," consisting of Style I and Style II. However, Style II cannot be said to be completely pre-Christian, or "pure" Anglo-Saxon: it began to appear in the 600s, just slightly prior to the church's becoming

the prime patron for art. The 700s saw a steady decline in Germanic forms as a result. Nevertheless, much of the impulse behind even Style II of the animal phase was not ecclesiastical or liturgical. Verity Fisher laments that the lack of written contemporary commentaries “on art and its perceived role in society . . . makes our interpretation of Anglo-Saxon motifs . . . so very difficult” (85), but observation alone reveals that in Style I of animal phase, the bronze and silver workers tended to create twisted, surreal animals and animal parts, while later, in Style II – predominantly the type of art which is found at Sutton Hoo, for example – whole beasts were intertwined in symmetrical shapes.

Sutton Hoo is only one of many burial sites in England—albeit the richest—to reveal a plethora of created objects, products of human cultural activity. It should come as no surprise that they are for the most part connected to warfare. At Sutton Hoo, archeological finds include many of the types of objects described in *Beowulf*: among others, the famous helmet with what many think are tiny boars on the eyebrows, jeweled cups, shields, shoulder clasps – and evidence of the co-existence of Christianity with paganism, two silver baptismal spoons. Objects found at other gravesites, in particular those of women, also include weapons along with jewelry such as necklaces (although necklaces have been found in the graves of males as well) as well as spindles, weaving batons, threadboxes—themselves tools for further creativity. As Fisher observes, “the literary trope of woman as ‘peaceweaver’ has been seen as the product of such involvement” (93).

One artifact in particular casts a long shadow over *Beowulf*. At the center of the pre-Christian Germanic tribe, both literally and figuratively, was the mead hall such as Heorot. Whether it was so important that it was treated as highly prized art rather than as

a mere gathering place, or whether the inverse is true, that art was treasured to the point that the hall was equated with it, the fact remains that Heorot is repeatedly presented in the poem as a created object so meaningful that it must be protected and revered as much as, if not more than, the men it houses. In some of the earliest lines of the poem the king of the Danes, Hrothgar, appears; rather than focus on him, however, the poet turns to his great hall. In eighteen lines, it serves as the measuring stick for the king, a symbolic representation of a human. First it is connected to both the king's thoughts and his ambition:

Him on mod bearn,  
 þæt healreced      hatan wolde,  
 medoærn micel      men gewyrcean  
 þonne ylðo bearn      æfre gefrunon. . . . (67b-70b)

(It came to his mind / that he should order a hall-building, / have men make  
 a great mead-house / which the sons of men would remember forever.)

Then, even as its striking beauty is presented, its fate is foretold, and tied to its fate is that of Hrothgar:

Sele hlifade,  
 heah ond horngeap;      heaðowylma bad,  
 laðan liges;      ne wæs hit lenge þa gen,  
 þæt se ecghete      apumsweorum,

æfter wælniðe            wæcnan scolde. (81b-85b)

(The hall towered / high and horn-gabled. The battle surge was waiting for it, / hateful flames; nor was it long, but it was not yet time, / that the sword-hate between father-in-law and son-in-law / should awaken after deadly violence.)

The hall's splendor is remarked upon again and again. It is "sincfage" (167: richly decorated), a "hordburh" (467: a treasure-city), a "goldsele gumena gearwost wisse / fættum fahne" (715b-716b: a golden house, of men surely known, / its goldplates shining). Furthermore, the sign of Hrothgar's defeated state is his turning over the guardianship of the hall, not his men, to the young Geat; his shame at having to do so is markedly present when he tells Beowulf,

Næfre ic ænegum men            ær alyfde,  
 siþðan ic hond ond rond            hebban mihte,  
 ðryþærn Dena                        buton þe nu ða.  
 Hafa nu ond geheald            husa selest . . . . (655a-658b)

(Never have I before allowed any man, / since I could in my hand hold a shield, / the splendid hall of the Danes, except now to you. / Have it now and hold it, this best of houses. . . .).

Even more remarkable is the fact that Grendel's assault is recounted as an attack on the mead hall much more so than on the thanes in it, and the battle correspondingly unwinds in terms of what happens to Heorot more than to the combatants: the hall resounds and

echoes, the poet's concern is with whether or not its walls can withstand the physical nature of the fight, its benches become weapons, the monster's cries are translated through those walls as the cowering Danes hear him screaming from their positions in other places. Even in the hot center of the action between Beowulf and Grendel, the poet's attention is on the building itself. He turns from the fight and takes five lines to tell us of the glory and future destruction of Heorot:

þæs ne wendon ær    witan Scyldinga,  
 þæt hit a mid gemete    manna ænig  
 betlic ond banfag    tobreca meahte,  
 listum toluca,    nymbe liges fæþm  
 swulge on swapule.    (778a-782a)

(Wise Scyldings did not ever expect / that by any ordinary means, any man  
 / might break it, beautiful, bone-adorned, / or that anything might  
 cunningly pull it asunder, unless fire embraced it/ in flames.)

Since the only part of the hall that is not damaged by the body-slammng struggle between Beowulf and Grendel is the roof (999b-1000a: "hrof ana genæs / ealles ansund"), it is entirely appropriate that this is the place for the victor to display the spoils of war; it is here that Grendel's arm and claw are hung rather than being displayed by Beowulf or his men. He is the enemy of Heorot—of creativity and its product, the good hall—and the vanquishing of him is a victory for art that is beautiful and utilitarian.

One final observation needs to be made: the real celebration, the formal pronouncement of the defeat of evil and the survival of good, is centered around the fact that art survives and conquers. It occurs only after Heorot is repaired. Like a bride who has been snatched from her groom but ransomed back into his care, like Esther waiting for her night with Ahasuerus, the hall is prepared and made lovely:

Ða wæs haten hreþe Heort innanweard

folmum gefrætwod; fela þæra wæs,

wera ond wifa, þe þæt winreced,

gestsele gyredon. (991a-994a)

(Then it was commanded that Heorot, the interior of it, / be adorned by hands; many there were, /men and women, who made ready that wine-hall, that guest-hall.)

What do all these passages tell us about the creative endeavor as it was viewed by these early settlers of Britain? In answering this question, I want first to acknowledge the historical probability that the reverence given to the mead hall reveals the value placed on the communion of the tribe, which was possible and pleasurable only in the confines of some sort of architectural structure. Preserving it meant preserving a way of life as well as salvaging a few fleeting moments of pleasure from the hardship of existence. Because the tribes of the Great Migration did indeed build structures such as Heorot, Hills finds its description “not at all implausible” (303). She bases her comment on findings such as the ones by Brian Hope-Taylor, whose excavations in 1953 revealed a massive timbered mead

hall at Yeavinger, not Hereot but a structure contemporary to it that “has been identified as a residence of the sixth- and seventh-century kings of Northumbria” and reveals “complex and sophisticated carpentry techniques” on the part of the craftsmen (302), complete with iron fittings much like those described as banding the doors of Hrothgar’s great home. In addition, John Niles describes excavations at Lejre in Denmark, where many Scandinavian scholars believe Hrothgar’s Scyldings lived. Archaeologists have unearthed three massive halls joined together and built in the sixth century, the time period contemporary to the events of *Beowulf* (“Great Hall” 40-44).

The fact that the mead hall is present in the poem is, therefore, not controversial; neither is the fact that it is a place of comfort and succor. Creating a welcoming and well-stocked hall symbolized stability for the people because of the success and strength of their king, but here is where the controversy, at least as far as my thesis is concerned, begins. The fact is that Hrothgar’s hall is far more than comfortable, and the poet’s vision of it is of a realm of luminous and living power rather than of an actual structure. Because of these circumstances, Heorot is a symbol of creativity much more than it is a representative of historical fact. The poet appears to be cognizant of this fact because the description he gives is not copied from reality but represents reality taken up a notch. As one example of his non-historical stress on the artistic nature of Heorot, the most striking feature of Hrothgar’s mead hall is the gold that is said three times in the poem to coat

timbers of the hall;<sup>8</sup> for such, however, there is “no archeological evidence in the ancient Germanic world,” as Karl Wentersdorf observes (“Poet’s Vision” 415).

Thus we may conclude with a degree of confidence that creativity in *Beowulf* seems to be deliberately highlighted. It is extensively and excessively present in both the form of material objects and of narratives. Its presence as we have examined it thus far appears to be equated with all that is good and with joyful, meaningful living rather than just survival.

If creativity is the theme of *Beowulf*, then the figure of the creator should logically appear at some point in the narrative to offer a clue that understanding the maker is important to understanding the poem. The Germanic artisan, after all, was the source of art. Because what he created usually had a practical purpose no matter how wondrous its appearance (thus what he worked on and produced was generally not the result of Boden’s H-creativity), the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxons historically located him in the mainstream of their culture. The type of work which the artist did consisted of creating objects which bettered the lives of ordinary humans, and his talent was a combination of hand/ physical dexterity and brain/ creativity which they admired in both the warrior and those who helped him.

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<sup>8</sup> Lines 306-14 -- op þæt hy sæl timbred / geatolic ond goldfah ongyton mihton ; Lines 925 - 27 -- . . . stod on stapole, geseah steapne hrof / golde fahne one Grendles hon; Lines 714-16-- wod under wolcum to þæs þe he winreced / goldsele sumena gearwost wisse fættum fahne



Perhaps because he occupied himself with just such practicality, there appears to be very little angst regarding the artist among these early settlers of Britain. This fact becomes clear in one of the earliest stories of the Germanic tribes focusing on the figure of the craftsman/artist. We can garner much of their society's attitudes by examining that story although it must be noted that, like all that pertains to pre-literate England, we cannot be sure just how much has been added to the myth by subsequent retellings. Nevertheless, the figure at the center of the story is the best-known of the characters from the Anglo-Saxon mythic past to survive into the written culture: Weland, the legendary smith who is also found in very early Norse literature. His story has been argued to derive from the Daedulus myth, which was heard by Germanic tribes who came in contact with Greco-Romans on the Danube in Austria in the fifth century (Bradley 42).

Several versions of Weland's story exist, but the most common one is that he was apprenticed to Mimi the smith and became so skilled at his art that he far surpassed his master. Because of his great abilities as a craftsman, he was captured by King Nidung of Sweden, hamstrung and imprisoned, and forced to make objects for the royal family. Eventually he took his revenge by killing the king's sons, making cups and rings from their heads and eyes and presenting them to the unwitting father and mother, seducing the king's daughter, and flying away on wings he had made from swan's feathers. Thus the ultimate craftsman used his practical craft in a wise, practical manner--to defeat his enemies.

But subtle alterations in the Daedulus myth as it transforms into Weland's story—if indeed this is its source—reflect the more positive view of the artist figure held by the Germanic people as opposed to the Greeks: the smith's wings lift him without cost from

his imprisonment, and no troubling questions about humanity's overweening need to be God are raised. The story, in fact, satisfies an Anglo-Saxon need for blood vengeance without regret and connects such blood to successful creativity in the form of procreation as Weland forces a promise from the king that he will not harm the child to be borne by his daughter, thus paving the way for the smith's descendants to inherit the throne. Then—with an excellent sense of timing—he reveals to Nidung the fate of his own two sons before flying away. Weland suffers no further harm because of the promise of immunity he has exacted from king before he tells him the horrible truth. Clearly, the story has overtones of the supernatural and the pagan, and at least one of the tools used by the smith, either real or fictional, as he worked with blades and sharpened objects was believed by the pre-Christian tribes to have magical powers—the whetstone (Williams 96).

In light of the thesis of this dissertation, it is significant that Weland—the magical and revered artisan—is alluded to in *Beowulf*, where he is the only male character given a name who is not meant to be seen as a warrior. Beowulf's own attitude toward the smith's work is near reverent: the armor which he has inherited from his grandfather Hrethel is an heirloom denoted specifically as having come from Weland. Further, the hero's concern is with preserving it more than with saving his own life. While he notes that the Danes should not hunt for any piece of his body if Grendel kills and eats him, he does expect them to

Onsend Higelace,	gif mec hild nime,
beadu-scruda betst,	ðæt mine breost wereð,

hræglā selest;                      ðæt is Hræðlan laf,

Welandes geweorc.                (452-455B)

(Send to Higelac if battle takes me this best of all war-shirts that shields my breast, my finest cloak; it is Hrethel's heirloom, the work of Weland.)

The oldest surviving art object which serves as historical witness to Weland's story is the eighth-century Franks' Casket, featuring on one of its panels an engraving of him in his smithy. The high status enjoyed by Weland "stems to some extent from the Germanic admiration of good weapons and fine jewelry" (Bradley 41)—put simply, just because he is a creative spirit. The respect which the tribes who migrated to Britain from the European continent held for a craftsman is also evident in the fact that he (or she, in the case of other types of artistry) was not blamed when his handiwork did not perform as it should. In the case of a sword which was not efficacious, for example, the blame was usually transferred either to the bearer or—as in *Beowulf* when the hero's armor fails—to *wyrd* itself.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to assume that the pagan Germanic world saw all craftsmen as equally important. The concept of *wergild*, for example, which placed a monetary value on each member of society, valued the goldsmith but not necessarily other technicians: in the 500s, for example, slaves were worth thirty sous and ironsmiths fifty, but skilled goldsmiths were valued at 150 (Le Goff 79). The fact that those who worked with precious materials were themselves more precious to their community suggests that the raw material as much as the raw ability was what was treasured. But no artisan had the same worth as the warrior, who not only did not create but actually sat idle when he

was not involved in feud. Jacques Le Goff notes the warrior's "contempt" for not just creative labor but labor of all types. Why engage in economic activity—or artistic endeavor—when he could obtain what he wanted "in blood" (75)? However, art provided him with the means to operate. If the act and process of creating did not interest the typical warrior (and it is the contention of this dissertation that *Beowulf* is unique because he is unlike his fellow warriors in that he *is* interested) the end product did in a most vital way. For example, as sword, it allowed him easy access to the blood that, spilled, would end an enemy's life.

What these preceding paragraphs point out is that, historically, the pagan Anglo-Saxon tribes valued creativity as both a practical ability and as one which dealt with valued substances and which generated beauty. In terms of *Beowulf*, the luminosity and splendor of the created object "fairly leap off the page" (Liuzza, "Introduction" 45), insistent and intense to the point that they may be viewed as having a purpose that is thematic, not just incidental.

But there is nothing easy when *Beowulf* is the text under discussion. The fact is that it reflects more than just a Germanic attitude toward art; it is also the product of Christianity. If the story of Horsa and Hengist is true—that in 449, the two brothers invaded England from Jutland and were asked by the tribes already present there to serve as their protectors from marauding by other Germanic tribes—they must have regarded themselves as being in the peculiarly happy situation of having conquered a people who enjoyed and welcomed the conquest. What they did not know, however, was that they themselves were to become the vanquished, or at least, their descendants were. Coming in contact with the Britons, who had already been exposed to the Christianity of the newly-

converted Romans of the third and fourth centuries, the Anglo-Saxons of the island, the heirs of Horsa and Hengist, gradually yielded their paganism to the less fatalistic teachings of the Hebrew Jesus. The story of Edwin and the sparrow in the mead hall, told in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, reveals one version of the process.

Yet Christianity was not born into an intellectual vacuum; it inherited many of the Greek and Roman traditions of the time. The Romans, in fact, held sway over the Jewish people even at the time of Christ's life and death, and a great deal of the early church's energy went toward fighting their influence. Jacob Nyenhuis notes that much of the first millennium's art reveals "a concern of reconciling the paganism of classical antiquity with the fundamental teachings of Christianity" (40). It was a long, extended, and syncretic process, as observed by art historian Herbert Kessler:

Craft traditions, moreover, fostered centuries-long continuities in certain classes of objects. On silver vessels depicting mythological themes, for instance, classical forms persisted as late as the seventh and possibly even into the eleventh century. In fact, the classical style was deployed for symbolic or rhetorical purposes within Christian images, providing a distinct mode of expression. (167)

The early church carried with it into its cultural life not just artistic themes and images from its predecessors but also many of their ideas, including a suspicion of art itself. As I pointed out in the first chapter, the word "creativity" had no equivalent for the ancient Greeks. Rather, their word which comes closest to our terms "art" and "craftsmanship" was "techne," which referred to the ability to make things by following the rules of nature, to "the difficult material struggle of making forms out of resources

available” (Stewart 12). Freedom from those laws is obtained only by those designated as poets. The ancient Greeks employed the term “poiein” – from which the word “poesis” is derived – to define creation which is the result of inspiration. Wladyslaw Tatarkiewicz in *A History of Six Ideas* explains the Platonic beliefs, those held during classical antiquity and for most of the Western tradition, that the power to create—the godlike inspiration—originates outside the self, in a madness sent on and poured into the individual by the Muses, and that the artist and the art which result from this divine possession are both dubious in terms of virtue (244). They have the power to arouse our passions and thus to be our masters; they invent, or create lies, and “at best beguile us into idleness; they disturb the harmony of the state” (Fehl et al. 9). In short, they lack moral responsibility. However, those creators connected with the term “techne,” those mentioned earlier, Plato found to be virtuous because they “carried out tasks ‘in the full light of reason’” (Nyenhuis 57).

Added by the early Christian church to Plato’s reasoning was the weight of the second commandment of the Old Testament, “Thou shalt not build unto thyself any graven image.” Regarded by the early church as being given to “protect us from sin . . . and from becoming slaves to our senses, fancy, and passions” (Fehl et al 11) instead of adhering to the virtues of heart, soul, and intellect, this commandment made suspect Greek and Roman forms of art such as sculpture and painting with their “palpably sensuous nature” (Fehl et al 12) and their connection with idolatrous worship of gods and goddesses such as Apollo and Diana. The Middle Ages, in fact, saw a gradual “flattening” of representation perhaps as a result of this rejection of the Greco-Roman idea of statues-as-gods.

Yet there are also discrepancies as to the status of the artist in the Bible itself. The idea of God himself as creator, “tired” from his labors, of Tubal-Cain as beginning the godly history of art, of Besalel as the architect of the temple—all of these appear to present creative endeavor as positive. However, the opposing ideas of work as punishment and of Cain as the inventor of technology such as weights and measures diminish if not outright challenge that viewpoint. The debate as to the nature of art, especially objects made in the name of the Christian such as images of Jesus and the cross, grew so heated that it resulted eventually in the Byzantine Iconoclastic movement, which attempted to rid the faith of almost all objects of worship. Efforts to reconcile the creative impulse with the church’s teachings were made at the Nicean Council in 787, where a lengthy decree was issued, stating, among other things, that, while “full adoration” could never be given to depictions and icons even of holy art because they are, after all, only representations of reality, they serve a valuable purpose because “the more frequently” believers and non-believers both see them, the more “they are drawn to remember and long for” the people and objects for which “they serve as models” (trans. Tanner et al 135). Nevertheless, Herbert Kessler concludes that only when “three-dimensional sculpture was integrated into an established cult of relics” were these forms of art accepted, and then only in Western Europe (173).

Kessler notes two other factors which also heavily affected Christian creativity in these early centuries of the church: first was “the attribution of symbolic qualities to materials” and second was the acceptance by the faithful that the church building itself was a place of “intersection” between heaven and earth (172). The first led to the conclusion that material objects such as the sacrament, relics, and yes, even works created

by artists held within themselves a certain spirituality. Those works revealed the dedication to God of the artist or the person who had them created, so making them of gold, ivory, glass and precious stones was one way of expressing piety, as was making them intricate and beautifully decorated. In short, raw matter became a means of achieving salvation and displaying one's devotion to Christ, a sort of celestial currency, so to speak. A very famous story first told by John Moschos explains the concept well: a patron gave gold to a craftsman to make a cross but weighed the gold both before and after the construction simply because he did not trust the worker; to his surprise, he found that the cross contained more gold than he had submitted and discovered that the artist had quietly added his own to the creation as an act of piety and love toward God (87).

In order to make known the depths of their faith in a more lasting manner, artisans particularly liked to choose materials which were resistant to decay and, more importantly, luminous, thus "satisfying the Christian metaphysics of light" (Kessler 172) which developed from the concept of Christ as the Light of the World. Brilliance, glow, color, and ornamentation that shifted luminosity to numinosity appeared everywhere. Given the love of resplendence already present among Anglo-Saxons, it is conceivable that this may account for the extensive and lavish descriptions of treasure and hall detailed by the scribe of *Beowulf*, the endless cataloging of and fascination with glittering objects: the "mada fela of feor-wegum, ceol gegyrwan [. . .] madma mænigo" ("great treasure of bright gold and silver, jewels from far land [. . .] heaps of jewels" --34-35, 41) that was sent to sea with Scyld; the "heals-beaga mæst / [. . .] on foldan gefrægen hæbbe" ("the greatest gold collar ever heard of on earth" -- 1195-6) which is given to Beowulf by Weolhtheow; the luxurious gifts to him from her husband, Hrothgar, including "eahta mearas fæted-hleore



on flet teon in under eoderas (“eight horses with gold-plated headgear [which were] led inside the walls on to the floor of the hall”), one of them with “sadol searwum fah, since gewurðad” (“a saddle cunningly made, studded with gems” -- 1036-38); the “hæðnum horde” (“heathen horde” – 2216) protected by the dragon; and on and on.

Several salient points must be considered. One is that even under these circumstances—that zealous scribes were honoring God and seeking salvation in their writing of *Beowulf* with their protracted highlighting of material objects—creativity again emerges as being of extreme thematic importance to the poem (in fact, it is underscored). Nor does this theory explain the negativity connected with certain objets d’art such as the hilt of the sword found in the cave, the necklace given by Wealhtheow, the treasure abandoned by the last survivor, and the dragon’s hoard that is not shared with the Geats but burned. We might argue that each of these artifacts darkens because of circumstances associated with it, but we might also conclude—conversely—that the abandonment or mistreatment of them helps to create these dark circumstances. *Beowulf* uses the sword the wrong way, so its blade melts and he becomes ineffective; the necklace is not kept by the one to whom it is given and so becomes a ornamentation on a dead man or perhaps even leads to his death; the luster of the treasure is cursed because the last survivor hides it as act of mourning instead of bequeathing and dispersing it to others, much like the man with the talent who hides his gift and loses it; the treasure that is not used for survival by the people for whom *Beowulf* gave his life instead helps to bring about their downfall.

Another factor to be considered is that such a theory—that the scribes were worshipping God when they wrote about treasures—also does not account for the proliferation of stories, artifacts which are not visible treasures/relics, and the

embellishments and use of literary techniques as displayed by the hero. If we try to explain the emphasis on narratives as the result of the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon culture's need for communal ties and friendship bonds, then we face the same sort of problem that we did about material objects: why do the stories after the conflict with the mother become dark, inward, highly prescient, or so digressive that they seem to perform little in the way of strengthening those bonds?

All of these questions can be answered if we accept that this poem is intended to make a statement about art. Christian intellectual tension about art, as well as the collision of Christian thought with the pagan love of the craftsman's handiwork, may be seen as reasons for the uneasy syncretism of *Beowulf* and for the negative/positive dynamic where all creativity is concerned. In addition, the fact that creating something requires isolation is one that emerges in connection with the making of stories and undermines the Germanic ideal of shared existence on both a personal and communal level: this finding—part of what Beowulf realizes in his confrontation with the mother, which I explore in a later chapter—makes creativity a threat to the Geats and the Danes of the poem, thereby generating still more discomfort about art, so much discomfort that the hero turns his back on his own potential.

One final point needs to be made. Art also served another—albeit closely related—purpose besides worship. The splendor of ecclesiastical objects emphasized the divine space of the church; art articulated the consecrated nature of the house of God. In a time period when the world was depicted as dualistic—as divided between good and evil, Beowulf and Grendel—the sphere of the good was small and select; it was the church, and it was expected to reflect materially the glory of the heaven to come. Therefore, it became

a sort of heaven on earth (Kessler 176-177). The beauty of the space of the church not only glorified God but also allowed the believer to “see” the sermon being preached and stimulated him to feel divine emotions or even to write or teach about the Bible himself. If we apply these ideas, the mead hall of Heorot as the repository of lustrous and vivid art becomes the locus of the good and the heavenly, an inspiration to act. Therefore, its shining appearance, the rich substances of the ivory, iron, and gold that coat it, and the many treasures that it holds are also meant to be viewed metaphorically, and once again I would argue that, in the Christian view as well as with the pagan one, creativity becomes the theme of the story.

### Chapter III: BEOWULF AS CREATOR

If *Beowulf* makes a statement about creativity, it stands to reason that its main character must know something about the topic. This chapter examines exactly what evidence is found that the hero of the Geats is indeed knowledgeable about the creative act, that he himself has the potential to create. While my framework here is research done mostly by David N. Perkins and Howard Gardner, I also employ the classic measure of a character based on what he does and says, what others say about him, and what the narrator reveals of his personality.

Both Perkins and Gardner agree with Boden in that creativity must be linked to a bounded area. Perkins calls that area a “Klondike space” while for Gardner, it is a “domain.” Perkins confronts the question, “Can we measure the cognitive system of human creativity?” and answers that we can but in “simple, almost atheoretical” ways (136): by showing that an individual has a “track record” of creating things and by examining his personality to see if it exhibits the characteristics that have been proven to be associated with creativity in humans (136). He warns that while we can assess the likelihood that a person has the ability to explore and cope with the conceptual space, “there can be no sure-sense measure of creativity” (138) in the sense that we total up scores on aptitude tests.

Using the first measure as being performance, counting can, however, help us determine Beowulf’s creative bent. In the course of the poem, he produces six narratives, although some of them are interlaced. First are two clearly defined stories, the short tale of the swimming match with Brecca and the lengthy one of his encounter with Grendel

that he relays to Hygelac and Hygd upon his return home. Inside the latter is a subplot involving Hondscio and Grendel's glove. In addition, Beowulf has a moment of foresight, or prophecy, when he explains Freawaru's fate as Ingeld's bride; this moment constitutes a story in its own right. As an old man, just before his confrontation with the dragon, he produces a reminiscence about his childhood and his grandfather Hrethel, which leads into a related tale of a father whose son has been hanged.

These performances are narratives not only because they have distinct plots and/or characters but also because they show knowledge and use of literary devices, each has a distinct tone, most have emotional depth, and at least two can be proven to manipulate facts so that they are not simple retellings but unique reconstructions. Seth Lerer compiles his own list of reasons explaining why the episode with Grendel, Hondscio, and the glove is one of several self-conscious "reflections on the poet's craft" proffered by Beowulf (722), and James Rosier has identified that same story as the site of wordplay used in "artistically relevant" ways to stress a theme (11). I have already commented on the use of humor, litotes, and manipulation in Beowulf's boast concerning the swimming match, but perhaps his one narrative that is the most carefully crafted and unified is the foretelling of Freawaru's tragic marriage. It is a story begun because Beowulf, in telling Hygelac about the feast at Heorot and the way Wealhtheow bore cups to the warriors, remembers her young daughter, who also served mead at the table. In examining the lines used to speak of Freawaru, we can see Beowulf's expertise in constructing what amounts to the most technically polished and perhaps most emotionally evocative story-in-miniature of the poem:

Hwilum for duguðe	dohtor Hroðgares
eorlum on ende	ealuwæge bær,
þa ic Freaware	fletsittende
nemnan hyrde,	þær hio nægledsinc
hæleðum sealde.	Sio gehaten is,
geong goldhroden,	gladum suna Frodan;
hafað þæs geworden	wine Scyldinga,
rices hyrde,	ond þæt ræd talað,
þæt he mid ðy wife	wælfæhða dæl,
sæcca gesette.	Oft seldan hwær
æfter leodhryre	lytle hwile
bongar bugeð,	þeah seo bryd duge!
Mæg þæs þonne ofþyncan	ðeodne Heaðo-Beardna
ond þegna gehwam	þara leoda,
þonne he mid fæmnan	on flett gæð,
dryhtbearn Dena,	duguða biwenede;
on him gladiað	gomelra lafe,

heard ond hringmæl	Heaða-Beardna gestreon,
þenden hie ðam wæpnum	wealdan moston,
oð ðæt hie forlæddan	to ðam lindplegan
swæse gesiðas	ond hyra sylfra feorh.
Þonne cwið æt beore	se ðe beah gesyhð
eald æscwiga,	se ðe eall geman,
garcwealm gumena	--- him bið grim sefa --- ,
onginneð geomormod	geongum ceman
þurh hreðra gehygd	higes cunnian,
wigbealu weccan,	ond þæt word acwyð:
"Meaht ðu, min wine,	mece gecnawan,
þone þin fæder	to gefeohte bær
under heregriman	hindeman siðe,
dyre iren,	þær hyne Dene slogon,
weoldon wælstowe,	syððan Wiðergyld læg,
æfter hæleþa hryre,	hwate Scyldungas?
Nu her þara banena	byre nathwylces

frætwum hremig	on flet gæð,
morðres gylpeð,	ond þone maðþum byreð,
þone þe ðu mid rihte	rædan sceoldest."
Manað swa ond myndgað	mæla gehwylce
sarum wordum,	oð ðæt sæl cymeð,
þæt se fæmnan þegn	fore fæder dædum
æfter billes bite	blodfag swefeð,
ealdres scyldig;	him se oðer þonan
losað lifigende,	con him land geara.
Þonne bioð abrocene	on ba healfe
aðsweord eorla;	syððan Ingelde
weallað wælniðas,	ond him wiþflufan
æfter cearwælmum	colran weorðað.
Þy ic Heaðo-Beardna	hyldo ne telge,
dryhtsibbe dæl	Denum unfæcne,
freondscipe fæstne.	(2020a-2068b)

(Sometimes for the company of retainers the daughter of Hrothgar bore ale-cups to lords in the back - / Freawaru, I heard from sitters in the hall / her



name, when the gem-studded treasure-cup / was passed among them. She  
 is promised, / young, gold-adorned, to the kind son of Froda; / the lord of  
 the Scyldings has arranged this, / the guardian's shepherd, and upon advice  
 supposes / that he with this woman may in part a deadly slaughter / settle.  
 But seldom anywhere / after the fall of a people only for a little while /  
 does the deadly spear rest / though the bride be good! / It may displease the  
 chief of the Heothobards, / and eachthane of his people, / when following  
 the maiden across the floor, goes / a noble son of the Danes, attended to by  
 the company of retainers; / on him glistens the sword of an ancestors, / hard  
 and ring-marked, once a treasure of the Heathobards / as long as they their  
 weapons might control. / At that time they led to destruction in battle / their  
 own dear retainers and their own lives. / Then there speaks as he drinks his  
 beer and sees that precious ring-hilt and old warrior, remembering Then an  
 old spear-bearer speaks over his beer, / who sees that ring-hilt and  
 remembers all his men who died by the spear / — his mind is grim — /  
 begins, sad of mind, a young champion's breast-thoughts to test / to  
 awaken war, and says these words: / "Do you, my lord, recognize that  
 sword / which your father to battle / carried his last time under the helmet, /  
 dear iron, when the Danes struck him / controlled the battlefield after  
 Withergyld lay dead, after men falling in death, those brave Scyldings? /  
 Now here a certain son or other of his slayers / exulting in his ornaments  
 walks across this floor, struts in his finery, / boasting of his murder and  
 carries precious things / which by right you should possess." / The man at

every suitable time reminds him / with grievous words so that the proper  
 times comes / when the woman's thane for his father's deeds /sleeps  
 bloodstained in death from the bite of the sword / having forfeited his life,  
 the other knows the land well and escapes safely. / Then there will be  
 shattered on both sides / the oaths of the lords; Afterwards in Ingeld /a  
 surge of deadly hate rises, and his love for his wife / becomes cool after the  
 seething of his sorrow. / Therefore I favor not / the Heathobards' part in  
 the Danish alliance; it is not without deceit / nor is their friendship fast.)

Although the story is a digression, it (unlike many of the digressions) does have a logical link to what precedes it, and it is truly an original work on the part of Beowulf because it is not the reshaping or repeating of events that have occurred but the production of pure fiction. In fact, the story told here is the only one of the poem which has not happened yet; indeed, at his moment in time, Beowulf cannot know that it will happen at all. Thus he is doing what writers are supposed to do, observing human nature and applying his knowledge of it to his material. Based on what he knows of feuds and peaceweaving, Freawaru's story is *likely* to occur. The fact that we already know that he speaks the truth is the poet's own self-conscious use of the literary tool of dramatic irony, another layer of creativity that has nothing at this point to do with Beowulf's own ability as storyteller.

Not only is the link to the rest of the poem well established, but so is the plot line, which is worthy of a box-office hit: A young girl is—perhaps reluctantly—married to a prince of her king-father's choosing, not hers; the prince comes to loves her; but in his kingdom, an old, bitter warrior who cannot let go of an ancient hatred for the girl's people

stirs up trouble for her and them; as a result, war ensues and she is caught between her new husband and her own family and tribe; her husband turns from her because of politics and hate. What is remarkable about the plot of the narrative is Beowulf's narrowed focus on Freawaru. This is her personal story; its unity derives from her circumstances. We are not told the outcome of the war but of her relationship with her husband, and the antagonists in it—the old man, political and social institutions, human emotions such as hate—are ours because they are hers.

Although Beowulf shows himself capable of employing literary techniques (for example, the idea that the thrusting of the sword in war and the thrusting of the body in the sex act are analogies—an idea that shows up more in some translations than in others), his real ability here is the development in quick, sure strokes of character. The set-up of the girl as the object of sympathy begins immediately because of the point of view, Beowulf's. He tells of what he saw of her character, not haughty but humble, innocent, and eager to please as she serves the men, and he supplies a hint of her beauty efficiently with the single word “gold-adorned.”

The characterization of the aging warrior is more prolonged and even better; above all, it is essential to the development of the plot. It is not just the repeated use of descriptives – grim, sad, old—but the power of the image Beowulf creates that moves us to understand the warrior. We see him only once, as he drinks beer and broods over every action, unable to let go of the past, nursing and fostering his hate, fomenting discontent. His characterization alone is what moves the story forward. This ability on the part of Beowulf as creator—to let the action grow naturally out of personality rather than being superimposed on the narrative in the form of an event that just happens—is so essential to

the writer/creator (and so rare) that Dorothy Sayers defines it as a “natural law” of creativity, equivalent to God’s own willingness to let his creation, man, have free will (64-79). Ingeld becomes just the pawn of the old warrior, who is the only character in any of Beowulf’s stories who speaks for himself in dialogue, yet another factor in his rapid development before the reader’s eyes into a fully-realized being.

The results of the successful characterization are many. We obtain the sense of satisfaction that comes only when, as Sayers explains, people in stories behave as their personalities necessitate; readers’ empathy with Freawaru and interest in the outcome are involved in a way that would seem impossible in a mere forty-eight lines; and we are forced to acknowledge Beowulf’s power as creator. The narrative finishes smoothly as Beowulf applies its knowledge in general terms to the relationship between tribes as if he is adding a moral to a parable. Freawaru’s tale is not one typical of Beowulf—and I will explain why it is not in a later chapter—but it stands as a testament to his extraordinary ability as an artist, as a performance that qualifies him as creative according to Perkins’ first method of measurement.

The second measure, behavior models, is defended by Perkins but explored at great lengths by Gardner, whose essay “The Creator’s Patterns” details his research into the lives of creative individuals, research which has produced an “exemplary creator” biography as well as a list of characteristics and related factors that are likely to be present in artists. It should also be noted that the seven people on whom Gardner bases his personality inventory are radical H-creators, people such as Einstein, Freud, Martha Graham, and T. S. Eliot.

Ironically, the one way in which Beowulf differs from the exemplary creator as defined by Gardner is in the first area which is listed, the connection between family and society. The profile is of a person “from a zone somewhat removed from the actual centers of power and influence in society—but not so far away that [he is] entirely ignorant of what is going on” (147). The “actual center” is exactly where Beowulf lives. During his life, he is grandson, nephew, and uncle to kings—and then king himself. While the fact that the realm of the Geats is perhaps not comparable to the complex societies from which Gardner’s creative personalities emerge may help to explain why Beowulf is creative without fitting Gardner’s pattern, it should also be noted that one of the seven creators studied by Gardner is Gandhi, who rose to become a social and political power as great as Beowulf. Variations in the pattern do occur—no one’s life conforms exactly—but Beowulf’s position of responsibility, far from negating my thesis, is the reason for it: my argument is that his suppressing of his creativity is caused by his unusually heavy social/political/cultural burden as king and protector.

Another important component in the biography of the creator is his own relationship with his family, whose financial circumstances are usually comfortable without being excessively wealthy, and who themselves are “correct rather than warm” (147), admiring of education and expecting great things of the child, careful to provide a moral if not religious environment. Beowulf’s family has wealth and comfort, but again, these are not valued in the same way among the Geats as they are today. An entire tribe enjoyed the success of the leader; his leadership depended upon his earning and giving away riches and thereby making life better for all, not in accumulating wealth for its own sake as the twentieth century advocated (all of Gardner’s creators upon him he based his

profile are from the early 1900s). And while Beowulf's memories of the grandfather who raised him are poignant, what they suggest is a man who is incapable of recognizing the needs of a seven-year-old little boy because he is wrapped up in his own grief and regret, a man who neglects a child emotionally without really meaning to do so. In fact, one of the oddest elements in the story Beowulf tells about Hrethel is his use of negatives rather than positives to describe the old man's emotional state:

heold mec ond hæfde Hreðel cyning,

geaf me sinc ond symbel, sibbe gemunde;

næs ic him to life laðra owihte,

beorn in burgum, þonne his bearna hwylc . . . . (2430a-2434b)

(Hrethel the king held me and kept me, / gave me treasure and feasts,

remembered the kinship / nor was I grievous to him as anything in his life/

--a man in his fortified place —than his own sons . . .).

While these lines reveal the physical care which Hrethel extended to Beowulf, they also suggest a preoccupation on the part of the grandfather with his own children. Beowulf's connection to Hrethel is measured not in terms of how much the king loved him but in terms of the degree to which he did not bring sorrow to the old man, whose two older sons have broken his heart because one kills the other. Other translations of the lines have gone even further in describing a relationship suffering from the effects on Hrethel of this traumatic event. Liuzza, for example, translates the lines as saying, "I was no more hated

to him while he lived than any of his own sons” (127)—a negative presentation of love at best.

Another comment made a few lines later suggests that Hrethel is so conflicted in his emotions that he does not know at this point in his life how to show love to anyone, not Beowulf, not the son who killed a brother:

	Swa Wedra helm
æfter Herebealde	heortan sorge
weallinde wæg;	wihte ne meahte
on ðam feorhbonan	fæghðe gebetan;
no ðy ær he þone heaðorinc	hatian ne meahte
laðum dædum,	þeah him leof ne wæs. (2463b-2468b)

(So the protector of the Weders / for Herebeald [his slain son] bore heart sorrows / surge of emotions; not in any way at all might he the feud with that lifeslayer put right; nor that warrior could he hate for his grievous deeds / though he was not loved by him.)

Furthermore, if the old man in the short narrative that is inserted into the middle of Hrethel's story is Hrethel himself, as several critics have suggested,<sup>9</sup> then we are told plainly that "oðres ne gymeð / to gebidanne burgum in innan / yrfewardas" (2451b-2453a: others he will not care / to await within his fortified place, guardian of an inheritance). This is a man who has little interest in the future.

The situation into which the little boy Beowulf is placed is troubling at its best and an experience with mental illness at its worst. He is surrounded by four males, three uncles and a grandfather, whose duty is to teach him the responsibilities and the code of behavior of the Geat warrior-prince (a version of morality and high expectations like those to which the exemplary creator is exposed). One of his uncles is killed by another, brother against brother, in what may or may not be an accident; we are never sure. Hrethel is then trapped between duty and love: his society says that he must take action against the surviving son, but his heart will not let him. Further, he seems also to be torn between loves, one that leads him to grieve himself to death for the loss of one child and the other that he tries to mute because it is for the surviving child, the one who killed his brother. What he suffers is a mental struggle with depression and anxiety.

While Gardner does not deal with reasons why a family that is "not warm" is likely to produce a creative child, Hans J. Eysenek does, and his observations are so relevant in

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson's discussion of the cult of Odin as it relates to the father/hanged son story in *A Guide to Old English*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997.



the case of Beowulf and the relationship he has with his grandfather that they need to be mentioned. Eysenek concludes that there is “powerful support” for “a link between psychotism and creativity,” that the mental illness rates for parents were “positively and significantly related to the creativity of the children” (224). In other words, a parent who is mentally unstable is likely to produce a child who (if he is not genetically predisposed to suffer the mental illness or if the illness is not one which will be inherited, as Hrethel’s is not) shows far more creativity than the offspring of a “normal,” “well-adjusted” parent. Eysenek has an explanation for the increased imaginative potential of the child that makes sense in light of the inspiration/elaboration process used to explain literary creativity that I mentioned in Chapter One: the child’s exposure to the free associative thinking of the mentally-disturbed parent— thinking which is the failure or inability to discipline one’s mind—makes him also more likely to think in new and radical ways, but he is able to exercise control over his thoughts to a degree that the unstable parent cannot. Far from hindering Beowulf’s creative potential, then, Hrethel’s depression and anxiety heighten it.

The third aspect of the exemplary creator involves his relationship with others beyond his family—his friends, his culture. The pattern Gardner describes as the artist grows older is movement back and forth between a set of peers and asocial (not necessarily antisocial) behavior. In fact, the “personal dimension” which is as important as the relationship or lack of it with family is the “distinct marginality” of the creator (149). It has probably been present between the individual and his world all along, caused “by birth, by religion, by gender” (150) or by other factors, and is determinedly maintained by him during his lifetime. Although he often needs a group to encourage him and to test himself against —“some sort of support is crucial” (148)—he is a loner, testing

out “domains” to master until he finds the one that allows him a creative breakthrough. When he does produce a new idea or make an innovative discovery, when he arrives at the “highly charged moment” of insight (148), he by necessity becomes even more isolated in order to do his work. As his life passes, he seeks to retain his creativity by continually “seeking marginal status” (150). His fear is that if he becomes too influenced by the conventions of society, he will sacrifice the basic, elemental, simple, regressive, free-associative thinking that has allowed him to explore conceptual spaces in new and perhaps boundary-shifting ways.

While Beowulf does not appear to be marginal, in actuality almost all that Gardner says is applicable to him. We have already found his childhood to be lonely because of his family relationships; it is also depicted as one of “lack of fit” (Gardner 146) in regard to his peers. The passage which seems to me key to understanding creativity as a theme in the poem is one which combines the two dimensions of the creative profile, childhood and marginality, but highlights those years in particular during which Beowulf experienced this lack. Late in the poem, we are suddenly told of events that chronologically belong to a preface, a past that seemingly has little to do with the heroic present:

Swa bealdode	bearn Ecgðeowes,
guma guðum cuð,	godum dædum,
dreah æfter dome;	nealles druncne slog
heorðgeneatas;	næs him hreoh sefa,
ac he mancynnes	mæste cræfte

ginfæstan gife,	þe him God sealde,
heold hildedeor.	Hean wæs lange,
swa hyne Geata bearn	godne ne tealdon,
ne hyne on medobence	micles wyrðne
drihten Wedera	gedon wolde;
swyðe wendon,	þæt he sleac wære,
æðeling unfrom.	Edwenden cwom
tireadigum menn	torna gehwylces.--- (2177-89)

(So the son of Ecgtheow showed himself brave, a man well-known for good deeds in battle, who bore himself well after glory and did not in drunkenness kill his hearth-companions; he was not rough and savage in mind, but to him out of all mankind God had liberally given the greatest ability and he held brave in battle. He had been long humiliated and despised by the sons of the Geats, who considered him worthless, nor did the lord of the Weders think he was entitled to any gifts on the mead-bench. They deemed him slow or lazy, no hero. But time brought comfort for his ills.)

This passage has been fairly difficult to explain in the course of the work. Several critics have dismissed it as simply an element of the romance quest in which the hero often begins humbly and changes as time passes; Norman E. Eliason suggests that it does not

refer to Beowulf at all, but to his uncle Hygelac (103-4); Adrien Brodeur finds it “an error of taste” on the part of the poet, who must have found this “Cinderella” motif already connected to source material and included it because he was attempting to be true to his source (237-9).

Like the story about Hrethel, the lines speak of the hero as a boy. We discover that he was dismissed in his youth if not held in outright contempt by the warriors of his tribe. In short, he is a misfit, a marginalized personality in spite of his high social standing. He eventually gains their respect by becoming a great fighter—he finds the domain in which he achieves stupendous creativity—but even in his exalted status as a killing machine in battle, his people recognize that Beowulf is somehow different. That difference has to do with his mindset: it is not “rough and savage,” the very words that might best describe a fighting man. Carol Clover notes, in fact, that the contrasting qualities of *hvatr/ blauðr* (hard/soft) make up a positive/negative binary in which to be “*hvatr*” was the desired attribute of warriors (374). He does not behave as other men do even in his adulthood or during his fights; that difference is seen, for example, in his refusal to drink heavily, to give his mind over to lethargy and inactivity on the night that he awaits Grendel’s arrival and possibly his own death while all the others are in a drunken sleep. He instead is alert, waiting, in a mental state of observation. It is also seen in his empathy for females that leads him, for example, to tell the story of Freawaru. His marginality may also be seen as one that he seeks. The night after his killing of Grendel, for example, he chooses to sleep away from the other men; his choice of job is to go alone to scout out the path for others; he chooses to reject the kingship until he has to take it.

Thus we may say that his lack of fit is due first to early factors beyond his control, second to his personality (his mental “softness”), and third to his own desire to maintain marginality as long as possible. One prime example of his failure to be in the center of the action is found in the details of the Frisian raid and its aftermath. Hygelac, Beowulf’s kinsman and king, is killed in this battle; Beowulf survives. This two-word sentence—Beowulf survives—is troubling because it was the job of the warrior to protect his king, to fight to the end with his lord and to die with him, as the men do, for example, in “The Battle of Maldon.” Perhaps he is in the process of scouting when his fellow warriors and Hygelac are killed, but the lines telling of the event put Beowulf in a dubious light: “ƿonan Biowulf com / sylfes cræfte, sundnytte dreah; / hæfde him on earne ana britig / hildegeatwa, þa he to holme stag” (2359b-2362b: Beowulf escaped from there / through his own strength, took a long swim; / he had in his arms the battle armor /of thirty men, when he climbed to the cliffs.) Yet the reason for his survival is not cowardice because he later crushes to death the warrior who slaughtered Hygelac and single-handedly kills most of the other Frisians and their allies, but only because they “þe him foran ongean” (2364b: they marched on foot to him), not because he seeks them out. In fact, his preoccupation with the thirty suits of armor—art—suggests that it is creativity that has entranced him into marginality. In fact, the word that can mean both art and strength —“cræfte”—is used in the text at this point as if to underscore the struggle between creativity/introspection and battle/social involvement.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It is necessary to point out that the Frisian raid takes place after Beowulf makes the choice to halt the exploration of his creativity. Therefore, his actions in leaving the

Yet another less-than-shining moment in Beowulf's history may also be explainable if we see him as a creator, the instance in which he watches Hondscio die in Grendel's grasp and does nothing to help his companion. Beowulf is expectantly waiting when the monster enters the dark hall and sees him as

[ . . . ] he gefeng hraðe	forman siðe
slæpendne rinc,	slat unwearnum,
bat banlocan,	blod edrum dranc,
synsnædum swealh;	sona hæfde
unlyfigendes	eal gefeormod,
fet ond folma.	(740a-745b)

(he seized quickly the first time / a sleeping warrior, tore him open without hindrance, bit into his joints / drank blood from his veins, / swallowed a huge morsel, and soon had / the dead man completely consumed, / feet and fingers.)

Not only is Beowulf curiously detached from the scene (where is the imaginative and compassionate man who later tells the empathetic story of Freawaru?) but—even worse—the poet suggests that there is an exploitive quality to his watchfulness because the Geat

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battlefield also have to do with his new reluctance—or lack of need—to shed blood any longer, as I will discuss in a later chapter.

hero needs to see how his enemy operates, and Hondscio is sacrificed to the hero's need: "Þryðsweðr beoold / mæg Higelaces, hu se manscaða / under færgripum gefaran wolde" (736b-738b: "The kinsman of Hygelac, / mighty one, watched how that maneater / planned to proceed with his sudden assault"). The exploitation of Hondscio does not end here, either, because his death becomes the subject of one of Beowulf's most controversial stories. Making it even more difficult to accept Beowulf as a noble hero, James Rosier's theory is that this story is intended as a joke, albeit a tasteless and sadistic one when measured by modern taste (and perhaps by that of the Anglo-Saxons). He suggests that Hondscio's name, which means "glove," refers to his fate of being put in Grendel's "glove," the word that is used both for the pouch he carries dead men in to snack on later, after raids, and for his stomach (11-12). In connection with the other warrior, then, Beowulf is a merciless user.

In possessing this exploitive nature, he confirms yet again his creative bent. Deliberate exploitation is, according to Gardner's profile, completely in keeping with creative personalities, whose actions are "frankly exploitive, even sadistic in character" when they have to be to allow the creator "the best opportunity to continue to work in his domain" (154). He gives as some of his examples Picasso's "ruthless" treatment of the women around him and Einstein's abandonment of his family only to conclude,

All of them [the creative people whom he studied] were quite prepared to use individuals and then to discard them when their utility was at an end. A legacy of destruction and tragedy surrounds those who enter the orbit of the creative individual; the excitement of being in the company of such individuals is great but the decompression afterward can be quite trying. (150)

Certainly what Beowulf does—watches to see how best to fight Grendel—is done with the same motive in mind that Gardner puts forth; he uses the knowledge gained by the sacrifice of Hondscio to attain his goal, “to continue to work in his domain,” the art of shedding blood. Furthermore, Beowulf continues the use of his friend when he creates the story about him. If what Rosier says is true, then he does the same thing that he did with his tale of the swimming match: unifies himself through humor with the people who hear him. Lerer calls this a “social” purpose and in doing so makes Beowulf’s actions seem less exploitive (722). Although Beowulf comes out of the Hondscio incident in a rather deplorable light, Lerer has a point with his rationalization of the hero’s actions, one that should lead us to consider the fact that exploitation is not always so extreme or intentionally evil on the part of the creator. For example, every writer uses what he knows, and often that involves using his memories of other people. The dilemma he faces is how much of his memory/knowledge he should reveal. His struggle to allow his characters free will to speak their truth is often in conflict with his love for and need to protect those from whom he has derived his inspiration. Nevertheless, to create, he must use and exploit; all that is in question is to what degree he will do so. Thus Beowulf is doing what all creators do, using what they have to in order to create.

However, Gardner makes a point of saying that necessity is not the entirety of the exploitation, that frequently it really is a selfish act because the man who allows his creativity full rein and then enjoys success is likely to become “self-promoting” (consider Beowulf’s flyting) and deprecating toward others. And in the last years of their lives, creators may deliberate cultivate a relationship with someone younger to tap into new energy or rejuvenate themselves. Beowulf’s odd revenge on Onela, who kills Hygelac’s



son, comes to mind. Instead of seeking out the enemy himself, he befriends Onela's nephew Eadgils and supplies him with weapons so that the young man can return to Sweden and kill his uncle. Although Beowulf has at this point ended exploration of his own creativity and taken up the role of king, this is one time when his social needs and his artistic personality conveniently coincide.

The elements that Gardner describes in his exemplary creator—a less-than-perfect childhood, marginalization or “lack of fit,” and exploitation of others—prove exactly what Boden states in her own explanation of creativity, that there is a link between it and society. Each of Gardner's three dimensions is really an exploration of the connection between the individual and others who comprise one's world. The boundaries of that world are set by these other people, and so any measure of originality and production is socially determined according to how well one performs inside cultural perimeters, if what he does improves or destroys them. If society instead decides that the actions and abilities of the individual are too radical, too dangerous, then he becomes a Grendel, not a Beowulf.

The world of the poem is created by the poet; it is “maintained” by the characters. They make up the society of the poem. I would suggest that the poet who imagines these characters intends the reader to see Beowulf positively as a creator. I base this suggestion on the passage examined earlier, the one describing Beowulf as a marginalized youth. Key in it is the phrase “mæste cræfte,” which almost every translation indicates means “great strength.” However, a few—such as Eliason—translate it as “bountiful gifts,” which they then assume refer to physical prowess and leadership in battle. In any translation, this is a gift from God to Beowulf, something that we might call “inherent” and certainly evocative

of the “gift” of inspiration like the one Caedmon received from God or a Norse skald from Odin. Although I do not deny that Beowulf begins to show bravery to earn their respect, the word “cræfte” has far greater connotations. It appears thirteen times in the poem. The list below breaks up these thirteen according to who or what is being described:

Beowulf:

His craft in sailing a ship

The craft that he uses to overcome the enemy, compared to God’s wisdom

His craft in tearing off the arm of Grendel

Craft as a gift or attribute that Wealhtheow advises him to use well

The craft that God gave him as a gift when he was a boy

The craft he uses to escape the Frisians

The craftiness toward friends which he is said to lack

Objects:

The glove carried by Grendel, noted as “devil’s craft”

The thief:

Craft in stealing the dragon’s cup

Craft in slipping in and out of the dragon’s cave without being caught

Grendel’s mother:

The craft that she has which is not as great as the strength of men

Unferth:

His craft as strength, mentioned after he gives Beowulf his sword

Eomer (Thryth's son):

His craft as skill in violence

The list allows us to see clearly the varying shades of meaning in regard to the word. In a few cases it seems to refer to a physical power, as we see in line 982, where it refers to Beowulf's ability to tear off Grendel's arm and hang it from the rafters. It may also refer to a learned skill, as is the case in line 209, where it is used to depict him as being "lagucraeftig," or "seaskilled." This type of usage is connected in turn to a use of the hands, whether to kill or to create. But the word also has connotations of a mental process that may be good or bad depending upon how it is used. (The lack of moral certainty probably has a historical basis and is the result of the Church's own ambiguity as to the nature of art, as was discussed in Chapter Two. But the hero's own struggle with creativity may also give the problem special emphasis.) Line 699 speaks of Beowulf's ability to overcome Grendel but compares it to God's wisdom, thereby suggesting that it is something good but something beyond mere strength, while lines 2166 through 2169 use a form of "craeft" which is related to sneakiness, duplicitous planning, and betrayal—a type of craft that we are told Beowulf does not possess. In fact, the chart above shows that Beowulf is mentioned in connection with all the aspects of the word—except the one that we see him exercise at great length, the ability to create stories. There is no reason for the poet to exclude it; by including so many of Beowulf's creations, he has assured us of this

potential. Logically, then, God's "maeste craefte" to him might easily be his creative nature. The mention immediately afterwards of Beowulf's lack of a "hard, savage" mind confirms that what he is given is not just physical strength.

In fact, if we turn back for a moment to the passage in which Beowulf is identified as an outcast in the same breath that he is credited with possessing "mæste cræfte," and if we considered the passage before it, the preoccupation with creativity, as well as creativity in connection with him, seems very significant. Just before Beowulf's childhood is remembered, a presentation of "cræft" to Hygelac and Hygd is made by the hero, not just in the form of objects as gifts but also in a verbal passage which serves as a sort of history of creation of one of these created objects:

[Beowulf] ða in beran	eafor heafodsegn,
heaðosteaþne helm,	hare byrnan,
guðsweord geatolic,	gyd æfter wræc:
"Me ðis hildesceorp	Hroðgar sealde,
snotra fengel;	sume worde het,
þæt ic his ærest ðe	est gesægde;
cwæð þæt hyt hæfde	Hiorogar cyning,
leod Scyldunga	lange hwile;
no ðy ær suna sinum	syllan wolde,

hwatum Heorowearde,        þeah he him hold wære,  
 breostgewædu.                Bruc ealles well!”

(Beowulf ordered in the boar’s head helmet, high-crowned, the great iron shirt, the patterned war-sword, then made a speech: “All this battle gear Hrothgar, wise and generous, gave to me. He asked that I should say some words about the past of his gift. King Heorgar, leader of the Scyldings, owned it a long time. Not sooner he made it a gift to brave Heorowearde, the iron corselet for his own son, brave he was. Enjoy it well!)

It is followed by Hygelac’s fabulous presentations to Beowulf, including other made objects, most notably another sword: “Het ða eorla hleo in gefetian, heaðo-rof cyning, Hreðles lafe, golde gegyrede; næs mid Geatum ða sinc-maðpum selra on sweordes had” (2190a-2193b) (“Then the bold fighter Hygelac, the protector of lords, caused them to bring forth the heirloom left by Hrethel, gold-covered; at that time among the Geats there was no greater treasure in the form of a sword”). The surrounding of the story of Beowulf’s disposition as a child with discussion of art and its origins as object and gift adds yet another layer of proof that we are to see him as a creator, one derived from association—a process in which meaning is given to a word or passage based on its proximity or relatedness to another. Rosier argues that one major method of the Beowulf poet was due to this use of related ideas, which he calls “composition by association,” and in this “transferred sense” (12), we may speculate with considerable confidence that the term “cræft” refers to an innate, internal, highly original creative power that manifests itself in stories.

The idea I suggest that his “gift” is something more than the safe, P-creativity of the traditional craftsman derives from the fact that although “cræft” is the word that is most likely to be used to mean “art” in Old English, it does not appear in lines in *Beowulf* where we might expect to find it, for example, in lines describing handiwork. The craft of the great metalsmith Weland, for example, is described as “smipes orþancum” (“smith’s skillful art”) in line 406, and as “geworc” (“work”) in line 456—not as “cræft.” The hall Heorot is described as being “searoponcum besmipod” – “skillfully smithed” in line 775 and “list”—made cunningly and cleverly in line 781. To resolve this issue and to confirm that “cræfte” usually refers to some sort of creative ability that is more than just physical craftsmanship (although it includes the idea of hand skill) we need to look for synonyms with the idea of discovering other words that might have indicated that there is a difference between the two. “Ellen” and “mægen” are the two most relevant words that appear repeatedly in *Beowulf*. Bosworth-Toller lists nine uses of “ellen” in *Beowulf*, one meaning “courage,” one meaning “fortitude,” two meaning “valor,” and the other five “strength” (246).

The second of these words, “mægen”—“main, might, strength, force, power, vigor, efficacy, faculty, physical ability”—actually seems to be the one that the scribes use the most when they wish to note physical power alone. It appears a total of seventeen times, twice in its root form in the poem to mean simply “strength,” while as “a military force,” it is used once more. However, the word in compound with others appears eight times in *Beowulf*, with one of them in conjunction with “ellen.” It and six more are in reference to the hero; the last refers to the sword Hrunting. The additional form “mægencræft,” in which the word with which I am most concerned is added to the word

for physical strength, is also used only once, in a reference to Beowulf's hands—the site of both his great strength and the physical ability of a craftsman to make. In addition, Bosworth-Toller notes three separate instances in Old English in which “mægen” and “cræft” are specifically used in *contrast* with each other, to separate the idea of physical strength from mental or artistic ability, for example, in the sentence “Sum þiþ gleaw modes cræfte sum mægenstrengo onfehþ” (“One is skilled in the arts of the mind, another receives great bodily strength”) from the Codex Exoniensis (656).

Several conclusions emerge from this examination. First, even if we take the word “cræfte” to mean “strength,” a linguistic link exists between power/physical strength and artistic ability. In Beowulf as hero, that link is made manifest: he uses his strength to cross borders and shed blood, and then, out of his bloody actions, creates stories. The fact that “cræfte” is nearly always used to refer to something more than just strength, something that is often connected with artifacts, procreativity, and mental ability, supports the idea that the boy Beowulf evinces “gifts” of a more radical nature than just art-as-traditional-handiwork.

One puzzling use of the word appears that is prudent to examine at this point. As it functions in connection with Grendel's mother's strength in line 1283, it poses a problem because her “cræft” is proclaimed by the poet to be “gryre læssa / efne swa micle, swa bið mægþa cræft” (1284b-1285b: less than an armed man's). Considering that the mother is associated with a combination of procreativity and bloodshed and lives in a distinctly bordered space, she has all the markers of creativity. Therefore, these lines are of import to this study. Liuzza comments about them, “In fact Grendel's mother is a much more dangerous opponent for Beowulf; the point of these lines is not clear” (93). If,

however, we accept the word to mean something other than purely physical strength, to mean the ability to make with both a physical and mental component, we begin to understand why her real power is not understood until it is experienced by another creator.

It is possible that the use of “cræft” was necessitated by the demands of the alliterative patterns of the lines; however, it is just as possible that certain lines were alliteratively built around the word because it is important to the theme. Rosier’s comment on the argument that the words used in the poem are subordinate to the alliterative pattern and are present for no reason except to promote it is relevant here:

It is obvious that an alliterative poetry, and more particularly a poetry influenced by a formulaic tradition, places certain demands on the poet. But for the gifted poet, whose lexical adaptiveness and inventiveness are so fully attested in his work, it seems reasonable to expect that he is able to use formal limitations in the service of his intent, that his perception and learning will in fact determine his use of prosody. (8)

In addition, other factors—the measurement of Beowulf’s ability made possible by examining his products, the coinciding of his personality with the biography profile of the exemplary creator, the linguistic and textual evidence for terms of art that are applied to him— all make it conceivable that we are to view Beowulf not just as a soldier with a weapon but as an artist of the sword. In such a thesis, the theme of creativity is carried out by the hero because he is a creator.



#### Chapter IV: THE BORDER AS THE REALM OF CREATIVITY

Boden conceives of creativity as activity inside or at the borders of a conceptual space. For the thesis of this dissertation to be accepted, I must prove that the *Beowulf* scribe also saw a connection between a bordered realm and the act of making. The base requirement of this proof is that the poet be accepted as capable of representing one thing with another and likely to do so. In other words, he must recognize and use analogy, which is the source of metaphoric and symbolic thinking. Sayers explains exactly how we can know that all men are analogical thinkers when she points out that “we think in terms of metaphor and analogy because we measure everything by our own experience” (23), and “all language is metaphorical because it is an expression of experience and of the relation of one experience to another” (28). In the case of an Anglo-Saxon scribe like the one who wrote down and edited *Beowulf*—perhaps even composed it—the potential for metaphoric, metonymic, and symbolical language was almost certainly enhanced by his exposure to the typological and symbolic literature of the Bible. Indeed, we can find many instances of analogical thinking on his part. One example that is of special interest because it clearly extends toward metaphor and the related trope of metonymy is seen in line 1343b, “nu seo hand ligeð” (“now that hand lies dead”) where the murdered Aeshere is remembered as being a helper to the king by way of comparing him to the part of the body which holds a sword, offers assistance, and supplies comfort. While this is a single example of the scribe’s ability, many other passages show his capacity for analogy as well as other intricacies of poetry. In fact, he has been argued to have highly developed poetic skills by many critics, including Rosier:

The relatively high degree of probable originality in the poet's vocabulary and his extensive capacity for variation persuasively suggest that he often composed with deliberation and concentration, that he was often conscious of the complex relationships among and the allusiveness of words, and that for him the limits of a traditional poetic language could be adapted and expanded for new associations. There is, therefore, reason enough to believe that the choice and use of words in *Beowulf* are frequently purposeful. (13)

If we accept that the scribe often presents things in light of comparisons to other things and, by putting many of these comparisons in the mouths of his characters, presents them, too, as being capable of understanding such mental connections, what evidence suggests that one of these mental connections exists between the border and creativity? The best place to begin to answer this question is found in the history of Anglo-Saxon art itself, where the border assumed an astonishing life of its own in a place that knew about restricted spaces and restricted living, the monastery. In monasteries, the production of material objects was as fraught with ambiguities as anywhere else in the Church:

Monasticism absorbed into Christian ideas the aristocratic disdain for manual labor embodied in [the antique idea of craft as mechanical]. But it developed arguments that since work—including the manufacture of art—was imposed on man after the Fall, it served a penitential function. . . . So long as it engendered no pride or excessive luxury, art contributed *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*: even though it implied neither divine inspiration nor personal sanctity in the maker, the making of religious art was an

acceptable form or meditation. Many of the numerous artists' signatures surviving from the Middle Ages are framed in formulae of humility, seeking prayer and expiation. (Kessler 179-180)

Much of the work in the monasteries, therefore, was not H-creativity but was instead mundane, consisting of copying objects which were considered divine, venerable, or pedigreed in order to perpetuate faith and truth and not of creating objects representing innovative ideas. Art work, in fact, was often influenced by patrons. All members of the cloister participated, from the highest to the lowest, nuns as well as monks. While the Anglo-Saxons did little in the field of architecture, their art work included the painting of icons, metalwork, weaving and embroidery, and illuminated manuscripts. As liturgical art, these objects represented for the members of the monastery who created and used them “a suspension of time and space that enabled contact with those in a higher realm” (Kessler 174)—in other words, art (the act and the product) became a liminal space of profound spiritual import for the monastic artist.

Considering art itself as a border—a locus of an intersection between God and man—it seems natural that the product, the object, began to reveal a fascination not just with the central aspects of a work but also with its borders. Evidence of this does indeed exist. Out of what was meant to be a highly regulated, “non-original” art which was presumed to be the product of labor rather than inspiration arose a surprisingly innovative style which has come to be known as “Hiberno-Saxon,” one which is unique to the islands of Britain and Ireland—and one which vitalizes borders. While Georg Swarzenski suggests it might have been an expression of the movement toward novelty and revolution which took place on the European continent and the West between the 600s and the 800s

(57), he also notes the belief of many scholars that the style is “a remaining embodiment of prehistoric, pre-Roman, pre-Christian spirit, persisting through generations and centuries by a hidden tradition or emerging subconsciously from age-old memories” (56). First seen in the seventh century, it represents the pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon impulse, possibly fused with ancient Celtic ones,<sup>11</sup> as it blended with ecclesiastical concepts to produce a form reflecting a distinct tension. It appears to have developed as the result of Irish monks entering Britain as missionaries. For example, St. Columba, a leading Irish missionary, founded a Christian outpost on the Scottish island of Iona in 563, and Columban monks traveled to Northumbria to establish a monastery at Lindisfarne in 635 in an effort to convert the northern part of the island to Christianity.

The Anglo-Saxon contribution to the art is mostly in the form of zoomorphic designs, usually animal heads, whose presence is attributed to a Norse influence (Swarzenski 58); as Meyer Shapiro observes, “All that pertained to human and animal force seems to have attracted them” (353). These animal designs are combined with

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<sup>11</sup> This statement is highly controversial. Georg Swarzenski, for example, refutes the idea of “Celtic racial elements” in the style because the Celts appeared in Ireland (where the form is believed to have originated) a thousand years before the first forms appeared, because the abstract style is in profound contrast to Hiberno-Saxon abstraction, and because no one has a final definition for the term “Celt” (57). What Swarzenski does insist upon, however, is the impossibility of isolating Irish (“Hiberno”) art from Anglo-Saxon (53). He uses “Anglo-Irish” to describe works that earlier historians had considered Irish.

swirls, waves, step-like straight lines—dynamic, kinetic, surging circularity and circular forms that ceaselessly seek an escape from the smooth surface on which they are engraved. The forms—intricate, geometric patterning—often show a decided inclination to move off the planes of objects without respect for borders. Perhaps the explosive vitality of this design is the very reason for the heavy, smooth, and solid frame which appears insistently at the edges of many Hiberno-Saxon works. It is impossible not to notice the boundary lines in this style. The opposition between the two designs—the surging figures entrapped by the stern frame—is a trademark of Hiberno-Saxon art, yet the two realms can never seem to remain separate despite the banding. A large number of the objects are characterized by an intrusion into the smoothness of the border. For example, the Emly Shrine,<sup>12</sup> an Anglo-Irish reliquary created between the late seventh century and the end of the eighth, has heavy gold bands around every section, but the band at the top, known as the ridgepole, is interrupted by a miniature version of the shrine. The tiny replica of the created object sitting atop the object itself is suggestive of the creative process: the work of the artist is first envisioned in the mind—a sort of miniature preview of what he is to produce in full—and then realized in dimensions that are readily perceived and in forms that are used by others. The presence of the little replica, appearing as it does in the frame, also reveals an inclination on the part of the artist to see the border as active, to allow the plane to “violate the frame’s assumed intangibility,” as Shapiro has observed about similar art (285). Additionally, at each end of the smooth, heavy boundary, animal heads bite into it, suggesting not only that they will eventually destroy the frame but also that the role which the frame plays is itself endangered. This is art which

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<sup>12</sup> Found in Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA. Accession number: 52.1396

metaphorically suggests the radical function of creativity, movement and destruction of the boundaries of a space. Swarzenski characterizes the Hiberno-Saxon style as “embracing, luxuriant, complex, anti-classic, opposed to reality and organic life as well as to constructive architectural order,” designed not just to please the eye but “to offer symbolism, tending not toward the subjective and the emotional but the objective and the mathematical” (55-57).

Was the scribe who put Beowulf’s story on paper familiar with the ideas suggested thus far? Certainly he would have conceived of art as the space in which one communed with God; the belief was common to the monastic world. It is also likely that he was accustomed to think of the frame of a work as a place to express creativity. Historically speaking, material objects such as the Emly Shrine were produced at the right time and in the right place for him to have been familiar with their approaches to art. But the designs on objects such as the reliquary bring to mind another expression of the border motif in a medium with which the scribe would certainly have been familiar: illuminated manuscripts, the most famous type of Anglo-Saxon art. The best known of these is the Lindisfarne Gospel, created by monks at the Lindisfarne Monastery. Its pages reflect a truth observed by Jacques Guilmain, “Consummate craftsmanship cannot be separated from art” (545), and display beautifully intricate techniques in the frames around many of the edges of pages—spiraling designs, knot work and interlace, ambiguity, and enigma, what Megaw calls “non-narrative art” (11). Intertwining is, in fact, such a feature of illuminated texts—even of many not connected with Lindisfarne—that whole “carpet pages” of complicated, interlocking patterns minus any script at all appear in a few

manuscripts of the seventh and eighth century, as if the border has temporarily expanded to overtake the manuscript itself.

One of the finest craftsmen of such illuminations is believed to have been the Lindisfarne monk Eadfrith, who may have created the familiar carpet page which begins the Gospel (Bruce-Mitford 5).<sup>13</sup> Robert Stevick, in studying the artist's creation of such complicated design, believes Eadfrith possessed a "sophistication of geometrical skills" in order to "develop the potentials of the irrational numbers to produce ratios that repeat" (Stevick 181). In layman's terms, Eadfrith's designs are not random at all but highly planned and orchestrated, the response of a mathematically skilled thinker. So detailed are the patterns that several theories have developed concerning them, such as the possibility that they employ an iconography of sacred numbers (Horn 218-227) or that they represent copies of mosaic patterns left in the pavements put down by the Romans (Gregory Henderson 98-101). Stevick, although noting the craftsman's fascination with "the quasi-magical quality of numbers and measures," has argued that the creation of the interlaced patterns found on the Lindisfarne Gospel's first carpet page must have generated emotions similar to those we expect to find in artists producing inspired, not copied, works—the feeling of achieving a "mystical experience" as the creator of "ordered forms that . . . do no less than express the divine will," of a work with "its central theme Christian truth, elaborated through and surrounded by a labyrinth of convoluted paths, knots, and

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<sup>13</sup> Found on folio 2.V of the *Lindisfarne Gospels*, London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D. IV

creatures” (546-47). What Stevick postulates—that the illumination represents highly original art whose creation resulted in an intense emotional experience for its maker—is likely true of other pages as well, not just in this one manuscript but in many of them. However, richly done border art supplied opportunities for the creative experience more than the complete page of patterning did because it was the type far more likely to be done by the monks rather than an entire page. After all, the art was supposed to support, not supplant, the manuscript. About the frames of manuscripts, R. Harris observes, “[t]he draughtsman understood the region of the margin not as a boundary possessing fixed limits but rather as an open area in which the energy of his forms can freely expand” (4). The monks of the Northumbrian monasteries were artists who vitalized the frame in particular, giving it an elan that, ironically, often surpassed what it was intended to highlight, the text. Given these facts, it is logical to assume that many scribes came to see the border—not the center of the page—as the space in which creativity flourished, the true domain of the creative experience.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> In the case of the *Beowulf* scribes, we do not know whether they were copying an older manuscript or taking dictation part of the time. Kiernan’s argument that the second scribe was the poet himself, if accepted, means that this scribe was producing original art. If this is the case, it could be argued that he did not regard borders as creative realms. After all, he had the entire page at his disposal. However, just as it is logical to believe that reading the Bible aided the monks in using metaphor and symbol, it is also logical to believe that the tradition of the inhabited and tangible borders influenced their view of it as a symbol of a space for creative activity, no matter what they themselves produced in terms of art.



The truth of this assumption, that the frame became associated with the realm of creativity, can be seen in many ways. The Emly Shrine, for example, uses the frame as the only place on the box to contain “narrative” art. What this term refers to is the presence of signifiers which are universally understood, the animal heads biting the ends of the border at the top of the box and the replica of the little box in the middle. Non-narrative art is the sort that appears on the planes of the box: a pattern of boxes and rectangular steps, the significance of which is found in the mind of the artist. Other frames are more direct in their presentation of objects inside themselves and are so filled with images that art historians refer to them as “inhabited.” The artist of the *Grimbald Gospels*, for instance, compartmentalizes the wide band around the first page of the work. Angels fill all of it except for eight medallions, and inside them, a series of related pictures appear.<sup>15</sup> In their totality, they depict “a fully orchestrated image of the Incarnation” and act as a “symbolic space” (Broderick 37). Other frames are “tangible”: they are perceived and employed by the subjects at the center of the painting that we do not expect to be aware of them. The *Hexateuch of Aelfric*, for example, in depicting the fall of Lucifer

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<sup>15</sup> Found in folio 115r of the *Grimbald Gospels*, London, British Library Add. MS. 34890. From this point until the end of the discussion of the frame, most of the works suggested as examples—and several others—are pictured in Broderick’s essay, listed on the Works Cited page.

shows him clinging to a frame to try to forestall his plunge into Hell,<sup>16</sup> and in another picture, displays Aaron's rod in the form of a snake that is curled around the border at the bottom of the page.<sup>17</sup> In some cases, the tangible frame supplies the viewer with a different kind of perspective. An early version of *Marvels of the East*, done around the year 1000, shows a monster grasping his frame with both hands and stepping on it with both feet as he appears to emerge from his world into the viewer's.<sup>18</sup> What Meyer Schapiro explains as the "inverse tangible" frame (280-281) is one which uses "visual synecdoche" (Broderick 40). For instance, only the feet of Christ are seen as he ascends beyond the limits of the frame in several Anglo-Saxon depictions. The border of a work of art does even more in the hands of scribe-artists: in many instances, it keeps narrative time by changing color when events need to be separated chronologically, or it acts as an expressive device in which the artist reveals either his own emotions about the subject or tells the viewer what his feelings toward it ought to be (for example, thorns appear in the

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<sup>16</sup> Found on folio 2r of the *Hexateuch of Aelfric*, London, British Library Cotton MS. Claudius B. IV.

<sup>17</sup> Found on folio 81v of the *Hexateuch of Aelfric*, London, British Library Cotton MS Claudius B. IV.

<sup>18</sup> Found on folio 82r of an *Illustrated Marvels of the East*, London, British Library Cotton MS Tiberius B. V.

frame around Satan in a drawing of the temptation of Adam and Even found in the Caedmon manuscript of Junius 11 in the Bodleian Library).

In giving all of these examples, I have not attempted to separate what is “Hiberno-Saxon” from “Anglo-Saxon,” I have not put them in chronological order (although all were created inside the years which have been argued to produce *Beowulf*), and I have included in the discussion frames around both manuscript and drawings. All are relevant, however, because the tangible frame and the inhabited one “represent the development of a concept that had already appeared in earlier manuscript illumination” (Broderick 35).

Broderick concludes,

Far from an inert boundary, then, the frame [. . .] is an animated zone that often plays an important narrative and expressive role[. . .]. English artists never fully accepted the notion of a completely neutral frame. The frame continues to have a life of its own, often responding in eccentric ways to exigencies of figure or field. (40)

The border is metacognitive, showing an awareness of itself, and—to use the terms of narratology—extradiegetic, operating beyond the traditional level of the drawing or textual manuscript itself. In essence, it became an extraordinary and unique realm of creativity.

Given these facts, the question we next confront is whether or not the scribe of *Beowulf* understands the border in the same way that I have proposed. Based on the historical data that I have just examined, we may logically assume that he easily could have because it is probable he shared the common view of it as “an animated zone” which

was likely equated with creativity itself. The textual evidence for his presentation of the border as such begins with the word “*mearc*.” Klaeber defines it as “mark, limit” and in a metaphoric sense, as “life’s end” (372), a usage found in line 2384I commented upon in Chapter One. However, the word “*mearc*” as it means “boundary” does not appear at all in *Beowulf* except in conjunction with other words such as the proper noun “*Wedermearc*” (line 298), referring to the boundaried territory owned by a tribe, the Weders, and in compounds with a “*ge*” prefix. “*Fotgimearc*,” for example appears in line 3042 (“*se wæs fiftiges fotgimearces / lang on legere*”) and means “the length or mark of a foot” (333), and “*milgimearc*” is in line 1362 (“*Nis þæt feor heonon / milgimearces. . .*”) as “a measure by miles.” As the verb “to make a mark” (373), it is used in line 450 (“*mearcað morhopu*”: Grendel will “mark with blood” the walls of his lair) and in the form “*gimearcod*” in lines 1264 (“*morþre gimearcod mandream fleon*”: Cain fled “marked with the murder” of his brother) and 1695 (“*þurh runstafas rihte gimearcod*”: the sword found in the underwater cave was “rightly marked with runes”). The term which is most important to this dissertation, “*mearcstapa*,” is not even listed by Klaeber as being a form of “*mearc*” but given its own definition as “mark haunter” and, as mentioned earlier, “wanderer in the waste borderland” (373).

Examination of all of these definitions points up an essential fact: the idea of boundaries is indeed present—but just as present is the idea of “marking” in the sense of writing, the form of creativity in which the *Beowulf* scribe exiled. Grendel will “mark” his cave with blood; Cain is “marked” by God; the sword is “marked” with runes. In the last example, the pairing of “*mearc*” with the creative act of writing/carving letters is pronounced. I am not the first to suggest such an idea, that the border and the act of

marking/writing are connected. For example, Manish Sharma compares the two meanings of “*mearc*” to the two meanings of “*forscrifan*” (to condemn, to cut into, to write upon) and concludes from his examination of both (he focuses on them as they apply to Cain) that they are related in usage and that “the structure of *Beowulf* can no longer be considered apart from the narrative boundary” of the poem (279). What he argues ultimately is that “the text seems to establish a link between the space upon which the monster treads [the physical border] and the mark which God has set upon Cain” (266), which, as Sharma points out, was regarded from the time of Bede on as a visible sign (271). Both etymologically and critically, then, it is reasonable to assume that the scribes of *Beowulf* associate the space of the border with creativity in the form that they would have experienced the most, writing.

Their insistent presentation of the border underscores the importance of it to the theme. Not only is it consistently present as a geographic location, but in its textual and metatextual form, it echoes many of the same capabilities as the frames of visual art like that discussed earlier. In terms of geography, if we begin from the vantage point of the hero, the Baltic Sea functions as the first dividing line of importance between his land of the Geats and the island of Zealand to which he travels in order to save the Danes from Grendel. During a feast on his first night in Heorot, Beowulf defines the sea he has crossed as a naturally violent habitat of “*hronfixas*,” “*wado weallende, wedera cealdost*,” “*norðanwind heaðogrim*,” a “*fah feondscaða*,” a “*mihtig meredeor*” (selected phrases from a twenty-line passages, 540-560: “whales,” “water surges, coldest weather,” “fierce northern winds,” a “hostile, dire foe,” a “mighty seabeast”). The sea as the first bordered

body into which Beowulf enters (at least as the poem's narrative unfolds) is indicative of the nature of the others which follow.

Zealand is itself a veritable model of a bound, enclosed structure. It is an island, demarcated from both sea and mainland. Its separation from the continent is given further significance when the old Norse legend which explains its existence is known, as the people hearing the story of Grendel and Heorot, and probably the scribe who copied down the story, may have known it.<sup>19</sup> According to the Gylfaginning, a woman tricked the king, Gylfi, into giving her land to plow. Using her magic, she plowed what he had given her—what he considered worthless because it was beside the sea—until she separated it from his kingdom, making an island which became her own world (Sturluson 46.) The

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<sup>19</sup> In actuality, we do not know to what extent the Anglo-Saxons were familiar with Norse analogues. Klaeber lists several of them under a preface to the poem entitled “The Fabulous Elements” (xii-xxix). In addition, a great many essays have explored this very topic, for example, Roberta Frank’s “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry” in *Speculum Noroennum: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke (Odense: Odense UP, 1981); Carol Clover’s “Skaldic Sensibility,” Arkiv for Nordisk Filologi 93 (1978): 63-81; and in connection with bloodshed and the body in particular, Seth Lerer’s “Grendel’s Glove,” listed on the Works Cited page and Mary Flavia Godfrey’s “*Beowulf* and *Judith*: Thematizing Decapitation in Old English Poetry,” also found on the Works Cited page. The general consensus of these essays is that there was overlap between Anglo-Saxon stories and Norse ones.

separation motif in her story makes the site of Zealand of special note as a separated microcosm which, like the ocean, proves threatening from the first. Although Beowulf and his men have come to the rescue of the Danes, their first meeting with them is in the form of a warrior on the coastline—a border guard—who views them as a distinct threat:

Gewat him þa to waroðe wicge ridan

þegn Hroðgares, þrymmum cwehte

mægenwudu mundum, meþelwordum frægn . . . . (234a-236b)

(“Straight to the water’s edge he rode, Hrothgar’s warrior, with his hand raised he shook his spear and shouted a challenge”).

The Geats have arrived in this place expecting violence and resistance—they are deliberately seeking a serial killer who has been on the rampage for a dozen years—and they begin their encounter with it immediately. It should be noted that the Danes’ reaction to border intrusion is typical and ceremonial in the sense that it always occurred when an unexpected or unknown intruder arrived. Although a trespass, the Geats’ arrival is not associated with the same type of violence Grendel uses, so it is treated with precaution and results in no bloodshed. After the coast guard lets them pass, Wulfgar, the warrior-doorman, grants them entrance into Heorot only when King Hrothgar orders him to do so and only when they agree to leave their shields and spears by the hall benches. These actions are not unusual but have heightened significance for the reader because of the paranoia of the Danish court that has been generated by the constant attacks and the reenforcement of the border as a way to prevent attack. Beowulf’s entry into the hall is, therefore, more hazardous than it might have been had he entered in a time of peace and

calm. The hall in which he and his men feast and await the arrival of Grendel, Heorot, is itself also insistent on the concept of markers and boundaries. It is a world inside the world of Zealand, its limits made evident by its its great door fastened by iron hinges. There are also limits to its role as the realm of safety: only as long as the sun shines do its boundaries mean anything. With darkness, the monster of the night traverses its space, bringing with him death, blood, and terror.

Also vital to this discussion is the parallel “world within a world” which exists on another part of the island: the small inland lake that lies inside Zealand, remarkable for its mixture of fire in its depths and frost above it. Invasion of its waters is painful because they burn and hide dangerous creatures. In fact, some suggestion is given by the poet that the line between the land and the sea is at points porous, much like the frame around Hiberno-Saxon art: line 1358 speaks of “windige næssas” (windy headlands), which are far more likely to be associated with the sea than with a self-contained inland body of water. Additionally, so is the “yþgeblond” which “astigeþ/ won to wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ / laþ gewidru” (1373-75) (“surge of waves” which “rise dark and black to the clouds whenever the wind stirred up grievous storms”). Finally, the beasts in the water are described as “nicras” in line 1427—“sea creatures.” Richard Butts remarks that this suggestion of the sea’s entry into the mere “parallels the narrative action of Grendel’s nightly raids on Heorot” (118), so both boundaried worlds are capable of being transgressed.

However, the mere has far greater depth than Heorot because at its bottom lies the farthest enclosure, the wondrous chamber of the cave, the home of the monsters. What we are allowed to see of the central part of the structure is surprising in its warmth and



domesticity. Its interior is lit by controlled and comforting “fyrleoht . . . blacne leoman beorhte scinan” (1516b-1517b: “firelight. . . glowing light, brightly shining”) ; it is a palace of refuge where “him nænig wæter wihte ne sce ede” (1514: “no water could harm him”); and at least one heirloom, a remarkable “sigeadig bil” (1557b: “victory-blest sword”), is displayed. Despite the suffocating and turbulent waters around the cave, quietness—perhaps even tranquility—abides here. If the sea is full of the surging life forms of monsters and snakes, if the water itself is constantly in a turmoil, here is—right at their limit—a sudden stillness like that of the frame on the Emly Shrine, one that seems to persist unless the stillness is disturbed by an unfriendly visitor. Not all of the depths are so familiar or attractive, however; one of the dark spaces has become a tomb for Grendel. The cave, the lake, the hall, the island: these are the constructs that make up the first half of the poem. Each is vitally and intrinsically marked by borders.

I began this examination of the geographic markers from the vantage point of the hero, but this is not the viewpoint with which the poet begins the poem. He focuses first on Scyld, who comes from and disappears at last back to a world that is beyond the boundary of the Danes’ knowledge and travel, and who is linked in the poem to the act of expanding borders in regards to his kingdom. Then he offers a genealogy of Danish kings, ending with the attack on one of them by a monster, Grendel, who is identified in large part by his spatial location on a boundary, as is his mother later in the poem. The designation of *mearcstapan*—“borderwalkers”—for the two of them (Grendel, in fact, is “famed” as a borderwalker) indicates their state of exile. The outlying lands on the island, the marshes, the cliffs and treacherous trails are their preserve; all that is not part of the civilization of the warriors and the mead hall makes up their world. But no physical fence

exists to separate them from the Danes. The separation of the two of them from society is therefore indicative of something psychological, societal, and cultural which marks them as Other. In reality, the dividing line appears to be at best an unseen border, but it is understood as much by Hrothgar's men as by the monsters. Its purpose is to keep the mother and son out, not to keep the warriors in, and it fails miserably. What they represent cannot be contained by people afraid of shadows, let alone the unknown. Grendel's horrific entry is always deliberate and inevitable; there is never any doubt that his nights in Heorot, those nights when he crosses at will into liminal space, will spawn blood and death.

For their part, the Danes show no inclination to go near Grendel's lake with its overhanging, frost-covered trees and root-filled water, the water where at night, a strange "wondersight" of fire gleams, yet the fact that they know where it is shows that they have entered its perimeters at some point in the past; they have crossed the border into this frightening zone, even if their stay was not permanent. Some of the best-known lines of the poem tell of a stag that comes to the lake (perhaps one that the Danes have followed there in the hunt). Though he is "chased by hounds and seeks haven by the edge [of the lake] he will die beside it, give up his life, rather than enter that hell-cursed water":

Deah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,

heorot hornum trum holtwudu sece,

feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,

aldor on ofre, ær he in wille,

hafelan beorgan. . . . (1368b -72a)

The stag's unnatural behavior suggests that there is also something unnatural about the inhabitants of the lake. The monsters are outside the ken of the warriors, beyond the limits of their understanding. Therefore, traversing or breaching the border between the two worlds is taboo, and that taboo holds even when the only alternative is death, as the stag's actions prove.

It is fitting, given the preeminence of geographic liminality, that Beowulf's last battle is completely the result of spatial transgression connected to a created object. A thief from Beowulf's kingdom sneaks into yet another cave, this one beneath a stone arch rather than the sea, and the home of a dragon. Because the thief steals a jeweled cup and carries it to a space where it does not belong, the dragon invades Beowulf's territory and Beowulf is forced once again to cross thresholds as well to do bloody battle. It is no accident that the lengthy poem concludes with an attempt to erect another type of physical border around the material evidence that a man leaves behind to testify that he even existed, his grave marker:

Geworhton ða	Wedra leode
hleo on hoe,	se wæs heah ond brad,
wægliðendum	wide gesyne,
ond betim bredon	on tyn dagum
beaduroffes becn,	bronda lafe
wealle beworhton,	swa hyt weorðlicost
foresnotre men	findan mihton. (3156-162)

(The folk of the Weders fashioned there on the headland a grave barrow broad and high, by ocean-farers seen from afar. In ten days' time their toil had raised it, the battle-brave's beacon. Round the remains of the funeral pyre they built a wall, the worthiest ever that their wisest men could find in their wisdom to build.)

The last view that the reader has of the Geats is of their movement as they form yet a third kind of border, a living one: “þa ymbe hlæw riodan hildediore. . . ealra twelfe” (3169-170: “then about that barrow rode warriors . . . a band of twelve”).

The many instances of the geographic presentation of borders help to make the reader aware that it is to be regarded as of significance; what happens on that border tells us why. When the transgression of it is answered only by Beowulf—when it is his personal and solitary experience at the “*mearc*,” not in conjunction with the other warriors—the result is profound violence and loss of blood that in turn produce created things, narratives which are “*gemearcod*” for Beowulf by the scribes. The episode with the sea beasts is the result of his answering their attack on him, and the story he creates from their encounter is long and skillful; the raging battles with Grendel and his mother becomes the source of not one but three stories (one to Hrothgar and two to Hygelac if we include the Freawaru narrative). When he becomes unwilling to cross borders—as for example, when the Frisians come to him instead of being sought by the hero, and he kills *Dæghræfn*—no resulting story is told by Beowulf but becomes a tale told by the poet, who no longer receives his material from the hero's personal experience but from history, experience of the group that is at least twice removed—hero, group—from the event in the telling by the poet. That the border must be seen as a source of creativity can,

therefore, be proven on the most important and most basic level of plot.

Thus far, I have examined the border as a zone of personal creativity in the form of the frame around the edges of manuscripts and drawings in terms of history, traced its etymology and its connotations as they relate to creativity, and noted its prominence in the plot level of the text as well as its link to creativity on this level. Finally, I would like to view the narrative itself as a created object in order to point out the ways in which the border is made present metatextually. This metatextuality reveals the border as a locus of creativity in the same ways that frames are its locus in more traditional art objects such as the Emly Shrine and the drawings I have examined.

The conception of the *Beowulf* text as an artifact has resulted in several critical essays in the last few years. Eric Jager's discussion of the perception of words as objects in the poem in his "Orality or Pectorality?" is elemental to the idea; so is Martin Stevens' "From Gold-Hoard to Word-Hoard," which treats treasure (most of which is created object) and words as equivalents. Lerer's Literacy and Power in Anglo-Saxon Literature is also insistent that poetry be so presented, and in his analysis of Asser's Life of Alfred, Lerer allegorizes the making of physical objects to parallel his theory that "literacy itself becomes a kind of craft" (24) and "the text . . . a crafted object" (27).

The same issues that arise in a discussion of material objects are present when treating a text as such, and the two major ones, the syncretism of the text and the method by which it is transmitted, are both issues of borders and liminality. The blending of the two cultures of paganism and Christianity is, just as in the case of three-dimensional objects earlier, typical of the Anglo-Saxon text. However, *Beowulf* is at its most syncretic when words and artifact coincide—for example, when the giants' sword occupies the

written passage. Lerer, in fact, suggests that the “representation” of reading and writing exemplified by the sword’s hilt gives “voice to an understanding of the written word as both the venue and the very subject of the presentation of the Germanic past to a Christian present” (*Literacy* 3), Making a paganistic history palatable to the Church was not an easy task. Like material objects, many stories were held to be suspect and thus created anxiety. Any story, oral or written, which was perceived as having as its purpose pleasure rather than didacticism, in particular Christian teaching, was regarded by the Church as sin. Augustine’s familiar definition of sin as enjoyment of what should be utilitarian illustrates the “patristic psychology” which classed stories of the heroic past as “a form of fornication” (Prendergast 130) because they seduced men from God. But because that same type of narrative was easily remembered and thus aided memory that might be used to retain Biblical teachings, it was considered necessary; therefore, “reactions to heroic poetry in the Anglo-Saxon period are characterized by a mixture of attraction and horror” (Prendergast 130), or a paradoxical ambiguity of the same sort creating tension in their material art. It was from this uneasy border space in which one culture died away during the birthing process of another that the text of *Beowulf* appeared.

Yet another space in which different cultures collided involves two means of transmission of narratives. Caedmon’s well-known story, told by Bede, offers a rare glimpse of the transformation of oral poetry during what John Niles has called England’s “third culture”: at the meeting between the oral (Caedmon) and the written (the scribes who took down his words as he spoke them.) From this story, Niles suggests a broader view of most of Old English literature as “a unique hybrid creation that came into being at the interface of two cultures . . . through some person’s prompting” (“Understanding”

139). Linguistic theorists today see the transgression of the oral world by the written as even more traumatic; many of them argue that orality and literacy produce different types of psychologies. Eric Havelock, for example, has made famous the theory that writing is what makes possible abstract thought; Walter Ong declares that illiterate persons show a resistance to abstraction and syllogism and concludes that writing is necessary in order for humans to develop these abilities; Martin McLuhan argues that writing causes alteration (for the better) in our thought. All put forth the idea that literacy changes our brains. It is not necessary for me to argue with these theories but simply to note once again that even in the process of being created, *Beowulf* as a text was subject to tension arising from intersecting boundaries, or, as Niles calls them, “interfaces.”

The story that the poem tells is itself a literary performance by the poet and, as a text, a series of carefully selected ink marks—words—on a page. Since both word and page take up space, both are connected to the concept of border, that which contains space. In this sense, we encounter not a cultural and historical liminality that pertains to several texts created during this period but to *Beowulf* metatextually. How do the literary techniques and the language of the poet affect the narrative as it stresses the motif of the border and its related expression of ideas about creativity?

This “how” is directly linked to the lack of page transparency, a lack which is one reason for the divided, broken nature of the text. “Transparency” here refers to the fact that a manuscript is a medium “which suppresses its own presence” (Kaufmann 14); in other words, the narrative occurs right in front of the readers’ eyes on the surface of the page, and they pretend not to see the printed words but the events themselves. The page is “see-through.” The manuscript “denies its printed form” (Kaufmann 28). “Exposure” of

the text occurs when the reader is made to realize that the narrative he is reading is just that—a narrative and not reality—in the same way that the viewer of a drawing is made to acknowledge that it is just a series of lines on a page. Both occur because the creator reminds us of the limits of his creation. For example, the artist makes the frame tangible because the subjects of the drawing do when they reach out to grasp it. The poet of *Beowulf* uses several techniques to expose his text, all of them connected to the motif of the border.

One which is especially noticeable is the use of the “I” narrator, whose voice intrudes abruptly into the body of the narrative at various times. Such blemishes on the transparency of the text may be explained on one level as remnants of the Norse tradition of the self-conscious skaldic poet or simply as the products of oral culture. The scop’s presentation relied on his voice being heard, and in fact, the authenticity of a text for centuries was validated by the narrator’s assurance that he had first-hand knowledge of the material or by his use of an oral, “natural” style (Kaufmann 26). Since the *Beowulf* poet is telling a story that has been repeated by word of mouth over and over, it is not surprising to see the first-person narrator employed to testify that what is occurring has actually been “heard” and is real. What is surprising, however, is the failure of this particular narrator to accomplish what first-person accounts typically do: they “promote a decreasing perceptual distance in readers’ experiences . . . [events described] become printed extensions of the readers’ own worlds” (Kaufmann 20). *Beowulf* is not intended, however, to be a “first-person account.” In fact, the story is already being told from an omniscient point of view (the narrative includes the story of Hildeburh, for example, which is never accredited to the “I” of the poet), so the necessity of an additional first-



person narrator seems questionable, especially since he is often distracting, much as the digressions are. Such is the case, for example, when he shows up suddenly in the midst of the fight with the dragon: “wæs sio hond to strong se ðe meca gehwan, mine gefræge / swenge ofersohhte . . .” (2684-5: “as stories have told me, [Beowulf] struck too forcefully when he stepped to battle”). Since five hundred lines of poetry and fifty years of narrative time have passed since we last heard from this narrator, and since Beowulf is fighting for his life at the moment, the unexpected eruption of the “I” voice into the text annoys because it takes us away from the heightening action and shocks, reminding us right at the moment of emotional climax that this is more than a poem: it is a created experience. The poet’s insistence that we acknowledge the border compels us as well to understand its nature: this is the realm of creativity.

The narrator intrudes twice more into the confrontation, slicing through the narrative as effectively as Beowulf removing Grendel’s head and Wiglaf finally puncturing the belly of the dragon. It is in the realization of the similarity between the actions of the poet and the hero that the narrator’s ruptures of the text can be readily perceived as metatextual: his cutting into the text is a reenactment of the narrative, but even while the “I” of his intrusion repeats the action of the print, it also reminds us that it is only print, and the conflict only a fiction. Thus the poet of *Beowulf*, by creating and destroying the boundaries of his story almost simultaneously, has made his point: the artist and the creation process cannot be dismissed from the text of the poem because it is a text about him and about it. A connection with the poem is a connection with what framed and created it. If we carry the metatextuality to its logical conclusion, the reader himself enters the frame of the story. Merely by reading, he is responding to the text, testing the

boundaried space, finding out about himself as he reacts to what is happening on the page, becoming more self-aware. And if the work seems to be full of contradictions and circles, it is: Overing, for example, has noted that it is “‘an about process,’ a form of continual questioning of values” which she describes as having “an interlace design” (xvii) like that found in the material art. The interlacing, in the context of this discussion of the text, is represented as the border as it is pushed and ruptured by the poet and his craft and consequently by the reader; it is as porous in places as the geographic one.

Other intrusions into the body of the narrative also point up the presence of the boundary, for example, the startling digressions. One of the most distracting is the sudden veering off in lines 1931-62 into the story of the proud king’s daughter who kills suitors who dare to look at her: “Modþryðo wæg / fremu folces cwen, firen ondrysne . . . .” Jessica Hope Jordan in examining this episode calls it “a point where the narrative slips . . . a visible gap in the text” (para. 9). Even accepting, as most scholars do today, that these two digressions and the many others in the story of the Geat warrior serve a purpose and have a unity that is not at first apparent, they invade the plot and create tiny boundaried narratives of their own, not obviously linked to the rest of the events.

To some extent, the border motif as expressed textually is also deepened by the ironic level of the poem. Irony itself depends on a demarcation line, the one connecting what is *meant* to the necessary reference point of what is *really* meant. As a direct result of the poem’s origin from two cultures, pagan and Christian, irony is created. As Sharma notes,

We have come to understand the narrative of *Beowulf* to be structured by means of interaction between the poem's two primary frames of reference: Christian and pagan. With the rejection of the critical attitude that the Christian elements of *Beowulf* are mere "coloring," irony becomes a fundamental structural component of the poet's narrative strategy. The relatively benighted pagan perspective is thus circumscribed by the broader Christian worldview possessed by the poet and his audience. An ironic divide is established between these two levels (or frames) of narration. . . .

(247)

The two viewpoints' decided opposition to each other is seen best in the poet's sermon against the Danes when they worship stone gods instead of the Almighty:

	Monig oft gesæt
rice to rune;	ræd eahtedon,
hwæt swiðferhðum	selest wære
wið færgyrum	to gefremmanne.
Hwilum hie geheton	æt hærgtrafum
wigweorþunga,	wordum bædon,
þæt him gastbona	geoce gefremede
wið þeodþreaum.	Swylc wæs þeaw hyra,
hæþenra hyht;	helle gemundon

in modsefan,	Metod hie ne cuþon,	
dæda Demend,	ne wiston hie Drihten God,	
ne hie huru heofena Helm	herian ne cuþon,	
Wuldres Waldend.	Wa bið þæm ðe sceal	
þurh sliðne nið	sawle bescufan	
in fyres fæþm,	frofre ne wenan,	
wihte gewendan!	Wel bið þæm þe mot	
æfter deaðdæge	Drihten secean	
ond to Fæder fæþmum	freoðo wilnian!	(171b-188)

(Many powerful often sat in consultation, considering advice, what strongminded men might best do about the awful horror of the sudden attacks. Sometimes they offered at heathen temples honor to idols, compelled with words the soulslayer with the distress of the people. Such was their learning, heathen hope, hell remembered in their minds. They knew not the Ruler, who judges deeds, nor did they know the Lord God. They do not have heaven, do not know what it means to praise the Ruler of Glory. Woe to them who shall through severe violence thrust in fire's outstretched arms, expect not comfort or any way at all to change! Well be it for him who after his deathday seeks the Lord and will embrace the Father.)

Though representing a point of that is in opposition to the actions of the Danes, this passage is not ironic. Irony results when the reader views the characters doing or saying something that he—not they—knows is misguided and the poet does not comment, as, for example, when Beowulf dies and his body is burned on the pyre. The line “heofon rece swealg” (3155: “heaven swallowed the smoke”) allows the Christian poet to expose the text again, to remind the reader that he is indeed a reader and that this is only a story because he has a knowledge that the pagan Geats do not have. While they may have viewed the afterlife as being as insubstantial as flames diffused into air, the Christian writer, by puncturing the basic story at crucial moments earlier, has shown us that what the characters think is going on is not necessarily truth. In their belief about life after death, they are completely mistaken. The poet’s absence from the text of the story leaves the reader to act as part of the narrative, to realize for himself the discrepancy; thus irony itself requires an acknowledgment of textual borders, those that he has permeated in place of the poet and those of which he is aware while the characters are not.

In many ways *Beowulf* is itself an exploration of a conceptual space like that suggested by Boden. It offers a story told expressively and evocatively, one that finds means to express human emotions in such a way that the reader experiences them for himself. This is the work of P-creativity. But the poem also pushes the borders of its own space, asking the reader to recognize and test his limit—his “mearc”—as well as testing the limits of traditional narration. In its use of boundaries as markers of creativity, the poem aligns itself with radical creativity. By shifting and violating its own frames, *Beowulf* extends the tradition of highly innovative Anglo-Saxon art and offers not just a narrative but a study in how and where such narratives are made.

## Chapter V: THE BLOOD-BOUGHT EXPERIENCE

Beowulf creates after he is inspired or conceives an idea. Such conception appears to occur when he sheds blood, at least before he enters the mere and the cave. This chapter is an explanation of how and why blood is regarded as the stuff of creativity, as well as of the steps taken after the blood is shed. It should be noted that blood is a symbol of the creative power in terms of myth. In terms of modern science, it is impossible at this point in human history for us to be inside the mind of a man at the moment an idea is born in him and to follow that idea as he explores it mentally. We cannot really know exactly what happens (in terms of science or physiology) that causes the idea to bloom or develop. All of us are individuals with completely unique sequences of exposure to stimuli that in themselves are unique. A person with the potential for creativity, for example, may hear a song which contains a phrase and then in a dream apply the phrase to a sequence of events, awakening to write a story based on that dream sequence—none of which was planned and is, therefore, unmappable. In fact, many who create cannot themselves tell us exactly how they came to produce what they did. All we know is that something somewhere began a process, and we call that beginning an “inspiration.”

What we can understand a bit more—still not entirely—is the process of labor that follows the inspiration because we can see at least some of what is happening. We do not see the inward thought and planning, the discarding of some ideas and regrouping of others, that goes on in preparation for a work, but we may, for example, watch the scientist as he goes through years of lab research and testing, coming up against failure after failure as he or she tries to turn a hypothesis into a truth. Writers spend hours with a pen or a computer, struggling to find the sequence of events that can logically lead to the

point at which they need the readers to arrive, and even more frustrating, to find words that make the journey have meaning and emotional resonance. Ernst Kris, in trying to explain how writers create, calls this phase, both internal and external, “elaboration” (qtd. in Martindale 163). Those of us who write call it the hardest work we have ever done.

*Beowulf* offers us a look at this difficult process of creation. Because the impetus for making something is mental, the presentation of it in the poem is psychological. But because the scribes who wrote the poem were Christian, it is theological, mythological, and typological as well. Creativity for them begins with blood, which is ubiquitous in *Beowulf*—oozing, steaming, spilling, dripping, evident in bloody tracks leading to the lake, hinted at in dried brown splotches on the blades of swords, exploding from heads as they burn in funeral fires. From its spilling, poets make stories and scopos tell them. All of this wallowing in life’s red liquid is one more proof that the real subject of the poem is creativity because, for the people of the poem and the poet, blood *is* creativity. The story of poetry—of making—is the story of blood and its loss.

Any number of scholars have explored the idea that there is a strong Norse connection in the poem to the idea of blood as creative power, scholars such as Mary Flavia Godfrey, Seth Lerer, and Roberta Frank. In “Snorri and the Mead of Poetry,” Frank in particular has written about poetry-making as it is associated with blood and death in the Norse mythic consciousness. As with many Norse legends of origins, the first complete written version of the beginnings of poetry-making appears in Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, where, in a section called the *Skaldskaparmal*, we are told that at the end of a great war between the gods, the two factions make a truce by spitting into a vat; from that spit, they create a man, Kvasir, who is very wise. As he travels to spread wisdom and thus

help mankind, he is killed by two dwarves, who save his blood in three vessels. This blood they mix with honey to produce mead, a drink which makes those who swallow it either a poet or a scholar. The god Odin comes in possession of the drink after an extended process: The dwarves kill a man and his wife, and when the son of the murdered couple, Suttungr, discovers the truth and intends to kill the dwarves, the two bribe him into releasing them by giving him the mead. Suttungr puts the mead in a cave and leaves his daughter to guard it; eventually, Odin seeks it. He first disguises himself as a manual laborer and goes to work for the brother of Suttungr in order to discover the hiding place of the mead; then he assumes the form of a snake to slither into the cave, where he agrees to spend three nights with the daughter in return for one of the vats of drink on each. To escape the wrath of her father because he has consumed all of the mead, he takes the form of an eagle and flees, finally spitting the mead into containers put out for him by the Aesir, a race of Norse gods, as he tries to soar away from Suttungr, who has also transformed into a bird to chase Odin. The small portion of the mead that flies back into the wind instead of into the vats may fall on any person, giving him or her poetic ability. Nevertheless, the greatest portion of the blood-and-honey mead is kept by Odin to give to other gods and to poets (trans. Larrington 31-40).

That the *Beowulf* poet knew this story is likely; Richard North traces allusions to it in writing as far back as the 800s (22), long before Snorri wrote the *Prose Edda*, and oral tellings of it undoubtedly preceded written ones. What it makes clear is that there is a link between violence/bloodshed and creation; like the Norse, the poet understands the same connection because Beowulf with his unique creative gifts—his “cræft”—must nevertheless shed blood (the sea monsters, Grendel’s) in order to produce a narrative.



Even those stories that are told by scopos who do not personally create them but simply repeat and embellish events have bloodshed as their origin, whether it is the blood spilled by Sigemund, or by the Frisians who kill Hnæf, or by Wulf and Eofor when they kill Ongentheow.

But a far more likely reason for the use of blood as an element of creativity is the Bible itself. In fact, the one biblical story to which the poet alludes is that of Cain, the ancestor of Grendel, and its interlocking of blood, narration, and creation is complex and total. It is easy to trace Cain back to the origin of all mankind; he is only second-generation human, first-generation inheritor of sin. God begins his creativity of mankind with narration, the act of speaking something out of nothing—"ex nihilo"—when He brings the earth/dust into being; he uses that creation, dust, to build the first man, and in the second account of this creation found in Genesis 2:7, He gives him a soul by breathing into him; from that man, God makes woman. At no point are we told how blood is made although we can assume that the animals had it and thus it must have been narrated into existence as they were. What we do know is it is a part of man that God invents out of pure imagination, with no model; it is unlike the image of Himself from which He devises the figure of man. He has no blood, as Jesus and the New Testament point out: the sole reason God in the form of the Son is born in human flesh is to possess it, and that blood creates immortality when it is spilled and used, the same immortality Beowulf seeks with his acts of bloodshed.

Blood reveals its unique and powerful creative nature by itself creating. In the most literal sense, it is a speaker and a narrator in the story of Cain, who kills his brother Abel. The entire episode, told in Genesis 4:4, is fraught with speaking, in fact. Eve speaks

to herald Cain's birth: "I have gotten a man from the Lord." God Himself speaks to Cain to admonish and advise him: "Why are you angry? [...] If you do well, shall you not be accepted?" Cain "talk[s] with Abel." And finally, God asks the fatal question, "Where is Abel your brother?" and then explains how he already knows the answer: "The voice of your brother's blood cries to Me from the ground." The first story inside the Bible is narrated by blood itself because it has been spilled in an act of violence. Furthermore, when God tells Cain of his punishment, the first cry of pain from him arises because ". . . from Your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth" (Genesis 4:14)—communication and communion with God the Creator like that carried out by blood will cease. Cain and his heirs spend their lives creating things, as if in doing so they may regain contact with God, as if they dare not let Abel's blood go to waste. Cain builds the first city (4:16), Jabal is the father of tent dwellers (4:20), Jubal creates music (4:21), and Tubal-Cain becomes "an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron" (4:22).

Blood as the source of creative inspiration functions inside the border analogy also, but on a corporeal level more than on a textual or geographic one. Blood must be shed, not kept inside the flesh, in order for it to supply inspiration. This type of invaded boundary is the same one that Lerer speaks of when he calls *Beowulf* "a poem of the body" ("Glove" 723), and in so doing, acknowledges the long-held fascination of readers and critics with the mighty physical build of each of the creatures who are its major characters, whether they are hero or monster. The body in *Beowulf* is overwhelmingly large, strong, superhuman. The Geat hero himself is always associated with height, strength, and, apparently, good looks. Hrothgar looks him over briefly in lines 247b-251a:

Næfre is maran geseah

eorla ofer eorþan      ðonne is eower sum,

secg on searwum;      nis þæt seldguma,

wæpnum geweorðad      næfne him his wlite leoge,

ænlic ansyn.

(Never have I seen a more glorious noble on earth, a warrior in armor, than is one of you; he is no hall-retainer made worthy with weapons, unless his appearance lies about him, his handsome face.)

However, it is not until readers see him in his fight against Grendel in Herot that a mental image of Beowulf as massive really crystalizes in their minds. When the monster realizes that Beowulf has “Sona þæt onfunde fyrena hyrde / he ne mette middangeardes / eorþan sceata on elran men / mundgripe maran” (750-753: a stronger handgrip than any he had known in the earth’s region, an iron clasp), when the poet tell us that Beowulf has more strength than any man on earth, when we see him tear off Grendel’s arm—it is only then that the image we have of the warrior begins to resemble that of a giant. Seen against what we know to be monstrous and extraordinary, the hero measures because he is a match for the monster in strength.

Just as Beowulf seems to gain physical substance for us during the fight, Grendel also becomes more “concrete and corporeal” (Orchard 36). His body is certainly that of a giant, not just because his actions suggest this but because we are told of his outlandish proportions. Beyond his strength, all that we learn of him is also connected to size, in

particular, to the massive claw-hands and the mouth that can swallow a man. His head alone is so huge that it requires four men to carry it on poles back from the lake to Heorot. The mother is of stupendous build as well. Hrothgar offers the best description of both her and her son:

hie gesawon	swylce twegen
micle mearcstapan	moras healdan,
ellorgæstas.	Ðæra oðer wæs,
þæs þe hie gewislicost	gewitan meahton,
idese onlicnæs;	oðer earmsceapen
on weres wæstmum	wræclastas træd,
næfne he wæs mara	þonne ænig man oðer. (1347-53)

(. . . they saw a solitary pair, great borderwalkers, they ruled the moors, sorrowful spirits. One of them is shaped most like a woman to their eyes, the other wanderer—misshapen—in man's appearance walked the paths of exile, but he was larger than any other man.)

Yet no matter how outlandish or exotic the bodies of these giants are, no discussion of them would take place in this essay if their bodies remained whole and intact. It is only as they are invaded and mutilated that the borders of them become important or even visible. Such mutilation is a constant in *Beowulf*, and the reason for the ever-present blood. Lerer writes,

The poem's landscape is littered with ripped trunks, severed heads, and fragmentary limbs. Grendel's arm, Aeschere's head, and the decapitated forms of the monster and his mother become the landmarks along which the poem's characters and its readers mark their progress toward heroic victory. ("Glove" 723)

The destruction that results when geographic boundaries are breeched is made visual in horrific, bloodsoaked, flesh-smearred images on the corporeal level of the border. And just as the bodies are severed and fractured, they are also ingested as Grendel's food: he eats human flesh and drinks human blood. This is the meal for which he visits Herot for twelve years, and he is in the process of enjoying it thoroughly when Beowulf grips him and drags him into combat:

Ne þæt se aglæce	yidan þohte,
ac he gefeng hraðe	forman siðe
slæpendne rinc,	slat unwearnum,
bat banlocan,	blod edrum dranc,
synsnædum swealh;	sona hæfde
unlyfigendes	eal gefeormod,
fet and folma.	(739-45)

(The monster did not think about waiting but searched with eyes of fire, snared a doomed one who was in his last sleep, tore and crunched bonelockings, drank the blood, gulped down morsels of flesh with glee.

Gloating at his success, he ate the first one, all he swallowed, feet and hands.)

The drinking of blood in Norse mythology is equated with the gaining of creative power and the ability to produce poetry. In Christianity, however, it is strictly forbidden in every case except one: the act of communion, the drinking of a substance which is meant to symbolize the blood of Jesus. This ingested liquid allows Christians to remember his life and death; the connection between blood and creativity is made here also because out of memory, creators produce stories. The taboo on drinking blood in general transforms the drinking of the blood of Jesus in particular into a radical act but a profound one as well. (Thus this opposition between taboo and blessing as it is attached to blood may also provide a reason for the Church's ambiguity where art is concerned.) Grendel, however, is never meant to be seen as participating in a divine act when he drinks blood; what he does is a travesty of Christian belief, a deviation in the extreme.

Grendel's power to disturb when he cannibalizes and drinks human blood is not just because it is a deviant action but also because it suggests two possibilities, both of them disturbing. One is the loss of art, of narrative, of the power to create. Abel's blood speaks because circumstances allow it to do so: it spills openly upon the ground. When Grendel kills, he also consumes. The blood that is necessary for the production of stories is lost, absorbed into a monster who cannot communicate on any meaningful level. Note that I do not say he cannot communicate at all; he can. And when what he speaks is basic to all humanity, his listeners comprehend the bare outlines of it:

Sweg up astag

niwe geneahhe;      Norð –Denum stod

atelic egesa,      anra gehwylcum

para þe of wealle      wop gehyrdon,

gryre-leo galan      Godes andsacan

sige-leasne sang,      sar wanigean

helle hæfton. (782b-788a)

(Again there rose up a sound. Danes of the North with fear and horror were filled, every one of them, who from the palisade wall that wailing heard, God's enemy singing his grisly song, the cry of the conquered, the captive of hell moaning his pain.)

All of the listeners understand the agony of the sound made by the monster; in fact, the poet describes the sound as an art form, a “song.” Yet any comprehension of it on any level deeper than the emotional—the philosophical, for example—is impossible, just as it is impossible for the blood he has consumed to be put to any meaningful creative use. It has been wasted pointlessly. A greater crime than spilling blood is spilling it for no purpose.

But perhaps the best interpretation of his actions is that they represent the ability of creative power to do harm when it is misused to create something of destructive power (for example, the nuclear bomb or perhaps the ability to engineer genetically) or to

produce the word that is spoken or interpreted wrongly (the speech that begins a war, for instance). Grendel offers a look at this type of creativity because, in all of his bloody devastation upon Heorot, he is a created thing himself. He is positioned as the *child* of someone. In fact, the idea that a monster might have a mother, one who is belligerently supportive of her little boy, is so fantastic as to be almost comical if it were not so deadly. Certainly the hero is stunned by the news. Additional proof that Grendel may be viewed as the created thing is his personal connection to another created thing: the marvelous pouch made of dragon skin which he carries. Beowulf tells of the pouch as he relates the story of his fight with Grendel to his uncle and king, Hygelac:

Glof hangode

sid ond syllic,	searo-bendum fæst;
sio wæs orðoncum	eall gegyrwed,
deofles cræftum	ond dracan fellum,
He mec þær on innan	unsynnigne,
dior dæd fruma,	gedon wolde
manigra sumne . . . .	(2085b-2091a)

(His glove hung, open and weird, laced strangely. It had all been ingeniously adorned with devil's craft and dragon skins. That doer of evil wanted to put me, guiltless and brave, in it with many others.")



Two facts immediately emerge: the use of the word “craft” implies an art connection, albeit to the devil, and the substance of which the bag is made is both monstrous and magical, dragonskin. Furthermore, we do not know until this point in the narrative, well past the fights, that Grendel carries with him such an object. I would argue that this is because Beowulf himself, after his trip to the lair, recognizes the monster for what he is, a product of a creative force, just as the bag is. Even the term used to explain the pouch, “glove,” is a factor in the realization of Grendel’s analogical nature. The term suggests hands and mouths, as Lerer points out: “As a hand-shaped cavity that swallows men, the glove is both limb and mouth. It is as if the writers had both asked themselves a riddle: . . . what is it that looks like a hand but swallows like a mouth? Answer: a glove” (“Glove” 735). And since Grendel himself appears to the reader as mostly claw/hand and mouth/appetite, the object and the monster appear to be equivalents, both the creations of an artisan.

The glove is also indicative of the cannibalism of Grendel. Made of the skin of another animal, it hints at the eating of one’s own species; used to contain meals, it is very like a stomach. With the eating of humans, the creature who is neither completely of the human zone nor completely of the animal one calls attention to a third world outside the existing social boundaries, one where he resides because he belongs to neither of the two established realms. In Boden’s terms, the existing boundary is challenged and an attempt is made to reshift it. The effect of iconoclastic and extraordinarily original creation is disruption, yet part of the disruption has to do with the similarity of that creation to us despite its terrible nature. Without such relevancy, it would not have such dramatic power to disturb. Grendel is able to open the door to Heorot and walk in because he has traits

very like a man; in fact, they mistakenly try to deal with him as such when they offer wergild and try to settle his dispute with them with “fea,” or money (156b). Nor has the bloodshed in Heorot always been productive; it, in fact, bears a resemblance to Grendel just as he resembles the men inside. The poet describes its doors as a “mouth” much as the monster is associated with one: “Duru sona onarn / fyr-bendum fæst syþðan he hire folmum ge hran; / onbræd þa bealo-hydig, ða he gebolgen wæs, / recedes muþan” (721b-724a: “The door burst open when his fists struck it although it was iron-forged, swollen with rage, he burst in, the mouth of the hall”). Grendel’s actions once he is inside, however, are so antisocial that they will eventually bring down the walls of Heorot by destroying the people inside it who make sure it stands. Art of this “cannibalistic” nature may push and even tear the borders, making us reevaluate those things about which we are complacent; it is not conservative or traditional. But it and its interpreters can also do great harm, so much so that Sayers equates it with evil in theology (105). It might be remembered that even in Norse myth, the revered craftsman Weland uses his art to destroy a society; when he makes cups of the heads of men whose only fault is that they are the sons of his enemy, his creation becomes “a perversion of that society” (Godfrey 10).

If it is possible for creativity to be perverted to evil, how then can an artist distinguish between that which is good and that which is its opposite? To ask the same question in terms of *Beowulf*, in what types of creativity/bloodletting should a hero participate, or, to pose the question in the same way that it has been posed ever since the study of heroic material began, what kind of violence is good violence? First of all, it must be observed that many creative endeavors begin without a full understanding on the part of the creator as to where they might lead; despite the outcome, can these be

considered evil? Beowulf, for example, has no intentions of killing a female or letting Hondscio die incidentally when he sets out to destroy Grendel. Thus he is not as morally guilty as if he had intended it. While lack of intent is no comfort to those who are damaged by new ideas and discoveries, just as being killed profits the mother nothing, it is not possible to say that Beowulf's actions in the center of the lair are evil. And while we may see her as creative because she is a mother, it is highly probable that she did not deliberately create evil; she did not birth Grendel with the expectation that he would kill thirty men in one night. In fact, she shows no such inclination toward violence herself until she takes revenge for her son's death. On the other hand, in the case of Haethcyn's attack on the Swedes at Ravenwood (lines 2922-2945), not only is Haethcyn killed but the poet plainly condemns the bloodshed as "onmedlan" (2926: "arrogant"). However, the incident does generate a story, so even this type of violence can be productive. But could this story be told by effectively by Haethcyn had he survived? It might but would undoubtedly be different in many ways. Thus motive has little to do with determining which act of creativity is right or wrong in itself, but it may affect the creator, the form, or the reception by the public, sometimes to such a degree that it negates or lessens the impact of what has been created. I think particularly of Wagner, whose music fell into disrepute because of the association of it with the Third Reich.

If the motives of the killer do not provide a hard-and-fast marker for the place where bloodshed becomes non-productive, perhaps the character of the dead or of their survivors do. Who is sacrificed in order to gain creative ends? Should good people, innocent ones, die? The bloodbath that is the story of Hildeburh fascinates and resounds; her husband and son are just two of the people who are slaughtered without reason, and

she is left to grieve, perhaps more a victim than the dead. Is the story that results from these killings worth what it costs to gain it? Marijane Osborn might say that it is; she argues that it serves a purpose in *Beowulf* that we may well see as moral because Wealhtheow takes it to heart and uses it as a warning in an effort to stop the killing of her sons, just as Hygd uses Thryth's narrative to become a good queen (para. 13, 14). In the case of Grendel, however, there is no moral ambiguity about Beowulf's actions: he is heroic because he spills the blood of a monster. Long before the story of Grendel's death is told, its moral value has been decided; the act of creativity has nothing to do with it. Yet not all creators get the clear-cut choice or have the ability to slay such walkers along the border; they do not know the outcome of their endeavors, or sometimes they do and pursue them whether they believe the outcome to be good or bad. Thus there is no sure way to assess what is good creativity and what is bad except in the most extreme—and rare—cases, when, for example, a thing is conceived of as good and becomes that good. Beowulf sheds the blood of non-good, so he is clearly good. Or, to make myself as clear as possible, I suggest that good may have been behind the invention of, say, eye glasses; yet even in this simple case, someone somewhere may have begun the process by doing wrong, by deliberately breaking something that should not have been broken, and others have almost certainly had eye injuries from broken lenses. Sayers is correct to observe that good, just by existing, calls evil into being, and to conclude that “the positive significance and result of evil is that it calls forth as a reaction the creative power of the good” (99). Further, the value of what is achieved is measured and altered by time. Given these facts, when answering the question of whether a “good” writer (her example

of a creator) can be the creator of an “artistic wrongness,” whether or not Beowulf may spill blood that he should not spill, Sayers’s answer is succinct: “Yes” (28).

In fact, this realization—that his actions are capable of resulting in reactions that may cost the members of his tribe their lives—is another aspect of the struggle between the man and society. Participation in a border activity results in a struggle inside the artist and in the realization that he, too, may wind up a borderwalker in the same way that Grendel’s mother does. This, in fact, is why the creative process is given such scrutiny in the poem and why the poet takes time to assure us that Beowulf has more creative potential and ability—“mæste cræfte”—than other men, to reveal his thoughtful, “soft” side: creativity is dangerous in even the most talented hands, hands like his. He can turn blood into powerful performances.

His great ability as creator is the reason he is the greatest warrior—an artist of the sword—and they are only followers. In part, their lack of ability, that lesser degree of creativity with which they were born or which childhood failed to develop in them, is the reason that not all border crossings are accompanied by violence, or not by the same degree of violence that Beowulf’s are. Sometimes the warriors simply do not have the personality to command fear that results in bloodshed, do not know how to invoke such creativity, do not have the right tools to carry out a transgression of the border, or do not choose to do so. Beowulf, for example, makes it a point—his choice—to let the coast guard know that his intentions are not hostile in spite of the fact that the potential for bloodshed is heightened. He is, after all, about to cross several boundaries to get into Heorot, and, as Boden points out, the greater the constraint grows, the higher the likelihood and degree of radical creativity. He has the ability to respond to it and shed

blood, to finish off what remains of the Danes, but as I have pointed out, Beowulf is a man of thought, of intelligence, and of “softness,” emotional responsiveness. It is not in his character to use his creativity in a deliberate and premeditated evil way; thus bloodshed does not occur in this instance.

The warriors with Beowulf lack his ability. His men kill also, but not to the extent nor in the radical ways that he does. Accordingly, they lack the ability to transform their acts into performance, as we see, for example, when

	Sumne Geata leod
of flanbogan	feores getwæfde,
yðgewinnes,	þæt him on aldre stod
herestræl hearda;	he on holme wæs
sundes þe sænra,	ðe hyne swylt fornam.
Hræþe wearð on yðum	mid eoferspreotum
heorohocyhtum	hearde genearwod,
niða genæged,	ond on næs togen,
wundorlic wægborra;	weras sceawedon
gryrelicne gist.	(1432b-1441a)

(One of the Geat lords/ with an arrow-bow the life / of one of the swimmers  
deprived; the lord's war arrow stood in him strongly, / he swam slower in

the water, destroyed by death. / Quickly into the water's waves came the  
 boar-spears / barbed and pressed hard into him / in the battle he was  
 attacked and pulled out of the water / the men looked at the wonderful  
 waveramer / terrible stranger.)

The lines do not stand out as remarkable; this dead beast is not one of Beowulf's sea monsters, nor does it transform into a tale like the one with which he entertained all of Heorot on his first night. They have killed a beast that appears to be like one he has already slain in the ocean; they are exploring a space that has already been mapped. At the most crucial point in Beowulf's fight with a similar water monster, it has such a grasp on him that it pulls him deep into the ocean and tries to put him into its mouth—to eat him. No such constraint holds the warrior who kills the “nicor” from the inland lake. Thus, although the killing of the beast involves blood, the “story” that evolves is a brief sort of show-and-tell, not an enduring legend. On the other hand, when Beowulf chooses to explore the problem of Grendel, he knows it is a matter of torn boundaries: Grendel signals this when he steps across the invisible “mearc,” invades the hall and rips apart bodies of men. Beowulf is equipped like no other to walk this boundary: his tools of creativity are his strength, his courage, and his ability to adapt to circumstances, as seen when he makes the decision to fight Grendel with his bare hands, his radically creative answer to a radically troublesome tear in the fabric of the social framework, one that is inevitably going to result in bloodshed.

I have mentioned the story Beowulf tells of the swimming match with Brecca at several points during this dissertation because it is the classic example of how one creates, the place in the narrative where we see first the affects of bloodletting on storytelling.

Both Boden and Perkins note that something new and different rarely occurs by chance; it is discovered because the creator has a desire to find something innovative. He is an explorer by nature, a seeker of new entries. Furthermore, Perkins adds that discovery is more likely to occur when sheer chance is combined with “cultivated” chance, when the explorer puts himself in the right place with the right tools and background to recognize newness and to know how to deal with it. This is what Beowulf does when he enters the ocean with Brecca: not only is he able to swim and strong enough to endure, but he also wears, even in the cold salt water of the Baltic, a “licsyrce” (550: coat of mail) and carries with him—just in case—a “deoran sweorde” (561: “dear sword”). When he is attacked, he enters Kris’s “inspiration” phase. Here, cognition is “concrete, irrational, autistic. It is the thought of dreams and reverie” (Martindale 163). Above all, it is free-associative, involving “regress to a primordial level” (Martindale 164). Not only are the events which happen during Beowulf’s swimming ordeal at the “primordial” level of legend and myth (and thus also the realm where bloodshed equals narrative), but the entire episode is dreamlike and watery, told in shifting kaleidoscopes rather than in real-time frames, with huge chunks of the five days spent in the water removed from the action. The beast’s dragging of Beowulf further and further down to the bottom of the ocean mimics the return to the primary stage, while his view of the sea bottom as a feast table is nothing if not free associative.

The “elaboration” phase of creativity begins with Beowulf’s exit from the water, when he enters “secondary process cognition,” which is “abstract, logical, and reality-oriented” (163). Here is where deliberate choice on the part of the poet affects the product dramatically. If he decides to loosen the stylistic rules regarding his work, it will increase



the novelty of it but often decrease the content and meaning; his choice is often dictated by the stylistic era (Romantic, Victorian, postmodern, etc.) in which he writes. Beowulf's elaboration produces a work that is appreciated by his contemporaries. His use of analogical thinking—the edge of his knife as a sort of plate on which he serves the beasts a “meal,” for example—and the humor that results from his understatement that they did not like his “taste” show his understanding of his milieu and his skill in the elaborative stage. This is a man who, at this point in the narrative, is assured and confident as a creator. Unlike Grendel, he is the teller of a story that strengthens societal bonds and simultaneously unites him with his culture even while it promotes his standing in it.

## Chapter VI: THE MORAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF CREATIVITY

Just as the border can be used as a metaphor for creativity, it may also function as a way to represent the interrelatedness of society and artistic ability. Martindale points out that “creative productions occur in structured social contexts” (159), and another of the contributors to *Dimensions of Creativity*, Simon Schaffer, explores the history of certain ideas to conclude that the term “creative” is itself socially inscribed, given not because of the intrinsic novelty and imaginative thought of an idea but because of “a lengthy process of hard work and negotiation within a set of complex social networks” (14). He declares the act of determining who is creative to be a form of mythmaking, a social process in which the relevant authoritative community decides in retrospect the character of a created thing, just as in literature the canon of accepted “great” authors is developed by a combination of critics and arrival in time of a work (22-23). In other words, one is deemed creative in part because he has the right contacts and the right press and because he is at the right moment in history. As Boden observes, “Some influential social group has to value an idea if it is to be recognized, preserved, and communicated” (“Introduction” 4): the border has to be pushed in acceptable ways even when unacceptable ideas are doing the pushing.

None of the authors in *Dimensions*, however, consider the mind of the maker himself, the interior experience of the creator when he has the chance to make an informed evaluation of what the impact of his creativity will be on his world. They do not ask what the moral responsibility of each artist is to his culture. Perhaps this is the case because the word “moral” has become controversial in the aftermath of modernism and postmodernism. It implies a standard of behavior that adheres to absolute truths, to a

concept of good and evil—all of which these philosophies have rejected. For postmodernism especially, there is no absolute; every action is relative. Beowulf and the poet who tells his story, however, do not operate in a culturally relative realm; the hero's concern for his society and the poet's adherence to the Christian concept of good and evil, as well as the moral ambiguity of art for the Church, require both of them to consider the nature of what is created and the artist's duty to behave in an accordingly responsible fashion. Additionally, the concept of art in the monastic world as an immersion into the border world between human and divine, a realm where man and God might communicate, reinforced the need for art to be socially and morally responsible as well as expressive of personal emotion and ideas. God was very real for the Anglo-Saxon scribe as he reached into his imagination to pull forth new creations, just as Elohoim did, to people his own little world, the poem. Creation was a spiritual unity with God.

I do not intend to abandon the pagan elements of *Beowulf*, but as a work of a scribe, it must also be considered in terms of Christianity. In fact, it is as a Christian work that it makes its most profound observations about creativity as an area of tension: the monks were engaged in border acts, mearcstapan themselves. When was creativity a type of worship and when was it idolatry? At what point might they unintentionally transgress the border and produce a Grendel rather than a hero? To help answer these questions, I have turned to a discussion of the creative act as it is analyzed by Dorothy L. Sayers in *The Mind of the Maker*. Born in 1893, Sayers earned public recognition as a writer of detective novels and stage plays, but she was known to her acquaintances (among whom were the Inklings and G. K. Chesterton) and to academics today for her intellectualism, her work as a student of medieval literature (particularly Dante), and her belief in, and in-

depth study of, Christianity. Given these facts, her articulation of her theory as to the workings of the human mind during the creative process provides a sound basis for a discussion of the moral and social dimensions of creativity in *Beowulf*. While I do not rigidly follow her model of creativity, her philosophical stance on the spiritual necessity of creativity and on its role as it pertains to good and evil is invaluable.

Sayers begins her argument by noting that God has established a type of law which it is death to ignore or to attempt to break. This law is not, as one might expect, a “moral” one in the sense that we use the term. Instead, what she calls the “natural law” is any statement of unalterable fact about the structure of the universe. It may be defied by man to his own detriment and destruction but not abolished without consequences and judgment. To use one of her most salient and simple examples, natural law says that the swallowing of prussic acid will be followed by death (4). This type of law is opposed to the law as “arbitrary regulation,” which is based on human opinion. For example, laws against theft exist, but they are not “natural” because theft itself will not lead to death by nature but only to punishment, and only to that if the thief is caught. However, Sayers also argues that arbitrary laws become long-lived or universal if they have some relevance to the natural ones: if theft, for example, is proven to be destructive to human society, then it becomes not just moral law but moral code, making a statement about man and his “natural” relationship to the universe. These natural laws are so fixed that not even God can abolish them, “except by breaking up the structure of the universe” (11). Furthermore, Sayers concludes that when the law that society enforces (the “arbitrary” law) is the same as God’s natural law, “the result is true freedom in human behavior” (9).

Using these basic premises, Sayers moves into her thesis:

Looking at man, [the writer of Genesis] sees in him something essentially divine, but when we turn back to see what he says about the original upon which the “image” of God was modeled, we find only the single assertion, “God created.” The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire and the ability to make things. (22)

The one essential truth about humanity is that since we are made in God’s image, *we are born solely to create*. This is our entire reason for being. In creating, then, we achieve true freedom. In fact, the Trinity of God (Father/Son/Holy Ghost) becomes for her an analogy, a metaphor for the act of creation, which she presents as, ideally, an equivalent threeness of Idea/Energy/Power: the Father acts as the Idea, the self-awareness that makes humans different from other life forms; the Son is the Energy, the inspiration and activity, both internal and external, that leads to a creation as well as the creation itself; and the Holy Ghost is the Power, the Pentecost of fiery tongues, the emotional and spiritual effect that is had by the act of creating upon the creator. If what he creates is viewed or experienced by others, they also may feel in part what he does. Further, there is nothing tidy or orderly about the process; creation is chaotic and the outcome not always under the creator’s control or entirely what he desired when he began the process. These facts, however, do not lessen his passion to create again.

The reason that Sayers introduces the idea of natural law first and then the trinity of creativity is because man’s failure to heed his own nature, that most basic and intrinsic need to create, is the ultimate breach of that law. It results in the same sort of death and destruction that the swallowing of the prussic acid does. Humans must create or live in misery, if not die outright: such is the unchanging, unalterable law of God because His

nature, the one that He instilled in us as His creation, is to make, to create, to produce. To do so is to be truly happy and fulfilled.

To view Boden's border metaphor for art in terms of Sayers' is to assess it as having a moral component, to understand it as a trinitarian composition. As well as a point of convergence between spaces, the boundary must be perceived as a realm in its own right, a third space between the two worlds on either side of it, a location where negotiation occurs between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable, right and wrong, good and evil. When these ideas are applied to *Beowulf*, the encounter with the mother emerges, just as it does when we employ Boden's analogy, as the center of the poem. The description of the lake in which she lives that Hrothgar gives of it is perhaps the most famous passage in the entire poem:

	. . . Hie dygel lond
warigeað wulfhleoþu,	windige næssas,
frecne fengelad,	ðær fyrgenstream
under næssa geniup	niþer gewiteð,
fold under foldan.	Nis þæt feor heonon
milgenmearces,	þæt se mere standeð,
ofer þæm hongiað	hrinde bearwas
wudu wyrtum fæst	wæter oferhelmað ,
þær mæg nihta gehwæm	ni wundor seon

fyr on flode. (1357-1366)

(Unvisited in their home, they haunt by wolf-cliffs and windy headlands, by fearful swamps where the stream flows from under the mountains gliding over dark rocks, water from under the earth. From here it is not far in measure of miles to where their lake lies, and over it the frost-bound forest hangs, the tree roots shadowing the waves of the water. By night it is a wonder strange to see, fire on the waters.)

The mere is a terrifying and surreal landscape where impossibility is made possible; for example, the night wonder of the fire on the waters, the frost and the flame, exist simultaneously. That the lake is not meant to be viewed as a lake alone but as something far more symbolic is suggested in Hrothgar's acknowledgement that "no man knows the depths" of the waters (1366b-1375b: "No þæs frod leofað gumena bearna . . ."). Indeed, knowledge of it in the sense of natural geography is not possible for anyone except Beowulf, who possesses "super"natural ability. Any attempted description of the physical lake immediately brings to mind the material art of the Anglo-Saxons with its zoomorphism and energy restrained by frames: the force of a falling stream is captured by the lake water; the waves churn chaotically, reaching blackly to the sky, but are held in check by boundaries of land; weird, writhing animals (sea snakes, "nicor," worm-like creatures) bite and snarl both at the surface and in the depths; static frost attempts to capture the motion of fire. The mere is the manuscript frame made physical, made capable of being experienced by the senses and by the body. As Richard Butts notes, it is the poet's attempt to "communicate men's imaginative response" (para. 1) to creations such as Grendel, the end result of "visionary experience" (para. 5) similar to that in which

the artist participates in order to “make.” Above all, it is the third space, the negotiated border, where opposites cohabit, however chaotically. Vaught has said of it, “The mere is fatally hostile to society” (para. 14), recognizing it as a metaphor for the meeting place of the two binaries.

But when Beowulf arrives at the lake, we are informed of a third physical feature to go along with the water and the fire: blood, the inspiration. Line 1422 tells us, “Flod blode weol” (the flood boiled with blood), certainly Grendel’s and perhaps Aeshere’s. In this particular threeness of blood, water, and fire (symbolizing in the Church repentance, baptism, and infilling of the Spirit into the new man) is a naturally occurring “Christian affirmation,” notes Sayers, evidence that “the Trinitarian structure which can be shown to exist in the mind of man and in all his works is, in fact, the integral structure of the universe and corresponds [. . .] with the nature of God” (xiii). Since the nature of God and therefore man is creative, this “integral structure” is repeated over and over in Beowulf’s lake experience. His entry into the mere, into Kris’s “elaboration phase,” is an immersion into what Sayers designates as three-part Energy: the unseen creativity (thought), the seen (the physical act of writing, molding, laboring over the object), and the final product itself. I would argue that the presence of the sea creatures in the waters of an inland lake are indicative of the creative power of the mere, the creative act itself, and of Beowulf’s creativity in particular: the beasts he killed in the swimming match are alive and well, as they will always be as long as his story is revisited by storytellers. And somewhere in the churning waters of creative power, Grendel lies dead in a dark corner, waiting for his resurrection in the story that the warrior has yet to develop fully. The proof that Beowulf is still in the elaboration / Energy phase of creativity, that he has yet to apply the blood



fully to a narrative based on the events with Grendel, is found in the rather lackluster performance he gives at the celebration after he rips off the monster's arm. His story is incomplete and apologetic in tone:

Uþe ic swiþor,  
 þæt ðu hine selfne      geseon moste,  
 feond on frætewum      fylwerigne!  
 Ic hine hrædlice      heardan clammmum  
 on wælbedde      wriþan þohte,  
 þæt he for mundgripe minum scolde  
 licgean lifbysig,      butan his lic swice;  
 ic hine ne mihte,      þa Metod nolde,  
 ganges getwæman,      no ic him þæs georne ætfealh,  
 feorhgeniðlan;      wæs to foremihtig  
 feond on feþe.      (960b-970a)

(I wish rather / that you had the option to see Grendel himself, / fiend in his  
 adornments, tired and fallen !/ I thought him quickly in a hard grasp / to  
 bind to his death bed, that he in my handgrip should / lie low, struggling for  
 life, / but his body failed in this duty to me; / I could not hinder him, God

did not will it, / I could not hold him firmly, / life's enemy; he was too powerful, / the fiend, in his pace of leaving.)

Not only the shallowness of the story at this point but also the comparison we get with the Grendel narrative as it is later polished and finished for Hygelac and Hygd—when he includes the death of Hondscio, the attack, and the aftermath—shows us its unfinished nature here and indicates the state of creativity Beowulf is in as he enters the blood/water/fire of the mere. Although the time at which he steps from the land into it is marked with a distinct time, the ninth hour, a sense of timelessness begins immediately after his immersion into the lake. The poet describes the period during which Beowulf sinks to the bottom of the lake with a confusing phrase: “*ða wæs hwil dæges.*” Fred C. Robinson translates it as meaning that it is “broad daylight” (136) when the Geat warrior arrives in the cave; others such as Stanley Greenfield believe it to be indicative of a superhuman feat, that it takes Beowulf “the space of a day”—hours—to reach the lake’s bottom (294). Greenfield’s explanation requires a physical impossibility, that Beowulf breath comfortably and normally under water for a great length of time. In actuality, the time element is completely unimportant except to stress one essential fact: there is no passing of time in the presence of art and thus no need to breathe on Beowulf’s part. Life itself is suspended in art. The poet’s task is, in fact, to overcome the tragedy of human life, “the fading of his referent in time” (Stewart 3), or, in other words, to create a constant “now,” much like the literary present tense, existing unchanged forever.

Creativity as it functions as the theme of the poem is better seen in another Trinitarian structure, one corresponding with the highest degree of creativity possible in the poem in its remarkably restricted and bordered existence: the trio of cave/ mother/

sword. As the most restricted space Beowulf enters during the course of the poem, the cave is associated with art of extraordinary Energy, the place where transformation rather than exploration takes place. This is the type of world in which the mother lives, a bordered microcosm of severe isolation. While this sounds unpalatable, the poet's presentation of the cave as a home makes such a solitary existence appear not only possible but perhaps even pleasant. What we are allowed to see of the central part of the structure is surprising in its warmth and domesticity. Its interior is lit by "fyrleoht . . . blacne leoman beorhte scinan" (1516b-1517b: firelight. . . glowing light, brightly shining), a controlled flame that reminds us of the biblical association between the Holy Ghost (Sayers' creative Power) and the tongues of fire that marked those who possessed it first. The cave's interior is a place of refuge from uncontrolled heat and fire, where "him nænig wæter wihte ne sce ede" (1514: no water could harm him); it holds at least one marker of family line/inherited abilities, a remarkable "sigeadig bil" (1557b: victory-blest sword). An heirloom, it is another form of the tool with which Beowulf spills the blood of inspiration and begins transformation. Despite the suffocating and turbulent waters around the cave, quietness—perhaps even tranquility—abides here. The cave appears briefly—before the struggle begins—to be a sanctuary and a haven, and it reminds us of the marginal nature of the human who is creative as well, including the isolation he craves when he seeks to create. The hint of home found in the poet's depiction of the underwater cave reminds both the reader and Beowulf that it is entirely possible that creativity may claim him, and that if he gives in to the need and desire for solitude in order to make, he is likely to abandon his social role, to exchange community for isolation.

The cave houses a female presence. While Sayers gives her Trinity no gender—Christian doctrine “sets its face against all sexual symbolism for the divine fertility” (21)—the poet’s gendered representation of Energy/elaboration serves a purpose that may be seen from the beginning of the description of the lake, long before Beowulf makes contact with the mother. Jane Nitzsche observes,

. . . the mere itself, approached through winding passageways, slopes, and paths, and in whose stirred-up and bloody waters sea monsters lurk and the strange battle-hall remains hidden, projects the mystery and danger of female sexuality run rampant. (para. 18)

The winding passages, solitary trails, and gorges between the narrow walls which lead to a wet, dark womb of a world go so far as to suggest the female body itself. Thus, when Beowulf enters the cave, he transgresses not only geography but also a symbolic corporeality. This corporeal body is female for several reasons, the most important of them being that such a title names the capacity unique to woman, the ability to give birth, to produce something new, original, and vital—a representation of Sayers’ “divine fertility.” A loss of blood-like that which occurs with the birth of a child is markedly different from the warrior’s loss of it; this difference seems to point out that there are also different kinds of stories available from its spilling, some associated with life and others with death. While maternity is the physical bodily state of creativity, a fulfilling of the destiny of the female body, it also results from and produces a variety of emotional bonds, of “affective and emphatically imaginative responses” (Trilling 9). Thus not only is the creature at the bottom of the mere a female, but she is also a mother, the impulse that produced a monster. Paul Acker suggests that she represents in psychoanalytical terms

“the return of the repressed” (703), which, as Martindale points out, is necessary for a creative act to ensue. For Beowulf, already experiencing the power of creativity as it works in him, she becomes not the weaker of the two monsters but the most dangerous force which he will ever face. As owner of the mere, of the creative experience itself, she is an extension of its “primal, chaotic energy” (Vaught para. 26) which draws the artist/warrior with his love of sensory experience/action and its promise of creative inspiration/violence toward herself, which “lures men to the end of desire and self” as they seek to replicate the female/the creative act (Anderson para. 14). The addictive, seductive, and compulsive nature of the act of creating for the person who experiences it is enhanced tremendously by representing it as an appeal by the female to the extreme maleness of the warrior even though the appeal is totally symbolic; Hrothgar’s description of her as solitary, sorrowful, large, and recognizable as a woman only by her shape is not intended to stir sexuality literally.

The reason for the singular encounter with the creative Trinity at this point in Beowulf’s life is due to several factors. Beowulf is at a moment when its attraction is particularly strong for him. Klaeber notes that he was probably no more than twenty at the time of his encounter with the monster Grendel and his mother (xlv), thus putting him at an age where initiation may possibly be still occurring. Blood, water, boundaries—all of them are archetypal indicators of coming-of-age as well as of creativity. Although it is not in the realm of this study to pursue such an analysis, Beowulf’s stage in life is one preoccupied with sex and death and the gaining of knowledge, a combination which he encounters with the monsters. Youth and the act of maturing impel the discovery. While twenty is a little older than the typical age for an initiate, it must be noted that the change

in the type of story that he tells after he emerges from the mere (a change that I will discuss later in this chapter) indicates that something transformative happens to him in the lake, and such change is often the result of an initiation. Too, in battling Grendel, he has called on all his resources and passion. In particular, the method he has used to kill him results in the senses being engaged in heightened response. Abandoning the method of sword-in-hand, his use of the hand alone puts him in direct contact with the subject matter of the narrative. It is one thing to dispatch a monster with a weapon, to feel the solid impact of striking a heavy body with it and the resistance of pushing in the point against muscle and fat, to see blood spill at the end of a the blade. It is another to struggle with your hand in the hand of the monster, to smell the blood and sweat and to taste it when it splatters on your face and spills on you, to feel the heat and weight of the body, to hear in your ear the pants for breath and the grunts of pain, to conquer by ripping and tearing. It is possible to get so caught up in the act and in the product that the creator forgets reality, the world about him; he forgets, too, that creating is a messy process, and sometimes, the result may not be what he intends to achieve.

Given the fact that the killing of Grendel is such an accomplishment that it earns Beowulf a coveted place in communal memory, it is the most intensely creative experience he has ever experienced, resulting in an intense self-awareness, a sort of knowledge of the Idea, as Sayers calls it. While she refers to the Idea as the image that the creator has before he begins to work of what the final product of his activity will be, I have altered her concept slightly to conceive of it as also the idea of what the creator has of himself. She points out that no human can ever be totally self-aware, unlike God, but creators may have moments of this type of knowledge. In order to explain what I mean

more clearly, I use the example of a writer who writes a novel. After finishing the work, he reads it and realizes that his own personality is there on the page, not obviously in the form of an autobiographical character, but more truthfully in the style, in the diction, in the background. More importantly, he looks at what he has created and discovers in astonishment several facets of his personality that he had not even known were in him until this moment, when he sees them revealed on the page or in the object. This is a moment of learning about one's self that creators achieve in a way that others cannot. And since—as Sayers points out—it is impossible to call up one part of the Trinity without engaging the other two, Power and Energy are realized by the creator as well. The mind of the maker is engaged and his connection with God in evidence. Beowulf is intensely alive.

The fascination and lure of the moment of creativity for Beowulf may best be seen in the poet's use of the decapitated head. The mother arrives at the door of Heorot and takes Hrothgar's friend Aeschere during the night. No one can tell the hour or the method of her entry into the hall or of her kidnapping, but the origination of her presence in the mead hall is Beowulf: in killing the son, he has called forth the mother. The only way that her presence is felt is in the result of her visit—the warrior is gone. Aeschere's head is later found by the hero on a rock by the edge of the mere, where the mother has left it as she re-entered her home. At the moment that the warriors see the severed head, the poet includes a description of emotion as experienced by Hrothgar's Danes:

Denun eallum wæs,  
winum Scyldinga,                      weorce on mode

to geþolianne,                      ðegne monegum,  
 oncyð eorla gehwæm,              syðþan Æsches  
 on þam holmclife                    hafelan metton. (1417b-1421bg)

(Then all the friends of the Scylding were grieved in heart, each warrior  
 suffering many griefs, when they found Aeschere's head on that seacliff.)

The presence of the head at this point in the narrative is highly significant, especially in terms of the corporeal border. Godfrey in her essay on decapitation as a Norse analogue offers further and more specific evidence of the

continuing fascination in monastic culture [like the one which produced *Beowulf*] with pre-Christian beliefs [like those held by the pagan Anglo-Saxons] about the human body, of the head as the source of intellect and creation. Through its prominent display of a severed head . . . *Beowulf* . . . reminds its audiences not of the powers inherent in taking heads as booty (although Scandanavian, Celtic, and English sources alike allude to such customs in warfare), but of the importance of the head as a wellspring of inspired expression. (6)

In Christian theology as well, the head is often the source of creativity. The first song of the Bible is created because of a victory by Deborah and Barak against an enemy of Israel, and its focus is the killing of Sisera, the general of the enemy armies, when a woman named Jael drives a tent stake through his temple as he sleeps (Judges 5); the puncturing of his head produces song. Salome's dance in the New Testament is created solely to



obtain the head of John the Baptist (Mark 6:28), and Jesus, whose blood is the source of new life, is the head of the Church (Colossians 1: 18).

The head is directly connected to the inspiring source, the mother herself, and it is also seductive for the warrior, like the female. Remembering Beowulf's mesmerized watching of the dismemberment and cannibalism of Hondscoio, it is easy to agree with Thomas Prendergast that such objects as decapitated heads produce in the hero an "erotic frisson" (133) which he finds impossible to ignore. Since the promise of creative power is an addictive lure for him, the placing of the head at the edge of the frost-and-fire art experience is no accident; the mother understands Beowulf, and thus she understands the appeal of the body part for him. Creativity seduces, and he succumbs.

The head is important also because it supplies shocking sense perception much like that of the combat between Grendel and Beowulf which I described earlier. Susan Stewart points out that by receiving sensory impressions and by making them intelligible to others, we can situate our personal experience in the universal. Poetry relies on the senses for three reasons: they are "central" to the encounter with others; they have a capacity for "extension, volition, distantiation"; and they free us from "the burden of immediacy" (8-9). They become a way for us to experience, feel, empathize, comprehend—all the things that a poet must do if he is to be successful in his endeavor. Although Beowulf had to have experienced the struggle with Grendel on an almost primordial level of the senses, we are told nothing of it, but as the warrior draws near the mere and enters it, the poet overloads us with sensory impressions, especially those relating to touch: frost, fire, water hot with blood, the grasp of the mother's claws, the tusks of the sea beasts tearing at his armor, her shoulder beneath his hands, the heavy weight as she falls against him. As the most basic of

the senses, touch is most likely to cause us to develop an awareness of self as opposed to object; the pleasure of stimulation by the senses and our ability to articulate it is what leads to this development of both racial and personal identity (19). This is exactly what Sayers has in mind when she speaks of the self-awareness of the creator. As the source of the self-awareness, touch is “the sense needed for being . . . the others are for well-being” (21). It is also associated with taste, which involves touching and feeling an object, liquefying it, eating it. Furthermore, all of the senses operate at the openings of the body and poetry “serves humanity because it allows them to express their corporeal senses” (14). The overload of the senses, then, helps to identify Beowulf’s exposure to the lake, the cave, and the mother as an exposure to creativity, his in particular.

The mother literally picks up Beowulf and carries him into her lair. Once inside, there is no need for conversation; as an Anglo-Saxon warrior, his means of tapping into this power is to cut into it, to fight and shed its blood in such a way that this encounter can be turned into the greatest story of his life. Upon being released, he

mægenræs forgeaf

hildebille,

hond sweng ne ofteah,

þæt hire on hafelan hringmæl agol

grædig guðleoð. Ða se gist onfand,

þæt se beadoleoma bitan nolde,

aldre sceþðan, ac seo ecg geswac

ðeodne æt þearfe. . . . (1519b-1525)

( . . . gave mighty impetus / to the battle-sword, his hand swung; he did not  
 hold back, / so that on her head the ring-sword sang / a greedy war-song.  
 Then the not bite / or injure her life; the edge failed / the lord in his need.)

The use of the word play on the “song” made by the sword as it strikes her has received much comment by critics; suffice it to say here that this first encounter, failing as it does, nevertheless produces song—a created thing.

The struggle’s most memorable moment occurs when the mother attacks the fallen warrior and tries to hack her way through the chain mail with a short dagger. Considering that Beowulf’s throat must have been exposed and was a far more vulnerable and vital place in which to attack him, her actions seem unwise at best. Christian teaching, however, repeatedly signifies the heart in the center of the chest as the origin of words and narrative, not just emotion. For example, “the heart of the wise teaches his mouth and adds learning to his lips” (Proverbs 16:23). The spoken word is directly affected by the heart: “if any man among you seems to be religious but bridles not his tongue, he deceives his own heart” (James 1: 26). More symbolically, Aaron, the priest for the children of Israel during their years in the wilderness, wore a breastplate when he went before God with the tribes so that He might see the representations of the tribe and remember them: “And Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgment upon his heart, when he goes in to the holy place, for a memorial before the Lord continually” (Exodus 28:29). In other words, the heart bears their stories to God and His memory recreates them.

In examining the role of the chest in Old English poetry composed before the arrival of Christianity, Jager comes to the conclusion that for the pagan Anglo-Saxons as well, the chest was the repository of the verbal actions of a human (848). For them, speech was not only received in what Jager calls the “pectoral” area of the body but also produced there. In *Beowulf* in particular, the poet never mentions the mouth “in physical descriptions of speech acts” but only in connection with eating (and thus with the invasion of corporeality) and as the metaphor for the door of Heorot (849). Further, Jager examines several Anglo-Saxon texts specifically to prove his contention that “poetic craft and inspiration reside in the chest” for the poet of *Beowulf*. (847). For communication, then, the chest is absolutely necessary and is the proper place for a connection between the two of them to occur, for him to succumb to his creativity and give up the social role that he plays in the world at the top of the lake. In the figurative sense, if he loses the battle with the mother on a symbolic level, he will die just as he would if we were reading the text literally.

But the mother is not just creativity; she also represents Beowulf’s own creativity and the creativity that is connected with the making of the story of the battle with Grendel. I have already explained her connection with creativity because of her locus in the mere; that she is part of the making of this particular story becomes clear when Beowulf tells the finished and polished narrative before Hygelac later. But before I can explain why her role is important in terms of the moral responsibility of the artist, it is necessary to prove her to be equated with Beowulf’s ability as well. Proof begins by examining the affinities Beowulf has for the monster, one of the first of which is a geographic nearness. The battles witnessed by the reader up to this point in the poem have been won by Beowulf by

strength, but that strength would have no effect if he were not in close contact with his enemies. In both cases, I have noted the sensory impressions he must have had with each because of their intimacy with each other. No one knows “monster” as he does in terms of spatial closeness. Closely related to this is his similarity in size, also an element of his strength. In fact, what has been particularly troubling to many scholars is the physical similarity between him and the Grendelkin. Much of the debate has been examined by Orchard, and much of it centers on a textual element, the use of the word “aglæca,” which can mean “wretch, monster, demon, miserable being”—and thus refer to what we assume the mother and son to be—or it may mean “fierce enemy, combatant” and be applied to the hero. Besides geographic/spatial and physical/semantic comparisons, their actions are similar. Mythic monsters and mythic heroes behave in the same way: they kill. But Grendel kills and obtains blood that he uses for no purpose except his own survival and sustaining of his own desire. The mother, however, creates a child, a creation that is not absorbed back into herself but set free to go out into the world. The blood she sheds is not self-absorbed and selfish. In part this aspect of the kinship between the mother and Beowulf is seen in the physical interplay between them. Carolyn Anderson in particular examines the relatedness and the interplay as it pertains to cannibalism and blood, the agent of creative action. She notes the use of the word “gæst” in the text at crucial points during the fight in the cave. Its root word means “to consume” (para. 1), but also has the double but opposite meaning of both “host” and “guest,” terms which are “marked [only] by positional differences in relationship between those who offer food and those who consume it” (para. 8). The application of the term to both the mother and to Beowulf is indicative of their kinship, their similarity. Anderson’s observation is of great importance

as Beowulf descends to the mere and the poet begins a word-play on the roles of host and guest. Grendel's mother is the former who literally carries the latter into her hall; here Beowulf is not offered the traditional meal of the guest but instead proceeds to carry out "the most drastic form of consumption by a guest," the breeching of boundaries enforced by societal taboos: the killing of his host (para. 24). Given the fact that the poet presents both Beowulf and the mother as potential eaters, as "gæst," and that they are linked by the blood of Grendel (she as mother-creator and he as story-maker), they share the essential of life. The extreme nature of their creativity is measured by their locations and the subsequent, juxtapositioned shifts in this placement: both step beyond boundaries—she into the human world, he into the monstrous. As monster, she is all that is believed to have been impossible, the impulses that have been rejected by humanity, that which resides deep within the recesses of the self. Beowulf has already been seen to share many of her characteristics; she shares many of his. The guest is the host, and vice versa. It is he—the guest—who takes the sword that should have belonged to the host and kills her, he who dismembers her son. In fact, Eric Wilson considers the two of them somewhat like mimetic doubles because of their mirroring of each other in acts of bloodshed.

If we accept that the mother and Beowulf both are linked to creativity, to production, and consider what both of them have produced, the question that emerges is the question that confronts all humanity: does evil spring from a creative force that is evil, or is it possible that good can produce evil? These are just other forms of the same questions asked about violence in the last chapter. If we trace them back far enough—to God as Creator—they are the most profound questions of any religious system. Fortunately, my thesis does not require me to find an answer except as it pertains to

Beowulf, and it was given in Chapter Five as yes, out of good can come non-good.

Whether the mother is evil or not is something we do not know. Unlike her son, however, she has never invaded Heorot and never killed any of the Danes until the moment that she acts in revenge. Grendel is a thing intact: the possibility of a story, a created thing, what the artist visualizes in his mind as a whole before he begins to make it visible. Was he imagined as an active evil? Or are his actions unintended consequences of his creation? Like every other story Beowulf tells, he has a point of origin before Beowulf slays him and uses his blood; whether he originated as intentional evil or not, he is evil at the point that Beowulf kills him.

As I pointed out earlier, the experience in the cave is had while Beowulf is still in the thought part of elaboration/Energy. Confronted with an extreme experience, a radical space, and profound questions, he encounters the moral, personal, and social dimensions involved in the making of a final narrative. Grendel is the wrong word, the narrative of harm. He is “a misinterpretation of what human was meant to be” (McDaniel). The blood has been shed, but Beowulf now must decide what to do with its evil nature. Is he to form a narrative that stresses the power and romance of evil? Should he use his gift as he chooses even if, in the name of artistic freedom and license, he chooses to create something that may damage his society? (Again, let me point out that while we do not know the thoughts of Beowulf at this point to point out that this is exactly what he is considering, we are about to see a great change in the type of story which he tells that suggests he begins to consider the ramifications of his creativity for others.) Or must he consider the implications of the story? Will he tell it in such a way as to bring good to Hrothgar and thereby promote the peace and wellbeing of the Danes, or will it become a

means of belittling the king who is too old to kill Grendel in order to show himself—Beowulf—in a heroic light (one which, by the way, would be perfectly truthful)? Sayers answers the question by stressing the power of the creative act: it is “the only kind of act that will actually turn positive Evil into good” (107).

Unable to kill the mother by using a sword he been given by Unferth—no real acts of creative ever occur with borrowed items—he breaks the chain on a massive and magical sword that he glimpses in the chamber and cuts her throat. It is a sword so great that no ordinary talent could swing it, something created by the same giants who are her ancestors; it is an utter impossibility because, as we find out later, the race of giants was destroyed in a flood, yet runes on the sword they made tell of their own demise. By piercing her body, he participates in the intense act of creating, of realizing his own ability. In Sayers’ theory of making, these moments of struggle and killing belong to the Energy aspect of the creative trinity. Immediately after killing the mother, Beowulf is filled with intense emotion: “secg weprce gefeh” (1568: the warrior rejoiced in the work” before he becomes “yrre ond anræd” (1575: angry and determined). For Sayers, it might better be called a manifestation of the Power, just as is the great light has broken over the cave, illuminating it. Lines 1571 and 1572—“efne swa of hefene hadre scineð rodroes candel”—tell us “a light arose within even as in heaven clearly shines the sky’s candle” and suggest the brilliance as a clear indicator of the momentous nature of the moment. Like the sword, the beam cannot possibly exist because of the great depths at which the cave lies under the water, but it does, nevertheless. It illuminates the center of the dark lair at the moment her blood is spilled, washing over him like the blaze that spilled over chaos when God spoke his first creative impulse into being. The darkness of



the impulse that produced Grendel's story is pushed away; the light of the "original great Idea" to which Sayers says one must compare his own acts of creativity in order "to see how wrong the corrupted version" is (107) gives not just natural but also moral clarity.

Caught in the light, Beowulf is at the decisive moment of his life when he must choose between options. We know that he is because he has available two bodies – corporeal stories--that he can take out of the lair's bordered space: Grendel's or the mother's. Having survived the encounter, he will rejoin the world above, but the question is, will he do so as a man who perceives the capability of creativity to produce evil—the moral dimension of art—or will he tell a story that does not attempt to redeem evil, one that disregards his responsibility to his fellow man, one that leaves intact Grendel's image of awesome power and his own image of destroyer of such power? For the Christian scribe writing the poem, this is the choice between heaven and hell, redeeming and destroying, eternal life or eternal punishment, life for one's self and life for God. It is also the struggle faced by the monastics every time they created a deeply creative work of art: was it created out of and for themselves or inspired by and made for God?

There is only one possible outcome given who Beowulf is in society and the childhood which he spent: he rejects the head of the mother. No else will have need to visit the cave at the bottom of the lake again—Beowulf's place in time and circumstance add to the radical nature of her story, just as they affect all art—so her head represents a story of blood and borders that no one else will ever be able to narrate. By telling things her way, he might achieve an originality like no other, an act of extreme freedom. But morality demands that he revisit Grendel's story, acknowledging it as evil and attempting to make something good out of it. The poet implies that Beowulf knows that the taking

Grendel's head will affect the sword ; he considers the fact that the edge of it is "not useless" after killing the mother, suggesting that it might become so after contact with the son:

He æfter recede wlat;

hwearf þa be wealle, wæpen hafenade

heard be hiltum Higelaces ðegn

yrre ond anræd, --- næs seo ecg fracod

hilderince, ac he hraþe wolde

Grendle forgyldan guðræsa fela

ðara þe he geworhte to West-Denum

oftor micle ðonne on ænne sið. . . . (1572-1579)

(He looked through the building, / then he turned by the wall, his weapon raised, / holding it hard by the hilt, Hygelac's thane, / angry and resolute.)

The nature of Grendel's true story is revealed when, at Beowulf's stroke, his body proves to be so rotten that it bursts open (1588b: "hra wide sprong"). The effective part of the sword, its blade, melts in Grendel's blood: "þa þæt sweord ongan / æfter heaþoswate hildegicelum, / wigbil wanian" (1605b-1606: then that sword began /after the blood shed in the battle / like battle icicles, its blade to wane). The connection between God's power and the artist's is acknowledged, as well as the time component of the Energy:

þæt wæs wundra sum

þæt hit eal gemealt    ise gelicost,

ðonne forstes bend    Fæder onlæteð,

onwindeð wæl-rapas, se geweald hafað

sæla ond mæla;        þæt is soð Metod.” (1607b-1611)

(That was a great wonder /that it all melted most like ice / when the frost’s  
bond the Father unlocks / loosens the water’s fetters, He has power / of  
times and seasons; that is the true Ruler.)

Finally, the waters of the lake change: “wæron yðgebland eal gefælsod” (1620: the water was all cleansed). It should be noted that the poet does not refer to the loss of creativity in this line; the mere is still “wældreore fag” (1631b: stained with the blood of slaughter). The man who emerges from the lake arises to his waiting men, who have seen hints of the Energy as the waters have welled with more blood while he is at their bottom. Now the material product of that Energy is made visible and available to them: not a head of a wondrous creature but only a very dead enemy, a “wliteseon wrætlic” (1649a: terrible sight). What Beowulf does is to take away the power of Grendel as a potential myth, a story in which evil gains additional power and fear in each retelling.

The effect of Beowulf’s decision, to admit the potential for evil in art and make a decision to assess it in terms of morality, has an immediate effect on his narrative. In the twenty-five lines following in which he speaks of Grendel, a new maturity is revealed. Rather than boasting of his own abilities, Beowulf displays a unexpected humility and

speaks repeatedly of the help God gave him: “ætrihte wæs / guð getwæfed, nymðe mec God scylde (1657b-1658: my strength would have been lost had God not protected me); and “me geuðe ylða Waldend, / þæt ic on wage geseah wlitig hangian / ealdsweord eacen -- oftost wisode winigea leasum ” (1661-1663: a sword the Ruler of Men allowed me to see on the wall there, splendidly hanging, old, gigantic -- how often He guides the friendless one). Lines 1671 through 1676 are again directed away from selfish concern and are attempts on his part to comfort the old king:

Ic hit þe þonne gehate,	þæt þu on Heorote most
sorhleas swefan	mid þinra secga gedryht,
ond þegna gehwylc	þinra leoda,
duguðe ond iogoþe,	þæt þu him ondrædan ne þearft,
þeoden Scyldinga,	on þa healfe,
aldorbealu eorlum,	swa þu ær dydest.

(I would have you sleep now in Heorot with your warriors in safety, and every man of your people, young and old, fear not evil, lord of the Scyldings, from that side again, nor the slaughter of your men, as you may ever.)

Considering Beowulf’s experience in the mere, Hrothgar’s extended reaction to the sword of the giants, brought back to Heorot by the young Geat, is logical and appropriate. As the king holds the hilt in his hands, we are told of its history, one which is in the form of a created thing, a runic narrative of some sort which is engraved on it:

. . . on ðæm wæs or writen

fyrn-gewinnes,	syðþan flod ofsloh,
gifen geotende,	giganta cyn;
frecne geferdon;	þæt wæs fremde þeod
ecean Dryhtne;	him þæs ende-lean
þurh wæteres wylm	Waldend sealde.
Swa wæs on ðæm scenum	sciran goldes
þurh run-stafas	rihte gemearcod,
geseted ond gesæd,	hwam þæt sweord geworht,
irena cyst,	ærest wære,

wreopen-hilt ond wyrm-fah. (1688b-1698a)

(On it was written of the beginning of ancient strife from the time of the flood rush, when the sea killed the race of giants, the retribution was terrible that was brought about; that was an estranged people from the eternal Lord, he who sent the rushing waters. So was there on that bright-gold sword-guard in runic letters rightly marked, set down and said, for whom that sword was made, of iron the best, of finest quality, with twisted hilt and serpentine patterned.)

Michael Near finds the text on the hilt to be a collection of markings whose true meaning, like that of allegory, “resides in a private space to which only the initiated have access” (322) and argues that Hrothgar is one such initiate. For the old man, the runes are “iconic indexes of the invisible world that lurks beneath the surface of human action” (325). He understands the unspoken motive, the underlying idea behind Beowulf’s choice of Grendel’s head for a narrative, as we see in the first lines of his lengthy speech to the warrior: “Ðæt. la, mæg secgan se þe soð ond riht / fremed on folce, feor eal gemon, / eald eðelweard, þæt ðes eorl wære / geboren betera!” (1700-1703b: So may he say who for truth and right / acts for his people, far times all remembering, / mindful, / an old warden of his land, that this earl is / a better man!)

Hrothgar’s stress on acting in the right way for the good of the people—the quality he himself possesses and sees in the “better man” of Beowulf—continues in line 1705, where he comments on the younger man’s “geþyld” (patience), a trait hardly associated with killing a monster, and line 1707b, where he predicts that Beowulf will become a “frofre” (consolation) to his people. Following the blessing is a warning in the form of a story about an evil king, Heremod, who grew solitary and “hwæþere him on ferhþe grow / breosthord blodreow” (1718b-1719a: yet in him grew a blood-fierce heart / a blood-ravenous breast-hord). The marginality, the connection of heart with “breast-hord” (a combination of heart/mind with treasure that points up the act of thinking as it connects to creativity), and the use of blood in the lines characterize Heremod as the man who creates without thought of consequences, who ravages his society selfishly. Hrothgar appears to use Heremod as an example of what Beowulf must not become if he is to be a good king. “Oferhyda ne gym” (1760: care not for pride), he advises, the same emotion that leads the

creator to produce objects or texts that do not serve good but his own will. And the joy and relief that Hrothgar exhibits at sight of Grendel's head indicates the rightness for him and the Danes of Beowulf's decision to return with it:

	Dæs sig Metode þanc,
ecean Dryhtne,	þæs ðe ic on aldre gebad,
þæt ic on þone hafelan	heorodreorigne
ofer eald gewin	eagam starige! (1778b-1781)

(God be thanked / Eternal Lord, that I have long lived / that I on this  
bloodstained head/ after long evil, with my eyes may gaze!)

The story of Grendel's head is, like every story, a partial revelation of its writer's character, a sort of unauthorized biography. As an Anglo-Saxon, Beowulf's character is proven to be heroic in the killing of Grendel because his actions save the community and rid it of a deviant serial killer. As the product of a Christian scribe, he is heroic as a creator who recognizes the ambiguous nature of the beast of art and moves to control and discipline it. As Sayers points out, evil Ideas "create" by destruction, but it is "the work of the creative mind to see that the destruction is redeemed by its creative elements" (112). Beowulf does not deny the nature of Grendel but renders him harmless by exposing the ugly truth of him, by turning him into just a head, rotting and gruesome, which is dropped on the floor of Heorot.

## Chapter VII: BEOWULF'S LIFE IN THE NEGOTIATED SPACE

To accept the moral dimension of art is to acknowledge a value system which is in place prior to the act of creating and to incorporate it into one's behavior. When the value system is the natural outgrowth of one's learning and culture, or what we might designate as one's conscience, it affects all of his behavior. Whether an individual can transgress his own value system or not is a question for other types of study, but the psychological cost of such transgression, if it is even possible, must surely be destructively high given that the values like those by which Beowulf operates are intrinsic, not inscribed by an external law. The monk scribes understood this; they were familiar with the story of David, who acted in opposition to the values that he himself held when he took Bathsheba and who paid the price in despair and loss. Thus for the Geat warrior, who has acknowledged the moral dimension, every subsequent act of creativity must be considered in light of it. The result of this consideration is constant negotiation between his creativity and his moral responsibility. While such a negotiation is indicative of Beowulf's nature as epic and tragic hero, it nevertheless should not have to happen; in a perfect world, where natural law and moral code are the same, it does not. In this one, however, man is capable of "contradicting his own nature," an ability "peculiar to man . . . and called by the Church sinfulness" (Sayers 10). Often as a result, the artist—especially one like Beowulf, who by dint of his heritage is taxed heavily with being his brother's keeper—sacrifices a portion of his creativity. What happens to Beowulf in particular is not that the fire of his creativity is completely extinguished but that it is altered and cooled; he finds other ways to create and other stories to tell. In many cases, the resulting product is of the highest quality, as in the story of Freawaru. The concern for others, the empathy that generates the



story, is only possible in a world where one's fellow man is valued; it is a consequence of Beowulf's recognition of the moral component of art, of the redemption of evil by creativity. In other stories, as in the slightly sadistic commentary about Hondscio, the effort falls short. But on occasion, Beowulf chooses not to create at all, especially after he reluctantly becomes king. The tragic quality of the last third of the poem is due in large part to his increasing denial of his own nature for the sake of his society. Sayers attempts to put into words what the artist realizes:

. . . as far as I conform to the pattern of human society, I feel myself also to be powerless and at odds with the universe, while so far as I conform to the pattern of my true nature, I am at odds with human society, and it with me.

(212)

True creativity lies in corresponding to one's real nature, not to the patterns of human society, but when Beowulf fails to participate in those human patterns, the people whom he loves die. As a result, he gives up much of his real, creative nature.

Beowulf's new ambivalence about shedding blood—about creating—begins immediately after his return from the mere. His awareness of the social cost when the unforeseen end of bloodshed proves to be evil and its victim blameless is revealed in the very story I just mentioned, the somber one of Freawaru, with whom he aligns himself. Additionally, the tool with which he has been most accustomed to create, the sword, is almost completely abandoned by him. After the mere, Beowulf is never comfortable with one. He constantly hands them off to others until the fight with the dragon forces him to rely on Naegling. He gives one sword to the Danes' coast guard; he gives another to

Hygelac; he gives them to his men. The one which he himself is given once belonged to his grandfather, Hrethel, whose son kills another of his sons, and whose love for the murderer keeps him from taking vengeance on him as was demanded by his culture. Hrethel's own life is a commentary on the struggle between duty to social values and the love for what the artist is capable of creating. Unable to sacrifice one for the sake of the other, his creativity is stymied and his life miserable.

Told at the same point in the poem as Hrethel's story, the episode which most clearly points out the frustration of Beowulf's position on the border between his own salvation and that of his nation concerns the death of his king, Hygelac. It is told twice, once by the narrator and once by the hero. The narrator's version, which I translated earlier in the third chapter, tells of Hygelac's death at the hands of the Frisians, whose land he has invaded, and notes the fact that Beowulf was not beside his king at the moment of his death. The most unusual part of the story involves his rescue of the thirty suits of armor, objects where were art treasures for the Geats; the rescue is apparently undertaken while the battle rages. His preoccupation with the created object—even if he did not himself create it—interferes with his duty to mankind.

However, the story as the warrior himself tells it is remarkably different. If we believe the version told by Beowulf—and we have reason to trust his stories given his alignment with good and the insightful truth of most of the narratives he creates after his return from the mere—he is separated from his king in the battle because it is his duty to go before him. Further, his act of killing when it finally takes place is not aimless and done for personal glory but directed and controlled:

. . . ic for dugeðum      Dæghrefne wearð  
 to handbonan,              Huga cempan; ---  
 nalles he ða frætwe      Frescyninge,  
 breostweorðunge,      bringan moste,  
 ac in campe gecrong      cumbles hyrde,  
 æpeling on elne;          ne wæs ecg bona,  
 ac him hildegrap          heortan wylmas,  
 banhus gebræc.      (2501-2508a)

(I slew Daeghrefn, champion of the Hugas, / with my bare hands in front of  
 the whole army. He could not carry off to the Frisian king / that battle  
 armor and that breast-adornment, but there in the field the standard-bearer  
 fell, a nobleman in his strength; no blade was his slayer, but my warlike  
 grip broke his beating heart, / cracked his bone-house.)

Once again a concern with art is present; Daeghrefn's attempt to steal a "breast-  
 adornment" and armor from Hygelac's corpse is thwarted in the same encounter that  
 brings about his death. The use of Beowulf's hands associates this killing with that of  
 Grendel, but rather than tear open the body of Daeghrefn, he implodes it. The corporeality  
 of the body is sustained whole, compacted, as if to keep the evil of it contained and  
 diminished. In fact, Beowulf's narrative of Daeghrefn's death may itself have been  
 contained inside him and his version never heard by his people before; the story is one of

several he tells just before going to his death, a sort of review of his life, perhaps even a sort of last confessional.

I would suggest that responsible creativity can also be radical and satisfying creativity, but only in rare—very rare—cases. Such a possibility is revealed in the narrator's story which appears after Beowulf's visit to the mere and his return home to the Geats. It is the story of Thryth,

Fremu folces cwen,	firen' ondrysne.
Nænig þæt dorste	deor geneþan
swæsra gesiða,	nefne sin-frea,
þæt hire an dæges	eagun starede;
Ac him wæl-bende	weotode tealde,
hand gewriþene;	hrape seoþðan wæs
æfter mund-gripe	mece geþinged,
þæt hit sceaden-mæl	scyran moste,
Cwealm-bealu cyðan.	Ne bið swylc cwenlic þeaw
Idese to efnanne,	þeah ðe hio ænlicu sy,
þætte freoðu-webbe	feores onsæce
æfter lige-torne leofne	mannan.

Huru þæt onhohsnode	Hemminges mæg;
ealo-drincende	oðer sædan,
þæt hio leod-bealewa	læs gefremede
inwit-niða,	syððan ærest wear
gyfen gold-hroden	geongum cempan,
æðelum diore,	syððan hio Offan flet
ofer fealone flod	be fæder lare
siðe gesohte;	ðær hio syððan well
in gum-stole,	gode, mære,
lif-gesceafta	lifigende breac
hiold heah-lufan	wið hæleþa brego,
ealles mon-cynnes	mine gefræge
þone selestan	bi sæm tweonum
eormen-cynnes.	Forðam Offa wæs
geofum on guðum	gar-cene man,
wide geweorðod;	wisdome heold
eðel sinne;	þonon Eomer woc

hæleðum to helpe,                      Hemminges mæg,  
 nefa Garmundes,                      niða cræftig. (1933-1962b)

([Thyrth was] the people's good queen, her crimes terrible. / None of all the retainers, except her great lord, / were so brave as to dare to venture to by day gaze in her face; / But to him [who dared], deadly, hand-twisted bonds were appointed; / quickly thereupon after the hand-gripe, his sword-death, ornamented with branching patterns, was determined, death-evil to make known. This is not was such a queenly custom for a lady to perform, no matter how unique she is, that a peace-weaver might exact life from a dear man after a pretended injury. Indeed, that was checked by Hemming's kinsman; members of her tribe when they drink and are satiated with ale say that her enmity grew less after she was given to the gold-adorned young champion who was to lords dear. She listened to her father's instruction and allowed herself to be sent on a journey to Offa's hall over much floodwater. Since then, she sits there well on the throne and lives a better life, as ordered by fate, and by all man-kind. My information about her was gained through hearsay. Therefore Offa was gift in war spear-bold man, widely honored; by wisdom he kept his native land; his son Eomer gave help to warriors, Hemming's kinsman, grandson of Garmundes, in battle skillful.)

This striking story features a female, but one who lives like a male, exerting power and using violence just her masculine counterparts do. As the story points out, Thyrth is the

material object, the artifact, that which is gazed upon, but she is also the active force that reciprocates and sheds blood, or, as Jessica Hope Jordan explains it, she is both “a place of resistance” and “piece de resistance” (para. 13). Sayers might define her as Idea, Energy, and Power all combined into a unique and powerful expression of the Trinity. Her violence, necessitated by her placement in an Anglo-Saxon narrative, is associated with her hands, those tools of the craftsman, and provides a strong connection to Beowulf himself. The words “handgewrithene” and “mundgripe,” both describing a twisting or binding to death and used in connection with the queen, seem to suggest that she herself puts to death the men who gaze upon her (Dockray-Miller para. 19) just as Beowulf tears off Grendel’s arm by twisting it, as the text indicates in its use of “writhan” to describe his actions in line 964b. Then a sword is used upon the victim: “after the hand-grip, his sword-death [. . . ]was determined.” But the queen makes the violence that is typically male uniquely hers: she kills for her own reasons, not to satisfy the code of vengeance held to be sacred by the men. She kills for personal reasons, perhaps for ego. In addition, she is a borderwalker, a transgressor of the boundaries, just as the monsters are and Beowulf is briefly. Jordan notes that she

does indeed achieve several ruptures: first, she “ruptures” the poem itself; second, she literally ruptures the men’s bodies as she has them killed [or kills them herself]; and third, she ruptures the male/female binary which has been inscribed for her by the poet. (para 21)

Even in the vocabulary employed to describe her, her position as artist is clear. In the poet’s use of the word “ligetorn,” or “lie trouble,” to describe the stories that she tells about the men who look at her, we might be hearing a description of the tales told by a

writer who interprets events in various lights, including fictional ones, without necessarily aiming for what is called “truth” by historians. Or, if we take the poet at exactly his word, Thryth’s narratives may be trouble-causing lies because they are the product of the monster, the egotist, that she is. The moral dimension is dismissed by her as she kills for no real reason until her parent—the source of most of a human’s values—intervenes and she subsequently begins to make different choices. She learns to love others in the form of her husband and son; thus she comes to evaluate her actions in terms of society. In the words of Osborn, “through her choice of roles, once she is queen, she [forces] the ‘drinkers at ale’ to tell a different story about her” (para. 16). Her potential for radical creativity as measured in her killing is exchanged for the radical nature of her queenship: she sits “on the throne” beside her husband rather than with the warriors as Wealhtheow and Hygd do; she gains the fame warriors hold dear; she is productive in the form of a son; her son does not die in battle but follows his parents to the throne in a successful lineage; and her kingdom is peaceful under the wise rule of her husband, Offa. Her success as a creator is due in large part to the love she learns to feel and in part to the willingness of Offa, king and representative of society, to allow her unique freedom. In the end, her life story becomes a benefit and a source of pride to the very society which at first regarded her with the same horror it regarded Grendel. A monster can transform into a queen if the right choices are made and the potential for creation utilized in the right way. The narrative of Thryth proves that it is possible to give one’s self to the process of creating and still be of service to the world, but only those with strength of character, self-control, and rare ability can survive the tension which is a constant.



The almost total silence of Beowulf's years as a king appears to be the result of his inability to create and rule simultaneously. He makes a decision to avoid bloodshed for the sake of his people, apparently doing so at the cost of his own reputation and ego; it is said that he rules only because Onela "let ðone bregostol Biowulf healdan, / Geatum wealdan" (2389-2390: let Beowulf hold the high throne / and rule the Geats). He uses others and guile to obtain his goals rather than shedding blood, as we see in his dealings with Eadgils, to whom he gives support and weapons so that he—not Beowulf and the Geats—is able to kill Onela. When he is finally forced to draw blood fifty years into his reign, two factors are significant: one is the tangled moral issue as to why the fight occurs and the other is the nature of what kills Beowulf, a dragon who hoards art until it decays and rusts, suggesting the fate of creativity when it is not utilized. The battle begins because a thief steals a cup; there is no equivocation in this statement. But the thief is a pitiful slave who seeks to placate his owner with the cup—no villain but a victim. And the dragon, the creature who appears to be the thief's victim, is a monster himself, one who gained the treasure through no effort of his own and who prevents its enjoyment by those who—unlike him—have a need for the cups and swords of which it is comprised.

Beowulf's physical abilities are marred by age, but the creativity with which he was born emerges in remarkable ways just before his death, due in part to knowledge he has gained in his life and in part to his realization that in death there is no opportunity for creating or need for the created object. As noted by the last survivor of the race of men who produced the treasures hoarded by the dragon,

Seal se hearda helm

hyrsted golde

fætum befeallen;	feormynd swefað,
þa ðe beadogriman	bywan sceoldon,
geswylce seo herepad,	sio æt hilde gebad
ofer borda gebræc	bite irena,
brosnað æfter beorne.	Ne mæg byrnan hring
æfter wigfruman	wide feran,
hæleðum be healfe.	

(The hard helmet shall from its fairly wrought gold-plating fall; cleansers sleep in death who the war-mask should polish. Such coats of mail that in war compelled and the shields that destroyed, the bite of iron, are decayed with the warriors. Nor may the coat of ring mail go far with war chiefs, at the warrior's side.)

Realizing the passing of life and the loss of opportunity, he narrates poignant and evocative stories from memories of past bloodshed, including one of a father who grieves the loss of his heir, a son. The failure to have children is a dominant theme in the final passages of the poem. Because he is unable to find a way to embrace the power of creativity as Thyrth does, Beowulf ends his days on earth without heirs. As he nears death, many of the greatest achievements of his life—while they are certainly worthy of praise on a public and political level—are negatively worded ones: “Ic on earde bad / Mælgescæfta, / heold min tela, / Ne sohte searon iðas, / ne me swor feal . . .” (2736b-2738b: I did not seek . . . I did not swear . . .”).

His last battle contains evidence of his negotiations between creativity and culture. The home which he invades as he goes to face the dragon is itself the opposite of the mother's den he visited fifty years earlier. It is high on a cliff, under arches, not under the earth; a stream of water runs through it rather than surrounding it, rather like the way Beowulf has increasingly channeled his creativity into one path, directed toward one social goal. The stream is small and fiery rather than deep and churning with energy; fire is connected with the dragon, but no frost or fireplace attempts to contain it or utilize it. Uncontrolled and deadly, it is creativity repressed until it boils over in a fit of destruction, scorching and burning hands such as Wiglaf's rather than empowering them (2697b: "ac sio hand gebarn modiges mannes . . ."/ that brave man's hand was burned). The dragon itself has none of the humanity of the mother or even her son; the only traits it possesses which bear any resemblance to those of men are greed and hate, the emotions of those who do not create to share but hoard their talents and who have had no experience in, or desire to, empathize with others or with society. Finally, the very artifacts themselves, those guarded by the dragon, are cursed and aging, connected with death and time, those experiences from which art should be free.

The battle itself is the antithesis of the dynamically sensual and emotionally-charged fight with the mother. We are told repeatedly of its outcome before it finally happens; there is no suspense, only sadness. Beowulf enters, challenges, suffers almost immediately in the flames as the newly-prepared shield fails to do its job, and strikes the dragon ineffectively with his heirloom sword, apparently his grandfather's, the one which Hygelac gave him. The first blow enrages the dragon—Beowulf has long since abandoned the sword, so now he lacks recent practice with it—and on his second stroke,

it breaks. The dragon knows better where to strike his enemy: his fatal blow to the warrior is in the neck, just like the one Beowulf dealt out when he killed the mother fifty years earlier. It is left to the young warrior Wiglaf to put out the fire of the dragon by cutting into its stomach. Because of Wiglaf's help, Beowulf makes a third and fatal strike, and "hi hyne þa begen abrotedn hæfdon"(2707: they both together brought him down).

The inversions of the fight with the mother continue even after the death of the dragon. Unable now even to enter a cave connected to art, Beowulf can only send an emissary, and Wiglaf, that emissary, finds there what is left when the creative power is neglected: a cursed and decaying treasure. The poet tells us of what he "has heard":

Geseah ða sigehreðig,	þa he bi sesse geong,
magopegn modig	maððumsigla fealo,
gold glitnian	grunde getenge,
wundur on wealle,	ond þæs wyrmes denn,
ealdes uhtflogan,	orcas stondan,
fyrnmanna fatu	feormendlease,
hyrstum behrorene;	þær wæs helm monig
eald ond omig,	earnbeaga fela
searwum gesæled.	(2756a-2764a)

(Then the victorious warrior saw, once he had gone past the seat,  
glittering gold and jewels lying on the ground, marvels piled by the wall;  
in the den of the dragon, the old dawn-flier, stood old bowls, service of  
vanished men, unpolished, richness gone. There were many helmets, old  
and rusted, and many arm-rings, skillfully woven.)

Later, we discover that this gold that has been “galdre bewundon” – “wrapped in a spell” (3052b) that promises destruction to any except the one whom God allows to touch it.

Only the man who does not bury his talent but uses it, the one who is “gemet,” or “fitting,” will survive seeing the treasure or use it effectively, and that man is not Beowulf. This is a treasure laid waste by disuse and by time; the reaction we are given to it by the narrator is not that of awed respect for the hand that created it but recognition of the death of a talent that is not used but suppressed and suffocated: “Sinc eaðe mæg, god on grunde / gum-cynnes gehwone / oferhigian, / hyde se ðe wylle!” (2764b-2766b: So easily jewels, gold in the ground, can overcome anyone, hide it who will!). And while this hoard is also “eald enta geweorc” (2774a: “the old work of giants”), there is—notably—not a single sword mentioned in connection with it. Instead, Wiglaf brings forth the objects of mundane life, “bunan ond discas” (2775b: “cups and dishes”) and finds not a bright shining light but a golden banner, a sort of flag signifying a reign of someone dead and gone, which is directly tied to craft and capable at least of glowing: “Swylce he siomian geseah / segn eall-gylden / head ofer horde, / ond-wundra mæst, / gelocen leoðo-cræftum; / of ðam leoma stod, þæt he þone grund-wong / ongitan meahhte, / wræte giondwilitan” (2767a-2771a: “Then he also saw a gold-woven banner, high over the hoard, hand-woven with wonderful skill; from it a light came so that he was able to see the whole treasure

floor and look upon the jewels.”) It is the only treasure described with any detail and the only one mentioned twice because Wiglaf specifically chooses it as one of the artifacts to take from the cave to the dying old king, who, as winner of the conflict, has the conqueror’s right to it.

Beowulf looks upon the treasure as Hrothgar had once examined the hilt, and just like the Danish king, he does not speak of the objects themselves but of what is relevant about them to him: they are his death. The last words he speaks are noted specifically as emerging from his chest and are equated with treasure and creativity like the artifacts themselves: they are his “breost-hord” (Stevens 221) and his self-spoken eulogy. The man who once discovered he did not need to breath under water and explored the timelessness of a submerged world now struggles for air and realizes that time for him is running out. Fittingly, he is able to speak his last few words only after Wiglaf sprinkles him with drops of the water like that into which he once sank, and those words are about created objects and creating them:

Ic ðara frætwa	frean ealles ðanc,
wuldurcyninge,	wordum secge,
ecum dryhtne,	þe ic her on starie,
þæs ðe ic moste	minum leodum
ær swyldæge	swylc gestrynan.
Nu ic on maðma hord	mine bebohte
frode feorhlege,	fremmað gena

leoda þearfe;                      ne mæg ic her leng wesan. (2794a-2801b)

(For all these precious things I thank my Lord, the King of Glory, with words I tell God, for what I gaze upon, that I may give these as gifts to my people before my day of death is acquired. Now I for this treasure horde have given my life; you must attend to further needs of my people. Nor may I here much longer stay.)

The treasures for which Beowulf has died—indeed, the objects which obsess him during his final moments—prove to be worthless, not just because they are old and rotting but also because the Geats do not keep them; the mass of artifacts that come to him by way of death are used only to mark his grave, to lie on his chest as if to symbolize the inability of Beowulf to breath and create any longer.

The last stories told are not Beowulf's but a nameless messenger's, and like the unnamed scop's of the first half of the poem, the stories are not his, not original, not the product of his own bloodshed, and as a result, they have a fatalistic, oblique quality to them that renders them far less powerful than the ones Beowulf once told. The messenger's story is a sad one as he narrates tales of death and disaster for the Geats: Hygelac's mortal wound in Frisia, the vengeance of Ongentheow, the lasting feud between the Geats and the Swedes. The only sword still available is in the hands of Wiglaf, and while the sword is an heirloom that has shed blood, it is no sword of the giants, and one of those hands is damaged by fire. It remains to be seen what abilities the young warrior possesses, what he will do with them, and how well he will negotiate the space between ability and society.

What *Beowulf* recognizes in its presentation of the theme of art is the indisputable fact that creativity is both a joy and a curse for man, a testing of his own nature as well as of that of the world in which he lives. Life at the border is edgy and intensely fulfilling when one is capable of coping with it. It gives an intense sense of self that is a connection to the explosive power of the Idea, God Himself. But it is not a comfortable or safe existence, and the danger is always there that the one who is a *mearcstapa* will cross the boundary at the wrong place or the wrong time and wind up forever on the wrong side of it, a monster and an exile. Neither is the uneasy business of traveling back and forth between the edge and the center an option that works consistently.

Ironically, life and the poem end in the most severely restricted space of all, the grave—but this is the one constraint which does not increase the potential for radical creativity. Outside of time, outside of society, outside of moral consideration, it is also outside the realm of the heart and blood. *Beowulf* cannot take comfort in its borders. The poem demonstrates as one of its great truths that it is rarely possible to lie down inside the final borders satisfied in regards to our creativity.



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