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Transformation and Punishment: Revisiting Monstrosity in Anglo-Saxon Literature

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TRANSFORMATION AND PUNISHMENT: REVISITING MONSTROSITY IN ANGLO-

SAXON LITERATURE

by

VIRGINIA RACHEL SCOGGINS

Under the Direction of Edward John Christie, PhD

ABSTRACT

Anglo-Saxon scholars generally define monsters within very narrow parameters: monsters are beings that are against nature and therefore not human. Examples of these Anglo-Saxon monsters include Grendel, Grendel's mom, and the dragon from *Beowulf*. However, Old English poetry contains another type of monsters often overlooked by scholars: the monstrous human. Human monstrosities present fascinating hybrid figures that visually look like humans, but who display characteristics of monsters. Under Foucault's punishment theory, these monstrous humans serve as spectator punishments who are transformed because of their crimes against society. By analyzing lexical descriptions and applying theoretical concepts, I argue that a new category of monster should be recognized in Anglo-Saxon literature.

Monstrous humans appear in both Anglo-Saxon biblical and heroic poetry. In the biblical texts *Judith* and *Daniel,* the main antagonists, Holofernes and Nebuchadnezzar, act as human monstrosities. They are characterized by their excessive vices, and through these vices, they lose their reason and ultimately their humanity. Similarly, in *Beowulf,* the bad king Heremod serves as a warning because his vice and evil actions lead him to be cast from the community and stripped of his humanity. Furthermore, *Beowulf* also illustrates human monstrosities since Beowulf and the Geats are depicted as dangerous, violent figures that are more monstrous than heroic when they are first introduced, which reflects the savage duality present within the warrior identity. Analyzing the texts through contemporary theoretical concepts also helps elucidate how monstrous humans function outside their societies. By using Kristeva's theory of abjection, I examine how Holofernes both repulses and fascinates as a vice-ridden monster. Judith Butler's performative identity theory applies to Heremod, who rejects his social role and therefore transforms into a monster, and to the armored Geats, who undertake monstrous violent acts as part of their performative warrior identity. Each of these texts explores the important relationship between humanity and monstrosity and how reason is the chief characteristic that keeps one from being termed a beast.

INDEX WORDS: Monstrosity, Anglo-Saxon, Beowulf, Transformation, Punishment, Judith

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sister, who has always encouraged me in all of my scholarly pursuits.

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1   INTRODUCTION: CONSIDERING THE HUMAN MONSTROSITY

In *Mandeville's Travels,* the narrator states, "a monster is a þing difformed aȝen kynde bothe of man or of best or of ony þing ells & þat is cleped a Monstre." In Middle English, *kynde* is defined as "the natural disposition or temperament of a person or animal; inherent qualities or properties of persons, animals; essential character" (MED). A monster is something deformed against the natural, innate external and internal properties that make humans unique and separate from beasts. A monster, then, is something that is neither a beast nor a man, something that goes against nature. Some critics define monster as a being of a fantastic race, the sole being in an unnatural race, a being that lives on the outskirts of society or categorization (Cohen; Friedman; Mittman; Oswald; Verner). A monster is a threat against the human world – which represents normality – and resides outside of the realm of humanity. Sometimes, these monsters live off the map, so to speak, and differ in physical appearance. This concept is rarely applied beyond fantastic races and our examination of monstrosity should be expanded to include human monstrosities. A human monstrosity is a being who is human and has a normal physical appearance, so they easily exist within the human world. However, the human exterior hides the underlying monstrous characteristics, which they eventually show within the confines of their social sphere. When their monstrosity is revealed, it upsets the social order because their monstrous actions pervert the established cultural norms, which makes them into a significant threat. The spectrum of monstrosity with its narrowly defined limits of pure human and pure monster eliminates the possibility for a human monstrosity to exist. However, Anglo-Saxon literature contains numerous instances of humans who exist on the outside of what is considered normal. These human monstrosities threaten the normal human world as much as the physical monsters, sometimes even more so because their overt humanity hides their monstrous identity.

In all these definitions, the important recurring idea is that monsters are in some way on the outside. Considering these ideas, the spectrum of monstrosity in Anglo-Saxon literature needs to be reevaluated and expanded to include this additional monstrosity.

Since monsters reside on the outskirts of culture, they are treated as dangerous others. Monsters in Anglo-Saxon literature, such as Grendel or the dragon in *Beowulf*, are formidable foes that need to be defeated. But monsters in Old English literature go beyond superficial antagonists that present obstacles for epic heroes. These monsters point to important cultural modes of thought, as many scholars have observed, subtly revealing cultural anxieties that might easily be overlooked due to their fantastical representation. The monstrous statuses of the creatures, along with their eventual defeat, manifest through transformation. What happens to the monster because of its crime points to Cohen's claim that "[t]he monster's body quite literarily incorporates fear, desire, anxiety..." (*Monster Theory* 4). If the monster's body represents Anglo-Saxon fear, desire, and anxiety, then the monster's transformation and punishment point to concepts not often analyzed. The punishment in these texts almost always culminates in some type of transformation, whether it is a bodily mutilation such as a beheading or a complete personality reversal. This transformation either eliminates the threat, and therefore returns the social balance back to the status quo, or turns the monster into something that can be tolerated and understood within the paradigm of the accepted social milieu. These punishment-transformations become in their own way monstrosities, because sometimes they take physical characteristics or personality traits that exist because of birth and pervert it so that the entity receiving the punishment is altered. Sometimes this altering is through bodily harm, such as in the case of the beheadings; other times, the transformation is merely superficial, such as when Beowulf dons his armor, or behavioral, as when Heremod goes against his duties as a king. No

matter the type of monstrosity, there is a human desire to rationalize it; when human reason fails to understand the "other," they punish it.

The representation of corporal punishment in Anglo-Saxon literature connects directly with Anglo-Saxon thought. According to *Law and the Illicit in Medieval Europe*, "although the general public may well associate the medieval period with lawlessness, it is rather the case that law, both as practice and as intellectual discipline, occupied a central and privileged place in medieval culture" (Karras xi). This observation is particularly important in regard to monsters. If law, and as an extension order and peace, was at the center of medieval culture, then the monsters – as defined by their punishments – become examples of medieval ways of being and of the writers' own anxieties. Monsters are in many cases tangible representations of these broken laws. Therefore, "if the goal of law was to delineate the realm of acceptable behavior and belief, guided by the ideal of justice, it often advanced to this goal through a process of negation" (Karras xi). Monsters negate laws, whether they are government laws, laws of nature, laws of culture, or a mixture. By negating the laws, they threaten the social order of acceptable behaviors and must be dealt with in a way that erases the aberration. In his discussion of early medieval law, Frederick Pollack states that the cultural conditions of the Anglo-Saxons allowed for "no refined legal science applied by elaborate legal machinery…[o]ur ancestors before the Norman Conquest lived under a judicial system, if system it can be called, as rudimentary in substance as it was cumbrous in form" ("English Law Before The Norman Conquest"). Thirteenth century historian Robert of Gloucester claims that the Anglo-Saxon period was "a past enshrining values of good, and Godly, governance which has, unhappily for people, been corrupted." Taking this claim that the past contained good and Godly ideals, followed by the assertion that the post-Norman society has been corrupted, then the punishments reflect the consequences of going

against the general good. Monsters serve an important function in regard to torture and the law. Laws and rules are designed to keep order and preserve society; monsters are outside society, so they also function outside of the law. They occupy liminal spaces that allow for a "just" society to enact fantastical, painful punishments upon them. They are not natural, not humans; therefore, the limits of human laws do not apply to them.

Anglo-Saxon punishments included bodily mutilation, amputation, hanging, and other corporal punishments. Anglo-Saxon law codes outlined these painful punishments, such as ones by Cnut which state: "At the second offense, there is to be no other remedy, if he is guilty, but that his hands, or feet, or both are to be cut off, depending on the deed. And if he has committed further offenses, his eyes should be put out and his nose and ears and upper lip cut off, or he should be scalped…thus one can punish and also protect the soul." Along with a bodily punishment like those outlined by Cnut, other punishments might include a type of *wergild,* where the accused would have to pay compensation to the king and/or the victim's family, or even death by hanging or beheading. Cnut, along with many other early medieval Germanic peoples such as the Lombards and the Franks, used corporal punishments instead of imprisonment (Peters 24). The aim of punishment was to place involuntary, punitive consequences onto the body of the accused by those in power. The accused were "those who were found responsible for transgressing the limits of what was deemed acceptable behavior and practice" and the aim of punishment was "to impose order from above through the enforced regulation of established norms" (Marafioti and Gates 9). Despite these laws, capital punishment was used infrequently during the Middle Ages. In England during the early fourteenth century, "less than a quarter of suspected felons were convicted" because "capital punishment was considered too severe to fit the popular attitude to crime." Most of the criminals who received

capital punishment were traitors (Mills 15-16). Capital punishment may represent the boundary between acceptable punishment and immoral cruelty. Bodily mutilations act as exemplary punishments. The missing body part reminds society of the offense and consequence; the punishment serves as regulation of acceptable social behavior. Capital punishment does not accomplish the same goal. By killing a person, the criminal cannot stand as a warning for the society. Additionally, killing a criminal does not, as Cnut stated, protect the soul.

Just, painful, and even mutilating punishments accomplished the goal of the process: to correct the error of the spectator. Plato stated in *Gorgias* that criminals of the most severe crimes "have thus become incurable" so they become examples for others when the spectators "observe these malefactors suffering in the greatest, the most painful, and the most fearful torments because of their sins, strung up forever in that prisonhouse of Hades, an example, a portent, and a warning to the unjust" (104). Monsters in literature become another form of spectator punishment. For many monsters, they lack the reason that would allow them absolution; therefore, they must be punished as an example for the spectator, which in the case of literature, is the reader. In Anglo-Saxon England, there was a tension between the judicial law of the kings and the canon law of the church. Though some of the kings aligned laws with the church, corporal punishment was not part of canon law (Peters 27). Part of the penance and meditation on sin enacted by the medieval church focused on the spectacle of Christ's torture and wounds. Bernard of Clairvaux preached about how meditating on the wounds of Christ could purify the conscious (Merback 102). The secular punishments of bodily mutilation and execution, mixed with a Christian preoccupation with Christ's suffering and punishment, points to a heightened Anglo-Saxon consciousness of crime and punishment.

The emphasis on correcting the behaviors of the spectators through example, instead of a focus on the criminal, points to a method of social control. Foucault states in *Discipline and Punish* that society "defines, in terms of its own interests, what must be regarded as a crime" (104). Late Anglo-Saxon community interests reflect this assertion. Anyone acting outside of the social norms, either in the community or religious sphere, was considered a transgressor. Through literature, monsters aid in outlining these crimes. Not only do monsters like Grendel and the dragon pose threats, but humans such as Heremod and Nebuchadnezzar become criminals who exhibit monstrous qualities. The collective societal consciousness has deemed the deeds in these texts criminal, and through the literature, justice is carried out. Foucault goes on to say, "the ideal punishment would be transparent to the crime that it punishes; thus, for him who contemplates it, it will be infallibly the sign of the crime, the idea of the offense will be enough to arouse the sign of punishment" (105). Therefore, the punishment must fit the crime. With Grendel, the arm is severed and hung on the wall of Heorot, so that "the display of this culpable body part serves to call attention to the specific nature of the transgression" (O'Gorman 154). This connects back to both Plato and Foucault's points – the spectators witnesses the criminal's painful penalty for his sins through the physical representation. In Grendel's case, the spectators can view the punishment of loss of limbs for the destruction to Heorot and Hrothgar's people because of said limbs. Additionally, the arm becomes the sign of the crime. For Heremod and Nebuchadnezzar, they lose their reason because their crimes make them cultural monsters. Lot's wife becomes a permanent example of defying God, because according to *Genesis A&B*, she is a large pillar for anyone to go and view; in other words, she is an enduring spectacle that serves as a sign for her punishment (lines 2563-74). The punishments must fit the crime.

The mutilation punishment carried out by Anglo-Saxon law manifests itself within Old English texts. Just as Grendel loses his arm, Holofernes loses his head. Furthermore, skin and the body represent an important aspect of monstrosity, punishment, and transformation. The skin acts as "the limit of the body's spatial location…[it is] the sensorial threshold mediating between the external world and internal sensation" (Mills 66). The skin is the corporeal thing that makes us visible and tangible in this world; it also acts as the boundary between the outside world and our internal soul. Through mutilation, part of a person is removed, a part of their body and their soul, and the barrier between soul and body is broken down. The skin acts as the sign of life, of the act of living through change and aging, so it is intrinsically tied to a person. By changing the skin, such as in the case of Lot's wife, or by mutilating it, as in the case of Holofernes, the victim transforms into something different. In many ways, the victim becomes monstrous. Anglo-Saxon society shunned criminals who had gone through mutilations. This shunning put them outside of the realm of society, into the same liminal spaces that monsters populate. In a different way, armor acts as a skin, transforming the person into something different. Unlike the punishment where skin removal brands the criminal, donning armor frees the wearer from punishment, changing the rules and the expectation of the person who wears it.

Imprisonment is another form of punishment that threads itself through these monster tales in Anglo-Saxon literature. The types of imprisonment manifest differently than modern ideas of imprisonment. The practice of incarceration in Anglo-Saxon English is ambiguous (Thomas 94). However, the literature points to several nonconventional forms of confinement as punishment for various crimes. Lot's wife and the fallen angels from Heaven are both subjected to forced confinement; Lot's wife is confined within a pillar through transformation, and the fallen angels are confined through banishment. Heremod and Nebuchadnezzar are both

imprisoned in their own minds through their loss of reason. In these examples, the imprisonment punishment restricts the movement of the monsters. Their freedom and agency are taken away from them, and they must exist in these new, confined spaces. The various forms of punishments played out alongside monsters points to a correlation between the monster's crimes and their subsequent punishments, which reflect an Anglo-Saxon spectator punishment used as a form of social and cultural control.

I propose that there are two types of monsters: physical monsters, which are entities that are somehow physically different than humans, such as being a giant, part animal, or completely inhuman; and human monsters, who go against cultural norms to pervert the social system and commit monstrous acts. As a result of their monstrous acts, they are punished in ways aligned with Anglo-Saxon cultural punishments of mutilation and imprisonment. By revealing the monstrosity inherent within these beings, they are designated as human monstrosities and subsequently transformed as their punishment. This detailed exploration of the monstrous acts, transformation, and punishment functions as a spectator punishment, which instructs as how to act and provides a standard for sustaining the established cultural norms. Even if Anglo-Saxon writers did not categorize humans as "monsters," they still wrote cultural and social monsters into their texts, and these human monstrosities must be studied alongside the more strictly defined monsters to gain a more encompassing analysis. More importantly, these human monsters undergo the same transformations and punishments as the physical monsters.

1.1 Reading Anglo-Saxon Punishment Through Foucault's Punishment Theory

Foucault's theories have had an uneven reception with critics of the Middle Ages. Anne Clark Bartlett's 1994 article "Foucault's 'Medievalism'" explores Foucault's concept of the author, settings of social codes, and identity formation in relation with the Middle Ages, while

emphasizing Foucault's problematic view of the Middle Ages as a utopian realm of nostalgia compared to modern times. Foucault has been accused of "present[ing] the Middle Ages as a free, untrammeled period, a time when reason speaks to unreason, when torture is writ upon the body rather than the soul…[he] left undisturbed the basic narrative of modernity, which viewed the origin of modern regimes, both epistemic and disciplinary, as the product of a distinctly postmedieval world" (Freedman and Spiegel 698). Bartlett concludes that medievalists should use critical theory and theoretical lenses to engage with texts, but also question and examine the lens to make an informed analysis (13-16). Often, critics of medieval studies use Foucault's *History of Sexuality* to explore gender and sexuality in pre-modern texts (Dinshaw, "Getting Medieval: *Pulp Fiction, Gawain,* Foucault"; Lochrie, "Desiring Foucault"). Despite the acceptance of some of Foucault's concepts, many critics, including Bartlett, Dinshaw, and Lochrie, question or disagree with many of his assertions. Furthermore, Lochrie contends that Foucault's notions of medieval sexuality were conflicted and contradictory, meaning that critics must be careful how they use Foucault's sexuality theories.

However, just because Foucault idealized the Middle Ages and presented conflicting ideas about pre-modern sexuality does not mean that his theories should be cast aside and never applied to the Middle Ages at all. Using postmodern critical lenses like Foucault's to analyze medieval texts can help enrich our understanding of the texts. Most notably, *Discipline and Punish* provides insights that broaden the reading of punishment and transformation within Anglo-Saxon texts since Foucault's study discusses the use of spectator punishment. While Foucault does not refer to any punishments that occur in literature, that does not mean his concept of spectator punishment is any less valid when applied to literature instead of historical cases. The punishments that are carried out within literature, especially in the Anglo-Saxon

period, serves as another way to "perform" the punishments, by letting the scene play out on the page. Foucault claims that history is full of spectator punishments where crowds gather to witness the act as it is carried out before them. Within the confines of a text, a very similar process occurs. Depending on the context of the situation, the text either traces a transgressor as they perform the crime or it details the misdeed for the audience, that is, the spectator. After the crime is identified, the offender is sentenced, and often the text allows the audience-spectator to witness the carrying out of the sentence.

Since punishment is often used symbolically to either alter the body in a way used in the crime or to make a statement upon the body for others, depicting a punishment in a text acts as just another symbolic representation meant to make a statement. Spectacle is used to teach viewers and narrated to re-teach the readers. Symbols of punishment are spread throughout Anglo-Saxon literature. For example, Judith holding the head of Holofernes in the Old English *Judith* becomes a sign of not only her victory, and therefore God's, over the heathens, but also as a visual representation of Holofernes' punishment. In *Beowulf,* Grendel's arm and head is used as a *tacen* or symbol of his punishment for his horrendous deeds against Heorot (discussed in Bremmer, "Grendel's Arm"; O'Gorman, "Mutilation and Spectacle"). Other visual and corporeal symbols of punishment occur in Anglo-Saxon literature: Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into a wild beast in the Old English *Daniel,* Heremod's exile from civilization in *Beowulf,* Lot's wife's transformation into a pillar of salt in *Genesis A&B,* and even Modþryth's silencing in *Beowulf.* These literary examples portray what Foucault calls "the theatrical representation of pain" (14). In Jody Enders' *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence,* she claims that Foucault's idea of spectator punishment combines the medieval oral and written cultures through representations of punishment. She writes, "With its imaginary rehearsals of actual or apocryphal

acts of violence, memory actually presages the spectacle of real interventions upon real bodies in pain" (111). The "theatrics" involved in literary spectacles allows the audience to experience the public punishment as if they were standing at the foot of the scaffold within a controlled, yet influential, environment that remains within their memory. This gives the voices behind the texts the power to generate hypothetical crimes and their punishments as a warning to their audience without having to wait for a transgressor in reality; therefore, they can warn against the crime before one even occurs.

Anglo-Saxon texts commonly use the physical body as the medium for these punishments. Because the body is the physical and the visual reality, it acts as a concrete manifestation that takes the punishment beyond the spiritual realm. Writing crimes upon the body provides a vivid image in terms that the audience can comprehend because those terms are within the realm of the physical. One of the core concerns of Foucault's idea of punishment is that the body is central because of its "political economy…even if they do not make use of violent or bloody punishment, even when they use 'lenient' methods involving confinement or correction, it is always the body that is at issue" (25). According to this idea then, the body functions as a source and nexus of power. This "body politic" is a medium that "supports…the power and knowledge relations that invest human bodies and subjugate them by turning them into objects of knowledge" (28). Since the characters analyzed in this chapter are human monstrosities, the body acts as the central important object in determining their monstrosity. The body becomes an object of knowledge when the transformation writes the sin upon the body, removes the character's humanity, and replaces it with a bestial monster. Additionally, because the body is the avenue for both the punishment and the warning aimed at the audience, the body holds all the power.

Punishment serves, in Foucault's words, as an organized ritual of pain. He contends that torture and punishment follow "a legal code of pain" that adheres to strict guidelines. The corporal nature of punishment means that the punishment "must mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy" (34). The transformations that function as punishments in Anglo-Saxon literature mark the offenders in various ways. In some instances, such as Grendel or Holofernes, loss of body parts becomes the symbolic scar on the body, the mark left after damage has been inflicted onto the body. Yet other punishments provide the spectacle that Foucault mentions, such as Heremod's noticeable flight out of the community and Nebudchadnezzar's dramatic removal of clothes and habitation in the wilderness. The process by which these characters are punished becomes its own sort of ritual within the confines of the text. Each text follows a similar structure: the text depicts the offender's crime, followed by the sentencing where the offender undergoes some sort of physical or mental transformation. Through the texts, a familiar pattern plays out that allows the audience to recognize the scenes as a similar type of spectator punishment that they may view in real life. The ritual becomes "the expression of the power that punishes" (34). Through doling out appropriate consequences for the misdeeds presented within the confines of the text, the literary work holds the power and becomes the judge and the law. The systematic punishing of bodies in Anglo-Saxon literature is not random, but highly calculated. Just as spectator punishment is meant to do, the texts present a pattern of cause and effect to demonstrate that when one goes against the laws of the society, a significant and painful punishment is the result. This ritualized punishment "traces around or, rather, on the very body of the condemned man signs that must not be effaced." The punishment becomes a warning and

beacon, and as Foucault claims, consequently the "men will remember [the] public exhibition" (34).

The transformed body in Anglo-Saxon literature is the spectacle the audience is meant to view, internalize, and learn from. No longer resembling a human creature, this monstrosity symbolizes wickedness through the metamorphosis that has occurred. Misdeeds take one further from humanity, turning them into something hideous and repulsive as a result. This visual and symbolic nature of the punishment through the literature presents something that the audience is meant to recoil from, be scared of, and want to avoid. What the audience recoils from and fears on the transformed body is what Foucault calls the "truth of the crime" (35). To appropriately reinforce this truth, "symbolic torture" is carried out, where the execution or punishment connects directly to the nature of the crime committed (44-5). Not only does symbolic punishment connect to Anglo-Saxon law codes where the mutilation punishment would reflect the crime, but it also extends to literary texts where the transformation punishments correspond to the misdeed committed by the character. For a symbolic punishment to work, Foucault contends that the focus must be on the audience. He states:

> "The main character was the people, whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance. An execution that was known to be taking place, but which did so in secret, would scarcely have had any meaning. The aim was to make an example, not only by making people aware that the slightest offence was likely to be punished, but by arousing feelings of terror by the spectacle of power letting its anger fall upon the guilty person" (57-8).

The scaffold used in public executions and spectator punishments is akin to the literary realm, where the text is the scaffold left in place and the audience that is listening or reading is

the public watching the spectacle. Through the impressive detail provided that outlines the initial crimes and then describes the transformation, Anglo-Saxon texts serve as didactic examples to warn the audience the consequences of these particularly offensive social crimes.

1.2   Why the Head? Abjection with Beheadings

Mutilating punishments accomplish the goal of correcting the error of the spectator. Plato states in *Gorgias* that criminals of the most severe crimes "have thus become incurable" so they become examples for others when the spectators "observe these malefactors suffering in the greatest, the most painful, and the most fearful torments because of their sins, strung up forever in that prisonhouse of Hades, an example, a portent, and a warning to the unjust" (104). Anglo-Saxon texts feature similar, platonic ideas about punishment. *Maxims II*, for example, states that, "*Wearh hangian, fægere on gildan þæt he ær facen dyde manna cynne*" (The criminal should hang, should properly repay the evil he previous did, lines 55-7).[1] The Anglo-Saxon concept of justice explicated through the *Maxims* emphasizes retribution and achieving a sense of balance. Additionally, in heroic poetry such as *Beowulf* or *The Battle of Maldon,* retributive justice is also enforced through the idea of *wergild* and blood feud revenge killings. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault states, "the ideal punishment would be transparent to the crime that it punishes; thus, for him who contemplates it, it will be infallibly the sign of the crime, the idea of the offense will be enough to arouse the sign of punishment" (105). Anglo-Saxon audiences, "were expected to recognize and understand the impact of these imagined penalties" (Marafioti and Gates 6). Many Old English texts depict crimes and subsequent punishments, with the poetic version of *Judith* being one of the best examples of spectator punishment. In the poem, Holofernes is incurable of his crimes and depicted as a heathen prone to drunkenness, pride, and lechery, crimes for which

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[1] Quoted in and translated by Marafioti and Gates, pg. 5

he pays for with his head. He acts as a warning to the readers – the spectators – of the sins against God while Judith becomes the physical manifestation of God's justice on earth, and losing his head rightly fits Holofernes' crimes.

The beheading of Holofernes stands in *Judith* as an example of abjection. The poet spends the first seventy-five lines of the poem creating a literary character who acts as a monstrous human figure and incurs disgust onto the reader through his excess and vices. In *Powers of Horror,* Julia Kristeva argues that abjection occurs when something "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous" (4). Other scholars have used Kristeva's abjection theory to provide insight into *Beowulf* in recent years. Paul Acker's essay "Horror and the Maternal in *Beowulf"* and James Hala's essay "The Parturition of Poetry and the Birthing of Culture: The *Ides Aglæcwif* and *Beowulf*" use abjection theory to try to explain the role of Grendel's mother in the poem. In Renee Trilling's essay "Beyond Abjection: The Problem with Grendel's Mother Again", she builds upon Acker's use of abjection and the maternal where he analyzes Grendel's mother and explores the Anglo-Saxon cultural anxieties associated with revenge feuds, but expands her argument to claim that Grendel's mother transgressors boundaries and categories applied so stringently to other characters. Though all of these articles aim to analyze *Beowulf,* and specifically Grendel's mother, through abjection theory*,* in chapter one, I will apply Kristeva's concept of the abject to *Judith.* However, the abject applies to Holofernes through three important ideas: he defies boundaries and social orders; he is characterized by food refuse and excessive consumption through the mouth; and he becomes a visceral representation of the ultimate symbol of abjection when he becomes a beheaded corpse. These abject qualities create in Holofernes a monstrous

figure that serves as a visual warning and illustrates the consequences for existing outside the limits of society.

Holofernes disturbs the very identity and order of humanity by blurring the lines between human and monster while also acting outside of the boundaries of the accepted social norms. The act of his beheading is abject since his body exists in a liminal space where the corpse and head exist on the fringes of identity. The body is unidentifiable, only finding meaning when the head is connected because the head *is* identity. When the head is removed, the body becomes meaningless. Beheading results in negative space, where what once was is no longer, causing the spectator to always search and see what is not there. The decapitated person is a "radical, omnipresent absence…a substance that is precisely both *nowhere* and entirely *there,* wholly reduced to its objective material remnant" (Masciandaro 23). After Holofernes' beheading, he remains an essential presence in the poem. He's an "omnipresent absence" because he is no longer in the poem since he is dead, yet his head remains as the "objective material remnant" that allows his influence to still dictate the action of the characters. Holofernes' men's reaction is based around this absence, and the shift in attitude that leads to the victory of the Israelite army occurs because of Holofernes. Though he has been killed and is no longer a character, his head becomes a central symbol for the remaining action in the poem, from the moment Judith takes it from the Assyrian camp until she holds it high for the Israelite army to gaze upon.

Abjection arises from the potential of a "place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). This disintegration of meaning is caused by an inability to distinguish between the self and other, and it causes a human reaction, such as horror. When the social order is challenged, the resulting threat of chaos causes the potential for meaning to collapse. In the case of Anglo-Saxon monsters, their existence throws everything out of balance. Their existence tests the limits of

meaning, and blurs the lines between "self" – in other words, human – and other, that is, monster. Though a man, Holofernes reflects the characteristics of giants and monstrous beasts, and he thwarts the social systems of the *comitatus* and Christianity. Abjection "acknowledges [the subject] to be in perpetual danger" (9). Holofernes is a danger to the self because of his crimes against the established order, which is what gives the self meaning.

Abjection manifests through the disgust of human refuse. Eating, vomiting, bodily fluids, even a head – any remnant left behind triggers this reaction because "[f]ood loathing is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (Kristeva 2). Some vehicles for human refuse are located in the face: the mouth, the nose, and the eyes. These body parts all relate to consumption. Consumption therefore leads to refuse, which is abject. The head, then, is intimately connected with abjection. In *Judith*, the beginning of the poem centers on a feast. Between drinking, eating, and loud conversation, the mouth consumes and expels. Holofernes, the leader of this action, becomes an abject figure through these acts. The eyes serve as another form of consumption. Though disgusted by this consumption, the eyes serve as an example in abjection theory that provides "[t]he fascinated start that leads me towards and separates me from them" (2). The spectator, though repelled by abjection, is drawn to the abject at the same time he is separated from it: "One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it…violently and painfully…[o]ne thus understands why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims" (9). When a head is removed in poetry, the characters in the text become reluctantly disgusted, yet fascinated, spectators. The eyes of both the spectators and the lifeless head consume.

The corpse is the ultimate symbol of abjection. For the spectator, "the corpse…upsets even more violently the one who confronts it" and the headless body represents the "refuse and corpses" that a person must "thrust aside in order to live" (Kristeva 3). The corpse is death

infecting life, and the foul trunk of Holofernes that Judith leaves behind when she takes the head reminds his army and the audience of their own mortality. Like Beowulf's treatment of Grendel and Grendel's mother, Holofernes is not buried or burned, but abandoned as an identity-less corpse. Even his own men flee from him. When his men enter his tent and see his lifeless, headless body, they confront the ultimate abject object: the corpse. Yet each of these beheadings demonstrates the fascination with the abject. Judith and Beowulf lift the head and display it for the spectators, and the decapitated head reminds the viewer of his own mortality, while inciting disgust from the centers of consumption.

1.3   Monstrosity through Performativity

Heremod's transformation and punishment occur because of his inability like Holofernes to adhere to Anglo-Saxon cultural and social roles. The accepted social norms for Anglo-Saxon society presented in *Beowulf* were rigid and defined, where structured roles were outlined for what it meant to be a king and part of the *comitatus*. The rules and customs of the lord-retainer relationship were understood and reinforced through literature, and *Beowulf* explores all of these roles extensively. Hrothgar and Beowulf both serve as examples of kings, and their actions demonstrate both the successes and failures of kingship, while digressions, sermons, and speeches also explore the roles of kings. In some instances, the speaker gives examples of good and bad kings, such as when Hrothgar warns Beowulf about the dangers of being a bad king in his sermon. Furthermore, the scenes with Beowulf and the Geats aiding Hrothgar and Wiglaf's refusal to leave Beowulf during the fight with the dragon affirm the structure of lord-retainer relationship.

All of these social customs can be viewed as a type of performativity. In her 1988 essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist

Theory," Judith Butler details the construction of identity as a performative act. She claims that identity is developed as a "social reality through language, gesture, and all manner of symbolic social sign" (519). In *Gender Trouble*, she furthers this idea by saying:

> According to the understanding of identification as an enacted fantasy or incorporation, however, it is clear that coherence is desired, wished for, idealized, and that this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, as *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means.[2] (136)

Though Butler's argument focuses on gender construction, Derrida's explanation of monstrosity shows that performativity can be expanded to include all facets of cultural identity. In his essay "*Geschlect* II: Heidegger's Hand," Derrida explains that humans possess the unique quality of assigning meaning to bodily actions and relates physical actions to signifying moments. He states, "The hand is monstrasity [*monstrosite*], the proper of man as the being of monstration. This distinguishes him from every other *Geschlecht,* and above all from the ape. The hand cannot be spoken about without speaking of technics" (169). In Butler's argument, she claims that identity is a fabricated illusion, but an illusion that is needed for society. Society holds itself together through the "coherence" gained through the "corporeal signification." The acts that construct identity are outward and superficial; that is, they are enacted bodily, meant to

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[2] Emphasis is Butler's.

be seen and interpreted by others, and therefore performative. Like Butler, Derrida suggests that

acts and gestures produce an effect possessing meaning. In his explication, he uses the word

monstrosite to relate to the idea of "showing", where the hands become the visual sign for the

man who enacts his monstration, or performative act. Being able to use the hands to convey

meaning, and to watch another person move their hands and ascertain context, fully places us as

humans separate from beasts. By viewing physical movements in this way, all of a person's

interactions with others can be interpreted as performative action. They are rituals and roles

ingrained into the society that the individual adheres to so that they may remain inside the

society.[3]

In addition to providing signification without words, performativity can also hinge on a

void in meaning. According to Derrida, the root of the word monster *(la monstre)* connects to the

idea of showing, thus monsters are anything that "shows and warns."[4] However, the monstrous

occurs because the "showing, signifying, designating" is a specific type of sign, and "this sign is

void of sense…showing, informing, warning, pointing as sign towards, but in truth towards

nothing…display that deviates from the display or monstration, a monster that shows nothing"

(167). Since the performative action modifies the known rituals, it no longer falls within the

established societal parameters. The sign then points towards something that does not exist, a

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[3] Similar to Butler's argument, J.L. Austin, in his work *How To Do Things With Words,* explains performativity by stating that the performance of the act is "the object of the utterance...it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate,* and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions" (8). By claiming that performativity begins with words, Austin suggests a relationship between the words uttered and the surrounding physical or mental actions. Conversely, performativity can create truths where no words have been spoken; the truths are manifested only through wordless performative actions and rituals, where these wordless rituals are performed either by the speaker to help provide significance, or by those experiencing the rituals to process the significance of the performance. However, words can reinforce the physical performance and serve as another form of performativity.

[4] In Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*, he glosses the word *monstrare*: "Monsters, in fact, are so called as warning, because they explain something of meaning, or because they make known at once what is to become visible"

void in the comprehension of rituals or order. Because of this, a new performative action has to

be generated from nothing, but this new performativity is wrong and without any rules to provide

context, so it becomes monstrous. Its genesis establishes a new, altered set of rules outside of the

accepted norm.

In *Beowulf,* words and speeches dominate the action of the poem, and through these

speeches characters relate past events and tell stories to their audience. To be understood within

the context of the poem, this performative action relies on the understanding of those around to

interpret the significance of the performance. Social performativity "depends for its efficacy on

an elaborate context of protocols, rules, institutions, roles, laws, and established formulae. These

need to be in place before the performative utterance is made" (Miller 179). If the preexisting

rules are not outlined, then the performance fails and does not achieve the required reaction. The

performance – whether a speech, an act, or a punishment – only adopts meaning when

responding to the established guidelines and context.

By engaging in actions outside of the accepted significance of identity, monstrosity also

arises from performativity. Contrary to performative acts executed within an established milieu,

"the alternative kind of performative creates the norms and laws that validate it" (Miller 179).

Through this act, everything is altered afterwards because the performative act is new and creates

a new outcome or consequence. Derrida argues that sometimes a performative act as this "while

continuing to work through tradition emerges at a given moment as a *monster*, a monstrous

mutation without tradition or normative precedent" (qtd. in Wortham 63). When an utterance -

either a spoken act or a physical action – contradicts the performative social norm, it becomes a

monstrous mutation. Thus, monstrous mutation contradicts "the legacies of 'belonging' that are

tied to notions of culture" (Wortham 67). This sense of belonging is pivotal to the stability of

culture and society. Since performativity in general relies on the pre-established rules and order before it is enacted, "the performative neither creates them nor alters them. It depends on their unaltered continuity" (Miller 179). All ceremony, ritual, and custom that dictate the societal construction are performative actions, and the construction of a social identity relies upon the individual to follow and interpret the appropriate performative actions. These can be considered what Butler calls "normative positions" (*Bodies* 14). Though she uses the term to refer to the sexes, the idea can be expanded to include all sorts of normative bodies. The normative position is the socially acceptable one. Following established performative roles shapes each individual into a person who is a socially acceptable being. Butler contends, "Performativity is not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms" (*Bodies* 12). When someone goes outside of the set of norms, creating a monstrous mutation which exists outside of the established rituals, he enters a liminal space, the space of monsters. This liminal space outside of the socially accepted actions is generated through alternative performativity, where the performance disrupts the known social cues and creates something completely new that contrasts and threatens the established order.

Chapter one focuses on the bodily transformations in *Judith*. Holofernes is beheaded by Judith and considered a monster due to his actions and the language used to describe him. Just as important as the beheading, the text's monster, Holofernes, is described in language usually attributed to giants, which aligns him with a specific type of medieval monster. An exploration of monster giants, along with the punishment of beheadings, compliments the discussion of Holofernes' and his men being depicted as monsters. Furthermore, I apply Kristeva's abjection theory to Holofernes to demonstrate the importance of his head at the center of his monstrosity and why Judith's decapitation punishment of him is significant.

Chapter two of my dissertation analyzes the bodily transformations as punishment in religious-themed texts, focusing on Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into a wild animal, the fall of the angels from heaven, and the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt. The practice in late antiquity of categorizing monstrous races establishes the foundation on which the Anglo-Saxons constructed their definitions of beast, man, and rationality. For example, Augustine tried to differentiate between what made one human or monster, and Isidore categorized the terms in his *Etymologies*. The *Liber Monstrorum*, the Anglo-Saxon book of monsters, divides monsters into three categories: men, beasts, and serpents. The book distinguishes between the classification of *men* and *beast*, and many of the monstrous men are hybrid creatures who range from mostly human to mostly beast. Boethius also defines humanity in *The Consolation of Philosophy,* along with King Alfred's Old English translation, which is particularly important to analyze in regard to the Anglo-Saxon definition. This historical context leads into a discussion of the Old English poems *Genesis A & B* and *Daniel*. Using *Daniel*, I focus on Nebuchadnezzar's transformation punishment from a rational human to a wild animal. Then, I analyze two important punishments found in *Genesis A & B*: the fall of the angels from heaven, and Lot's wife turning into the pillar of salt. Each of these three punishments in *Daniel* and Genesis *A & B* present different types of transformations. The way Nebuchadnezzar loses his reason aligns with Augustine's idea of humanity, creating a stark differentiation between human and animal. The fall of the angels serves as the precursor to Cain's sin, which is significant since medieval thinkers believed monsters descended from the line of Cain. The fall of the angels also sets up the dichotomy between good and evil, which the idea of monstrosity hinges upon; furthermore, the fall also sets up the monster living on the outside motif that plays such a significant role in texts like *Beowulf. Genesis A & B* depicts the transformation of Lot's wife into the pillar as

something the reader can go see as they read the story centuries later; this opens the idea that punishments are eternal, tangible notions that serve as warnings.

Chapter three explores the cultural transformation of a minor character in *Beowulf,* Heremod; this human monstrosity undergoes punishment resulting from his transgressions against society. Most critics believe Heremod serves as a parallel to his counterparts, Sigemund, warning against the dangers of being a bad king (Dragland; Orchard; Overing). While I do not disagree with this assertion, I investigate this minor character as a human monstrosity. While Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon are supernatural, physical monsters, Heremod functions as a cultural monster. He is in many ways just as dangerous, if not more dangerous, than the physical monsters in the text. He presents dangers that remain hidden beneath the guise of humanity. Heremod acts against every notion of Anglo-Saxon community with the poem, from cutting down his table companions to running away from the joyous sounds of the mead hall. The language used to describe Heremod aligns with Grendel, one of the physical monsters in the text. Although most critics parallel Heremod to Sigemund, the Heremod-Grendel and Heremod-Beowulf parallels are just as important because they broaden the limits on monstrosity. Heremod and Grendel act as inverses of one another; Heremod increasingly acts more monstrous, to the point where he retreats away from the mead hall and into the marshes, whereas Grendel approaches the mead hall from the fens. They both pervert social norms, resulting in monstrous acts.

The fourth chapter examines the language used to describe armor in *Beowulf*, which suggests that warriors like the Geats wear armor and perform monstrous acts of violence. The armor transforms them into socially accepted "monsters," which exempts them from punishment once they remove the armor. In *Beowulf,* Beowulf and the Geats arrive on the shore of Denmark,

wearing threatening armor. This armor makes the warriors look fierce, but the description of the armor provides a multifaceted meaning. Beowulf initially presents himself to the Danes as a potential monstrous figure, and the language that describes him fits within the "monstrous language" used in the poem. The mail, helmets, and weapons are described in terms of fire and burning, while simultaneously being dark, grim, and grey. These images of fire and burning contrast with Heorot, which is described as gold and gleaming, an ironic place of light in dark times. The use of Beowulf's armor is extremely specific and important, pointing to significant transformations in his character.

My ultimate aim in this dissertation is to argue the validity of an additional category for Anglo-Saxon monsters, that of the human monstrosities. Despite a critical tradition of analyzing monsters within strictly defined categories, I argue that the spectrum of monsters found in Old English literature is more fluid and intricate than the established narrow classes allow. Like traditional monsters, human monstrosities threaten the human world and the balance of civilization by upsetting the accepted social customs. However, in consequence of this crime against humanity, these monsters suffer transformation punishments that align with their transgressions. Most transformations result in a removal, either physically or mentally, that expels the human monstrosity out of their original place in civilization into the liminal spaces inhabited by monsters. Additionally, I am influenced by three theoretical lens: Foucault's punishment theory; Kristeva's abjection theory; and Butler's theory of performativity. Foucault's theory of punishment explores the idea of spectator punishment as symbolically making a statement upon the body that re-teaches the viewer. By using Foucault's assertion that the body serves as the nexus of power, I argue that the human monstrosities experience transformation punishments because the body is the determining object for the human monstrosity and holds all

of the power. In analyzing Holofernes' role as a monster, I apply Kristeva's abjection theory. Abjection theory centers around the disturbing placement of things that are in-between established borders and how these ambiguous things disrupt the balance. Additionally, abjection explores the repulsion associated with food refuse, excessive consumption, and decaying corpses. Since Holofernes' monstrosity originates from his sins of gluttony, drunkenness, and lechery, this disturbing behavior creates a visceral repulsion. Finally, Butler's performative theory elucidates the ways in which bodily actions and social customs signify meaning. This theory is applied to the accepted rules of kingship and Anglo-Saxon culture defied by Heremod and Nebuchadnezzar, along with the way in which warrior identity is created and enacted through armor worn by the Geats. Through close lexical, historical, and literary analysis of *Judith, Daniel, Genesis A&B,* and *Beowulf,* I contend that the vocabulary and literary devices presented within each poem support the place of human monstrosities in Anglo-Saxon literature.

2   CHAPTER ONE: THE BEHEADING OF HOLOFERNES: LOSS OF HUMANITY, REASON, AND THE HEAD IN THE OLD ENGLISH JUDITH

The Old English poem *Judith* follows a heroine sent by God to behead the villainous general Holofernes. After completing her seemingly impossible task, she carries the head to the Hebrew army, displaying it and helping them achieve a victory over the Assyrian army. This heroic act characterizes Judith as a hero and soldier for God while the violence enacted against Holofernes intensifies the victory over his evil deeds. At the center of *Judith*, and one of the most important symbols in the poem, is the head of Holofernes. Beheadings like the one depicted in *Judith* are pervasive events throughout medieval literature. In Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae,* Arthur defeats the giant of St. Michael's Mount and instructs one of his men to cut off the giant's head. Bede cites instances of beheaded kings in his *Ecclesiastical History of*

the English People. He writes of King Edwin's death in 633 A.D., when Edwin is killed in battle at Haethfelth. Later "the head of King Eadwine was carried to York" (140). King Oswald, killed in 642 A.D., was also beheaded when "*Heht se cyning, se ðe hine slog, his heafod on steng asetton; his hond mid þy earme, þe of his lichoman aslegen wæa, het to ahoon"* [The king who slew him, ordered his head to be set on a pole, and to hang up his hand with the arm, that was struck from his body[5]].[6] In the limited extant Anglo-Saxon corpus, scenes of beheading appear multiple times. Two texts in the Cotton Vitellius A.xv manuscript include the motif: Beowulf beheads both Grendel and his mother in *Beowulf* and Judith beheads Holofernes in *Judith.* Hagiography such as Ælfric's *Life of Saint Edmund* also depicts beheaded saints. Middle English verse furthers this tradition with perhaps the most famous of the medieval beheading games appearing in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight.* Prior to *Sir Gawain,* the beheading game motif appeared earlier in folklore, like in the Old Irish tale *Fled Bricrend* and the French *Le Livre de Caradoc.* From this small list, one can easily see that many medieval authors were interested in the act of severing heads.

For Old English literature, the head symbolizes the display of power and victory, but ultimately carries more significance. Since the head is a shocking visual symbol, the act of beheading serves as a spectator punishment and performative act for the victor. The decapitation of monsters, such as Holofernes in the Old English *Judith,* becomes a warning of the harsh consequences for disregarding the social norm, and therefore, God. Though Old English

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[5] Translation by Thomas Miller. *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People.* Trans. Thomas Miller. Cambridge: In parentheses Publications, 1999. Web. 25 July 2015.
[6] For more on the deaths of King Edwin and Oswald, see Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., "Grendel's Arm and the Law," in *Studies in English Language and Literature: Doubt Wisely*, ed. M.J. Toswell and E.M. Tyler (London: Routledge, 1996), 121-32; Daniel O'Gorman, "Mutilation and Spectacle in Anglo-Saxon Legislation," in *Capital and Corporal Punishment in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. J.P. Gates and N. Marafioti (Rochester: The Boydell Press, 2014), 149-164; John Edward Damon, "*Desecto Capite Perfido:* Bodily Fragmentation and Reciprocal Violence in Anglo-Saxon England,*" Exemplaria: A Journal of Theory in Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 13.2 (2001): 299-432.

literature has limited association between the head and reason, the connection does occur within the texts. Because of this correlation, the head also serves as a symbol for reason and humanity, and decapitation becomes a punishment for monstrous figures that have rejected humanity and reason, leading to the removal of the seat of this key characteristic of humanity. Because of the way that the beheading punishments are carried out, they serve as performative actions associated with the political economy of power between humans and monsters.

In the Old English *Judith,* Holofernes succumbs to vice and excess, effectively erasing his humanity. These acts turn him monstrous and results in his decapitation, which acts as a spectator punishment for his sins. The punishment of beheading allows for a reading of *Judith* through abjection theory. Any crime or misdeed against society can be an example of the abject because "it draws attention to the fragility of the law"; abjection is "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady" (Kristeva 4). The threatening figures – such as Holofernes – must be rejected, excluded from society, and therefore eliminated to reestablish order. Additionally, Holofernes serves as a character who incurs disgust onto the reader through vice and excess. As abjection theory deals with something that "disturbs identity, system, and order" and "the in-between, the ambiguous," Holofernes demonstrates this by defying social boundaries and being characterized through food refuse and excessive consumption. His abjection centers around his mouth, where almost all human refuse originates through the mouth, nose, and eyes. The beginning of *Judith* details a feast where Holofernes participates in excessive drinking, eating and loud conversation. When he is beheaded, the decapitation is the ultimate symbol of abjection through the visceral representation of the beheaded corpse, which places his body in a liminal space where the severed head and corpse exist on the fringes of identity.

The Anglo-Saxon poem *Judith* emphasizes the power of the head and the literary importance of decapitation, and the poem features a beheading as a prominent plot device that directly affects the protagonists and transforms the decapitated character through punishment. Though most scholars agree on Judith's pivotal role in the defeat of Holofernes, many choose not to group *Judith* with other monster tales from the Nowell Codex. I argue that *Judith's* placement in the manuscript alongside *Beowulf* and other texts containing monsters should not be ignored because of Holofernes' role as a monstrous human. By placing Holofernes into that categorical gap, his actions and descriptions provide expanded ways of interpreting his role and the poem as a whole. Holofernes serves as a gluttonous giant-like figure, whose monstrous ways result in his loss of reason, which is performatively punished by his decapitation. *Judith* is found in the Nowell Codex, and is dated around the late tenth to the early eleventh century. The fragmented poem is an Old English version of the biblical tale of Judith, a Jewish woman who beheads the Assyrian general Holofernes and then takes the head back to the Israelites. Scholars have done much research on Judith's role as a woman, the religious implications of the text, Judith's function as a saintly figure, the historical and political influences on the poem, the importance of the fragment, and the significance of its place in the manuscript.[7] *Judith* directly follows *Beowulf* in the Cotton Vitellius A.xv manuscript, with the other texts in the manuscript including *The Life*

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[7] See Hugh Magennis, *Gender and Heroism in the Old English Judith,* England: Brewer, 2002; /Wilkie Collins, "The Master-Mistress': Complicating Figurations of Desire in the Old English 'Judith'", *Medieval Perspectives* 22 (2011), 20-28; Christine Thijs, "Feminine Heroism in the Old English *Judith*", *Leeds Studies in English* 37 (2006), 41-62; Karma Lochrie, *Gender, Sexual Violence and the Politics of War in the Old English 'Judith',* Indiana UP, 1994; R.E. Kaske, "Sapientia et Fortitudo in the Old English *Judith*." *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*. Ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel. Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute, 1982; Bernice W. Kliman, "Women in Early English Literature, 'Beowulf to the 'Ancrene Wisse.'" *Nottingham Medieval Studies* 21 (1977): 32-49; J. P. Hermann, "The Theme of Spiritual Warfare in the Old English *Judith*", *Philological Quarterly*, 55 (1976), i-9; M. Locherbie-Cameron, "Wisdom as a Key to Heroism in *Judith*", *Poetica*, 27 (1988), 70-75; A. H. Olsen, "Inversion and Political Purpose in the Old English *Judith*", *English Studies*, 63 (1982), 289-93; A. W. Astell, "Holofernes's head: *tacen* and teaching in the Old English *Judith*", *Anglo-Saxon England*, i8 (1989), 117-33; J.J. Campbell, "Schematic Technique in Judith", *English Literary History*, 38 (197I), I55-72; P.J. Lucas, "The Place of Judith in the Beowulf-Manuscript", *The Review of English Studies*, n.s. 41 (1990), 463-78; R. Woolf, "The Lost Opening to the 'Judith'", *Modern Language Review*, 50 (I955), 168-7.

of Saint Christopher, Wonders of the East, and *Letters of Alexander to Aristotle.* Kenneth Sisam

was the first scholar to suggest that the compilation of the *Beowulf* manuscript may have been

compiled because of the texts' concern with monsters in his 1953 essay "The Compilation of the

Beowulf Manuscript." He states that the Nowell Codex "is a collection in verse and prose of

marvellous stories" with a unifying theme of monsters (65-67). Andy Orchard developed his

book *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* around the idea

that "two themes…connect the texts…: pride and prodigies" (27). Other critics have used

Sisam's assertion to explore the importance of monsters as the unifying factor of the *Beowulf*

manuscript. Although the unifying thread of monsters is important to the texts, especially

Beowulf and *Judith*, the motif of decapitation, and the head as Godfrey points out, is an

important element to the texts contained within the manuscript.

  Judith is often removed from the category of monstrous texts in the Nowell Codex. Sisam

argues that *Judith* does not fit into the thematic design like the other texts in the manuscript

because "Holofernes was no monster" (67). Howell Chickering in his article "Poetic Exuberance

in the Old English *Judith*" addresses different ways of reading the poem, including sexual

violence, gender role reversals, and combinations of "heroic poetry and hagiography" (123). Ann

W. Astell explores the poem's allegorical implications, while Peter J. Lucas argues for Judith's

role as a hero. *Judith* need not be excluded from the Codex's monster theme. Holofernes can be

read as a monster, just not in the same way that Grendel is read as a monster since Holofernes is

a human monster. Casting Holofernes as the villain in the poem is not a new idea. Most scholars

agree that *Judith* is a poem about good fighting evil. Judith represents "God" while Holofernes is

linked "to the devil…[so] the contrast between the two characters is absolute" (Hartman 432).

The pure, good hero Judith, who "represents good, the Church, and chastity," fights a villain

characterized by debauchery and sin, symbolizing "evil, Satan, and licentiousness." Because of this clear divide, "Judith is clearly meant to be a Christian hero, and Holofernes is most certainly cast in the light of a demonic monster" (Fee and Lemming 133). While reading Judith as the pure and chaste soldier of God and Holofernes as the devil is a strong, solid argument as countless scholars have shown over the years, it is not the only way to read their dynamic. By reading Holofernes as a human monster, along the same lines as the evil king Heremod in *Beowulf*[8], and equating him to giant monsters, such as Grendel or the giant of Mont Saint Michel, Holofernes' actions, punishments, and transformations can be seen to align with the other stories of monsters and their punishments throughout Old English literature.

2.1 The Head in Old English Literature

Decapitation was one of the documented capital punishments in Anglo-Saxon England. Beheading as a punishment "was one of several degrading punishments appropriate for a court to inflict upon traitors or petty traitors" (Suppe 160). While many punishments, such as mutilation or hanging, cannot be easily studied, decapitation is more pronounced through osteological evidence. Because beheadings are carried out with weapons such as an axe or sword, the bones often display evidence of the act, such as clefts in the bone that differ from cuts made to remove the head of a hanging victim (Buckberry 133). Archeological evidence from late Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries shows decapitated and mutilated skeletons in shallow graves in liminal spaces and along roadways (Buckberry 132). Formal execution cemeteries began cropping up in the seventh to ninth centuries, and by the period of the ninth to twelfth centuries, execution cemeteries were more commonplace (Reynolds 233). These cemeteries also displayed the heads of criminals and traitors on spikes until they started decomposing. Many of these execution

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[8] Heremod's classification as a monstrous human is discussed in chapter 3 of this dissertation

cemeteries were located along the edge of roadways, so the severed heads acted as symbol of

punishment (Buckberry 140; Reynolds 224). Heads were also placed outside town walls on

stakes (Reynolds 243). Although the severed heads aligning the Anglo-Saxon execution

cemeteries belonged to criminals, the care used to sever them without excess bodily damage

emphasizes the importance of the body part. The head remained intact, so facial recognition

remained possible. William the Conqueror used beheading as a punishment after coming to

England. The first time he used decapitation as a punishment was ten years after the Battle of

Hastings in 1076 when he executed an earl (Engel 106). The acts of decapitation that appear in

Anglo-Saxon literature may "suggest the Anglo-Saxon custom of taking away an enemy's head

as a token of victory" (Shirai 320). However, beheading can also be a result of the physical shape

of the body, making the head the easiest part of the body to remove (Engel 106).

The head did not hold the same significance in Anglo-Saxon literature as it does for

modern readers. Scant evidence from the time period supports the notion that mental activity

came from the head. Despite this, some Old English medical writings influenced by Latin texts

suggest that some scholars may have believed that the brain was located in the head even though

that concept was not widely acknowledged during the period (McIlwain 103-112). In Mary

Flavia Godfrey's article "*Beowulf* and *Judith*: Thematizing Decapitation in Old English Poetry,"

she argues that "the inclusion of these two works testifies to a continuing fascination in monastic

culture with pre-Christian beliefs about the human body, of the head as the source of intellection

and creation" (6). However, in poetic and religious texts, Anglo-Saxons located the

consciousness, the mind, the soul, mental faculties, and feeling in the chest.[9] Often, when

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[9] For more about mental and emotional activity in the chest and the cardiocentric mind, see Leslie Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto: UP of Toronto, 2011); Antonina Harbus, *The Life of the Mind in Old English Poetry* (Amsterdam-New York: Rodopi, 2002); Malcolm Godden, "Anglo-Saxons on the Mind," in *Old English Critical Essays*, ed. R.M. Liuzza (New York and London: Yale UP, 2002), 284-314;

referring to the acts of feeling or thought, these acts occurred within some kind of "mental enclosure" or "mind container" (Mize 57). The word *mod* is used often in a variety of ways, all centering around a person's inner self. The *Bosworth-Toller* glosses *mod* as "the spiritual as opposed to the bodily part of a man…soul, heart, spirit, mind, disposition, mood." But the *mod* is not connected with the physical head, but as an inner mental space and "a person's spiritual center, as well as the seat of emotions and thought" (Harbus 38). Mental and emotional activity was not separated, but believed to interconnect. Leslie Lockett has explored in depth the use of cardiocentric vocabulary to reference mental events. The mind, which housed both ideas and emotions, was centered in the chest, a bodily area represented in the literature through the words *heorte, breost,* or *hreðer* (Lockett 62). She contends that intense feelings of grief, anger, or yearnings are associated with heat in the chest cavity, while depictions of grief, anger, desire, and love are described using words meaning to boil, seethe, or swell (57-59).

Though poetic language supports the idea that Anglo-Saxons situated the mind and consciousness in the chest or heart instead of the head, the head still relates to ideas of thought. Amid the overwhelming evidence of language connecting the chest and heart to the mind, there are a few examples of the head as the seat of thought or reason. *Beowulf* contains the line, "Þonne bið on hreþre under helm drepen" (Then he is struck in his heart under his helm, line 1745). The line references the heart, not the mind, but locates it under the helm, in the place of the head. Though the line could metaphorically mean the entire person, which contains the heart, is located under the helm, an alternative reading of the line can also be applied. The placement provides a parallel for the seat of intellect being in the same place as the head. Another example that connects the head and the heart occurs in the Old English poem *Genesis A*: "on hreðre

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Britt Mize, "The Representation of the Mind as an Enclosure in Old English Poetry," in *ASE* 35 (2006): 57-90; Soon Ai Low, "Approaches to the Old English Vocabulary for 'Mind,'" in *Studia Neophilogica* 73 (2001): 11-22.

heafodswima/…heortan clypte" (in his mind, swimming in the head [dizziness] embraced his heart, lines 1568-1569). The word *heafodswima,* glossed in the Bosworth-Toller as dizziness, is a compound containing *heafod,* head. The poet relates the head and the heart, and despite "a somewhat confused sense of the location of the mind…the compound based on *heafod* 'head' has not deterred the poet from co-locating the *hreþer* and the *heorte* with it" (Harbus 39). The *Durham Proverbs* make a more physical connection between the head and the heart: "Eall on muðe þæt on mode" (All in the mouth that is in the mind, line 12). A Middle English version of the same proverb reads, "That the hert thynkyt the mowte spekyt."[10] The following exchange occurs in the Dialogue of *Adrian and Ritheus*: "Saga me, hwær bið mannes mod? / Ic ðe secge, on ðam heafde, and gæð ut þyrh ðone muð" (Tell me, where is a man's mind? I tell you, in the head, and it goes out through the mouth, 23). Both of these examples cite the mouth as the vessel through which the mind communicates. *Adrian and Ritheus* even declares that "mannes mod" is in the "heafde." The poetic *Edda*, a Scandanavian text referenced in Old English poems like *Beowulf* and *Deor*, depicts multiple examples of the head in relation to knowledge and wisdom.[11] Though the aforementioned only represent a few examples of a head-mind connection, they do prove that in multiple places the relationship of the mind extends beyond the chest to the head.

Through the connection in the literature between the head and the mind, the head may be included in the realm of mental faculties while not ignoring the central importance of the chest. Ultimately, the head functions as the seat of perception. The head contains organs connected to all of the five senses – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin – and these organs culminate to make the head the most important region of the body to experiencing the world. Though touch is achieved from anywhere on the body, the other four senses are limited only to the head, which

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[10] Quoted in *The Cambridge Old English Reader,* ed. Richard Marsden, pg. 353.
[11] See Godfrey, "Decapitation in Old English Poetry," 6-12.

means that any knowledge gained passes first through organs of the head. Even if the Anglo-Saxons believed the mind was found in the chest, the head had to initially engage with anything that was to be processed by the mind. Therefore, in addition to the certain death caused by beheading, the loss of the head leads to the loss of that outward engagement with the world because without the head, the body has no way of interpreting and ingesting the world around it. The correlation between the head and the mind is strengthened with the evidence that the texts that deal so heavily with decapitation – *Beowulf* and *Judith,* for instance – explore the themes of reason, mental and emotional activity, and monstrosity. *Judith* is a poem that overwhelmingly deals with matters of the mind, reason, emotions, and most importantly, heads. While the mind may be located in the chest, the head acts not only as the seat of the mind, but as the physical output of the mind. The head, then, becomes a physical, external representation of the body's engagement with the world.

One of the defining characteristics of humanity is intelligence, the ability to reason, to wit, and to think. Augustine attributes reason to humanity in *The City of God*: "But whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal" (Ch. VIII). The capacity for intelligence and the ability to understand rational thinking is described as being located in the chest, but the head serves as an external marker. When the head is removed, the physical representation of reason is eliminated. Heads allow man to speak, another characteristic separating the human race from animals. The head acts as an identifier that makes one human, and the organs located in the head – the eyes and the mouth – are the vehicles for that humanity. Though much of the language surrounding speech is also connected to the chest[12], the head is the external mode by which speech is released. By removing the head, one removes what it means to be human from

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[12] See Eric Jager, "Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry: Orality or Pectorality?", 845-59.

the body by silencing the power of speech (Godfrey 6). In *The Life of Saint Edmund,* the miracle surrounds the fact that Edmund's head still speaks after it is removed, pointing to the power and importance of the head as a vehicle for human speech and communication. Since humanity is the quality that separates beasts from man, removing the head – the symbol for humanity and reason – becomes an extremely powerful action. The person who beheads the other takes control, both symbolically and physically, of the object that encloses the essence of being.

If the chest is the center of mental activity, then what is the head in Anglo-Saxon literature? The head obviously was a concern for Anglo-Saxons. The literature contains numerous examples of beheaded characters. In *Beowulf,* there are three examples of beheadings. When Beowulf is in the mere fighting Grendel's mother, he "yrringa sloh,/þæt hire wið hales heard grapode,/banhringas bræc" (angrily struck so that it touched against her neck hard, broke the bone-rings, lines 1565b-1567a). Beowulf decapitates and kills Grendel's mother with this action, and then he goes over to Grendel's lifeless corpse, strikes him, "ond hine þa heafde beċearf" (and his head was cut off, line 1590b). In this climatic scene, the poet describes Beowulf physically removing both heads. But that does not finish the action with the removed head. Beowulf's men then drag Grendel's head into the mead hall by the hair to display it for everyone. The third beheaded character in *Beowulf* is Æschere. When they follow Grendel's mother's tracks, "Æscheres/on þam holmcliffe hafelan mētton" (on that sea-cliff they met Æschere's head, line 1420b-1421). After she steals him from Heorot, Grendel's mother beheads him off-page and then displays his head on a pike outside her lair.

In addition to the three beheaded characters, the poem offers two more attempts at beheading that demonstrates the relationship between the head and power. When Beowulf and Wiglaf fight the dragon, the poet describes the attack: "mægenstrengo sloh/hildebill þæt hyt on

heafolan stod/niþe ġenyded" (struck with great force with his sword, so that the sword stood in the head, violently forced, lines 2679b-2680a). The focus of the sword's blow centers on the head instead of any other part of the body while the mode of attack parallels the other two battles in that the final strikes are to the head. Unlike with Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf does not decapitate his opponent. Since the head represents power for the victor, and this final battle of Beowulf's is a failure, he cannot achieve the same end result as the other battles, which is beheading his opponent. However, Beowulf is not completely impotent since he does inflict violence upon the head by stabbing the dragon there. The verb *ge-nidan* (2680a) means to force an object to or from a position; additionally, the verb is modified by *niþe,* meaning violently or hatefully.[13] Instead of using the sword to slice through the neck and remove the head, he shoves it violently into the head, ultimately failing and achieving the inverse of the intended outcome. Unlike a decapitation, the sword only pierces the head and Beowulf is powerless at this point to completely remove the head.

The dragon, on the other hand, asserts more power in the fight, so he comes closer to beheading his opponent. When the dragon retaliates, he "heals ealne ymbefeng/biteran banum" (enclosed all [Beowulf's] neck in his sharp teeth, lines 2691b-2692b). During the dragon's part of the action, the event described specifically refers to enacting violence against the neck. The poet uses the word *ymbfon,* which means not only to grasp but also to surround.[14] In attacking Beowulf, the dragon surrounds his neck with his sharp teeth, which function just as much as a weapon as a sword. Though the wound was bloody and mortal, the dragon still did not behead Beowulf, and ultimately Beowulf has to stab the dragon lower on the body to kill him. By beginning the fight scene with the dragon with a focus on the head and neck, the poem draws to a

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[13] *ge-nidan* and *niþ* in the Bosworth-Toller
[14] *ymbfon* in Bosworth-Toller

close with another reference to beheading. Though the dragon does not remove Beowulf's head, he bites into his neck, which is the same type of wound needed to remove a head, and this therefore stands in for the beheading. The wound is fatal for Beowulf, emphasizing the power associated with the head and the act of beheading.

Beheading literally separates the head from the body, but it symbolically separates the transgressor from the group. Because the internal self cannot be changed, either because the character is too monstrous or too evil, the body must be transformed. Criminals and monsters all exist in a liminal space because of their actions. They have either committed crimes against the law or crimes against humanity. Removing the head reassures those within the society by transforming the being into something even more inhuman while reminding the viewer of the criminal or monster's identity so they know order has been restored. In the case of saints, they too exist in a liminal space, but on the other end of the spectrum. They are not too monstrous, but super-human through their deeds of faith. Losing their heads allows them to transcend above the social order of humans. Decapitation divides the group from those who try to transgress against the prescribed social norms.

Religious texts like *Judith* feature scenes of decapitation that emphasize the head as an object of importance. Arguably the most famous Biblical beheading scene in Old English occurs in the poem *Judith*. In the text, examined in detail later in this chapter, God aids Judith in infiltrating the Assyrian camp and ultimately beheading the monstrous general Holofernes. Like in *Beowulf,* Judith takes the head back to her people and displays it for them, casting the head into an important role. The hagiographical prose text *The Life of Saint Edmund* by Ælfric locates a beheading at the center of the miracle. After a detailed account of the bodily tortures inflicted upon Edmund, Edmund refuses to deny Christ, and Hingwar "het hine þa beheafdian"

(commanded his men to behead him, lines 215-216) and his men "slogon him of þæt heafod" (beheaded Edmund, line 219). The heathens hide the head in the woods, and God sends a wolf "to bewerigenne þæt heafod wið þa oþer deor" (to guard the head from other wild animals, lines 234-235). Though dead, the decapitated head remains animated. When people call out, "him andwyrde þæt heafod, 'Her, her, her'" (the head answered them, "Here, here, here," line 238). Edmund's men are able to retrieve his head and return it to his body. The plots of these two texts are centered around the beheadings of enemies. Since the beheadings are not tertiary events or asides, the texts stress the significant value of the head within the political economy of the body. By possessing the head, Judith and Hingwar hold the power; however, Judith maintains the power because she remains in possession of the head and presents it to her people, yet Hingwar ultimately fails since the power remains with the head, which allows God's miracle to be carried out through the reanimated head.

Juliana is a work of poetic hagiography that also contains beheading that functions as a display of power. After Eleusius has tortured her repeatedly, he commands she "aswebban…þurh sweordbite… heafde bineotan" (be put to death, killed with a sword, deprived of her head, lines 603-604). At the end, she becomes a martyr when she is killed: "ða hyre sawl wearð /alæded of lice to þam langan gefean/þurh sweordslege" (then through a sword stroke, her soul came to be taken out of her body, to the eternal rejoicing, lines 669b-671a). The use of the word *bineotan* is significant in this passage because it means to deprive the use or enjoyment of something or to deprive of life.[15] To deprive someone of something is to deny their possession of it, which implies that the possession of the item is significant. The use of the word goes beyond the idea that Eleusius kills Juliana, but he robs her of something of value, therefore placing power on the

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[15] *Beneotan* in the Dictionary of Old English

head as an object. The head is a commodity of power, and by depriving her of it, Eleusius shifts

power to himself. In *Fates of the Apostles,* Bartholomew was executed by the heathens by being

heafde beneotan (deprived of his head, line 46) because he would not worship the pagan gods.

The heathen king takes away something valuable and powerful from Bartholomew – his head.

Though both of these martyrs find bliss in heaven after their death, their earthly punishments

were the removal of the head as an assertion of dominance. These religious-themed texts center

on beheadings, emphasizing that possession of the head provides a measure of power to the one

who deprives the head from the body.

So, what do these examples tell us about heads in Old English literature? Heads are

symbols of victory for the person who removes his opponent's head. The act of decapitation is

one of "performative affirmation[] of power and authority" (Tracy and Massey 1). Whether a

spoil of war, a tactical device in battle, or warning, the prominent display of the heads after death

is evidence that the head is a powerful visual representation. When kings were beheaded, their

heads were taken and displayed, making the head a trophy. Ann Astell argues that in *Judith,* the

head represents the Christians overcoming the heathens (122). In *Beowulf*, the display of

Æschere's head outside the mere demonstrates Grendel's mother's power, while Beowulf's

display of Grendel's head solidifies his position as ultimate victor in the eyes of Geats. Even the

saintly beheadings are meant to be a victory for their beheaders, though Edmund, Juliana, and

Bartholomew are liberated above that victory by God. In *Apollonius of Tyre,* mention of severed

heads on the gate illustrates the visual power of heads (*And þa heafda ealle wurdon gesette on

ufeweardan þam geate*, lines 39-40). Many of the beheadings found in Old English literature are

connected with monsters, and even Edmund can be argued to have monstrous connections, since

the beheading is carried out by heathens followed by protection from a monstrous figure in the

form of the wolf. In the literature, heads act as a strong symbol. Unlike when one witnesses heads lining a road or sees a person lift a head in victory, the literature does not have the clear visual clue that signifies power and domination. Furthermore, the overwhelming number of monstrous decapitations associates the political economy of power within a clear dichotomy: humans with reason triumph over the monsters. Choosing beheading as the punishment to defeat the monster emphasizes the importance of reason as a characteristic of humanity and goodness. Therefore, the literature specifically depicts the head as a symbol, and consistently Old English poetic texts use heads in similar symbolic ways to act as performative actions that not only give power to the beheader, but also to further the textual concern of reason as a marker of humanity.

Removing is not the only way the importance of heads is demonstrated. Some Anglo-Saxon texts feature monstrous human-animal hybrids where the head has been replaced. Saint Christopher is described as a dog-headed giant. Though the *Passion of St. Christopher*, contained in the Nowell Codex, is missing the first lines, and therefore the physical description, Old English Martyrology illustrates his monstrous description. The text claims that Christopher came "of þære þeode þær men habbað hunda heafod" (from the nation where men have a dog's head), "his teð wæron swa scearpe swa eofores tuxas" (his teeth were as sharp as a boar's tusk), and "he ne mihte sprecan swa man" (he could not speak as a man) (66). In *Passion of St. Christopher*, the king calls him "wyrresta wilddeor" (the worst wild beast, line 38). Saint Christopher is a beheaded figure in a sense, because he does not have a human head but the head of a dog. The Old English Martyrology also makes a reference to literal beheading when the king orders his subjects to find Christopher and "him brohtan þæt heafod" (bring him the head) so he can see what it looks like (66). The head becomes the valuable commodity for the king because it represents what makes Christopher worthy.

Like Saint Christopher, the donestre and blemmye are beings whose monstrosity is specifically figured as a misalignment of head and body. The blemmye are literally beheaded men, creatures without heads and faces in their chests. *Wonders of the East*, also located in the Nowell Codex, describes the donestre, a monstrous being part of a race of half-men/half-beasts who use speech to deceive and kill foreigners. They eat all of the body, except the head, which they keep and weep over: "Þonne hi fremdes kynnes mann gedeoð, ðonne næmnað hi hine his magas cuðra manna naman, mid leaslicum wordum hine beswicað, him onfoð, þænne æfter þan hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde þonne sittað wepað ofer ðam heafde" (20). The fact that the donestre keeps the head is curious, and it is even more curious that he weeps over the head. The head is significant, no matter the reason the donestre is weeping, even if he is weeping "from the guilt which plagues him, now that he has returned to his more human physiognomy" (Mittman 101). All of these examples show the separation between human and monster based on the type of head. The head of an animal or the lack of a head suggests that one is monstrous, while the possession of a head is a characteristic that makes one human. Therefore, depriving someone of their head not only shifts power to the one who removes the head, but it also turns the person who has lost their head into a monstrous being by removing one of the tokens that signify their humanity.

The head functions as the signifier that makes one human. In the stories of the saints, Juliana and Edmund have their heads removed because after every other form of torture, their unfailing devotion to God finally results in decapitation. This act kills them, and it is that final violent act that signifies their "super-humanness" granting them saint status. Removing the last piece of mortality tests the limits of their human faith. The donestre weeps over the heads of his victims because after eating everything else, he faces the humanness of the person he just

ingested, making him unable to eat the head and causing him to be beset with grief. Saint

Christopher, the donestre, and the blemmye are considered monstrous on account of their heads.

Heads are therefore connected to identity. Beowulf and Judith take Grendel and Holofernes'

heads to their respective armies to prove their deeds. Æschere's head outside of Grendel's

mother's lair is meant to have significance to the men when they recognize the identity of their

comrade's head. Power can be found in the head by its connection with identity. A person's face

is unique to him and allows for a visual identification. When someone is decapitated, "the

clearest proof of death" remains since "facial identity remains intact after disembodiment, and

the severed head, held aloft by its remover, can be recognized" (Tracy and Massey 4). Separating

the head from the body allows the inherent, essential quality of identification to transfer from the

owner to the victor, who now possesses the head. If the head is removed from the body, the head

retains the power while the body becomes devoid of identity, placing it in a liminal space where

identity and agency is unattainable.

The removal of a head as punishment can be viewed as a just punishment for monstrous

figures. Because Anglo-Saxon society used bodily mutilations as evidence for the guilt of a

crime, beheadings become the same kind of evidence. With the case of the blemmye, "his

decapitation" is "the mark of a deep-seated moral failing" (Mittman 91). For monsters like

Holofernes, Grendel, and Grendel's mother, their decapitation suggests the same moral failings

demonstrated by their deeds in the poem. For figures like Edmund, Juliana, and Æschere, their

beheadings are byproducts of the moral failings of the monstrous characters who behead them in

their narratives. Because of the religious nature of *Juliana* and *The Life of Saint Edmund*, those

characters, who are wrongfully beheaded, are granted saint status. For Æschere, he becomes a

shocking, visceral reminder of Grendel's mother's monstrous acts. His head serves to remind

Beowulf on the eve of his battle why she must be defeated. The removal of the monstrous heads as punishment is in opposition to the act of presenting the head as supplication when pledging oneself to his lord. By placing the head on the lap of the liege-lord, one submits to societal norms and communal morality. It is fitting, then, to punish transgressions against the established belief system by decapitation. Monsters lose their heads because they break defined social roles and thwart the balance.

2.2   The Gluttonous Feast of Holofernes

The Old English *Judith* reduces the biblical version found in the Vulgate and in the version by Ælfric to two main characters: Judith and Holofernes. The poetic version begins with Holofernes hosting a feast for his men. Judith does not attend this feast, unlike in the other versions. Because of this change, the focus of the blame in the Old English version of the story shifts to Holofernes, positioning him as the villain. Holofernes holds a banquet where he invites his men to drink (*Holofernus winhatan wyrcean georne / ond eallum wundrum þrymlic / girwan up swæsendo*, lines 7b-9a). At this feast, Holofernes "*on gytesalum, / hloh ond hlydde, hlynede ond dynede*" (was joyous in feasting, laughed and bellowed, shouted and made a great noise," lines 23b-24). During the feast, Holofernes becomes "*modig and medugal*" (arrogant and drunk, line 26a), and makes his men "*drencte mid wine*" (drunk with wine, line 29b). Holofernes does not have Judith continuously filling his cup in this version; he hosts his own drunken feast and is responsible for getting himself and all his men intoxicated.

Because of the overindulgence during the feast, Holofernes and his men get so drunk they are incapacitated. Holofernes encourages his men to drink:

oðþæt hie on swiman lagon,

oferdrencte his duguðe ealle,   swylce hie wæron deaðe geslegene (lines 30b-31)

[until they lay in unconsciousness, all his men drunk, like they were struck by death].

Though Judith slays only Holofernes this night, this line foreshadows the fate of the Assyrian army. Not only are the men immobile so Judith can carry out her task, but because of Holofernes' debauchery during the feast, he symbolically kills his men by allowing himself to become so weak that he is defeated. The men lying unconscious like they were "*deaðe geslegene*" represents the men dying alongside Holofernes. When he is killed by Judith, they are lying as if they are dead like their leader. After Judith is brought to Holofernes, he, like his men, succumbs to drunken oblivion. The poet writes that Holofernes is so drunk that

> he nyste ræda nanne

> on gewitlocan (lines 68b-69a)

> [he did not know any reason in his mind].

This line is extremely important to the poem. This line "shows just how low Holofernes's vices have brought him at this point" (Hartman 433). As a result of his debauchery, Holofernes is brought to a state below human: he has lost his reason. Mary Flavia Godfrey argues that "*Judith* is a poem obsessively concerned with intellection and reasoning, with examples of men whose minds and judgments are clouded by emotion, desire, drink, or simply by the trappings of civilization, to their detriment and disaster" (12). If we think of *Judith* as a poem "obsessively concerned with intellection and reasoning," then Holofernes' loss of reason becomes an important issue in the poem. According to Saint Augustine and Boethius, intelligence and reason is the quality that separates man from beasts. Additionally, a description about reason is found in King Alfred's translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philsophy*:

> Is sio þridde gecynd þæm twæm betere,

> sio gesceadwisnes. Nis ðæt scandlic cræft,

forðæm hit nænig hafað neat buton monnum.   (187-9).

[The third nature is better than the others, intelligence. That is not a disgraceful craft, for no beast has it, only men.]

Through Holofernes' vice of drunkenness, he has lost his reason, and the alcohol plays a vital role in Holofernes' downfall. It renders him and his men physically paralyzed, while also rendering him mentally paralyzed. Therefore, the responsibility for Holofernes' demise lies with himself. Because of his excessive vice, he is demoted from a human, from a *rican þeodne* to a physically and mentally impotent body. The poet writes that he does not know reason "*on gewitlocan.*" The word *gewitloca* means the mind, but is a compound made up of the noun *loca*, which means an enclosed or locked up space, and the verb *witan*, meaning to have knowledge, so the compound gives the sense of a place where knowledge is kept and kept safe. The intelligence, sense, or reason is removed from Holofernes' mind – from where his knowledge is usually enclosed – so that it is empty of everything that makes one human. Holofernes loses his reason and humanity in a similar fashion as other human monstrosities, such as Nebuchadnezzar in *Daniel* and Heremod in *Beowulf*, as discussed in chapter two and three.

Holofernes undergoes this transformation and is turned into a monster not because of his evil ways, but because of his wicked vices. In the Old English version of the poem, Judith does not take part by occupying a role of feminine cunning. Instead, Holofernes causes his own drunkenness, and his destruction is caused by his own hand through his insatiable thirst. Gluttony is not his only vice, though. Holofernes displays greed in his overconsumption and his "eallgylden fleohnet" (lines 46-47). More importantly, he is guilty of *luxuria.* Jerome's translation of the Bible includes the term, which "is associated with drunkenness or gluttony and with sexual excess" (Jordan 37). In *Moralia in Job,* written between 578 and 595 A.D., Gregory

the Great wrote, "From gluttony are propagated foolish mirth, scurrility, uncleanness, babbling, dullness of sense in understanding. From lust are generated blindness of mind…" (33.88).[16] According to Gregory, gluttony and lust, Holofernes' chief vices in *Judith,* lead to loss of intelligence and reason. Gregory also claims, "pride of mind leads to the pollution of the flesh, the heart of the reprobate is…plunged into the wantonness of beasts" (21.29). Through Holofernes' arrogance he aligns himself with animals, making him less than human. Gregory's treatment of *luxuria* in his *Moralia in Job* "fix[ed] for medieval moral theology a certain view of *luxuria* and its place among the principal and most lethal sins…Gregory's teaching on *luxuria* doubles the sin" (Jordan 38-39). The opening of *Judith* depicts Holofernes at the pinnacle of *luxuria,* and if Anglo-Saxon religious thought based on Gregory's theology believed that *luxuria* was the worst of all the sins, then Holofernes' characterization places him as the most immoral monster. Because of his debauchery, he is made into a monster of his own accord, and any ensuing punishment can be seen as warranted.

Holofernes' debauchery reflects the vice of gluttony and aligns his vices with the abject. The feast begins as a communal meal where the men share mead, food, and company, but the feast devolves into a loud, raucous event where Holofernes and his men get louder and drunker as the night progresses. During the description of the feast, the poet shows three instances where Holofernes was loud: "*hloh ond hlydde, hlynede ond dynede…styrmde ond gylede*" [laughed and bellowed, shouted and made a din…stormed and cried out" (lines 23, 25b). The scene becomes ironic, and abject, because Holofernes and his men take part in a socially acceptable function, gathering in the mead-hall, but the overindulgence of feasting and drinking bring about their deaths. Holofernes evolves into an abject character, morphing into a figure of disgust for the

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[16] Translated by John Henry Parker, *Morals on the Book of Job*, (Oxford: Rivington, 1844)

viewer. Since abjection explores the tension between disgust and intrigue with ingestion and excrement, the scene centers around excessive ingestion, through overeating and drunkenness, and expulsion, through his and his men's loud raucous yelling (Kristeva 2-3). The source of his abjection is the head, which is powerful because it contains the mouth. By adopting the role as an abject figure, he repels acceptable social norms, further removing him from the realm of humanity. His excessive volume points not only to gluttony and the excrement of noise, but also to pride. He laughs the loudest, illustrating his arrogance. The feast tables are filled with food, and *hie þæt fæge þegon* (the doomed men ate, line 19b). This choice of adjective to describe Holofernes' men foreshadows their future fate. By using the word *fæge,* the poet reinforces the idea that by partaking in this gluttony alongside Holofernes, the men are dooming themselves. The food, wine, and gluttonous acts of debauchery begin the series of events that cause the men's destruction, and the emphasis lies on the abject through the ingestion of food and drink and the excrement of noise. Holofernes is at the metaphoric head of the table, distributing wine and encouraging their joyous celebration, and when his head is removed, by extension his men are also killed. The next line illustrates Holofernes' arrogance: *þeah ðæs se rica ne wende* (yet the powerful one didn't expect [the doom], line 20b). A few lines later in line 25a, the description of *modig ond medugal* (arrogant and drunk) combines both vices of pride and gluttony into one half-line. In this scene, Holofernes portrays the vice of *luxuria* described by Gregory in his teachings. By beginning the poem this way, the poet positions Holofernes as the vice-ridden human monster pitted against Judith and allows the spectator to begin to be both disgusted yet fascinated by the abject excessive actions.

Because the action is centered around Holofernes' mouth, he does not use his eyes. He is blind to the threats around him; furthermore, his head becomes worthless because he has no sight

and no reason. Seeing connects both to humanity and to reason, and *Maxims I* draws a connection between the eyes and reason: "*seo sceal in eagan,, snyttro in breostum*" (Seeing must be in the eye, and wisdom in the breast, line 122). By juxtaposing these two ideas, the act of seeing first must happen and lead to the wisdom in the breast. This maxim reinforces the head-intellect connection. Though wisdom, intellect, and reason are located in the chest, seeing is a connected process to wisdom, and seeing originates in the head. Since seeing is the ingestion of knowledge, the eyes are one of the ways humanity is taken in; therefore, one needs the head to ingest and attain wisdom. In *Judith,* Holofernes puts all his energy into his mouth instead of his eyes, and subsequently his behavior at the feast makes it so he commandeers the attention of all the men around him. He has no worries, is blind to the threats around him, and makes enough noise that the focus remains on him, which demonstrates that his reason and intellect through the use of his head.

The doomed Assyrians are an extension of Holofernes' vices because they follow the behavior of their leader and indulge in overconsumption of food, alcohol, and leisure. Holofernes and the Assyrians reject the mind and reason in favor of indulging their passions. Kristeva contends, "Food becomes abject only if it is a border between two distinct entities or territories…between the human and non-human" (75). During the feast, the overconsumption becomes abject because it is the source of Holofernes rejecting his humanity, losing his reason, and becoming a monster. The food and "orality signifies a boundary of the self's clean and proper body" (75). Through his and his men's gluttony, they tarnish themselves and become objects of disgust while their actions during the feast represent the epitome of hedonism. Godfrey notes, "the Assyrians represent the extreme of men unable to consolidate these parts of their personalities or to apply them appropriately in social settings" and that they are "lacking the

internalized wholeness of the man who has learned to control his passions" (16). This emphasizes the lack of humanity in these characters since even their feast does not reflect the communal spirit of the *comitatus*. Instead, "this distancing from the heroic version of the social environment is total, encompassing more than the familiar aspects of the *comitatus*" (Godfrey 16). The Assyrians distort the heroic trope of the *comitatus* gathering in the feast hall because they gather and celebrate together, but the excess taints the scene. The poet uses the feast to demonstrate this absence in the Assyrian's personality. Since the absence of reason, intellect, and rational thinking makes them less than whole, they become less than men, closer to beasts because of their lack. Because of their perversion of the accepted social norms through excess vice, along with their demotion to a less than human state, the impending punishment for Holofernes and the Assyrian army is just and deserved. Holofernes losing his head not only removes the physical representation of his lack of humanity, but also eliminates the seat of abjection. Decapitating him neutralizes the threat, and it restores the balance by erasing and removing the source of his monstrosity.

2.3   Holofernes as a Monstrous Human

These characteristics not only paint Holofernes as a villain against the hero Judith, but also demonstrate what makes him a medieval monster. Holofernes' vices of gluttony, pride, and lechery are reminiscent of giants. In the Book of Wisdom 14:6, giants are killed by the flood because excessive pride and arrogance are their two main sins (Cohen 51). But giants are not only associated with pride; they are also characterized by their gluttony since in addition to symbolizing pride and arrogance, "the giant embodies appetite of all kinds, enfleshing those sexual and sensual sins where a body does not know the limits of its contours" (Cohen 67-8). Scholars have thoroughly discussed Holofernes' lechery and attempted rape of Judith, which

reflects the hypersexuality often associated with giants in medieval literature. But the gluttony demonstrated by Holofernes in the beginning lines of the poem implies an additional, unexplored connection between Holofernes and giants. The volume of Holofernes' voice demonstrated by the amount of times the poet refers to his loudness makes Holofernes seem larger than he is. Though Holofernes does not have the large physical appearance of a giant, he appears metaphorically larger by finding ways to make sure he overshadows all his men and to ensure his essence expands and encompasses as much space in the scene as possible. In the case of the feast, he laughs, shouts, and celebrates louder than anyone else, which makes his presence appear larger. In his book *Of Giants*, Cohen explores Arthur's fight with the giant of Mont Saint Michel found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and makes reference to the giant's large "maw," which is the source of his gluttony, and uses the example to contend that the mouth of the giant is a source of enjoyment (68). This argument can be applied to Holofernes. The beginning of *Judith* centers around events related to Holofernes' mouth because he eats, he drinks, he yells and laughs, and he instructs his men to bring Judith to his bed. Since his gluttony relates to him both over-ingesting through food and drink and over-expelling through his voice, his "maw" is continuously the impetus for his actions and the place of expulsion and excrement. On the other hand, Judith uses her mouth like Holofernes does, but does not cause disgust for the spectator since her mouth does not consume; there is no ingestion and excrement because she uses her mouth only to pray to God and to give her heroic speech to her people. Furthermore, Holofernes even displays a gluttonous need for attention. During the feast, he attempts to keep all focus on himself by being the loudest, and buys his men's attention through his gifts of food and drink. His mouth contributes to this through the continued excessive

use of his voice and by taking control of his men's mouths through his offering of food and drink.

The poet describes Holofernes as evil, wicked, and terrible in multiple places, and in line 71b, the poet also calls him "*wærlogan*." This word is a kenning made up of the word *wær,* which means faith, pledge, or oath, and *–loga*, a suffix which means liar. *Wærlogan* refers to a person who breaks his oaths, and according to James Walter Rankins's 1910 "A Study of the Kennings in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," the word also denotes a devil (57). This word also appears in other places throughout Old English literature, such as when it is used in *Andreas* to describe the cannibals, in the Old English version of *Genesis* and Cædmon's scriptures to describe the people of Sodom, in *Genesis* to describe the people before the flood, and by Wulfstan multiple times in his homilies. Breaking promises or more importantly oaths furthers the monstrous characterization of Holofernes since oath-breaking was a punishable offense in Anglo-Saxon England. During Alfred's reign in the late ninth century, men who broke oaths and pledges faced punitive measures. They had to give up their weapons and possessions and spend forty nights in prison, and the first clause on oath-breaking says "that each man should carefully fulfil his oath and his pledge" (qtd. in Thomas 102). In the legislation of Edward the Elder in the early tenth century, men who broke their oaths had to atone for it as the court saw fit.[17] Daniel Thomas, in his essay "Incarceration as Judicial Punishment," argues that the focus on oaths in the Alfredian codes could extend to the entire population, "by which is apparently meant an oath of loyalty to the king" (103). Taking this idea and applying it to Holofernes situates his status as oath-breaker within the poem. If Anglo-Saxon law concerned itself with upholding oaths, then seeing a character breaking an oath would place him in a criminal role because when one swears an oath,

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[17] From Wormald, *Making of English Law*, qtd. in Thomas, pg. 96-97

he swears fealty to his lord or king, to follow his lord in all decisions. Holofernes has broken an oath with God by being a heathen and participating in excess vices, making him a criminal.

Furthermore, Holofernes has broken an oath to his men. The positioning of Holofernes' description as oath-breaker within the poem emphasizes his betrayal to his men. The poet writes:

> Wiggend stopon
>
> ut of ðam inne   ofstum miclum,
>
> weras winsade,   þe ðone wærlogan,
>
> laðne leodhatan,   læddon to bedde
>
> nehstan siðe (lines 69b-73a)

[The warriors stepped out of the chamber with great haste, the wine-sated men, who lead the oath-breaker, hateful tyrant, to his bed for the last time].

When describing who the warriors are attending to, the poet uses the word *wærlogan*, "the oath-breaker." The poet previously referred to Holofernes within the terms of the lord-thane bond: *rican þeodne* (line 11), "powerful/great prince," *weagesiðas* (line 16), "companions in evil," *goldwine gumena* (line 22), "generous lord of men," and *egesful eorla dryhten* (line 21), "terrible lord of men." The change in Holofernes' description occurs after he has gotten drunk because at this point in the poem, Holofernes is completely overcome by his vices, and the warriors have brought him into his chamber, where he will meet his end. Because of his drunken state, he has broken his oath with his men to protect them. The lord-thane roles comprise a "popular literary motif" in Anglo-Saxon poetry, and within the paradigm of heroic, epic poetry, "The most important bond was therefore that between the lord and his retainers, who formed a warband…The lord was obligated to protect and reward his men" (Page 48; Olsen and Raffel

xii). Lordship in heroic society according to *Beowulf* includes a king who is "the dispense of rings in peace and the guardian of the people during strife…kings must be generous during times of prosperity…but protect their people and territory from the threat of invasion." Though *Judith* varies in many ways from *Beowulf*, "The gnomic statements of the Cotton and Exeter manuscripts also support the ideals of kingship as presented in *Beowulf*" (Rothauser 109). Though Holofernes is not a king, he fills that role in the poem for an Anglo-Saxon audience familiar with the literary motif of the *comitatus*. The beginning of *Judith* frames Holofernes as the generous lord – the *goldwine gumena* – who gives his men a lavish feast full of food and wine. However, because Holofernes is a monstrous figure, he twists this scene and perverts the intended social meaning where the feast does not represent a generous lord taking care and protecting his men; instead, the feast becomes a monstrous display of vice where Holofernes destroys his men. His gifts of wine are deadly weapons, and he breaks his oath to his men by providing the means for – and being the instrument of – their death. Thus, Holofernes becomes a double oath-breaker: breaking oaths to both God and his men. Judith, and by extension God, comes into Holofernes' camp to enforce his punishment since as an oath-breaker, Holofernes goes against the expected, respected practice, which pits him as an outsider, existing in the liminal spaces of society like other monsters.

Holofernes' tent stands as the metaphorical monster's lair in the poem. When Holofernes' men bring Judith into his tent, she sees him on his bed with a fly-net surrounding him. The poet describes Holofernes behind his fly-net as follows:

þæt se bealofulla

mihte wlitan þurh,   wigena baldor,

on æghwylcne   þe ðær inne com

> hæleða bearna,   ond on hyne nænig
>
> monna cynnes (lines 48b-53a)

[so that the wicked one was able to see through, the prince of warriors, on everyone that came within of the children of heroes, and on him none of mankind].

The above lines are especially important to the way the poet has depicted Holofernes, especially in the use of the verb *wlitan,* which refers to both Holofernes and mankind. Situated inside his tent, Holofernes holds the power because he is able to gaze out at everyone else, yet no one can see him. By using a verb meaning to gaze or look, the poet places the focus on Holofernes' head since the eyes are located in the head. His position of seeing provides a sense of power inside his lair, making him once again the dominant being. This emphasis on his head heightens the importance of Judith's future action of beheading him since she eliminates that source of his power by removing his head.

This position of power illustrates his privileged enclosure within the tent through the fly net, which the poem uses to separate Holofernes from the rest of mankind, placing him into the liminal space of the realm of monsters. The scene begins with Holofernes separated from Judith (and therefore the audience) by not only the tent, but also a fly-net. Judith has already ventured deep into the monster's territory by entering into the Assyrian's camp, and when the men bring her inside Holofernes' tent, she enters the monster's lair. This parallels Beowulf's journey into the mere to face Grendel's mother and into the dragon's lair. However, the tent is not described in the same way that the mere or dragon's cave is in *Beowulf*, but instead as a lavish structure in the middle of a warrior camp. Since Holofernes is a human monstrosity, it fits that his lair is one made of human sins and vices. The only descriptors the poet uses refer to the golden fly-net and the bed, and these two details are important because they once again connect to the pride and

luxuria. The golden fly-net reflects greed, the bed represents sex and carnal pleasure, while placing himself behind the fly-net so only he can look out depicts Holofernes as arrogant. The description of who can view Holofernes through his fly-net not only depicts him as arrogant and prideful, but it also characterizes him outside the realm of humanity since mankind is unable to look upon him in his lair, separating him as the mere separates Grendel's mother. By stating that it is mankind who cannot see Holofernes, the poet removes Holofernes from the race of men, which places him into an unknown liminal space outside of humanity.

     Judith is a poem of obvious dichotomies where the strict dichotomy of good and evil permeates the poem the saintly Judith alongside the evil Holofernes. The characters' opposed mentality constitutes another clear dichotomy. As described earlier, Holofernes rejects reason and erases his intelligence with wine, yet Judith is the opposite, remaining very much inside her head. Six lines after Holofernes is *nyste ræda nanne on gewitlocan* (line 68b), the poet also references Judith's mental state. After Holofernes passes out drunk on the bed, the poet calls Judith *þeowen þrymful* (glorious handmaid, line 74a), which reminds the reader of Judith's goodness and virtue. Since she has been brought into the bed chamber of a lecherous demon, and into the so-called monster's lair, the poet reminds the audience of Judith's purity and status as the hero. But more important than that is the poet's attention to Judith's mental state. He describes Judith as

> þearle gemyndig
>
> hu heo þone atolan eaðost mihte
>
> ealdre benæman ær se unsyfra,
>
> womfull, onwoce (lines 74b-77a).

[exceedingly mindful how she most easily might deprive the terrible [one] of life before the lustful [one], the evil [being], awoke]

According to the plot, Judith tries to determine the best way to kill Holofernes before he sobers enough to realize what she is doing. However, the phrase *þearle gemyndig* to describe Judith is the most pivotal one for this section of lines. Unlike Holofernes, who has no reason or sense in his mind, Judith is mindful, and not just mindful, but *þearle* mindful, and the use of this word juxtaposed to Holofernes' condition places the characters at two extreme ends of the spectrum. These lines are the first glimpse that the audience receives of Judith in the poem where she is the active participant instead of passively being handled by the Assyrians, and her first action is to be mindful of how she will successfully kill Holofernes. Because the emphasis is not on physicality but mental acumen and reason, the poet does not mention the sword and Judith does not interact with the sword until the following lines, when she "*genam…scearpne mece*" (took…a sharp sword, lines77b-78b). The poet places the emphases on her mind, on her reason and intellect, instead of her physical strength.

While this may be because of her gender, I argue it points to the poet's theme and concern with the mind. Two other lines in the poem support the emphasis on her mind and reason. The fragmented first line of the poem refers to Judith's mind: *tweode / gifena in ðys ginnan grunde* (doubted [not she] the gifts on this wide earth, lines 1b-2a).[18] Though this line is fragmentary and cannot be considered the beginning of the poem, these first lines illustrate an early concern with the mind within the poem. Since Judith does not doubt God, her lack of doubt demonstrates her strong will and steadfast mind. Though she has been in the camp four days, her faith and mind are still strong. When the poet refers to Judith's mind again in this beginning

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[18] Translation based on Mitchell & Robinson's assertion: "Most scholars assume that a negative preceded *tweode*, the sense of the sentence being 'she did not doubt His gifts in this wide world'." (314)

section, he describes Judith as *gleaw on geðonce* (wise in thought, line 13b). Once again, emphasis is placed on Judith's reason and intellect, which contrasts her with the arrogant, frivolous Holofernes. In the first lines, Holofernes invites his men to a banquet with wine, and then the next lines are devoted to the feast where Holofernes and the men get progressively drunker and lose their reason. The poet refers to Judith's mind a few other times through the next lines, such as in line 41 when he describes her as *ferhðgleawe* (prudent), and *snoteran idese* (wise woman) in line 55. Not only is her holiness and brightness emphasized (as pointed out by other critics), but her mental ability also bears mentioning multiple times. The poet also places emphasis on Holofernes' mind leading up to the death to emphasize the importance of the head and reason. When Judith is brought to Holofernes' tent, the poet describes him as feeling *on mode bliðe* (joyous in his mind, line 57b-58a) because he *þohte* (thought, line 58b) that was he was going to defile Judith, which suggests that the thing that makes his mind happy is his lechery, his despicable intention to rape Judith. These juxtapositions of the descriptions of the mind show the poet's concern for not only holy goodness and devotion to God, but also for astute minds. By placing this emphasis on the mind directly prior to Holofernes' beheading, the head acts as an external marker for internal thought, reason, and emotions, which connects the mind and the head closely together and develops a relationship between the two. Judith, who is strong and pure in her mind, will take physical control over Holofernes' head, the visual reminder of his sin and vice.

Although Judith is described as both wise and bright in multiple places while at the Assyrian camp, she is not unaffected by the situation. While talking to God, Judith says, *"heorte onhæted ond hige geomor, / swyðe mid sorgum gedrefed"* (my heart inflamed and my mind sad, very troubled with grief, lines 87-88a) and then *"torne on mode"* (distressed in mind,

line 93b). The poet still emphasizes the mind in these lines, to the point where Judith discusses it when speaking with God. In part, "in the speech she emphasizes her need for God's help, a theme which had also been alluded to in the opening lines of the poem" (Magennis 18). While this is true, Judith's words also demonstrate her own mental difficulties. Unlike Beowulf, who enters the monster's lair to face a physical battle, Judith's battle is partially physical, but also partially mental since she has to find the courage to kill Holofernes and overcome her troubled mind. Once again, the poet brings the state of the mind to the forefront of the text and makes it a concern for the characters. The drunken spell that Holofernes has cast over the entire camp seems to have extended to Judith because when she enters into the monster's lair, though she is brave, bright, and wise, she is not unaffected. This places her among epic heroes, such as Beowulf. When Beowulf descends into the mere to fight Grendel's mother, he reaches the bottom and is unable to use his weapons against the monsters she sets against him, and then he discovers his sword will not cause her harm.[19] Beowulf, like Judith, is negatively affected by whatever magic exists within the monster's lair. Judith, like all of Holofernes' men and Holofernes himself, finds herself troubled in her mind because there seems to be some kind of spell cast over the entire camp, causing everyone to have their minds weakened. However, like Beowulf, Judith overcomes this to succeed in her task of slaying the monster. Judith's unwavering will, her reliance on God, her mental acuity, and her strong sense of reason help her overcome this mental struggle and complete her undertaking.

2.4   Decapitation as Transformation Punishment

When Judith cuts off Holofernes' head, she uses her mental strength instead of physical strength, which illustrates the triumph of reason over all. After her prayer to God, "*wearð hyre*

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[19] *Beowulf,* lines 1506-1528

rume on mode" (she became abundantly spacious in mind, line 97b). All trouble left her, and she no longer felt affected by the haze over the camp so that her mind clears and she can use her best weapon, her intelligence and will, to kill Holofernes. Once again, the poet places importance on Judith's mind, reason, and intelligence. Judith does not possess the same physical strength as other epic heroes, so she becomes a warrior in another way, which befits her since she fights a different kind of battle, not an intense one with swords, but a battle with the mind and her will. While Judith cuts off his head, the poet calls Holofernes *hæðenan hund* (heathen hound, line 110a), which furthers Holofernes' removal from humanity by placing him among beasts and monsters. Bernard Huppe argues that partially the poem meant to "celebrate a type of Christian innocence triumphant over heathen bestiality" (236). This triumph over bestiality also reflects the poem's concern with reason triumphing over everything.

The body language surrounding the staging of Holofernes' decapitation is significant. The way Judith positions Holofernes reflects the reason for his punishment, because "the posture of enemies is used to emphasize their vices and their total defeat by a hero" (Arthur 315). The poet describes Judith preparing Holofernes for his beheading as follows:

> genam ða þone hæðenan mannan
>
> fæste be feaxe sinum,   teah hyne folmum wið hyre weard
>
> bysmerlice,   ond þone bealofullan
>
> listum alede,   laðne mannan,
>
> swa heo ðæs unlædan   eaðost mihte
>
> wel gewealdan. (lines 98b-103a)

[Then she took the heathen man firmly about his hair, dragged him with her hands towards herself disgracefully, and the evil [one] skillfully laid out, the hateful man, so she might most easily well control the wretched.]

Judith grabs Holofernes by the hair and drags him towards herself, placing him below her. This posturing frames the narrative into a clear victory-defeat organization. The scene parallels the one in *Beowulf* when Grendel's head is brought back to Heorot, where the men drag the head along the floor by the hair.[20] In both poems, "the head is held by the hair ('be feaxe') and placed below the victors' hands, emphasizing the hero's victory over the enemy" (Arthur 315). The fact that both monsters are treated violently by their hair is noteworthy since Anglo-Saxon laws had multiple penalties for hair violence. The laws were meant to discourage shameful and public pulling of the hair. Kent and Saxony, along with the *Lex Saxonum* and *Lex Burgundionum,* had laws against grabbing someone's hair, and Frisia added an extra specification about grabbing hair because of anger, since hair pulling could be the start of a physical altercation (Oliver, *The Body Legal*, 109; Oliver, "Genital Mutilation," 64). Additionally, "[t]he Germanic clauses similarly consider the physical commencement of a struggle, which may lead to further injuries requiring additional reimbursement" (Oliver, *The Body Legal,* 109). One of the laws of King Æthelbehrt, probably compiled around 602, states: "*Gif feaxfang geweorð, L sceatta to bote*" (If hair pulling happens, 50 *sceatta* as compensation, 33).[21] Though "grabbing an enemy by the hair would be an undignified tactic for a male hero," Judith is not a male hero (Magennis 17). Part of the power within the poem comes from Judith's gender. She becomes a female hero, who fits within the same paradigm while retaining her femininity. Placing Judith within the domestic space of the bed chamber, on the very bed where

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[20] *Beowulf,* lines 1647-8
[21] Old English from Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law*

Holofernes intended to rape her, gives her power that cannot extend to Holofernes. When she

grabs his hair, she pulls him towards herself *bysmerlice.* Because of his vices, his debauchery,

and his evilness, his body gets treated in a shameful way because Holofernes deserves no respect

because at this point since he is less than human. This is all demonstrated through his head

because she shames him through his head, and she physically places herself above his head

before she cuts it off. Therefore, Judith uses the treatment of the head to take the upper hand and

place herself above Holofernes, seating herself in the place of the hero and the victor.

Judith's decapitation of Holofernes is not an easy feat. She takes multiple strokes to

remove his head:

> Sloh ða wundenlocc
>
> þone feondsceaðan   fagum mece,
>
> heteþoncolne,   þæt heo healfne forcearf
>
> þone sweoran him,   þæt he on swiman læg,
>
> druncen ond dolhwund.   Næs ða dead þa gyt,
>
> ealles orsawle;   sloh ða eornoste
>
> ides ellenrof   oðre siðe
>
> þone hæðenan hund,   þæt him þæt heafod wand
>
> forð on ða flore. (lines 103b-111a)

[The one with braided hair struck the enemy with a gleaming sword, the hateful one, so

that he lay in a swoon, drunk and wounded. He was not dead yet, completely lifeless; then struck

earnestly the brave woman another time the heathen dog, so his head rolled forth on the floor.]

When she first strikes, she only wounds Holofernes. The poet addresses his mental state

yet again by reminding the reader that he is drunk, one of the reasons Judith is removing his

head. He has already removed his reason and displayed the vices of greed, pride, gluttony, and lust through his mouth, and since his transgressions culminate around his head, Judith enacts justice by removing his physical head. Holofernes' actions have made him the example of abjection, and because of his loss of reason through his vices, those actions place him outside the socially acceptable "I." When Judith decapitates him, the external markers for his internal mind – the eyes and the mouth – are silenced and the threat they pose is eliminated. The viewer is now safe from the origins of sin and disgust found in Holofernes' head, and the social order is restored.

Judith does not kill Holofernes with the first stroke, but has to wield the sword a second time to remove his head. Judith's battle with Holofernes more closely reflects Beowulf's battle with Grendel or Grendel's mother, where the hero in the narrative faces against a matched foe he can fight. In his fight with Grendel's mother, Beowulf strikes her twice with his sword before he finally decapitates her.[22] In both of these fights, the heroes require two strokes to kill their enemy. Holofernes' transformation into a human monster creates a larger threat within the poem, making him a formidable foe within the hero-monster paradigm for Judith. The idea of a hero using one stroke to behead an enemy may be more a literary construction and societal ideal than a reality. Single-stroke decapitations arise from an impossibility of the instantaneous death by beheading (Masciandaro 31). Expecting a one-stroke beheading then idealizes the act of decapitation into a perfectly executed punishment.

When Judith beheads Holofernes, she takes the most important thing from him. Additionally, taking possession of the head, Judith gains proof of Holofernes' death, because "there is no real proof of death like a severed head" (Massey 185). Through this removal, Judith

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[22] The first strike comes at line 1519-1520, then the killing blow lands at 1565-1568.

has in effect cut off the head of the Assyrian army, which the poet ironically suggests since "the destroyer is destroyed, the head of the army loses his head" (Chickering 33). By showing his head to the Bethulian army, Judith proves that she succeeded in her task. Because of her gender, she cannot simply kill Holofernes, and his head gives her power because she needs a powerful symbol to show to the army. Taking the head and showing it to the Bethulian army "is the surest piece of evidence Judith can present of having defeated him" (Bremmer 125). Holofernes' head becomes that symbol for her and allows the power to transfer to her hands.

The head serves not only as a trophy and social display. The act of "beheading can signify many things…the actions of heads after separation can speak volumes…all these severed heads…tell a story" (Massey 185). For Holofernes, the punishment fits the crime since Holofernes' crimes go against humanity through his engagement in the sins of pride and gluttony, and over-indulgence in every vice. Judith's decapitation of him is a just punishment handed down by God for his crimes (Marafioti and Gates 6). When Judith decapitates Holofernes, she transforms his body by removing the head and leaving behind the *fula leap* (foul trunk, line 111b). Through separating the head from his foul body, she separates reason and brawn. She takes the head as her trophy, the body part which represents the intellect so closely associated with Judith, leaving behind the foul body used to participate in many of his vices. The foul trunk left behind symbolizes Judith's – and by extension, the spectator audience's – rejection of Holofernes' crimes against humanity. Punishment results because of a transgression from the societal limits of what's normal and acceptable (Marafioti and Gates 9). Holofernes' actions transgress acceptable behavior. Within the limits of the poem, all of his crimes deal with the mind – excessive drunkenness that dulls and empties the mind, excessive arrogance that clouds the mind, and excessive overindulgence that removes his humanity and turns him

monstrous. As a result of his crimes in the poem, Judith enacts a fitting punishment by removing Holofernes' head. Furthermore, by the time the men bring Judith to Holofernes' tent, Holofernes is rife with irrationality, so the best way for Judith to stop his irrationality is to remove the source of it – his head. Though God made it so Judith could kill him, God allows the one who deals out the punishment to be a person who possesses all that Holofernes lacks.

After she cuts off Holofernes' head, Judith places it "*on ðam fætelse þe hyre foregenga...hyra begea nest...þyder on lædde*" (in the bag which her attendant…both their food…thither brought, lines 127a-129b). The head, even a severed head, holds immense power. The severed head "as a seat of reason, wisdom, and even the soul…was afforded a special place in the body politic, even when separated from its body proper" (Tracy and Massey 7). With the *Judith* poet's focus on reason and the mind, the head functions as the most important part of the body in the poem, and in taking the head, Judith takes a prize more important than the armor given to her at the end of the poem. She goes from being physically maneuvered by the Assyrians and being the intended for Holofernes' rape, to being the physical victor over him. With God's help, she reclaims her agency in the poem. But the head still poses a threat. A severed head has a gaping mouth that still may have the ability to speak, while the head threatens to "open[] its dead eyes to stare at the gathered audience, to transform *them* into the object of the gaze" (Cohen 145). When Judith places the head inside the bag, she protects herself from the head's gaze and lessens any lingering power the head holds by hiding it from view. But Judith does not keep the head covered by the bag forever. When she reaches the gates of Bethulia, she uncovers the head and shouts, "*on læs laðestan / hæðenes heaðorinces heafod starian*" (gaze on the head of the hateful warrior, lines 178b-179). By holding the severed head and declaring that the people of Bethulia gaze on it, Judith transfers the power from the head to herself. She holds

the head as her token of victory, diminishing the head to only a trophy. But Judith does not claim the victory as her own; the victory belongs to God. As the army gazes on the severed head while Judith gives her speech, the power gained from the head once again transfers from Judith to the Bethulian army. The head not only serves as confirmation of her kill, but also acts as a spectacle of punishment for the people and the audience. When the audience experiences Holofernes' head dropping onto the floor and rolling away, and when they see Judith lift the head to the Bethulian army, they become spectators to the punishment along with the armies in the poem.

The poet describes the soldier who finds Holofernes' body as being *hreoh on mode* (troubled in his mind, line 282a). Once again, the poet returns to the mental state of the character, focusing on the soldier's distress at finding his leader dead. His troubled state parallels his leader's headless state. The soldier essentially has a crazed emotional breakdown:

<div align="center">

He þa lungre gefeoll

freorig to foldan,   ongan his feax teran,

hreoh on mode,   ond his hrægl somod (lines 280a-282)

</div>

[He then quickly fell frozen to the ground, began to tear his hair, troubled in mind, and his clothes, too]

Like his leader, the soldier loses his head, so to speak. When the army discovers Holofernes' death, the poet describes them as *hreowigmode* (sad at heart/soul/mind, line 289b). The troubled state of mind extends to the entire army, until they flee. For Holofernes, this is another punishment because his corpse is left behind, bereft of identity.

2.5   Conclusion

As a corpse, Holofernes becomes the ultimate symbol of abjection because he is "death infecting life" (Kristeva 4). The corpse represents "excrement and its equivalents…stand[s] for

the danger to identity that comes from without…society threatened by its outside, life by death"
(71). By abandoning the corpse, Judith rejects the abject, and the threat from the outside – from
the abject monster – is resolved. Instead, she takes possession of the head, the physical symbol of
his transgressions, and uses it as a sign for the Bethulian army so that the head retains meaning;
the severed head restores the lost reason and intellect in the poem by erasing the source of that
loss. The headless corpse, however, exists in a state of absence. Holofernes is there, but he is not.
His body is reduced to nothing but a material remnant, refuse, a waste product of life.

Because of his extreme vices, Holofernes occupies a liminal space between human and
monster. Through his overindulgence in gluttony, violence, and lust, Holofernes erases his
humanity and loses his sense of reason as he transforms into a something else. Despite never
turning into a physical monster reminiscent of Grendel or monstrosities from *Wonders of the
East,* Holofernes adopts monstrous characteristics that align him with giants and completely
rejects everything that makes him human. By reading Holofernes' actions and his eventual
beheading through Kristeva's abjection theory, Holofernes is viewed as an object of disgust,
which alienates him from humanity. His gluttonous actions result in multiple forms of refuse
originating primarily from his mouth; therefore, the head is the source of his abjection. As a
monstrous human and abject figure, Holofernes rejects acceptable cultural norms, which further
expels him from humanity. As a result, he fits into the category of monstrous human. His status
as a monstrous human is punished by Judith, who removes his head. The decapitation serves as a
symbolic removal of everything that connects him to humanity and solidifies his role as a
monster for eternity. Holofernes' head becomes a powerful symbol for Judith so her people can
defeat the Assyrian army, while Holofernes' corpse is another example of the abject which repels
the viewer and makes him a monster. This refuse has no identity because it has been removed of

everything that represented humanity – the head. Holofernes rejected his reason, and as a result of his vices, erased his humanity, and by extension, his identity. In death, his punishment becomes a corporal representation of this: a headless corpse, erased of humanity and reason.

3 CHAPTER TWO: MARKING SIGNS OF PUNISHMENT UPON THE BODY: MENTAL INSTABILITY AND TRANSFORMATION PUNISHMENT IN OLD ENGLISH GENESIS RETELLINGS

The Old Testament was a source of inspiration for many Anglo-Saxon writers. Biblical subjects found their way into every type of Old English text, from epic poetry to riddles to sermons. The majority of the Old Testament poetic texts are preserved in the MS Junius 11, which contains *Genesis A, Genesis B, Exodus,* and *Daniel. Genesis A & B* are poetic retellings of the biblical book of Genesis that cover the fall of the angels and Eve's temptation, along with stories of Abraham, Noah, and Lot. The biblical story of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, and Belthazzar is retold in the Old English *Daniel*. Additionally, the subject of the fall of the angels is also discussed in detail in the poem *Solomon and Saturn*, which is found in the Cotton Vitellius A.xv.

The characters found in many of the Old English retellings represent examples of punishment in Anglo-Saxon biblical poetry. In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault claims that early forms of torture and punishment, including ceremonial demonstrations such as dismemberment, branding, and public exhibitions of physical pain or prisoners on scaffolds, were meant as spectator punishments. He explains that a punishment "must mark the victim…either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it" (34). By marking the condemned

man, he carries around visual proof for everyone of his guilt and consequences, and through that, "the condemned man published his crime and the justice that had been meted out to him by bearing them physically on his body." Furthermore, the marks sometimes connected symbolically to the crimes committed, either by cutting off the limbs used in the crimes or punishing the criminal with the same instruments used during the crime. Through the public judicial torture punishments, the body undergoes transformations that reflect "the truth of the crime" and carries the results of the investigation, consequences, and justice (43-7). Though Foucault focuses his historical research on post-medieval laws, the concept of writing punishment onto the body was not unique to the Early Modern period. Medieval literature, and Anglo-Saxon literature in particular, featured a number of instances where a character's punishment results in some sort of change upon the body. Each character analyzed in this chapter, Nebuchadnezzar, Satan, and Lot's wife, undergoes a significant transformation punishment that marks the body, resulting in them being turned into monstrous or non-human figures. The Old English *Daniel* presents a clear picture of Nebuchadnezzar's sinfulness as a mental instability that threatens his humanity, and because he is guilty of the mortal sin of pride and arrogance, he acts irrationally and lacks the wisdom to make basic decisions. Through his inability to see clearly, he endures a fall that is marked upon his body as the characteristics of a wild beast. Reading each transformation as both punishment and spectacle reveals the underlying cultural anxieties through the behavior being corrected, and just as in other poetry from the Anglo-Saxon canon, the punishments provide instruction on how to stay within the accepted social norms of the community and act as a warning against mortal sins by expelling the transgressors into liminal and marginal spaces, while transforming them into something gruesome and bestial as a result of their crimes.

3.1   Anglo-Saxon Concept of Sin

The Anglo-Saxons were extremely concerned with the idea of sin and evil. Old English penitentials, such as *The Old English Penitential* and *The Old English Handbook,* outline punishments for crimes rooted in the concepts of sin, and theologians wrote numerous texts exploring and explicating the topic. The penitentials presented a scaffolded punishment process, which delineates between small and large sins. This idea of varying levels of the severity of sins is reflected in Augustine's writings. In *The Enchiridion*, he writes, "every crime is a sin, every sin is not a crime" and explains that the penitence depends on how great or small the sin (LXIV). The existence of the penitentials suggests an Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with systematic crime and punishment, while Augustine's comment allows for a degree of severity and subsequent punishment for different crimes.

The varying levels of sin become more concrete through Old English penitentials and Ælfric's sermons, and examining the outlined sins provides a clearer picture of the cultural concept of sin and crime at the time. While minor sins are not something a person should engage in, the literature places a much stronger emphasis on major sins. The penitentials, found in the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 190, lists eight major sins:

> *þæt synt morþur & stala & mæne*
>
> *aþas & gytsung & unrihthæmedu & gyfernys & tælnysse.*
>
> *& lease gewitnysse*
>
> [They are murder and stealing and false oaths and covetousness and fornication and greediness and slandering. And false witness][23]

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[23] Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 190, s. XImed, XI2; Exeter (Ker 45B, Gneuss 59) 368, S31.06.04, found at http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/

The penitential instructs that a person guard themselves against these evils and instead focus on God's righteousness. The eight sins in the *Old English Introduction* are almost the same as the ones outlined in Aelfric's sermon for Midlent Sunday:

Se forma heafod-leahter is gyfernyss, se oðer is galnyss, ðrydda gytsung, feorða weamet, fifta unrotnys, sixta asolcennss oððe æmelnys; seofoða ydel gylp, eahteoða modignyss. Þas eahta heafod-leahtras fordoð and geniðeriað þa unwæran into helle-wite.

[The first mortal sin is greediness, the second is lust, the third covetousness, the fourth anger, the fifth sorrow, the sixth is idleness or falsehood, the seventh vainglory, the eighth pride. These eight mortal sins destroy and condemn the unprepared into hell-torment.]

These eight sins outline concrete actions that are the greatest evils a person could engage in. In the Anglo-Saxon Genesis retellings analyzed in this chapter, the villainous characters commit these sins and are punished as a result through bodily transformations into monstrous, bestial characters. Coupled with Ælfric's claim that mortal sins destroy, these texts reflect the severity of the concept for Anglo-Saxons, so much that they outlined the sins clearly within religious contexts and then used them as the main conflict in poetry. By presenting the outward nature of sin in the literature, the relationship between guilt, crime, and punishment evinces that each component must be designated and observable for others. Just as Foucault's notion that punishment must visually manifest the crime onto the accused and reflect just consequences, the bestial transformations serve as Foucault's judicial torture punishments by bringing together the guilt, crime, and consequences into one marked transformation. Sin destroys, according to Ælfric, and the transformations located within the texts indicate that what sin destroys is the core of one's humanity. In the Genesis retellings, the punishment erases the villainous characters' humanity either by removing their reason or permanently disfiguring their physical body,

implying that one's conscious ability to actively try to avoid sin is a function of humanity while sin is a force that drives one farther away from that same humanity.

Anglo-Saxon conceptions of sin were powerfully influenced by two early theologians, Augustine and Boethius. In *Confessions*, written between 397 and 400 A.D., Saint Augustine provides a discussion of the concept of sin where he defines sin as "not a substance but perversion of the will when it turns aside from you, O God…and veers towards things of the lowest order" (VII, 16). According to this definition, sin is not a tangible thing inside a person, but a change that occurs within where sin and evil cause the basic essence of a person to transform into something different. The "perversion of will" indicates that the soul, mind, and interior humanity of the person shifts from what is right and good into the "lowest order." Augustine explains that "vipers and worms…were created to suit the lower order of your creation." Therefore, sin and evil transforms a person into a being of the lowest order, just like beasts.

Boethius also equates sin and evil with a loss of humanity. In his *Consolation of Philosophy*¸ written around 524 A.D., he writes, "To give oneself to evil, therefore, is to lose one's human nature…vice lowers those whom it has seduced from the condition of men beneath human nature" (Book 4, Prose 3). Like Augustine, Boethius describes sin as a transformation to a lower state, and in both cases, a bestial state. Boethius even goes as far to say, "anyone who you find transformed by vice cannot be counted a man." Through original sin, every person has the potential to sin and be reduced to this lower state. Righteousness and reason help man stay close to God and away from evil, and loss of reason and a rejection of free will lead to evil.

This early idea that sin erases humanity through a transformation extended into the writings of Anglo-Saxon theologians. Scholar and Christian thinker Aldhelm, who was writing in

the latter half of the seventh and early eighth centuries, was considered at the time one of the most well-versed men in early Christian texts, demonstrating knowledge of Augustine, Jerome, Gregory the Great, and Cassian (Laistner 155). In his prose works, Aldhelm addresses the seven vices, specifically naming the vice of pride as the chief sin and referring to it as "the most cruel monster." In *Prosa de uirginitate,* he "diagnoses the fundamental problem as arising from Pride" (McDaniel 102). Significantly, Aldhelm refers to this root sin of pride as a monster, which provides causation for the literary theme of bestial and monstrous transformation punishment. If the vice itself is personified as a monster, then the transformation occurs because vice is a monster that takes hold of the person and strips away the humanity. Building on earlier theologians, Aldhelm references the ideas of sin conceptualized by John Cassian and Gregory the Great, who were writing in the early fifth and late sixth centuries respectively. Drawing attention to the eight vices, Cassian not only lists them in his work, but also states, "We are all overcome by them, and they exist in every one." After acknowledging that everyone is prone to sin, he describes how these vices take hold of the body: "These same evil passions…which claim for themselves dominion and a most horrible tyranny in our mortal body" (5.2). Through these lines, Cassian suggests that the body acts as the vessel where sin takes hold, making the results of the "horrible tyranny" a physical, and perhaps visual, affair. Furthermore, he claims that a side effect of sin is being trapped within "the bars of vices which shut us out from true knowledge," and that though one may be plagued by "the fire of vices which terribly inflame our minds," through God, one can "penetrat[e] with pure eyes of the mind to the foul darkness of vices" (5.2).[24] Here, Cassian equates sin with mental transformations, where the mind is blocked from the knowledge that provides our humanity, or the mind is darkened or inflamed. Sin, and specifically the eight

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[24] http://www.osb.org/lectio/cassian/inst/inst5.html#5.2

vices, transmute the mind somehow, which yields the transformation that causes tyranny on the body.

The vice of pride was presented as the chief sin as well by Gregory the Great in *Moralia in Job*. Gregory warns that one should not "pervert his virtue, in consequence of its singularity, into the sin of pride" (XXXI.9). This sentiment echoes Augustine with the same basic idea that sin and vice leads to a perversion – that is, a transformation – of a person's spirit into something inverted and opposite from God and righteousness, yet unlike Augustine, Gregory specifically mentions pride. Gregory personifies pride as "the queen of sins" who "reigns over" the other vices, and describes her as a monster who "fully possesse[s] a conquered heart" and gives it to the other vices "to lay waste" (XXXI.87). A century later, Aldhelm chose to mirror Gregory's characterization of pride when he called the vice "the horrendous monster," while referring to the other vices as "those seven wild beasts of the virulent vices, who…strive to mangle violently" (trans. Lapidge and Herren 68). Once again, the vices are presented as bestial monsters, and Aldhelm even highlights the idea that vice will "mangle violently" those who are not armed against them. By choosing that violent image, Aldhelm puts forward the idea that vices will cause a destructive transformation. Throughout Gregory and Aldhelm's descriptions, pride is depicted as a monster, which is significant when read alongside Anglo-Saxon texts featuring punishments since a large amount of these literary texts depict the criminalized subject as some sort of monstrosity. If theologians like Augustine, Gregory, and Aldhelm assert that sin changes the ultimate nature of a person, and the sins themselves are monsters, then the literature creatively applies that basic core idea to the poetry by changing their transgressors into bestial and non-human states.

The Christian theologians not only associate sin with bestial imagery, but Gregory and Ælfric align sin and mental state. In the sermon on Sexagesima Sunday, Ælfric claims that if a man possesses "heard-heortnysse and ungewyldelic mod" (hard-heartedness and an unyielding mind), then the holy seed will dry up in their heart. By living with a hard heart and unyielding mind, a person rejects the very thing that makes them human, which is the ability to think about decisions and make the right choice. Being unyielding makes a person no better than a beast who does not have the ability to reason and learn from mistakes. Gregory specifically addresses how sin negatively affects the mind: "the first vices force themselves into the deluded mind as if under a kind of reason, but the countless vices which follow, while they hurry it on to every kind of madness, confound it." In these lines, he links madness directly to the vices, suggesting that weak minds are at a risk to lose their reason to sin. The lines following list each of the vices, and to the description of each vice, Gregory adds that they deceive the mind "as if with reason," which furthers his assertion that sin removes reason from a person.

Ælfric's sermon also discusses the effect that mortal sins have on the heart and mind. He says:

> *Woruld-cara, and welan, and flæsclice lustas forsmoriað ðæs modes ðrotan, and ne geðafiað godne willan infaran to his heortan…ymhidignyssa ofðriccað þæt mod.*

> [Worldly cares, and wealth, and fleshy lusts choke the mind's throat, and permits no goodness to enter into the heart…anxiety crushes the mind.]

Mortal sins and focusing too much on earthly pleasures destroys the mind, and effectively cuts off the ability for righteousness and God's goodness to affect the body. Through sinful ways, a person creates a block between them and God and leaves them alone in a God-less sphere. A person's focus on worldly possessions and mortal sins causes anxiety, which further

separates the heart and the mind. In the sermon on The Ninth Sunday After Pentecost, Ælfric poses the question: what does it matter if a person has wealth, "and ðin ingehyd beo æmtig ælces godes?" (and the thoughts/mind be empty of any goodness). Once again, Ælfric draws a parallel between sins of the flesh and the obsession with worldly riches and the mind. Possessing large amounts of wealth yields an empty mind because of the way sin blocks a person from righteousness. Ælfric's sermons outline the sins that should be avoided and emphasizes the importance of the role of rationality in the act of committing sins.

While the teachings of these theologians is important for understanding the Anglo-Saxon conception of sin, Gregory's teaching also provides commentary on the punishment. Through his exploration of Satan's trial before God, he provides a hypothetical situation containing a spectator punishment. Gregory writes:

> "For he will be cast down in the sight of all, because when the eternal Judge then terribly appears, when legions of Angels stand at His side, when the whole ministry of heavenly Powers is attending, all the Elect are brought to behold this spectacle, this cruel and mighty monster is brought captive into the midst, and with his own body, that is, with all reprobates, is consigned to the eternal fires of hell…O what a spectacle will that be, when this most huge monster will be displayed to the eyes of the Elect" (XXXIII.37).

In this excerpt, the ultimate trial and punishment is described, and Gregory imagines a Foucault-esque scene where the criminal has been made visible for all to see, where the punishment is enacted not only for Satan, but for "the whole ministry of heavenly Powers" and "the Elect." By Gregory choosing to present Satan's punishment as a spectacle, a link can be established between sin and spectator punishment among learned scholars of the time. Not only does Gregory emphasize numerous times that Satan is brought before the large audience in a

very noticeable and public way, but he refers specifically to Satan's body as the instrument of punishment. As Foucault writes, punishment is to be written upon the body either by scars or through spectacle, and Gregory's punishment fulfills both those qualifications, although in this instance, the body is not a literal body but his group of followers, and thus a metaphor for his physical body. Furthermore, the wording almost suggests that the spectacle is something of celebration when Gregory writes, "O what a spectacle that will be," and this verve used in his account extends to the literature. Just as Gregory's version delights in the spectacle of the punishment and highlights the instructive nature of the public gathering, Anglo-Saxon literature employs the same preoccupation with these themes to provide a clear demonstration of sin and consequences through spectator punishments.

Finally, the connection between sin and spectator punishment during the medieval period may most obviously be observed through depictions of the crucifixion. Crucifixion imagery began gaining popularity during the medieval period, with theologians such as Ælfric and Wulfstan detailing Christ's passion and churches presenting artistic depictions of the crucifixion. For example, the tenth century Reliquary Cross survives, a golden cross containing an ivory figure of Christ in the middle which is believed to have been made in Winchester. According to the Victoria and Albert Museum, which is where the cross is now housed, "The cross is one of the rare surviving pieces which give substance to descriptions in contemporary documentary sources of the sumptuous church furnishings of pre-Conquest England." Along with similar church objects believed to be widespread during the period, Christian writers also wrote of Christ's suffering. In his *Catholic Homilies,* Ælfric writes, *Crist þa geþafode þæt ða wælhræwan hine genamon and gebundon, and on rode hengene acwealdan* (Then Christ agreed that the cruel men take him and bind him and killed by hanging on the cross, found in *Sermo De*

Initio Creatureæ, Ad Populum, Quando Volueris). In a homily by Wulfstan, he writes, *he geþafode, swa he sylf wolde, þæt hine man to deaþe forrædde. Hine man band, hine man swang, æt nyhstan on rode aheng, him ægðer þurhdraf mid isenum næglum ge fet ge handa swa ða Iudeas þurh deofles lare þa menniscnesse to deaðe acoman* (He agreed, as he willed, that the men put him to death. He was bound and beaten and finally hung on the cross, and iron nails were driven through his feet and hands, and therefore the Jews through the devil's teaching put his human body to death). In the first description, Ælfric focuses on the physical punishment suffered by Christ that was inflicted by the men, while in the second, Wulfstan intensifies the visual image by making the tortures more detailed and specific. Both homilies provide vivid retellings of Christ's punishment, but not on the public display if his body. However, as representations of the crucifixion moved beyond the written word, the artistic renderings of Christ's Passion began focusing more on the spectacle of the event. The Harley MS 2904, more commonly called the Ramsey Psalter, contains a detailed image of Christ's crucifixion. In the manuscript illumination, the figure of Christ is prominently displayed in the middle, while a weeping woman faces him on the left and a man faces him on the right. Both figures clearly stare at Christ's suffering, emphasizing the visual nature and spectacle of his crucifixion. While Christ is obviously not a criminal on display to warn others of the consequences of improper actions, his punishment acts as a spectacle to viscerally remind Christians the pain and suffering his human body underwent to grant humans salvation. In both written and artistic examples of crucifixion, the torture is emphasized to highlight his suffering through his punishment, with the transformation occurring afterwards during his resurrection.

Throughout most of the discussions of sin in Anglo-Saxon literature, sin is linked intrinsically with transformation and the lack of reason. In their writings, Augustine, Boethius,

and Ælfric implicate the mind as a key component of sin, and each definition suggests that sin and evil reduces humanity and places a being into a lower, bestial state. Furthermore, Aldhelm, Cassian, and Gregory all refer to sins as monsters or beasts, which suggests that the genesis of the transformation into a bestial state occurs because the sin themselves are monsters that overtake the body and mind. In the Anglo-Saxon versions of *Genesis,* sinful characters are depicted as having their mental states altered as they descend into evilness. Nebuchadnezzar exhibits an unstable mental state until he transforms into a deer, while Satan and the angels lack rationality until they are changed into monstrous beings. Even Lot's wife suffers a lack in judgment that ends with her transformation into a pillar of salt. The fall made sin one of the possible consequences of exercising free will; however, the transformations do not occur for humans who commit minor sins since all humans are guilty of that; instead, the transformations are doled out on characters who consciously abandon the will of God by succumbing to the temptation of the worst sins. Therefore, the characters in these poems serve as visual reminders of the link between sin and choice, and the seriousness of offending God.

3.2   Physical Transformations as Punishment in Old English *Genesis* Retellings

Multiple Old English *Genesis* stories feature physical transformations that serve as punishment for transgressions. *Daniel* features Nebuchadnezzar's transformation into a deer, *Solomon and Saturn II* and *Genesis A & B* provide various versions of the fall of the angels where they are transformed into monstrous demons, and *Genesis A* tells of Lot's wife being turned into a pillar of salt. Since this theme of transformation as punishment is threaded through various *Genesis* retellings found in different manuscripts, it demonstrates the theme's importance to Anglo-Saxon literature. Additionally, each story connects mental instability and loss of reason to the characters' punishment, showing that a person's status as a rational being is a significant

concern in regard to their transformation. By focusing these biblical stories this way, physical, mental, and spiritual stability become pillars of existence for the spectator audience. Subverting these pillars results in dramatic, theatrical repercussions within the texts, and each of the transformations lead to extreme corporal punishments where the body is changed into an unrecognizable form. This "very excess of violence," according to Foucault, "is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all of its force" (34). Though severe, the violence emphasizes the gravity of the crimes, and the pattern of transformation punishments across the different texts suggests that the consequences are not literary embellishment, but a systematic set of rules to symbolically correct the spectator-audience's behavior.

The fall of the angels is a popular motif in Anglo-Saxon literature. Stories of the fall appear in poetry, wisdom literature, and saints' lives. Though these stories are so widespread, they are apocryphal since the Bible does not detail the story of the fall and only hints at the story (Anlezark 121). However, Anglo-Saxon poets wrote about the fall over and over again, and the story permeates Anglo-Saxon literature. Poetic versions of the fall appear in *Genesis A & B, Solomon and Saturn II, Christ and Satan, Juliana, Vainglory, Elene,* and *Andreas.* This section will focus on the story of the fall presented in *Solomon and Saturn II* and *Genesis A & B. Solomon and Saturn II* is one of two prose dialogues, and this particular one is found in the Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 422 manuscript. The text details a dialogue between the king of Israel, Solomon, and a prince of the Chaldeans, Saturn. *Genesis A & B* are two poetic versions of the book of Genesis found in the Junius Manuscript. *Genesis A* starts with an account of Satan's war, while *Genesis B* is a separate poem included in the middle of *Genesis A* between lines 235 and 851 detailing the fall of Lucifer and the temptation of Eve. The portrayals of Satan presented in these texts explore the rejection of rationality that leads to a transformation into

monstrous, demonic figures manifested in physical forms, which reflects a textual concern with the role of rationality in sin.

The crime of disobedience is clear in the narrative presented in *Solomon and Saturn II.* Though the sin of pride was a concern of religious texts of the time, disobedience was also an important concern. Addressing the crime of disobedience acts as a spectator punishment for society because it has wide social implications. The idea of disobedience is introduced in the poem by drawing a distinction between those who obey and those who do not: *oðer his dryhtne hierde, oðer him ongan wyrcan ðurh dierne cræftas / segn and side byrnan* [One who serves his lord, and one who goes against him to make banners and wide armor by means of secret craft, lines 444-5]. In these lines, disobedience relates to going against a lord and working in secret to rise up against him. While the most significant part of this line is *dierne cræftas,* or secret crafts, the word *dyrne* also carries the definition of evil, dark, and deceitful. The disobedient one creates armor and weapons through evil craft.

This theme of disobedience and devil's craft appears in other places in Old English literature. In *Genesis B,* Satan transforms himself into a serpent in the garden *þurh deofles cræft* (through devil's craft, line 491). Not only does this transformation from human to beast occur, but he also willingly transforms himself through his own abilities in order to deceive others. At the beginning of *Daniel,* the poet refers to *deofles cræft* when he writes that the Israelites *curon deofles cræft* (chose devil's craft, line 32b). The Israelites turn away from God, and through pride, focus on devil's craft, which leads to a downfall much like the angels. The poet of *Beowulf* also refers to secret, evil craft when he writes, *Sceal mæg nealles inwit-net oðrum bregdan dyrnum cræfte* (One shall not cast a net of treachery for another through evil craft, line 2168). All of these examples identify cunning, trickery, and secrecy as the root of the crime. In the line

from *Beowulf*, the poet uses this wisdom to warn of the dangers of going against one's kinsmen through treachery and malice, which aligns with the message in *Solomon and Saturn II* and *Genesis A & B.* The one who partakes in *dierne cræftas* transgresses against the lord, his kinsmen, and the community. By doing this, he betrays the one he is loyal to, and especially in texts like *Beowulf,* the loyalty associated with the lord-retainer relationship is held sacred. The fact that this is accomplished through *cræft* implies the transgressor commits the crime through his own actions and constructs his own guilt. The distinction between the two types of people – one who commits minor sins and is aligned with God and one who commits sinful crimes and turns from God – rests on mental action, on choice, and on the active participation in sin. To use one's skill to purposefully make banners and armor to go against God is a deliberate action that focuses on worldly cares and betrayal, thus effectively closing the mind to reason and goodness.

Genesis B describes Lucifer's decision to wage war against Heaven, which is the crime that leads to his transformation punishment. God creates the angels and makes Lucifer the greatest of all of them. When God created the angels, *he him gewit forgeaf* (he gave them intellect/reason, line 250). Since God presents the angels with intellect, that reason connects them to Him, which indicates that those beings with reason are godly, while those without are beast-like and monstrous. In *Moralia in Iob,* Gregory teaches that God is the reason behind all rational creatures since he gives life to all. God has created a system for Heaven and earth, and as rational beings, He allows us to understand the reason behind things by clearing our mind and giving us the clarity to see what is right and rational.[25] In the beginning, He gives Lucifer intelligence and makes him *swa mihtigne on his modgeþohte* (so strong of mind/intellect, line 253). Though God makes Lucifer his second, Lucifer rejects the gifts God gives him and

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[25] *Moralia in Iob,* Book 30.17, found on http://www.lectionarycentral.com/GregoryMoralia/Book30.html

transforms himself into an evil monster: *ac he awende hit him to wyrsan þinge* (but he turned himself into worse thing, line 259). The action here culminates around the verb *awendan*, which has the definition *to turn* while including connotations for turning in an unfavorable direction, perverting, and turning upside down. Lucifer perverts himself into something grotesque, something completely opposite of the good, bright, and shining angel that God created. The use of the word *þinge* is also significant. When Lucifer transforms himself, he is no longer an angel or even a being; he is a *thing*. Since he inverts God's creation, the condition or state that he turns himself into is something *worse*.

Satan commits the crime of betrayal against God, which incurs God's wrath. Satan claims that he cannot *þeodne þeowian* (serve as a retainer, line 268a) and that he *tweo þuhte / þæt he gode wolde geongra weorðan* (doubted that he would become God's vassal/follower, lines 276b-7). These lines establish Satan's refusal accept his subservient role because he wants to create his own group where he is the sole ruler. Next, Satan arrogantly states that he has his own group of brave companions: *strange geneatas* (strong vassals, line 284); *hæleþas heardmode* (brave, stout-hearted warriors, line 285); *rofe rincas* (strong warriors, line 286); *holde on hyra hygesceaftum* (loyal in their hearts, line 288). Finally, he ends this speech by declaring he will no longer be God's retainer: *Ne wille ic leng his geongra wurþan* (line 291). When God discovers Satan's plan, He demands that Satan pay for his crime: *sceolde he þa dæd ongyldan* (he should be punished for his deeds, line 295). The poem explicitly declares that Satan's transgression be punished. Because of the severity of his crimes, he must receive *ealra morðra mæst* (the most torment of all, line 297). God directly states that Satan should be punished for his crimes, making the offense and the consequence explicit. The sentence that follows these lines is one of the most significant in *Genesis B*:

> *Swa deð monna gehwilc*
>
> *þe wið his waldend   winnan ongynneð*
>
> *mid mane wið þone mæran drihten* (lines 297b-9a).

[And so death to each man who begins to work against his ruling lord, with wickedness against his great lord.]

Satan has committed the worst possible sin ever imagined – he has gone against God; for this, he has to suffer the worst punishment possible. However, the poet does not leave the idea there, connected only to a biblical Satan who has defied God. Instead, the language in *Genesis B* takes Satan's punishment one step further since lines 297-299 make the punishment more general than specifically going against God. Death and punishment come to anyone who betrays and commits crimes against their ruler or lord. This aligns with the epic poetry that explores lord-retainer relationships, loyalty, and betrayal. Adding this subsequent line frames the idea of punishment in a much more relatable way for the audience. Since the message is no longer a sermon of the evils of Satan and the importance of obeying God, the message relates specifically to social actions with the poem warning that a man shall not go against any ruler. Further didactic lines occur on lines 302a-303: *Forþon he sceolde grund gesecean / heardes hellewites, þæs þe he wann wið heofnes waldend* (Therefore, he shall seek the pit of harsh punishment because he worked against the ruler of heaven). The line offers a clear cause and effect: one receives punishment for going against the leader. This acts as a form of social control, where the punishment becomes a performative action. Satan undergoes the worst punishment of all for going against God, and if a person in a community goes against the leader, the same horrific punishment will happen to them. The line serves as instruction for how to act properly and avoid punishment.

Forms of the verb *weorpan* appear in multiple places in *Genesis B* in relation to transformation. The verb means to cast or throw out, with a connotation of change to the person.[26] Additionally, a similar word, *weorþan*, is also used to connect more specifically to transformation and change. According to the poem, one of Satan's crimes is that the rationality in his mind transforms into hostility for God (*gram wearð him se goda on his mode*, line 302). His very nature is evil and transforms the gift of intellect that God has given him into wickedness, separating him from God and the rest of the angels. The first thing God does to punish Satan is to "*hine on helle wearp*" (cast him into hell, line 304). Since the arrogance and wickedness in his mind has turned him into something grotesque and monstrous that cannot exist in Heaven, God immediately removes Satan from their community and banishes him out of Heaven, into the realm of the other. In the next line, the verb is used once again to describe the bodily transformation of Satan: *þær he to deofle wearð* (where he was turned into a devil, line 305). Now Satan's bright and luminous form described earlier in the poem has also been altered because God transforms him into a monster. Even his mind is altered because *wearp hine on þæt morðer innan* (Mortal sin/wickedness transformed him within, line 342b). He does not retain any godly reason or goodness; therefore, his mind changes to result in a complete transformation. To emphasize the severe transformation, the poet reiterates the story of Satan's fall in lines 339 to 355, pointing out that Satan was the *scynost* (most beautiful, line 339a), and twice claiming he was the brightest in heaven (*hwitost on heofne,* line 340a, and *hwit on heofne*, line 350). Then, he mentions the transformation into darkness Satan has undergone. Satan goes to live in a *sweartan helle* (dark hell, line 345), and twice the poet writes that he takes care of that dark place, *grundes*

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[26] *Weorpan,* Bosworth-Toller

gyman and *gieman þæs grundes* (lines 346a, 349a). The emphasis on light and darkness reinforces Satan's transformation and expulsion from God's good graces.

The pit of hell to which Satan and the angels are banished in *Genesis B* and *Solomon and Saturn II* is described as a type of monstrous realm. *Genesis B* claims that *hyra woruld wæs gehwyrfed* (their world was changed, line 318b). Not only did the physical bodies of the angels transform, but the space in which they existed changed. In *Solomon and Saturn II,* hell is described as:

> *wintre beðeahte,*
>
> *wæter in sende and wyrmgeardas,*
>
> *atol deor monig irenum hornum,*
>
> *blodige earnas and blace nædran* (lines 459b-62).

[covered in winter, sent water inside, and a pit of snakes, many wild beasts with horns of iron, bloody eagles and black adders.]

Hell is presented as a horrific wild place full of terrifying wild beasts, which aligns with other monstrous realms filled with beasts and savage animals found in Old English literature. *Genesis B* presents hell as an even more undesirable, savage place. Satan calls it a *laðran landscipe* (hateful landscape, line 376a) and *grimme, grundlease* (grim and bottomless, line 390a) with *sweartan mistas* (dark mists, line 391a). The idea of hell being a dark, menacing landscape and watery pit full of monsters also relates to *Beowulf* (Anlezark 132). The water is reminiscent of Grendel and Grendel's mother's lairs, where Grendel resided in marshy fens and Grendel's mother lived underwater. Hell presents as a monstrous realm located in the liminal spaces of society. The punishment for the angels and Satan is not just bodily transformations into

devils, but a permanent residence in a fiery or watery realm full of unforgiving landscapes and savage creatures.

In the story of Lot's wife, the language used describes her transformation into a pillar of salt after looking back at the city when she had been instructed not to. *Genesis A* depicts Lot's wife's transformation as follows:

> *Us gewritu secgað*
>
> *þæt heo on sealtstanes   sona wurde*
>
> *anlicnesse.* (lines 2565b-7a)

[The scripture tells us that she immediately turned into the likeness of a pillar of salt.]

God enacts another transformation punishment through Lot's wife for going against his word. When God commanded Lot's wife not to look back, she disobeys, and in that moment she morphs into an inanimate object and remains like this forever. The story of Lot's wife is perhaps the most overt example of a spectator punishment. The lines that follow present a concrete image of punishment for the audience:

> *æfre siððan*
>
> *se monlica   (þæt is mære spell)*
>
> *stille wunode,   þær hie strang begeat*
>
> *wite, þæs heo wordum   wuldres þegna*
>
> *hyran ne wolde.   Nu sceal heard and steap*
>
> *on þam wicum   wyrde bidan,*
>
> *drihtnes domes,   hwonne dogora rim,*
>
> *woruld gewite.*   (lines 2567b-74a)

[She always remained a still statue (that famous story), where she received strong punishment because she wouldn't hear the words of the thanes of glory. Now shall she continue her fate in that residence, hard and towering, God's judgment, for all of her days, until the end of the world.]

According to *Genesis A,* Lot's wife may still be found outside the gates of the city as a warning for disobeying God. In two other versions of the story of Lot's wife, Ælfric's version of Alcuin's *Interrogationes Sigewulfi Presbyteri* on line 482 and the Old English *Hexateuch*, the writers use the word *getacnunge* (a sign/token/symbol) to describe Lot's wife. Even more than the didactic explanation of her enduring punishment in *Genesis A,* these two texts strengthen the concept that she serves as a visual reminder of disobeying God. The version in the *Hexateuch* adds the word *unwislice* (unwisely), connecting her act of looking back and going against God to reason. A lack of reason leads to her crime and subsequent punishment, and her transformation makes her a symbol for others of God's power and judgment. The form of her transformation and the use of the word *getacnunge* mark Lot's wife's body as an object of knowledge where her body acts as the commodity which God asserts power over. As in Foucault's argument, the body is scarred as spectacle, where her scar is the *getacnunge* implemented by the statue. She remains like this forever, keeping the signs of her transformation punishment a permanent spectacle. When God transforms her, her entire corporeal body is changed from something living into an inanimate object. This transformation is different than other transformation punishments where the guilty is transformed into a monstrous, but living, being. When she becomes the pillar of salt, she is "both herself and a representation of herself at the same time, an object that is both an original and its copy" (Waugh 91). This hybrid figure that Lot's wife becomes makes her something unnatural and grotesque, not in the realm of the living, but not quite dead, thus she

becomes a monstrosity in that the punishment takes away her life and mandates that she experience torture until the end of time. Her transformation is a public spectacle that creates fear for the spectator-audience by always maintaining the signs of her monstrous punishment upon her body.

The statue she becomes serves as a constant reminder of the consequences of sin and disobedience, much like other spectator punishments in the Anglo-Saxon period. Heads speared on pikes lined the edges of execution cemeteries and bodies lined roads outside of towns. Mints, which were a centralized and bustling part of Anglo-Saxon settlements, displayed severed hands that acted as a spectacle for the community. Furthermore, mutilated body parts were often mounted at the scene of the crime, such as the hands of a thief and the nose or ears of an adulterous wife (O'Gorman 156-7). Lot's wife serves as a similar type of spectacle, but instead of a single body part, her entire body becomes the symbol of the crime. Since she disobeyed God, the mutilation encompasses all of her, removing her humanity and turning her into a permanent warning. By locating the statue right outside the city walls at the scene of the crime, the spectator punishment aligns with others from the time period, such as punishments given to the thieves and adulterous wives, where the mutilated part is housed where the offense occurred.

3.3   Nebuchadnezzar's Mental Instability

The Old English poem *Daniel* is a retelling of the biblical story of Daniel. The Old English version does not follow directly after the Vulgate one, and many scholars believe that the poet used an Old Latin account derived from the Greek version of the scripture.[27] The Old

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[27] For more on the source of *Daniel*, see Oscar Hofer, "Über die Entstehung des angelsächsischen Gedichtes *Daniel*" in *Anglia* 12 (1889); Robert T. Farrell, "The Structure of the Old English *Daniel*" in *The Poems of MS Junius 11*, ed. R.M. Liuzza; Robert E. Bjork, "Oppressed Hebrews and the Song of Azarias in the Old English *Daniel*" in *SP* 77 (1980); Paul G. Remley, *Old English Biblical Verse: Studies in* Genesis, Exodus and Daniel, 1996

English poetic retelling expands upon the biblical sources by focusing more on the character of Nebuchadnezzar. Instead of centering on Daniel and his prophesies, the poet presents a story about the pride of the Israelites, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Babylonians. It is a moral story about "oppositions between the 'way of righteousness,' which is rewarded, and the 'way of the world,' which is punished" (Anderson 229). Many critics focus on the binaries present in the poem, such as "humility (represented by Daniel and other refugees from Judah) versus pride (mainly charged to Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians); loyalty to the Covenant (and the Lord) versus idolatry; good counsel versus drunkenness or foolishness" (Remley 243). The poem details "the pride and humbling of Nebuchadnezzar," with stories of the Israelites and Belthazzar as supplemental examples (Harbus 261). The Israelites turn away from God and give into their vices, which causes them to be punished, and Nebuchadnezzar is a king whose pride causes him to go against God, and consequently he is punished for this sin. The poetic version of *Daniel* is an in-depth exploration of man's lack of reason, and how this mental instability transforms the mind and body into a subhuman state as punishment. This subhuman state characterized by lack of reason makes Nebuchadnezzar a type of monstrous human, where he still physically retains human characteristics, but is stripped of his humanity and inhabits a liminal space between human and monster.

The poet begins the poem by immediately describing acts of sinful vices. Previously victorious and protected by God, the Israelites are presented in the poem as a race who have now changed:

oðþæt hie wlenco anwod   æt winþege

deofoldædum,   druncne geðohtas. (17-18)

[Until pride invaded them at the feasting,/ with devil-deeds, and drunken thoughts]

Within the first twenty lines of *Daniel,* the poet points out the shortcomings of the Israelites. The group who previously obeyed God has now devolved into sinful acts. Most important in this section is the use of the word *wlenco* or pride. As many critics have pointed out, *Daniel* illustrates the dangers of pride.[28] However, this text does not just function as a warning against pride since Nebuchadnezzar's pride is only one of many sins depicted in this poem to create a manifestation of sinfulness that results in bestial transformation. Since pride appears at the beginning of the text, the poem connects immediately to the eight major sins outlined by theologians such as Ælfric and Aldhelm. These are not minor sins that the Israelites, and eventually Nebuchadnezzar, are committing. By depicting the characters engaging in major sins at the very beginning, and providing specific details about the Israelites not in the Vulgate version of *Daniel,* the poem sets the tone by refocusing the Old English version of the biblical story within the theme sinful deeds, rationality, and punishment.

In addition to the sin of pride, the poem focuses on other sins to begin the ritual of transformation of Nebuchadnezzar and his followers by clearly marking the crimes for the spectator. During the feast, the Israelites engage in excess and gluttony. In the Midlent Sunday sermon, greediness is the first major sin outlined by Ælfric, where he states that *Gifernys bið þæt se man ær timan hine gereordige, oððe æt his mæle to micel ðicge (*greediness is when a man eats before his time, or at his meal takes too much). He goes on to say that this sin creates *oferfyll*

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[28] For more on the theme of pride in *Daniel*, see Robert T. Farrell, "The Structure of the Old English *Daniel*" in *The Poems of MS Junius 11,* ed. R.M. Liuzza; Graham Caie, "The Old English *Daniel* A Warning Against Pride" in *English Studies 59.1* (Feb. 1978); Antonina Harbus, "Nebuchadnezzar's Dreams in the Old English *Daniel*" in *The Poems of MS Junius 11*; Manish Sharma, "Nebuchadnezzar and the Defiance of Measure in the Old English *Daniel*" in *English Studies 86.2* (Apr. 2005); N.D. Isaacs, *Structural Principles in Old English Poetry*

(gluttony), *druncennyss* (drunkenness), *unclænnys lichaman* (foulness of body), *modes unstæððignys* (instability of mind), *ydel gaffetung* (idle vile mocking)*,* and *fela oðre unðeawas* (many other vices). Finally, he blames greediness and gluttony for Adam's decision to eat the forbidden fruit. Excess then acts as the commonality between the sins, showing just how sinful and unstable the characters in this poem are. Even before we are introduced to Nebuchadnezzar, the first few lines of the poem set up a world of sinful indulgences and vices that affect the reasoning and humanity of the characters. Framing the poem this way in the beginning sets up the "ritual of transformation" as described by Foucault. For spectator punishment to be effective, the punishment must be calculated directly to rules and social codes that are broken. To an Anglo-Saxon spectator audience, beginning the narrative with an obvious rejection of the eight major sins outlines the crimes the character has committed. The obvious "spectacle" of the crimes marks the beginning of the punishment process, where first the crimes are addressed before the character is sentenced.

The pride the Israelites feel at the wine-feast is accompanied by *deofoldædum*, or devil-deeds. This compound word directly links the Israelites with the *deofol,* or the devil. While they are not inherently monstrous, they are visibly marked with sin from the beginning of the poem, therefore aligning with other monstrous figures like Satan. The excessive drinking represents the conduit through which the Israelites have fallen out of God's favor. Though the dangers of excessive drinking are often covered in sermons, they are also presented in the Old English gnomic poem *Fortunes of Men:*

> *Sum sceal on beore   þurh byreles hond*
>
> *meodugal mæcga;   þonne he gemet ne con*

>*gemearcian his muþe   mode sine,*
>
>*ac sceal ful earmlice   ealdre linnan* (lines 51-4).

[Some shall be with beer from a cupbearer's hand a man excited with mead, and then he cannot determine moderation for his mouth with his mind, but must die completely miserable.]

These lines explicitly connects drinking too much to the mind and thought. If a man cannot control his drinking, his mind is negatively affected. Because of his excess, loss of reason, and loss of mental faculties, he is punished through death. Excessive drink becomes a symbol for a man's mental instability and demise. This relates directly to the actions of the Israelites. The Israelites' transgression occurs "under the influence of drink, in a state of pride" (Farrell 221). By using excessive, greedy drink, the poet visibly marks the Israelites with their crime. In spectator punishment, the crime must be marked upon the body, and in this case, it is done so through spectacle. The Israelites make a sinful spectacle of themselves at this feast, which ultimately leads to their punishment. By using the dative form of the word *deofoldædum*, the poem presents the idea that the drinking and pride were conducted *with* devil-deeds, that when pride invaded (*anwad*) them, devil-deeds entered into them as well. Using the word *anwad* in relation to pride posits the idea that the sin becomes its own entity with its own actions. While surrounded by the other major sin of greediness and excess, the sin becomes an aggressor, an other outside of society, who invades the Israelites and transforms them into something unrecognizable. As the Israelites succumb to pride and devil-deeds, they change into monstrous figures that are consumed by their crimes.

The devil-deeds permeate the Israelites' *druncne geðohtas*, which furthers the removal of their rationality and humanity. The thoughts of the Israelites are mentioned specifically in lines 17-18: *oðþæt hie wlenco anwod æt winþege / deofoldædum, druncne geðohtas* (Until pride

invaded them at the feasting,/ with devil-deeds, and drunken thoughts). Pride has invaded their

bodies through excess drink, along with devil-deeds and drunken thoughts. Through the

alliteration of the two words *deofoldædum* and *druncne*, a close correlation is drawn between the

two words, just as *wlenco* and *winþege* are an alliterative pair in the previous line. In line 17,

pride connects to drinking and feasting, which emphasizes the way the excess vice stems from

pride and arrogance. This arrogance has made the Israelites complacent and they no longer fear

God; instead, they celebrate and engage in excess that leads to devil-deeds. The "drunken

boasting" of the Jews leads to their downfall (Farrell 222). The *druncne geðohtas* become a type

of *deofoldædum* that the Israelites do. Lines 23-24 specifically point out that the Israelites engage

in sin: *Israhela cyn unriht don, / wommas wyrcean* (The Israelites doing evil, performing sins).

Since the drunken thoughts are not pure, they are the avenue by which the Israelites have

performed evil, sinful deeds; therefore, they are connected to pride, devils, and sin. Ultimately,

the Israelites have *curon deofles cræft* (chosen the Devil's craft, line 32). This relates directly

back to Ælfric's Sexagesima Sunday sermon, where he discusses that worldly concerns choke

the throat of the mind. The worldly vice of alcohol cuts off the mind, blocking a person from

God and any goodness. Instead, the Israelites open themselves up to evilness, which easily takes

hold through the Devil's craft. Because they opened themselves to evil, the Israelites are

punished through their mind. Reason and goodness stems from a person's mind, so through their

excess pride, greed, and gluttony, the Israelites undergo the cutting off of their mind that Ælfric

preaches. The text emphasizes the dangers of these sins by detailing the ritualistic way they

perform the sins as they move towards their monstrous transformations and punishment.

  The mention of *druncne geðohtas* draws attention to the mental state of the Israelites.

Pride and devil-deeds have invaded (*anwod*) them during the feast. Not only has this sin made

them turn from God, but it has also altered their mental state. The use of the verb *curon* in line 32

links the Israelites' mental state with the *deofles cræft.* By choosing the Devil's craft, the action

implies mental activity when they make decision. Starting *Daniel* in this way sets up the theme

of hazy thinking and unclear mental states for the entire poem. By reading the poem within this

frame, the Old English *Daniel* provides a more complex investigation into Nebuchadnezzar's

character and psychology than the biblical version. The poem does not focus on Daniel's

miraculous deeds, but on a severely flawed group of people and man. By exploring the

psychology of sin and crime through these characters, the poet presents a relatable set of

misdeeds to the audience spectator. Sin is inherent in everyone, yet something that is strictly

preached against and forbidden. The poem provides examples of major sins that allow the

audience to fully understand the transgressions before watching the symbolic punishment of

Nebuchadnezzar, which turns him to a human monstrosity through loss of reason and humanity.

Though the Israelites begin the poem, the nexus of sin and crime within *Daniel* is

Nebuchadnezzar. Just like the Israelites, Nebuchadnezzar also suffers from an unclear mind. The

poet describes him as searching for knowledge after the Israelites are taken over and he

commands:

> *geogoðe*   *gleawost wære*
>
> *boca bebodes,*   *þe þær brungen wæs.*
>
> *Wolde þæt þa cnihtas*   *cræft leornedon,*
>
> *þæt him snytro on sefan*   *secgan mihte.* (lines 81-4)

[that they brought the wisest youths that were in command of books. He wished the

youths to learn the knowledge so that they might tell him the wisdom in their minds.]

He looks to the newly captive Israelites as a means to acquire knowledge because his own mental state is unclear, which strengthens the theme presented at the beginning of the poem. Without reason and goodness, he mind is closed, making him unable to gain any of the knowledge he desires. This limits him, and in his sinful state, he avoids turning to God. The poet follows these lines with a direct mention of Nebuchadnezzar' weakened mental state:

> *nales ðy þe he þæt moste   oððe gemunan wolde*
>
> *þæt he þara gifena   gode þancode*
>
> *þe him þær to duguðe   drihten scyrede.* (lines 85-7)

[but not because he would remember to thank the good Lord for the gifts that he had given him.]

In these lines, *gemunan* refers directly to Nebuchadnezzar's mental lack. The word *gemunan* is a transitive verb that means to remember or consider, which makes it a word reflecting mental activity.[29] In *Beowulf,* the word is used numerous times. For example, it is used when characters recall memories (lines 2114, 2430, 2606, 2633), strength (2678), and feuds (1259, 2042, 2488). In relation to good judgment, Wealtheow uses the word when she tells Beowulf, "*ic þe þæs lean geman*" (I will remember you for this reward, line 1220), or in relation to someone wise, it is used in this description of Beowulf's father, "*hine gearwe geman / witena welhwylc wide geond eorþan*" (he is well remembered, by every wise man, throughout the wide world, lines 265-6). The word is also used as a verb for more specific mental activity. The people of Heorot "*helle gemundon / in modsefan*" (pondered hell in their hearts, line 179-80) when they prayed to pagan idols to help them defeat the threat of Grendel, and they also *"helm ne gemunde"* (did not think about their helmets, line 1290) when Grendel's mother attacked them because of

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[29] *gemunan,* Bosworth-Toller

their fear and surprise. In the *Blickling Homily* for The Fifth Sunday After Lent, the word is used in conjunction with *geþencan* to emphasize the mental reasoning and choice connected with spiritual belief (*mid inneweardre heortan gemunan and geþencan*, with their internal heart consider and reflect upon). Since the verb is transitive, each of these uses connects mental activity with possessing something, like a memory, or places something that the person is thinking about into the mind. The word reflects Nebuchadnezzar's inability to think about, remember, or bear in his mind the idea that he should thank God for what he was given. For him, his mind is empty of this specific thing he must remember or consider, so there is no mental activity happening. Instead, a mental lack occurs because he does not remember to thank God. By forgetting God, he begins to reject the one thing that makes one human: reason and knowledge. Without God, there is no humanity and reason, and because of this, Nebuchadnezzar begins his transformation into a bestial monster. Despite this mental lack, he indulges in the sin of greediness and excess as he tries to acquire this knowledge. His gluttonous desire for the youths to learn the knowledge is only for his benefit, so that he can take that knowledge all for himself. Nebuchadnezzar does not need mental acumen to perform the sins. Focusing on the action involved with *gemunan* indicates Nebuchadnezzar's emptiness, which only serves to highlight his sinful excess, and effectively strips of him his humanity.

Because of his arrogance, Nebuchadnezzar places himself above God into a position where he does not think he needs to thank Him; moreover, he is incapable of learning and understanding for himself because of his impeded mentality. Though he is a mighty king who has just conquered the Israelites, he seeks knowledge where he lacks it because he is greedy for what he does not possess and desires to have all things. Boethius equates rationality and reason with humanity in *The Consolation of Philosophy*, where he states that man is "a rational animal"

(Bk 1, Pr 6). A man has the ability to think and make decisions, as Philosophy explains, "any being, which by its nature has the use of reason, must also have the power of judgment by which it can make decisions, and by its own resources, distinguish between things" (Bk 5, Pr 2). As the events of *Daniel* progress, Nebuchadnezzar continues to lose this base marker of humanity. He becomes unable to use his reason to make decisions, such as thanking God, and cannot gain the knowledge he seeks. Because of his mental instability and sinfulness, he loses touch with his reason, and thus begins to lose his humanity. Losing one's humanity is a terrible fate, and the poem explores how a person approaches this state by connecting it to punishment. By focusing on the loss of reason and humanity, Nebuchadnezzar's demise into a bestial, monstrous being functions as a spectator punishment for the audience. None of the outward signs of Nebuchadnezzar's sins are ignored, but instead are emphasized over Daniel's good deeds. This public example, as Foucault outlines, helps to incite fear into the audience spectator. The poet's aim is not to lift Daniel's deeds, but to provoke the audience to, as Foucault states, "recoil from the truth of the crime" (35). As Nebuchadnezzar moves further from his humanity, the audience spectator should feel more revulsion at his actions and the consequences.

When Nebuchadnezzar builds an idol for his people to worship, the poet uses the scene to further establish the deterioration of the king's mental state. The poet writes that Nebuchadnezzar worshipped the idol: *for þam þe gleaw ne wæs.../reðe and rædleas, riht* (because he was not wise or right, but savage and ill-advised, lines 176-7). Once again, Nebuchadnezzar's lack of intelligence is the focus of the scene, where, through his actions that are spawned by this mental deficit, Nebuchadnezzar continues his decline. He is not just unwise or confused, he is *reðe*. Though this word depicts Nebuchadnezzar as cruel, additional connotations make him savage and wild. The word is used to describe animals, along with being

an adjective found in *Beowulf* that describes Grendel (*reoc ond reðe,* line 122). Since this lexical association aligns Nebuchadnezzar with other monstrous figures in Old English literature, it introduces his descent into mental instability and unintelligence as a transformation into a beast. These lines in *Daniel* appear shortly after Daniel has been introduced, who is described as *snotor and soðfæst* (wise and true, line 151) and who spoke to the king *wislice* (wisely, line 160). When the two characters appear together in the poem, the idea of reason versus mental instability becomes clearer.

The connection to animals and monsters at this point in the poem is particularly important. In King Alfred's Old English version of Boethius, sin is equated with transformation into an animal: "a man grown so vile as to have turned from good to evil, though canst not rightly call him a man, but a beast." Then, specific sins are expressly connected with animals; for example, a greedy man becomes a wolf, a false man becomes a fox, and a savage man becomes a lion (Bk 4, Ch XXXVII). Nebuchadnezzar has embraced his sinfulness to such a degree that his mind is transforming. Once this transformation is complete, his physical form will reflect his inward state, which becomes a visual sign of his punishment. When Nebuchadnezzar transforms into an animal-like being, he serves as a living, visual example of those sins. If the people around him partake in the same crimes and sin as Nebuchadnezzar did, then they will suffer the same fate and turn to a more animalistic state. The poem presents the spectacle of his punishment and transformation by showing the roots of the crime, then depicting Nebuchadnezzar as his sin and crime transform him into a human monstrosity.

Daniel embodies reason gained through God, and Nebuchadnezzar represents how knowledge is hidden when one turns away from God. The lack of knowledge leads to evil, because evil stems "from a deficiency in us" (Jones 96). Sin and evil become tied to lack or

absence of knowledge and righteousness. In *Interrogationes Sigeuulfi*, Ælfric writes, "*nis yfel nan þing buton godnysse forgægednysse, swa swa þeostru ne synd nan þing buton leohtes forlætennyss*" (Evil isn't anything except a transgression from goodness, just like darkness is not anything except loss of light). By equating it to darkness, Ælfric connects sin and evil with lack. After his rejection of God and knowledge, Nebuchadnezzar turns away from goodness, shutting out reason and creating a negative space manifested through a mental lack. Like other mutilation punishments, the negative space represents the punishment that has been taken away, just like a hand, tongue, or head. Since mutilation punishments found in Anglo-Saxon law codes were aimed at spectacle and the visual reminder of the crime committed, Nebuchadnezzar's mental lack can also be read in the same way. The poet highlights the negative space from the symbolic mutilation, drawing even more focus to the poem's interest in this character's crime.

The word *gleaw,* used in the phrase *gleaw ne wæs*, presents a layered meaning for Nebuchadnezzar's acumen. The word is defined as clear-sighted and keen, along with wise, intelligent, or sage, while additionally referring to physical sight and the eye.[30] Not just depicting Nebuchadnezzar as unwise, the word implies that Nebuchadnezzar is not clear-sighted and that his vision and his eyes are hazy and obstructed. Since the word refers to sight and vision, the description focuses on how Nebuchadnezzar does not see and lacks the very basic sense of seeing and reasoning. Augustine connects the idea of sight and wisdom in *City of God* when he says that "blindness is a vice of the eye" (XXII, 1). Just like blindness, lack of sight and hazy vision indicate a change in the eye. This inability to see blocks out light, and therefore God's divine light, which is just another way to block oneself off from God and humanity, just as worldly cares chokes off the mind. In *The Consolation of Philosophy,* Boethius also explores this

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[30] *gleaw,* Dictionary of Old English

idea when Philosophy tells him, "When they lose possession of their reason and give themselves wholly to vice…they are blinded by a cloud of ignorance" (Bk V, Pr 2). Blindness itself is not a sin, but represents the physical symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's lack and deterioration. Slowly, Nebuchadnezzar's sinfulness is removing his senses, which function as markers of his humanity. Blindess and Nebuchadnezzar's lack of sight acts as yet another mutilation punishment, just as his mental lack. As the crimes of Nebuchadnezzar escalate, his punishment becomes more visible. Piece by piece, Nebuchadnezzar's humanity is removed as he is mutilated, slowly transforming him into an unrecognizable being.

Another adjective used by the poet, *rædleas,* further supports Nebuchadnezzar's poor mental state. Glossing the word as without counsel, ill-advised, or unwise supports the opposition between him and Daniel. The word can also be defined as "in confusion."[31] By considering this connotation in addition to "unwise", it enforces the unclear state of Nebuchadnezzar's mind because he is unable to see and confused. The suffix of the word, *leas,* emphasizes the idea that Nebuchadnezzar lacks something mentally because his *ræd* (intelligence) is *leas* (less). On the other hand, Daniel is described as *soðfæst,* which is defined as righteous, pious, just, or true, referring to Daniel's connection to God. However, once again, the poet deliberately chooses a word with a deeper connotation to amplify the opposition between the characters. The word can also mean "without deception"[32], aligning the word with the ones connected to adjectives to describe Nebuchadnezzar. The king is confused and not clear-sighted, whereas Daniel is true and without deception, and this description of being true and without deception correlates directly to the confused and hazy mental state of Nebuchadnezzar. Nothing is hidden for Daniel, which is reflected through his ability to explain the dreams. By adding the

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[31] *Rædleas,* Bosworth-Toller
[32] *Soðfæst,* Bosworth-Toller

suffix *–fæst,* the word *soðfæst* adds another layer to Daniel's sense of reason since the suffix means fixed or firm. Where Nebuchadnezzar's mental state is uncertain, Daniel remains firmly and fixedly wise; he is not deceived, yet Nebuchadnezzar has been deceived and confused in many ways. He cannot interpret the dreams, and he presents an idol for his people to worship. Describing Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel using these adjectives in this section emphasize the muddled mental states and lack of reason that plague Nebuchadnezzar in addition to his pride.

Furthermore, in Ælfric's sermon for Wednesday in Easter Week, he warns that turning to the devil extinguishes the mind (*þæt ne beo næfre ðurh ðone laðan deofol adwæsced*). The language surrounding Nebuchadnezzar's mental instability reflects Ælfric's idea. Seduced by worldly things and the devil, Nebuchadnezzar's mind has been completely suppressed. Through this physical representation of mental transformation presented in homiletic literature, he becomes more than just a symbol of pride. Nebuchadnezzar engages in many of the eight major sins, and the poem tracks the deterioration of his mind through his sinfulness. Next to Daniel, the stark contrast between the characters becomes even more apparent. Daniel possesses what Ælfric calls *godcundan leohte* (divine light), which *onlihte ure mod* (illuminates our mind), ultimately pushing out the aforementioned dark and devilish deeds. This contrast specifically sets up the relationship between mental stability and sin. Sin is not just an act that goes against God; *Daniel* clearly depicts the influence that sin has on mentality. The more a person falls into the major sins, the more significant their mental transformation becomes. As the poem unfolds, Nebuchadnezzar continues growing less rational, bringing him further and further from his human state.

As Nebuchadnezzar burns the three youths in the furnace, the poem continues to explore his problematic mindset. When the people bow before the idol, they are described as *mode*

gefrecnod (corrupted and wicked in the mind, line 184) like the king. Nebuchadnezzar orders the torturous death of the three youths because of his *hreohmod* (troubled, fierce mind, line 241). Even when he witnesses the miracle of the youths being saved from the fire, he is described as *swiðmod* (violent-minded, line 268). Nebuchadnezzar's mental and emotional state leading up to his punishment is significant because as the description of his mind builds, each new description adds an additional layer to fully develop his mental instability. Along with being troubled, his mind is unclear, muddled, and violent. Using *hreohmod* to reinforce that Nebuchadnezzar is disturbed, fierce in mind, and hardened furthers his characterization as savage and bestial at this point in the poem. Through his fixation on worldly cares and sin, he has blocked his mind and driven out humanity, creating a void and lack where evil settles. Not just emphasizing Nebuchadnezzar's pride and arrogance, *swið* also depicts him as a cruel, violent person, which is reflected in his torture of the youths. Allowing himself to torture the youths transforms him into a violent and savage being, paralleling the transformation mentioned in Alfred's Boethius where the overall savage and cruel man transforms into a lion.

When he witnesses the miracle in the furnace, Nebuchadnezzar directly refers to his sense of reason and understanding. He states that though they put three people in the furnace, he sees four in there, *to soðe / nales me sefa leogeð* (in truth, my mind/understanding lies to me not at all). Nebuchadnezzar claims that this unbelievable thing he sees is *soðe* instead of *leogeð*. Furthermore, he declares that his *sefa* is not lying to or deceiving him. His reason is clear in this moment because he has bore witness to God's miracle. The direct mention of Nebuchadnezzar's mind and reason at this moment strengthens the poem's interest in the topic. Before, Nebuchadnezzar suffered from his unclear mental state. However, in this moment, by staring directly at the furnace, he has gained clarity through God. The act of seeing God's miracle with

his own eyes offers the audience a solution to sin and a way to avoid punishment. However, this clarity does not last for the king. Though he acknowledges God's power, Nebuchadnezzar does not change his ways or accept God's might: *wearð him hyrra hyge and on heortan geðanc / mara on modsefan þonne gemet wære* (His mind was haughtier and the thoughts of his heart were more on his own heart/mind than was proper, lines 490-1). Even when presented with reason, he rejects it; he retains his pride and ignorance. More importantly, he rejects God by refusing to accept his miracle and change his way. This casts him outside of the realm of humanity, which is reflected in his transformative punishment.

In the text, Nebuchadnezzar's numerous major sins result in a grave punishment. When interpreting one of the king's dreams, Daniel tells him:

> *and þonne onhweorfeð   heortan þine,*
>
> *þæt þu ne gemyndgast   æfter mandreame,*
>
> *ne gewittes wast   butan wildeora þeaw,*
>
> *bac þu lifgende   lange þrage*
>
> *heorta hlypum   geond holt wunast.* (lines 569-573)

[And then your heart will be changed so that you shall not remember the joyous noise of man nor knowledge, except the custom of wild beasts, but you shall live a long time jumping with the deer, dwelling beyond the wood.]

In this passage, Daniel outlines Nebuchadnezzar's impending physically transformative punishment: because of his actions, he will be transformed into a beast. His reason is stripped from him and his heart and mind changed, which means he no longer mentally associates with the human world and becomes a human monstrosity. The word *onhweorfan* is used to denote the change in those lines, and the word also means to reverse, revert, or turn. The verb is connected

to the idea of not remembering *mandreame* or *gewittes*, both of which serve as markers for humanity. If Nebuchadnezzar's punishment is a reverse of *mandreame* or *gewittes,* then the lines posit that there is an opposite state to having one's senses or the noises of man. That reverse state is exemplified by Nebuchadnezzar's condition as a human monstrosity. His physical body still resembles a human, but his mental faculties have reversed to the opposite of mankind. The punishment fits his crimes against society and God, which places him within a systematic ritual of spectator punishment. Because of his pride, he falls lower than any man into the role of a beast. Moreover, he loses the privilege of humanity because of his persistent unclear mental state and his inability to see reason even when reason appears to him and he sees truth in his mind. He no longer possesses human reason and only understands *wildeora þeaw*. Therefore, the spectator is reminded that humanity is not guaranteed since there is a reverse state, and this reverse state not only acts as a spectacle of power, but also should cause the spectator to recoil. In this particular instance, God holds all the power and can transform anyone into a human monstrosity for the crimes committed by Nebuchadnezzar, and the spectator should feel a level of revulsion after witnessing his transformation punishment.

In Nebuchadnezzar's case, his punishment is a type of mutilation. This reflects Anglo-Saxon law codes which outline mutilations as punishment. Mutilation punishments were used in Anglo-Saxon society to be a warning to others that a particular crime would not be tolerated. They also aimed to reform the criminal instead of killing them (Allen 18). Cnut II's law codes 30.4-5 outline mutilation punishments, such as removal of body parts that fit the crime:

> *gif he ful wurðe, butan þaet man ceorfe him ða handa oððe þa fet oððe aegþer, be*
> *þam ðe seo daed sig…swa man maeg styran eac þaere sawle beorgan.*

[If a man is convicted, his hands or his feet or both will be cut off, for his deeds…So that the man may be corrected in addition to his soul saved]

By having his reason and humanity removed, Nebuchadnezzar is mentally mutilated, creating yet another lack, similar to the loss of a limb. Just as the removal of a hand or foot creates a negative space and a lack, the removal of reason and humanity does the same thing. *Daniel* acts as a comment on major sins, a chief concern for theological thinkers of the day, and the punishments inflicted upon Nebuchadnezzar show that these major sins will not be tolerated. Nebuchadnezzar's exile and transformation represent a performative punishment. He becomes a spectacle demonstrating the dangers of committing major sins and ignoring God. The poem spends a great deal of time detailing his mental instability before he is finally punished. Though the punishment is important, that alone is not the only thing of which the poem wants to warn the audience. Since the poem also provides a clear exploration of how Nebuchadnezzar ends up punished, the warning is against the kind of mental crimes committed by Nebuchadnezzar.

In addition to being stripped of his reason and humanity, Nebuchadnezzar is cast out of society. This exile exemplifies the worst punishment he receives. The Anglo-Saxon community was the heart of society, and anyone on the outskirts was a marginalized figure and a monster. Criminals were hanged outside of the boundaries of the communities, and monsters such as Grendel in other Old English poems reside in the liminal spaces. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar that he will not remember the *mandreame,* or the joyous noises of the human world. The use of the word *mandreame* is also used to described Cain and Heremod in *Beowulf*: *[Cain] mandream fleon* (Cain fled from the joys of man, line 1264); *He ana hwearf mondreamum from* ([Heremod] alone turned away from the joyous noise of man, lines 1714-5). In each of these examples from *Beowulf,* monstrous characters flee the safety of the community

and are sequestered to the liminal spaces outside of the community boundaries. Cain leaves after committing murder, and the poet connects Cain in the poem with the murderous monster Grendel. Heremod leaves after killing his table-companions. All of these characters are violent murderers who cannot remain inside the realm of humanity. The word choice in connection with Nebuchadnezzar is just as important to his crime. Though God stops him, Nebuchadnezzar attempts to commit murder in a horrible way, in addition to his litany of other crimes which include the loathsome sins of pride, excess, wrath and subsequently turning against God. For these crimes, Nebuchadnezzar must leave all human joys because he is not worthy of being human any longer. The similar punishments and vocabulary connect Nebuchadnezzar to other monstrous figures in Anglo-Saxon literature who also go through transformation punishments. By highlighting the emphasis among the different texts of monstrous figures being pushed out of society, the importance of the spectator aspect of the punishments become clearer. Through transforming the characters into monstrous figures that relocate to liminal spaces, the texts demonstrate that sin and social transgression remove community status from a person and strip them down to something lower than a human, like a human monstrosity.

Nebuchadnezzar is to reside in the woods in his monstrous form, which represents the marginal spaces outside of human community. His heart and mind transforms so that he only understands the customs and community of wild beasts. This fits his crime of being a savage, cruel, and grim ruler. Since he acted in savage ways as a human, he now literally becomes a wild beast. Though his kingdom served as a source of arrogance for him, he now dwells in the wild woods without a fixed home. After Daniel explains his punishment to him when he interprets his dream, Nebuchadnezzar does not heed the warning. Instead, he focuses on worldly things that

feed his ignorance and force him to commit even more atrocities considered part of the eight major sins. He states:

> *ðu eart seo micle   and min seo mære burh*
>
> *þe ic geworhte   to wurðmyndum,*
>
> *rume rice.   Ic reste on þe,*
>
> *eard and eðel* (lines 608-11a)

[You art a great celebrated city that I built to a place of glory, powerful far and wide. I will rest in you, dwelling and home.]

He focuses on his own role in building up this city, and places his worth within his worldly riches. His pride is at the apex in these lines as he emphasizes how great and powerful the city is. In his sermon for Midlent Sunday, Ælfric claims that pride "*is ord and ende ælces yfeles…ælcre synne anginn is modignys*" (is the beginning and end of every evil…the beginning of every sin is pride). Aldhelm, Cassian, and Gregory all described pride as a monster, and here Nebuchadnezzar has succumbed to that monster, which highlights his transformation into a human monstrosity. The poem's deliberate placement of this scene immediately prior to Nebuchadnezzar's physical transformation elucidates the connection between sin and bestial transformation. He has been warned and could have chosen to turn away from his sinful ways; however, everything Nebuchadnezzar has done before this moment has built until his mind is closed off and lacking, and all goodness is erased. At this moment, the last vestiges of his humanity are eliminated as he fully embraces the monster of pride, and he's ready for the physical transformation that is to come.

Nebuchadnezzar's punishment is one of exile, not of death. Because his crime was committed in the mental and psychological sphere, the punishment is not capital, but transformative. God exiles Nebuchadnezzar, and he suffers a grave punishment:

> geocrostne sið   in godes wite,
>
> ðara þe eft lifigende   leode begete…
>
>   susl þrowode,
>
> wildeora westen   (lines 616-7, 620b-1a)

[a terrible journey in God's punishment that any living person has received…suffered torment, a wilderness of wild beasts].

Nebuchadnezzar suffers one of the worst punishments a man could receive as a result of his extreme sinfulness and lack of reason, where he remains in exile for seven years as a *wildeora gewita* (one who knows the same as wild beasts, line 621). He loses the security of his city that feeds his arrogance, and the city is replaced with the wild desolate wasteland fit for punishment. The loss of the city represents a mutilation punishment for Nebuchadnezzar because by being cut off from his kingdom, the very community at the root of Nebuchadnezzar's pride is violently ripped from him. As the expulsion from the city does not simply warn against the dangers of pride, it also represents the final loss of reason and humanity. His transformation into a beast and removal to the liminal spaces aim to teach him and others a lesson, so his transformation becomes a spectator punishment since he acts as a visual warning against committing major sins, ignoring God, and shunning reason. Without God, and without basic humanity, a person becomes of the lowest order of beings, and must suffer the greatest torment in the wilderness without the luxury of companionship or spiritual and worldly comforts.

The punishment aims to reform Nebuchadnezzar. After seven years, Nebuchadnezzar learns his lesson and discovers the truth in God. He looks into the clouds and accepts God, and then he recovers: *Þa he eft onhwearf / wodan gewittes* (He reversed from the madness, lines 626b-627a). To attain his pardon, Nebuchadnezzar *locode,* which is a verb that means turn the eyes towards something. The verb can also mean to see and "possess the power of vision."[33] This action is significant because it indicates that Nebuchadnezzar has to change his physical position to look upwards towards the clouds, representing his shift to God. By placing this spiritual transformation within a physical action, the poet ties the punishment and reprieve directly to the body. This connects to Foucault's aforementioned idea that punishment carries signs on the body that should not be erased (34). As Nebuchadnezzar is delivered from his bestial punishment, the symbolic gesture of raising his eyes keeps the crimes and punishment written on his body through the physical actions, reminding the spectator-audience of the relationship between crime, criminal, and pardon.

Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar's act of dressing functions as a ritualistic pardon that retains the signs of his crime on his body. The poet describes Nebuchadnezzar's transformation back into the realm of humanity:

> *Gewat þa earmsceapen   eft siðian,*
>
> *nacod nydgenga,   nið geðafian,*
>
> *wundorlic wræcca   and wæda leas,*
>
> *mætra on modgeðanc,   to mancynne* (lines 631-4)

[The miserable one understood and traveled again back to mankind, a naked miserable man who admits his wickedness, wonderful exile without clothes, more humble in his mind.]

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[33] *locian,* Bosworth-Toller

The transformation in this passage turns him from a bestial, savage creature into a civilized one, where the reinstatement of his humanity is represented by the clothing he acquires. In his sermon on Saint Benedict, Ælfric provides another example of clothing as an important signifier for humanity when he describes Saint Benedict's temptation and punishment in the wilderness. When Saint Benedict was tempted in the flesh, he "*unscrydde hine ealne, and wylode hine sylfne on ðam þiccum bremlum and þornum and netelum*" (stripped himself completely, rolled himself on the thick brambles and thorns and nettles). As his punishment, he removed his clothes, which are markers of humanity. Just as a result of his temptation, he transforms himself into a more bestial and animal-like state of nakedness through his removal of clothes so he could inflict punishment upon himself. This punishment is a tangible and visual warning, illustrating that sins like Nebuchadnezzar's will result in the removal of everything. Saint Benedict was tempted by worldly and fleshly desires, so his punishment strips him of those very worldly things. Since Nebuchadnezzar's most serious sin is pride, the loss of every material possession that he holds dear is fitting. After his punishment is over, he transforms back into a man, but is left without clothes as a warning for himself not to repeat his crimes. Nebuchadnezzar spent the seven years naked and without clothes; the removal of his clothes acts as another type of mutilation punishment. Once again, something is removed as payment for Nebuchadnezzar's transgressions. The clothing he wore serves as a visual symbol of the humanity he has sinned against. Not only is Nebuchadnezzar removed from the city walls and placed into the marginal spaces outside the boundaries of the community, but he is also stripped of any vestiges of material humanity when he is cast into the wilderness. He becomes a savage beast, something monstrous and opposite of the humanity he has been cast from. When the poet describes Nebuchadnezzar's pardon, he remains without clothes; in fact, the poet mentions his state of

undress twice. Through this emphasis, the lack of clothes becomes a signifier of Nebuchadnezzar's crime. He has served his sentence and received the reprieve, yet the body still retains traces of his crime and punishment. This allows the spectator-audience to be reminded that despite Nebuchadnezzar's rehabilitation, he committed a terrible crime detailed throughout the entire poem. The body remains a powerful commodity by serving as an object of knowledge with Nebuchadnezzar's past sins and crimes written upon his nakedness.

When Nebuchadnezzar is transformed back, he also physically moves into the realm of the community once again. The transformation of location from the wilderness and realm of the beast back to the community of *mancynne* reminds the reader of his exile, and furthermore, upholds the signs of his punishment. His punishment set him apart from the community and robbed him of human contact; all traces of humanity were erased from him – his clothes, his city, and his reason. In every way, Nebuchadnezzar becomes a spectacle marked by the signs of his punishment upon his person. His punishment recalls Cnut's law: *swa man maeg styran eac þaere sawle beorgan.* Though he undergoes mutilation and transformation as his punishment, he does not receive death, and he does not remain in exile forever. He sees the error of his ways, just as the law of Cnut aims for, and his soul is saved. Nebuchadnezzar then possesses a *leohtran geleafan* (bright faith, line 642a). The use of the word *leohtran* is specifically significant to describe Nebuchadnezzar after his transformation and punishment. The word *leoht* has a related meaning that means "giving mental illumination."[34] This word parallels the poet's earlier use of *gleaw ne.* At the beginning of the poem, Nebuchadnezzar possessed an unclear mental state, but after his punishment and reformation, his mental state is bright and illuminated. The mental fog, represented by his lack of knowledge and the drunkenness of both

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[34] *leoht* in the Bosworth-Toller

Nebuchadnezzar and the Israelites, has been removed after his seven year exile. *Daniel* presents

not only the punishment for pride, but consequences for the lack of reason. The poem aligns

clear thinking and reason with God, and when that reason is clouded, one is no better than a wild

beast living in the realm of monsters. The body acts as the conduit for the punishment and

redemption, and as each sin is brought forth and added as evidence to his crime throughout the

poem, the transformation punishment marks the body of Nebuchadnezzar. Thus, the audience

becomes a spectator who cannot turn away from the visual and public example that is aimed at

inciting fear into those who witness it.

3.4   Conclusion

The punishments described in this chapter, of Nebuchadnezzar, Satan and the angels, and

Lot's wife, function as symbols and warnings. Each character defies God in some way, and

because of that, God transforms them in some manner as punishment. In each case, the

punishment serves as a didactic warning, with the purpose to instruct the audience about the

consequences of the sins of pride, betrayal, and disobedience, which clearly reflects Foucault's

assertion that punishment must be spectacle. Nebuchadnezzar is marked by the spectacle of his

transformation into an animal through the loss of reason. He exists for seven years in the

wilderness, outside the boundaries of society, as a spectacle for all to see. In the case of Lot's

wife, her permanent position as a pillar of salt aligns with Foucault's notion that torture places

"on the very body of the condemned man signs that must not be effaced" (34). She retains the

scar and the spectacle in her changed body, and her transformation into an inanimate object

intricately threads the signs of her guilt onto her very body. Satan's punishment, according to

Anglo-Saxon writers, was the most significant. Foucault writes that torture and punishment

should be remembered by all and that "it must be seen by all almost as its triumph…the very

excess of the violence…the fact that the guilty man should moan and cry out under the blows…is the very ceremonial of justice being expressed in all its force" (34). Satan's punishment is by far the most severe, with God casting him down into a special prison full of tortures that he created just for him. The pit of hell, with its torments and excessive punishments, represents the justice and judgment of God. Satan "moan[s] and cr[ies] out" over and over, evident when he complains in the poem about his unfair treatment. He also tries to get back at God through Adam and Eve, the first in his never-ending quest to get back at God for His punishment. God presents Satan's punishment as the ultimate punishment and intends it to be remembered by all.

Reading *Daniel, Genesis A&B,* and *Solomon and Saturn* as narratives of spectator punishment and physical transformation can bring us to a better understanding of the poems' treatment of their villainous characters. Each poem provides a compelling exploration of the mental deterioration caused by sin, leading to the rejection of reason and loss of humanity that causes their characters to become unstable. Since this mental instability is an interior symbol of sin, the punishments transform the characters' physical forms as a visual representation of their bestial status. The interest in the psychologies of sinful characters provides a depth to the poem that deserves attention. These poems are not just basic retellings of familiar *Genesis* tales, nor are the blanket warnings against pride. The poems offer unique explorations of the mental state of their characters, which is not a major concern in most Anglo-Saxon literature. These texts demonstrate a clear connection between reason and sin, and suggest that humanity is intrinsically linked to goodness and deeds, while warning that when one goes against their human qualities of intellect, reasoned choice, and rationality, they are no better than a mindless animal.

4 CHAPTER THREE: READING HEREMOD AS A MONSTROUS HUMAN: PERFORMATIVE IDENTITY AND MONSTROUS TRANSFORMATION IN BEOWULF'S DIGRESSIONS

Beowulf has received much critical attention as a monster story. J.R.R. Tolkien's 1936 essay "*Beowulf:* The Monsters and The Critics" addresses the significance of monsters in the poem. Tolkien argues, "It is just because the main foes in *Beowulf* are inhuman that the story is larger and more significant...[it] moves with the thought of all men concerning the fate of human life and efforts" (129). Tolkien also claims that the monsters are not a "blunder of taste," but instead a key aspect to the overall understanding of the poem (115). Following this essay, numerous scholars have explored the theme of monstrosity in *Beowulf*, including Andy Orchard, Gillian Overing, Jane Chance, and Jeffrey Jerome Cohen.[35] Most of the monster scholarship on the poem surrounds the three major monsters in the text: Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon. These three monsters aid in driving the plot and action of the poem, as well as establishing Beowulf as a hero. The *Beowulf* poem is part of the Nowell Codex, and following *Beowulf* in the manuscript are four other texts that feature monstrous themes: *Judith, The Life of Saint Christopher, Wonders of the East,* and *Letters of Alexander to Aristotle.* The three monsters in *Beowulf* draw more critical attention than other potential monsters in the text, yet the prevalence of monsters in the poem and the manuscript open up the possibility of additional

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[35] For more about monsters in *Beowulf* and the Middle Ages*,* see Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003); John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981); Gillian Overing, *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters and the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1999); Bettina Bildhauer and Robert Mills, eds. *The Monstrous Middle Ages* (Toronto: U of Toronto Press, 2003); Seth Lerer, "Grendel's Glove," in *English Literary History* 61 (1994); Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "*Beowulf*, Lines 702b-836: Transformations and the Limits of the Human," in *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 23.4 (Winter 1981); Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

monsters within the poem. Though Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon are fantastical

monsters, *Beowulf* does not limit the types of monsters there because the poem also includes

human monstrosities. Tolkien's claim that the poem focuses on "the fate of human life and

efforts" is especially important when expanding the concept of monster within the poem to

monstrous humans since that is exactly what these monstrosities address.

An often overlooked monstrous human in the poem is King Heremod, who appears in the

poem's digressions. The Heremod digressions comprise some of the most interesting material in

the poem, especially when read in light of monsters. He appears in exactly two places in the text,

once around line 900 and again around 1710. Though not a monster in form, mainly because

Heremod is a human man, analyzing this important character through the lens of monstrosity

begins to reshape his purpose within the poem. Heremod functions in a similar way as the other

traditional monsters in the poem. While he is not physically monstrous like the other three,

through semantics and metaphor, Heremod occupies the role of monster culturally and socially.

Based on traditional definitions of monstrosity, reading Heremod through that lens will help

elucidate a more nuanced reading of Beowulf. I argue that Heremod serves as a new category of

Anglo-Saxon monster in *Beowulf,* a monstrous human. The monstrous human inhabits an

unsettling liminal space between human and monster that is unexplored in Old English criticism.

As the monstrous human possesses every physical trait of a human on the exterior, this makes it

both dangerous and frightening when the monstrous moral and social traits are revealed. To

illustrate the monstrosity, a monstrous human commits acts that pervert the established

performative social roles. The Heremod digressions portray the character as a monstrous human

through his rejection of all accepted normative masculine roles, such as his refusal to give gifts

and his decision to kill his table-companions. As a result of his role of monster in the poem,

Heremod suffers a specific spectator punishment where he loses his reason and is transformed into an animalistic state. This transformation from human to beast reflects his inner corruption upon his physical body, making him more visually monstrous and lessening some of the inherent threat that was previously associated with his hidden nature. Ultimately, Heremod's performative rejection of social customs and subsequent consequences serve as a warning for denying the established rituals and cultural order.

4.1   Heremod's Rejection of Performative Social Roles

Heremod's monstrosity occurs because of his rejection of Anglo-Saxon social roles. In *Gender Trouble,* Judith Butler argues that identity and social customs are all performative. By people outwardly engaging in words, gestures, and acts, she contends that the surface signifiers and the absence of other overt signifiers construct a fabricated identity (136). Similarly, Derrida asserts that humans derive meaning from bodily actions, where hand gestures express meaning and context. Since actions and gestures are considered performative, defying social roles serves as an act where the spectator witnesses the performance that places the human monstrosity outside of society. As Derrida suggests, monstrosity can occur when the signifiers as "void of sense" and when the understood gestures and acts stray from the norm and point towards nothing ("Heidegger's Hand", 167). Thus, the performance deviates from the accepted social customs and establishes a new performative action from nothing, and from a void of understanding, which makes the new performativity exist within a realm with no context or rules; therefore, the new performative act can be considered monstrous.

For Anglo-Saxon society, the performative roles are clearly defined within the heroic code. *Beowulf* provides examples and counterexamples of the performative roles one must fulfill,

and the culturally accepted identities are reinforced through rituals and actions. Common

characteristics of the Germanic heroic code include:

> reciprocal loyalty between retainer and warlord, as especially enacted by
> the exchange of gifts for services and services for gifts; revenge obligation
> regarding injury or death, on behalf of kinsmen as well as one's lord; and fame-
> assuring battle courage, especially if a successful outcome – battlefield victory –
> seems impossible. (Hill 1)

Lords give gifts to their retainers, and men bring gifts back to their lords; the men of the

comitatus share mead in mead-halls and follow their lords into battle. The spirit of the *comitatus*

is often characterized by courage even in the face of certain death, along with unyielding loyalty

that extended even after the death of the lord when the retainer would avenge the lord's death

(Mitchell and Robinson 136). On the other hand, bad kings are characterized by "crime, kill[ing]

his companions, and refus[ing] to give gifts" (Hill 80). These actions go against the normative

masculine codes of kingship, which prizes taking care of the warriors and being generous. In

Beowulf, Beowulf demonstrates this loyalty and spirit of feuding after fighting Grendel by

returning to Heorot with Grendel's head, and "having accomplished this act of revenge, having

brought the appropriate *wergild* to Hrothgar, the epic hero has earned his heroic identity"

(Damico 96). However, since the poem is a fictitious heroic story with an invented hero in the

character of Beowulf, "the heroic world is symbolic" and "a culture projects…its own ideal

forms, against which it can measure itself, and the hero is an ideal type against whom men can

measure their behavior – although by this measure cultures and men will always be found

deficient" (Earl 45). These idealized notions include "blood and oath…male and female, kin and

king, hall and hut" (Earl 34). Within the confines of the poem, the normative codes of heroism

and masculinity are idealistic ways of living, and reflect cultural models of behavior, which suggests a performative quality inherent in the heroic codes. If the characteristics of a hero presented within poems like *Beowulf* are ideals, then they are there to be instructive and striven towards since the actual culture does not live up to that same level, and by that nature they are performative.

The interactions between warriors serve an important function within normative heroic codes. Loyalty is predicated upon some level of respect, trust, or admiration between the lord and thane, whether or not that loyalty is achieved through successful battle tactics or generosity. The heroic world of *Beowulf* may be considered "a man's world, run by the king, the law, and the wisdom of men" (Earl 39). The inherent masculine order of the culture is addressed in "Maxims I" found in the *Exeter Book*:

> *swa beoþ þeoda geþwære,   þonne hy geþingad habbað,*
>
> *gesittað him on gesundum þingum,   ond þonne mid gesiþum healdaþ*
>
> *cene men gecynde rice* (lines 56-58).

[People are united when they have come to an agreement, they sit together in good health, and with companions bold men hold rule naturally]

The maxim suggests that men rule best when they are in accordance with each other and the natural order of things, while the adjective used to describe the ruling men indicates the warrior identity of those in power. Furthermore, the maxim emphasizes that the men have come together and sit together as companions. The concept of table-companions was important to the heroic identity; the word *comitatus* means "companions", and the group was made up of the warrior class (Earl 34). Old English poems like *Beowulf, Daniel,* and *Judith* feature scenes of the lord and retainers feasting together at the table while sharing drink. Drinking together in this way

"unifies the loyal court and solidifies heroic values...[and] capture[s] the essence of the solidarity and loyalty of a victorious heroic court" (Damico 257).

Many of the ideas and stories that reflect this general idea of the heroic code were created in the late ninth century during the rule of King Alfred, where he placed emphasis on a sense of lordship and kingship. However, by the time of poems like *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *The Battle of Maldon* in the eleventh century*,* the blind loyalty inherent in the heroic code was diminished and the literature addressed the idea that the heroic code often fails (Hill 2). In his work *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic,* John Hill argues that the heroic code found in *Beowulf* is not as idealized as some scholars would choose to believe, but that the poem instead suggests that the loyalty between the lord-retainer is not so resolute and that thanes could switch allegiance if they chose without dire consequences. Additionally, Hill asserts that the attitude towards feuds is more ambivalent and that the poem does not celebrate revenge killing (4-10). Though Hill argues for a more complex ideology concerning the heroic code within Anglo-Saxon literature, he acknowledges that the signifiers of the heroic code are still present within in the poem, and these characteristics are still inherent in the normative masculine and heroic identity.

Overwhelmingly, these characteristics of normative Anglo-Saxon warrior identity center around understood and pre-established rituals of interaction. The performative action of cementing loyalty between the lord and retainer hinges on an exchange, either of gifts or words, and that significance is understood by both parties through the accepted social customs. Just as in Butler's performative identity theory, "the essence or identity" of these Anglo-Saxon social customs "are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs" (Butler 136). Even feasting in the mead hall is a facet of performative identity that creates a bond of table

companion between those sharing food and drink. Although not as blindly followed as idealized depictions portray, courage and loyalty, along with revenge feuds, are other performative deeds culturally and socially understood and meant to be followed. Within *Beowulf,* these characteristics of normative heroic codes are explored continually, making digressions such as the one featuring Heremod impactful since his performative actions go against the established rules, rituals, and order, and thus creates, as Derrida calls it, a "monstrous mutation" through his creation of an altered performative. When Heremod kills his table-companions and refuses to give gifts, he actively rebels against the recognized customs, and the act of going against it provides a shocking and obvious deviation from the norm. By enacting the performative action in an altered, perverse way, he creates a "monstrous mutation", and therefore, turns himself into a human monstrosity.

Even the role of hero is a performative one, where deeds are done publicly or made into a public spectacle through speeches and boasting. In *Beowulf*, Beowulf retells of his fights with Grendel and Grendel's mother, exaggerating his deeds to gain himself more renown and recognition. When Beowulf recounts his version of the fights, he "proffers information neither we nor they have heard before...in its protestations of excessive length and its self-conscious of telling, Beowulf's story of the fight seems strikingly unlike anything he has performed before" (Lerer 721). As he recounts his fight with Grendel's mother to Hygelac, he presents a very specific image of the fight, removing details that would make him look weaker, like his need of the magical sword, or diminishing any struggles he encountered (lines 2130-40). This alteration of events into something tailored more for the king and the audience in the mead-hall emphasizes the performative aspect of the deeds. The actions only have meaning when they are passed on and accepted by society. A person is judged by his actions, how those actions fit into the social

construct, and how the actions affect his reputation. This is seen throughout the poem. Unferth questions Beowulf's reputation, which Beowulf shuts down by using Unferth's own dubious reputation. Hrothgar uses examples of good and bad kings and queens to warn and instruct Beowulf. Some scholars believe that the "prime function of a secular vernacular epic is to commemorate and celebrate the ancestral past and to glorify it by dramatizing those values that exemplify the race in concrete examples for the edification of the present" (Damico 14).[36] Because of the way the poem uses characters featured in the digressions like Heremod, they become performative examples of how to act within a socially acceptable way.

　　Punishment in the poem is a performative act. Grendel's defeat is one excellent example of punishment as a social performance. After Beowulf defeats Grendel, Grendel's arm is mounted in Heorot. The arm becomes a performance, and "the emphasis on the visibility of the arm makes it clear that the exhibited limb fulfills a function as signal and testimony" (Bremmer 128). Then, Beowulf brings Grendel's head back to the hall after he defeats Grendel's mother, which acts as a further performance. Through the punishment of Heremod, the digressions demonstrate this kind of performativity since his character is used as a foil to good kings when Hrothgar uses Heremod as a warning for Beowulf to show him what he should not do as king. Thus, his actions and performative role within the poem result in very specific punishments. Unlike Grendel, whose punishment is performative through Beowulf's presentation of his dismembered body parts, Heremod's punishment is itself a performance. First, Heremod is described by his specific transgressions, and then he is transformed by his punishment, which

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[36] For more on *Beowulf*'s rhetorical composition, see Helen Damico, *Beowulf and the Grendel-Kin: Politics and Poetry in Eleventh-Century England* (West Virginia Press, 2015) and Robert Frank, "The *Beowulf Poet's Sense of History*," in *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honor of Morton W. Bloomfield*, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982).

results in a very specific action. Through his performative punishment, Heremod is robbed of his reason and is left in an animal-like state.

4.2   The Monstrous Human

Beowulf is found in the MS Cotton Vitellius A. xv manuscript, a manuscript which is full of texts dealing with monsters and marvels. The manuscript also contains *Letters of Alexander to Aristotle* and *Wonders of the East*, a text concerned with the description of far off places and the fantastical beings which reside there. Directly following *Beowulf*, the poem *Judith* contains the beheading of the monstrous Holofernes.[37] For *Beowulf*, the inclusion of the characters Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon are obvious reasons why the poem was placed alongside these other Anglo-Saxon texts preoccupied with various ideas of monstrosity. Reading *Beowulf* through the lens of monstrosity can enlighten the perspective on the seemingly non-monstrous scenes and digressions.

Two earlier, classical sources for monsters in the Anglo-Saxon period include Saint Augustine and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies.* In *City of God,* Saint Augustine approached the idea of monsters by situating them into God's creation. He asserted that despite deformed births, unusual appearances, or any other so-called monstrous attribute, any rational being or being descended from Adam was human (16.8). Though Augustine characterizes any rational being as essentially human, his exploration implies the difficulty in ascertaining a clear definition of a monster. By cataloging the "monstrous races of men" like those that "have one eye in the middle of the forehead; some, feet turned backwards from the heel" for example, he describes "human or quasi-human races" that are characterized as monstrous by their physical abnormalities.

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[37] I analyze Holofernes as an example of a monstrous human in chapter 1 of this dissertation.

Despite the physical deformities that separate these marvels from normal humans, Augustine still stands by his assertion that even these beings are men if they are rational.

However, though Augustine delineates monsters from men through this one characteristic, his description still implies an ambiguous margin where the rational man and the monstrously deformed physical being cross. Augustine mentions "human births that have differed widely from their ascertained parents" and finally concludes that "all the races which are reported to have diverged in bodily appearance from the usual course…if they are embraced in that definition of man as rational…trace their pedigree to that one first father of all" (16.8). By this definition, physical deformity may cause a being to be monstrous, but if they possess reason then they are a human. Additionally, he points out that monstrous births occur within human races and acknowledges there are entire separate monstrous races. But even Saint Augustine does not understand how to deal with all of the unusual races, such as the cynocephalus, a dog-headed animal-human hybrid who is more animal than human. Though his final argument is a bit ambivalent and inconclusive, where he states either the monstrous being does not exist, exists outside of humanity, or is human and descended from Adam, his discussion of monsters suggests that human monstrosities exist. Within his parameters, a monstrous human is a rationale being, and therefore descended from Adam, but physically deformed in a way that separates them from the rest of the human race.

Echoing Augustine's sentiments, Isidore of Seville in his *Etymologies* accepts that monstrous beings in the human race are distinguishable from monstrous races. First, his depictions suggest that hybrid figures, like those that are part human and part animal, are monsters. For example, he describes one hybrid being as such: "a monster to which a woman gave birth, whose upper body parts were human, but dead, while its lower body parts came from

diverse animals" (11.3.4)[38]. Isidore also provides an additional category of "an unnatural being", which he claims "takes the form of a slight mutation, as for instance in the case of someone born with six fingers" (11.3.6). With this definition, Isidore creates a new category for humans possessing characteristics outside of the norm. Oddities considered "unnatural beings" include actual existing ones, like pygmies, those with two different-sized hands or born without a hand, or someone with a misshapen head. However, he also lists fantastical creatures, like people born with two or three heads, people with canine-like fangs protruding from their mouth, or someone born without a head (11.3.8). Though he outlines these categories, they still are not considered monsters, but portents or unnatural beings. To begin exploring monsters, he states, "Just as, in individual nations, there are instances of monstrous people, so in the whole of humankind there are certain monstrous races" (11.3.12). These "monstrous races" include the giants, cynocephali, and cyclops. Many of the "human monstrosities" he describes either appear in mythology, like the Minotaur or Gorgons, or in the *Wonders of the East,* like the blemmyae and panotians. One of his final, deciding points about the difference between humans and monsters features the cynocephali: "The Cynocephali are so called because they have dogs' heads, and their barking indeed reveals that they are rather beasts than humans" (11.3.15). Similar to Augustine's final conclusion, Isidore emphasizes the use of reason, specifically human speech, to distinguish between man and beast. Though the barking may be the language of the cynocephali and not comprehensible by those hearing it, the difference between human and monster rests on human-defined parameters within a human's capacity of reason.

Often, monsters appear in places where their mere existence threatens the social order, hierarchy, or cultural boundaries already set in place. In *Monster Theory: Reading Culture,*

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[38] Translated by Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville,* Cambridge UP, 2006.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen claims that the Latin word *monstrum* is "that which reveals…that which

warns" (4). In his *Etymologies,* Isidore elucidates the Latin verb *monstrare*, meaning "to show."

Isidore writes, "Monsters, in fact, are so called as warning, because they explain something of

meaning, or because they make known at once what is to become visible" (qtd in Verner 3). At

the most basic linguistic level, monsters function as a sort of symbolic representation, and

because of their abnormal status, they serve as warnings. These warnings may be geographical,

like when monsters reside on the edges of maps barring entry into unfamiliar territory or outside

the community walls encouraging people not to venture far from home. On the other hand, they

may serve as cultural warnings, such as the humanoid figure Grendel, a descendent of Cain who

is filled with murderous rage. By existing within liminal spaces, the monsters also call into

question the boundaries of humanity. Cohen asserts that a monster is "a morally and physically

deformed creature arriving to demarcate the boundary beyond which lies the unintelligible, the

inhuman" (*Of Giants* xiv). In addition to physical deformities, moral deformities may be

included to identify monsters, as the spiritual body may be as abnormal and repulsive as the

physical one. Though that boundary between the monstrous and non-monstrous most commonly

rests on physical deviations, the spiritual and moral aberrations also cause a separation, yet the

distinction may not be as obvious as a monster like Grendel, who has an outward appearance to

match the deformed inward appearance. This ambiguity resulting from altered inward morality

yields a wider category of monstrosity, including human monstrosities who may look like a

normal human but hide monstrous inward deformities.

In a modern theoretical context, this relates to Derrida's use of monster in his

performative theory. Derrida argues that the French *la monstre* "goes in the direction, the *sens,* of

a less known sense…*Monstrer* is *montrer* (to show or demonstrate)…[it] is what shows in order

to warn or put on guard" (166). The word *monstrare* and monsters then serve as a warning through their "showing." By connecting the idea of warning to showing, it adds an impression that the "showing" or demonstration is more significant and meaningful. The monster does not just show something different, but instead serves the performative action of warning. As the monster is outside of the normal social and cultural context, either through a distorted physical or moral appearance or through perverted established performative actions, the monster then reveals an aberration to the norm, shows what should not be done, and warns of the consequences of engaging in this monstrous behavior. Within this context, "the monster is definitionally a displacement: an exhibit, demonstrative of something other than itself" (Cohen, *Of Giants* xiv). The monster serves as a spectacle, whose actions, transformations, and punishments are meant to instruct and warn.

Beowulf provides the reader with two different types of monsters. The first is the common monster in Old English literature, the physical monster. Physical monsters are entities like those described by Augustine, Isidore, and the *Liber Monstrorum,* that are somehow physically different than humans, such as being a giant, part animal, or completely inhuman like Grendel or his mother. The other type of monster presented in the poem is a human monster. A monstrous human is a human, but defies social and cultural norms to pervert the social system and commit monstrous acts. Even if Anglo-Saxon writers did not categorize humans specifically as monsters, they still wrote cultural and social monsters into their texts. The monstrous humans featured in the digressions supplement the monsters in the main story. They serve as human counterparts for the fantastical monsters to widen and strengthen the warnings presented through monstrosity in the poem. Most importantly, these human monsters undergo the same transformations and punishments as the physical monsters. The Heremod digression fits into this

category of monsters in *Beowulf* while also fulfilling Isidore's assertion that monsters must act as warnings. Within the poem, the Heremod digression serves as a warning to Beowulf, meant to demonstrate the gravity of what happens when a hero stops living by the heroic code and gives into the sin of pride. Though Heremod is meant as a didactic example in Hrothgar's sermon, analyzing Heremod through the lens of a monstrous human elucidates his role and provides a richer engagement with monstrosity found in the poem.

Human cultural monsters are created when they step outside of their normative positions. To keep a stable social order, examples of those who go against the performative actions are shown and punished. The monster, including the monstrous human, falls "under the 'other' category, which is typically regarded as *abnormal,* viz. deviant from the self-constituted norm, hence *unintelligible* through exceeding (viz. blurring and confounding) the norm" (Ciobanu 121). The "self-constituted norm" is created by society, founded upon social and cultural values accepted and followed by the group. When one contradicts the performative norm, their actions become a monstrous mutation. Returning again to Derrida, the monstrous mutation occurs when an action happens outside of the established rules and order of society, which opposes and threatens the society's sense of belonging and stability. Thus, the monstrous mutation becomes a new performative act that has no context or rules, and therefore creates a void. Because of this monstrous mutation, which arises from human monstrosity, the person who performed the new performative action is transformed into a monster and subsequently punished. In the case of Anglo-Saxon monsters, such as Heremod, Grendel, Holofernes, and even Nebuchadnezzar, they become social and cultural monsters because the mutation of their performative roles transforms them into monsters.

This monstrous human that arises from an altered performative action indicates a new category of monster in Anglo-Saxon literature. The current categories include human, monsters, and the monstrous other. Humans, as Augustine concludes, are rational beings. Monsters are not rational beings and act as portents through their "showing" by telling us things about humanity. Typically, they are physically different, either more like beasts or so removed from a human likeness that there can be no confusion of their monstrous status. The monstrous other occupies that ambiguous category that Augustine and Isidore both address, containing either confusing hybrids that look like humans and possessing rationality, or humanoid figures with gross physical deformities that separate them severely from the normal humans. However, these much explored categories leave a gap in our perception: there is a "monstrous-in-human" category. This category contains beings that are humans, yet they socially or mentally act as monsters. Derrida claims, "a monster is a species for which we do not have a name, which does not mean that the species is abnormal, namely the composition of hybridization of already known species. Simply, it shows itself…in something that is not yet shown…it frightens precisely because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure" ("Passages" 386-7). In this quote, Derrida implies that monsters can arise from known sources, such as humans, but the monstrosity occurs from the fear felt "because no anticipation had prepared one to identify this figure." In the case of monstrous humans, they may be more unsettling than a traditional monster because a monster like Grendel or Grendel's mother separates itself easily through visual physical markers. There is no confusion or mistake. A monstrous human, like Heremod, Holofernes, or Nebuchadnezzar, comprises the "hybridization of already known species" mentioned by Derrida, and that hybridization does not immediately reflect itself on the exterior. As in Derrida's monster description, a monstrous human shows "in something that is not shown yet," by appearing as a

human within the parameters of the societal norm, yet acting in monstrous ways that are not familiar and unanticipated by society. A monster "crosses boundaries between human and nonhuman, mingling the appropriate and the inappropriate, showing itself in constantly novel and unexpected ways" (Camille 200). A monstrous human fits within these parameters, especially considering that the category exposes the tension between the appropriate physical traits combined with the inappropriate performative social actions.

This places the monstrous human into an alarming liminal space between human and monster since the monstrous human can hide their monstrosity and attempt to blend into normal society. Through this, they often gain power, as is the case with Heremod, Nebuchadnezzar, and Holofernes. However, the true nature of their character always reveals itself through monstrous actions, but the illusory physical traits catches the spectator off-guard, which makes the monstrous human that much more terrifying. When their monstrous behavior is revealed, they undergo some type of transformation that solidifies their existence as monsters and punishes their dual nature. This idea is clearly identified in Old English literature, from characters like Heremod in *Beowulf,* to Nebuchadnezzar in *Daniel,* the angels, Lucifer, and Lot's wife in *Genesis A & B,* and Holofernes in *Judith.* This new category of monstrous human expands the view of monster in Old English literature, while providing a way to read these characters as related figures that thwart the social normative codes. Because of their actions against the established cultural rules, the monstrous humans are treated as spectacles, whose punishments are meant as visual signifiers of the transgressions against the performative identity through the transformation they endure.

4.3   Heremod as a Monstrous King

Reading Heremod through Isidore's definition of a monster coincides with how most scholars view his function in the poem. Descriptions of Heremod follow those of Sigemund and act as a contrast. When Hrothgar gives his sermon to Beowulf, he "elaborates on the final, overt vices which finally made Heremod a bad king" (Kaske 492). Sigemund is a hero who does what is right because kills a dragon, that is, a monster. Because of this, he acts as a perfect model of heroic behavior for Beowulf. On the other hand, Heremod is an example of what *not* to do. He does not kill a monster; instead, he kills his own people and becomes a monster. Sigemund and Heremod's performative actions reinforce the cultural norms: killing dragons is a heroic, esteemed action, evidenced by both Sigemund and Beowulf, while killing table companions leads to subhuman status. Thus, Heremod functions as a warning, a "showing" for what a bad king is. He demonstrates (a word that etymologically comes from *monstrare*) to Beowulf what negative consequences certain actions can have if a hero goes awry. The example of Heremod's erroneous actions helps Hrothgar explicate the qualities of a righteous and just king through Heremod's monstrous rejection of accepted cultural normative codes of behavior to become a monstrous mutation. Heremod's monstrous actions identify ideas of inherent goodness and latent sin. In this way, Heremod becomes another monster in the poem, one who is not a clear threat to the Danes, but a past threat and a warning of how easily one can succumb to evil.

In Hrothgar's sermon, Heremod serves a dual purpose: both as a parallel to Beowulf and as a warning for the potential disastrous end to which Beowulf may succumb. After praising Beowulf's glory and heroism, Hrothgar incorporates Heremod into his speech. He states that Heremod eventually caused the destruction of his people: *ac to wælfealleond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum* [but as the destruction and as a deadly plague of the Danish people] (1711-12).

From his initial introduction in the poem, Heremod is described within terms of death and turmoil, which is the complete opposite of the hopeful strength of a king or hero. A traditional hero is one who demonstrates military achievement and lives by a code of honor (Goldsmith 211). Therefore, the performative role of a hero should be one where the hero is loyal to his lord and protects his people, and he should perform great deeds and feats of strength to prove his worthiness. A king is also supposed to protect his people since kings are wise, revered, and generous. However, Heremod is none of these things. His military prowess is reflected back upon his own people instead of onto enemies through his destruction of them. Though under his protection, his people become his enemies. The poem states that Heremod *geweox* (grew/increased/flourished) for the *deaðcwalum* of his people, a deadly pain, plague, agony. For most kings, the increase, growth, or flourishing would occur from the prosperity of their people, yet Heremod finds this growth or increase through violence. He flourishes as the destruction of his own people, specifically as a *deaðcwalum,* a compound word that pairs the idea of death with physical pain. Thus, Heremod not only kills the Danish people, but purposefully inflicts terrible pain onto them and grows or flourishes as a result.

Inflicting pain and agony on his people through violence connects him to both Beowulf and the other monsters in the poem. Beowulf and the monsters are the only characters depicted as performing acts of violence – Grendel and Grendel's mother against the Danes through the destruction of Heorot, and Beowulf through his defeat of both of them. Andy Orchard argues, "In proclaiming that Heremod was a cause of great death among the Danes, Hrothgar is simply echoing Beowulf's recent observation of the same trait shared by Grendel" (112). The specific use of the word *deaðcwalum* lexically aligns Heremod with Grendel. Beowulf describes Grendel as *deaðcwealm Denigea* [deadly plague of the Danes] (1670). The poet has already

described vividly Grendel's slaughter of the Danes in Heorot, and forty lines later, Heremod's

actions are described in the exact same way, as causing a deadly plague to the Danish people.

By calling both characters plagues, the word choice emphasizes the inherent devastation

contained within their actions. Plagues do not kill just one person, but numerous, and the poem

describes how Grendel murders the people of Heorot for twelve years. Depicting Heremod with

the same vocabulary heightens the danger of his violence because a *deaðcwalum* implies more

than one or two deaths, but a more sustained reign of death and destruction upon his people.

Both Grendel and Heremod serve the same narrative function at this point. Grendel is the threat

in story present (who has just been defeated), whereas Heremod represents an analogous threat

in the past. Therefore, the poem intentionally connects Heremod to the monsters to categorize

him as one, while also paralleling him to Beowulf, who Hrothgar tries to advise against

becoming a monster.

In addition to Grendel and Heremod being deathly plagues upon the Danes, both

characters are also described similarly when attacking the Danes. Line 1713 describes that

Heremod *breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas* [enraged in mind destroyed his table companions]. In

line 723, Grendel is described similiarly: *he gebolgen wæs* [he was enraged]. This further relates

Grendel's monstrous actions to Heremod's. By attacking his own people, Heremod destroys any

heroic code of honor he originally possessed. Though Heremod is lexically connected to Grendel

through those words, he is not the only character that Heremod is linked to through line 1713.

After Grendel's mother kills Æshere, he is described as follows:

þá wæs fród cyning

hár hilderinc   on hréonmóde (1307b-8)

[then the wise king was, the old warrior, savage in his mind]

By using the adjective *hreonmode* to describe Hrothgar, the line emphasizes his troubled spirit. The word is a compound consisting of the word *hreon,* which means savage, rough, or disturbed. This description occurs right after Hrothgar discovers that his closest table-companion Æshere has been murdered by Grendel's mother. As a result, Hrothgar's first reaction is to become *hreonmode,* savage in his mind. From the loss of his friend and the horrific revenge enacted by Grendel's mother, Hrothgar experiences an overwhelming feeling of violence that is unlike him. This savage violence mirrors Heremod, who was enraged in his mind before killing his table-companion, and Grendel, who was enraged and subsequently slaughtered the people of Heorot. In both of the previous examples in the poem, the rage felt in the minds has yielded monstrous violence. Later in the poem, when Beowulf recounts his deeds to Hygelac, he states that Hrothgar *healsode hreohmode* (implored savage in his mind, line 2132a). Once again, Hrothgar is described as being savage-minded after Æschere's death, yet this time he urges Beowulf in his violent mood to take revenge upon Grendel's mother. Unlike Heremod and Grendel however, Hrothgar does not partake in any violence. Instead, he passes the violence off to Beowulf, the hero who enacts violence within the performative heroic social codes. Though many kings enact revenge violence in the poem, Hrothgar does not because he acts as a foil to Heremod. Unlike the two monsters, when Hrothgar becomes enraged with savagery and violence in his mind, he is stopped and calmed by Beowulf and the revenge is undertaken within the proper parameters of the heroic code. Hrothgar never gives into that savagery, which keeps him from transforming internally into a monstrous human.

A final use of the word *hreoh* in relation to the performative role of a king completes the poem's exploration of the motif. When Beowulf becomes king, the poet says about his reign:

nealles druncne slog

heorðgeneatas   næs him hreoh sefa (lines 2179b-80).

[never, when drunk, slew his hearth-companions, a savage mind was not in him].

This particular line relates to two important characteristics displayed by Heremod. When king, Beowulf never committed the monstrous act of killing his table-companions, which is a direct parallel to Hrothgar's story of warning. Additionally, the good king Beowulf did not possess a *hreoh sefa,* which separates him from the monsters Heremod and Grendel and emphasizes the importance of Hrothgar's temptation of his savage mind. Instead, Beowulf follows the performative social roles of a king, and the spectator punishment of Heremod's monstrous transformation has succeeded in its warning. Though Beowulf and Hrothgar resist any evil temptations, Heremod fails and instead succumbs to the vices. Since one of the most important Anglo-Saxon normative masculine codes of behavior was the relationship to the table-companions, the choice to have Heremod kill them allows the character to completely destroy any goodness he may have possessed. The altered performativity transforms him and serves as a monstrous mutation, one which, as Derrida argues, points towards nothingness because Heremod has now subverted the established rules and created an entirely new monstrous margin of existence for his actions.

The poem clearly demonstrates that Heremod was not always evil. Others had high expectations of him:

swylce oft bemearn   ærran mælum

swiðferhþes sið   snotor ceorl monig,

se þe him bealwa to   bote gelyfde   (907-09).

[Often, in earlier times, many a wise man mourned over the brave man, who trusted in him for relief from the evil]

Acting under the established order of the performative social codes, the wise men believed that Heremod was going to save them and protect them like a hero should, which points to Heremod's previous goodness. Because of this change, the wise men *bemearn.* The verb *bemearn* means loss and regret; the word also points to the idea of death. Therefore, reading the phrase within the context of death, loss, and regret constructs the idea that Heremod has undergone a symbolic death, killing the good man he used to be, leaving behind something different and transformed.

Just like Beowulf, Heremod began in the performative role as the strong, heroic type. The poet describes the expectations set upon Heremod as follows:

þæt ðeodnes bearn   geþeon scolde,

fæderæþelum onfon,   folc gehealdan,

hord ond hleoburh,   hæleþa rice   (910-12).

[The child of the king should increase in power, take from the noble father, guard the people, hoard, castle, and kingdom of the hero]

These lines are in themselves both instructive and performative as they outline the expectations for the king's son. According to these lines, Heremod was meant to fulfill his role and guard his people. However, he does not act like a hero (such as Beowulf) and guard his people; instead, he engages in a performative mutation like Grendel and "rejoices in the death and destruction of the Danes" (Dragland 607). The poet presents the reader with a reason for Heremod's behavior a few lines later. Heremod acts the way he does because *hine fyren onwod* (915) [Sin took possession of him]. Sin and wicked deeds overcome Heremod, and too much transformation has occurred for Heremod to return to his previous heroic and good state. Through his monstrous mutations, he has perverted the performative norm too much and is now

outside the constructed social system. Sin has possessed him and changed him internally, making him a disturbing monstrous human. For Heremod, the danger rests on his hidden monstrosity, that his outward appearance aligns with normative human figures with no apparent physical deformities, but his inward body is diseased and twisted with sin to such a degree that he cannot repent and atone. Furthermore, the hero he once was has symbolically died, leaving the human outer shell vulnerable to the sin and wickedness that took possession.

Grendel also succumbs to sin and wicked deeds: *ongan fyrene fremman* (100-01) [he began to perform wicked deeds]. The word *fyren* connects both Heremod and Grendel, drawing similarities between their actions through lexical association. The difference, however, is that Grendel – already a monster – performs the wicked deeds, while Heremod gets transformed as the wicked deeds take possession of him. Essentially, Heremod is turning into a monster through his rejection of the performative social roles. Carol Walker Bynum argues, "Replacement-change permits newness and difference but tends to make its appearance…arbitrary and ultimately inexplicable" (20). The idea of replacement-change is tied to the idea of switching, changing from one thing to the other. She adds the idea of radical change "where an entity is replaced by something completely different" (25). Based on the poet's description of him, Heremod was once a highly thought of hero, but when sin took possession of him, he rejects the established cultural roles and is replaced with a monster. Furthermore, if one reads Heremod as symbolically dying, then his old self is erased, leaving the potential for "newness" and for him to be "replaced by something completely different." When sin enters or takes possession of him, it happens inexplicably and, according to the poet's description, changes Heremod into a different man. He becomes the opposite of what he once was. Heremod, despite the change he undergoes, remains

superficially human. His transformation is not physical or outward; it occurs internally. The good, heroic man he once was is essentially replaced internally by a sinful, wicked monstrosity.

While some critics contend that Old English monsters are only born not made, Heremod seems to thwart this claim (Oswald 23). His rejection of the established performative roles makes him into an other, therefore, a monster. By sin and wickedness taking possession or entering him, a transformation occurs within him. If what makes one monstrous are the "monstrous attributes of excess, lack, or hybridity," then Heremod possesses the monstrous attribute of excess (Oswald 24). When the poet discusses Heremod's destruction of the Danish people, he describes him the following way:

> ne geweox he him to willan ac to wælfealle
>
> ond to deaðcwalum   Deniga leodum   (1711-12).

[He did not increase but to the destruction and deadly plague of the Danish people.]

The use of the verb *geweox*, meaning to increase or to grow, points to Heremod's excess. His growth and increase results in destruction, so through his transformation, he becomes possessed by the sin of excess violence. Cohen asserts, "The monster is born only at this metaphoric crossroads, as an embodiment of a certain cultural moment – of a time, a feeling, and a place. The monster's body quite literally incorporates fear, desire, anxiety, and fantasy…the monstrous body is pure culture" (Cohen 4). With this in mind, Heremod can be read as a cultural reaction. One could argue that *Beowulf* is a story of decline. At the end of the poem, a Geatish woman predicts the Geats will face hard days, slaughter, harm, and captivity now that Beowulf is dead. The tendency in *Beowulf* to show the "consolidation then dissolution of social structure is a recurrent theme of unstable Germanic life" (Dragland 606). If *Beowulf* is a story of decline, then

"the poem will end with the death of the hero and the imminent destruction of his nation" (Earl 29). Reading the poem this way positions Heremod as a monster born out of Anglo-Saxon anxiety. In a society dictated by a performativity of controlled violence, Heremod is transformed into a monster through his violent excess, and he therefore embodies the fear of that same excess.

Additionally, Heremod's violent excess is unfounded. The poem does not provide a reason for Heremod to kill his table-companions that may have provided some sympathy or understanding for his actions. Both Grendel and Grendel's mother get reasons for their violent actions; Grendel was offended by the loud noise, music, and joy emanating from Heorot, while Grendel's mother sought revenge for the death of her son. Even the dragon's violence is a response to the theft of his treasure. Unlike these monsters, Heremod has no reason for his violent excess, which makes his actions all the more unsettling. Part of Heremod's monstrosity stems from his pride:

ðéah þe hine mihtig god   mægenes wynnum

Eafeþum stépte   ofer ealle men   (1716-17)

[Though he the mighty God elevated him in the joys of power and strength over all men].

Heremod has been blessed by God with great strength that exceeds others. The use of the verb *stipan* denotes that Heremod has been raised or elevated to another level beyond normal men, yet he rejects these gifts bestowed upon him by God. By using both of the words *stipan* and *geweaxan,* Heremod is depicted as larger than life through his growing, flourishing, and rising. Yet, he does not remain humble, which is one of the points of Hrothgar's sermon to Beowulf, and this excessive pride poisons Heremod's mind. This larger-than-life status he has achieved through his growing and rising has yielded violence, and the excessive violence fits with the enormity of his pride and character at this point. Because of his pride, Heremod enacts violence

for the sake of violence, and as a result, he is punished and cast from the human race. Men like Beowulf and Heremod are powerful and expected to function within their performative roles in violent ways to attain glory, respect, and honor, but their strength and power also makes them dangerous.

The language surrounding Heremod's actions reasserts the idea that he is a monster. The verb *geweaxan* implies an idea of change pivotal to his transformation; it has a variety of connotations around the definitions of to grow, to flourish, to increase, or to develop. However, Heremod flourishes only to the heights of destruction. *Maxims I* features the word in a similar fashion. The line reads, "Guð sceal in eorle, wig geweaxan" [battle and war shall increase in the hero] (lines 83b-84a). In *Maxims I*, the idea of increasing connects with a hero and his expected duty of courage and valor, which implies that the word has a positive connotation. In the above example, the hero flourishes through socially sanctioned violence, and his heroism grows through his participation in these deeds. Heremod does just this, but in the opposite way. He grows through violence, but not the accepted performative violence of battle and war, but the deadly destruction of his own people. When the verb is applied to Heremod, it is a contradiction focusing on the opposite qualities. Heremod is deliberately aligned with a word associated with gaining heroic qualities because he was a hero and he had the potential to be a great man such as *Maxims I* outlines. However, the battle, war, character, and wisdom that increase inside him are not of valor or wisdom, but of wickedness, because this increasing turns him into a monster through deeds. Therefore, when the poet writes *ne geweox he him to willan ac to wælfealle ond to deaðcwalum Deniga leodum* [he did not increase but as the destruction and deadly plague of the Danish people], he turns the meaning of *geweox* upside down to strengthen the horrific transformation that Heremod has made.

The word *geweox* also has metaphoric importance. As Heremod performs all these wicked deeds, the word deliberately points to Heremod's increase or growth. If this word is read metaphorically in this instance, Heremod grows in size, moving him into the realm of the monstrous. Oswald maintains that Anglo-Saxon monstrosity only deals with the physical body, "although monsters do often perform actions that can be deemed monstrous" (28-29). However, to preserve her point, she adds that actions can be changed. Verner constructs the definition of monster through the definition presented in *Mandeville's Travels.* She asserts that Mandeville's claim that a monster is against "kinde" covers a broad array. She states, "'deformed against kind' may mean…deformed against the nature of the general category of creature under consideration…'kind' is to be broadly interpreted as humankind with the medieval European representing the standard form…a broad interpretation of 'deformed' would include behavior as well as appearance" (5). If an Anglo-Saxon definition only relates to physical (which perhaps limits the Anglo-Saxon literary potential), then *Beowulf'*s use of the verb *geweaxan* as a metaphor allows Heremod to still be read within the confines of a more narrow definition of an Anglo-Saxon monster. If Verner's contention is that monsters can be defined as against the nature of general category, including behavior, then Heremod's role in being the destruction and plague on his people cements his role as a monster. But if one focuses on Oswald's more narrow definition, then Heremod's metaphorical growth, increasing him in size beyond the limits of a normal man, turns him into a monster. Just as his transformation was invisible because it occurred on the inside, now his monstrous growth is invisible because it happens metaphorically.

This growth places Heremod into an extremely important monstrous realm: that of the giants. Part of Heremod's narrative is even associated with the giants:

He mid Eotenum wearð

on feonda geweald   forð forlacen,

snude forsended.   (902-904).

[With the giants, he was betrayed forth into the power of his enemies, sent away at once]

The poet states he was with or among the giants. Although the scene depicts that he was

betrayed into enemy's hands, which may be either the Jutes or the giants, it does not lessen the

connection. Heremod was *mid Eotenum*. If that phrase is read in light of his metaphoric growth,

then Heremod's symbolic transformation into a monster, specifically a giant, becomes even

clearer. Cohen writes in *Of Giants* that the giant's "body [is] an affront to natural proportion, the

giant encodes an excess that places him outside the realm of the human" (xi). He continues, "In

the England of the Middle Ages, he signifies those dangerous excesses of the flesh that the

process of masculine embodiment produces in order to forbid," and then draws attention to the

giant's "destructive consumption of every object and being that come close to his maw" (xiii).

Giants serve an important function in Anglo-Saxon literature. In *History of the Kings of Britain*,

Geoffrey of Monmouth tells the story of Gogmagog, a terrible savage giant who is twelve cubits

tall and has excessive strength. Along with twenty other giants, Gogmagog attacks and

slaughters the Britons (20). This example situates the giants in an important place within

Britain's history. Prior to someone setting foot upon the soil (in this case, Brutus), giants

occupied the land. The giants become enemies from the moment that Brutus settles and renames

the island Briton because they act as obstacles between the Britons and their new home.

Physically, they are different in size than the newly settled Britons, and their actions are violent

and savage. Monmouth later relates how Arthur encounters a Spanish giant who viciously attacks

anyone who approaches him, steals a woman and her nurse, and rapes the nurse (172-173).

Similarly, in *Genesis A*, descendents of Seth marry descendents of Cain, much to God's

disapproval; therefore, God decides to smite the evil, sinful giants (157). These other examples

of Anglo-Saxon giants are, like Gogamog and his followers, excessively violent and brutal and

connected with sin. Read alongside these examples of other Anglo-Saxon giants, Heremod

transforms into a monster because of his violent excesses. These excessive actions place him

outside of what it means to be human, a hero, and a king. Heremod becomes marginalized

through his actions. Like the monstrous giants, Heremod's destruction of his people reflects

Cohen's assertion of the giant's destructive consumption. Beyond this, the connection to

excessive size makes him a monster. In the *Liber Monstrorum,* a king named Hygelac is

described as "a monster[] of an amazing size" (109). His only monstrosity is abnormal size,

which points to humans shifting into the realm of the monstrous based on certain aberrant

characteristics.

Heremod also transforms into a monster socially. After killing the Danes, the poet

describes him as doing the following: *he ana hwearf, mære þeoden, mondreamum from* (1714-

15) [he alone turned from noble lords, and from joyous noise]. This description of Heremod is

pivotal. One of the key features of a monster is his location, the outskirts of society. Orchard

comments about Grendel's home: "[his] dwelling-place is described or implied by a bewildering

number of terms *mearc*, *moras*, *fen*, *fæsten*, and *fifelcynnes eard* which have as their common

feature their remoteness from human habitation" (59). Giants are pushed to the margins of

society, outside of civilization (Cohen, *Giants,* 34). In Anglo-Saxon society, borderlands were

dangerous liminal spaces because of their location between two realms. On one side of the

borderland rests society, the human community with villages and the hall. Within this

community, people found protection and safety. Beyond the borderland was the wilderness,

which could include forests, fens, or marshes. Anglo-Saxons were thought to have feared the wilderness, which emphasizes "the uncivilized aspect of the monster; it dwells alone" (Bodvarsdottir 42). The wilderness represented danger because of the savage creatures (beasts and monsters) which inhabited it; furthermore, boundaries marked where Anglo-Saxons would hold battles or hang criminals (43). The physical location of monsters in society reinforces Heremod's new position. After killing the Danes, he turns away from the joyous noise of society, leaving the realm of human civilization and marginalizing himself. By doing this, Heremod makes himself a cultural monster. Monstrous behaviors "help mark the monster as a cultural as well as a physical Other. Some such behaviors include habits of eating, grooming, and dressing, reactions to human approach, use of human language, and transgressing gender roles"(Oswald 6). This definition can be extended to transgressing social roles as well. When Heremod defies the heroic code, he transgresses performative social norms. Instead of conforming to the rigid definition of a physical monster, Heremod transforms himself into a cultural monstrosity, an even more dangerous threat since he looks like a human, used to be a hero, and has succumbed to wickedness, which is the cause of this transformation. This cultural monstrosity is also dangerous because it thwarts the performative norms which society is built upon. Monstrous mutations threaten the stability of the entire system and must be dealt with accordingly. If one accepts that humans in Old English literature cannot turn into a monster physically, then Heremod has perhaps skirted that by turning into a monster socially on top of the aforementioned metaphoric transformation. When Heremod flees, he flees from society and the comfort of community. To the Anglo-Saxons, "the hall with its surrounding enclosure served as an emblem of civilization" (Bodvarsdottir 43). The hall serves to protect the people from other tribes and monsters (Earl 115). Heremod turns away from this symbol of human companionship and

interaction, leaving it behind to dwell alone. Thus, he is made into a monster in two ways: he places himself on the outskirts of civilization, choosing to dwell within the realm of monsters in the wilderness; and he transforms into a loner, a trademark of monstrosity, by rejecting the joyful noise and companionship of his people.

Once again, the poet uses parallel descriptions that highlight Heremod's inherent monstrosity. The poet describes that Cain does as follows:

he þa fag gewat,

morþre gemearcod,   mandream fleon,

westen warode.   (1264-66).

[Then he departed bloodstained, marked for murder, fled from joyous human noise, dwelt in the wilderness.]

The poet places Cain's exile after the murder of his brother as a narrative echo to Heremod. Just as Cain flees away from human civilization after his monstrous act, Heremod does the same. In this line, the poet specifically situates Cain in the wilderness, the realm of monsters; furthermore, Cain may be considered another type of monstrous human because he is a human who then becomes the lineage for other monsters, such as Grendel's mother and Grendel. By paralleling Heremod to Cain, Heremod's status as monstrous human is reinforced by lexically connecting the two human monstrosities to each other. Though Cain resides in the wilderness, the poet never places Heremod in the realm of monsters; however, as stated previously, he does claim that Heremod *mid Eotenum wearð on feonda geweald forð forlacen* (902-03), which puts Heremod into the realm of the giants. Cain is not the only Biblical figure or monstrous human in Old English literature who gets exiled from civilization. In *Daniel*, the word *mandream* is used in a similar fashion. The poet writes:

Se ðec aceorfeð   of cyningdome,

and ðec wineleasne   on wræc sendeð,

and þonne onhweorfeð   heortan þine,

    þæt þu ne gemyndgast   æfter mandreame,

ne gewittes wast   butan wildeora þeaw,

ac þu lifgende   lange þrage

heorta hlypum   geond holt wunast.   (567-74)

[The Lord will cut you off from your kingdom, and they shall drive you from men, change your heart so that you won't remember the human joy, nor will you (Nebuchadnezzar) know anything except the custom of wild beasts, but you will live a long time leaping like the hart and shall live in the woods.]

In this instance, King Nebuchadnezzar is turned away from human civilization and made to live like animals. He will no longer be a human but a beast, and he will live like the deer and dwell in the woods, away from society in the realm of monsters. The focus on Nebuchadnezzar's mental state is especially important here. He transforms, and his mind becomes like that of beasts. This is a crucial point in regards to monstrosity, especially Heremod's. A description about reason is found in King Alfred's translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philsophy*:

Is sio þridde gecynd þæm twæm betere,

sio gesceadwisnes. Nis ðæt scandlic cræft,

forðæm hit nænig hafað neat buton monnum.   (187-9).

[The third nature is better than the others, intelligence. That is not a disgraceful craft, for no beast has it, only men.] (183).

One of the defining characteristics of humanity is intelligence, the ability to reason, to wit, and to think. To return to Augustine's explication of man and beasts, he also attributes reason to humanity in *The City of God*: "But whoever is anywhere born a man, that is, a rational, mortal animal" (16.8). This goes beyond instinct; there is an intelligence that humans possess that beasts do not. God forces Nebuchadnezzar away from man's joyous noise – here the symbol for society – and forces him into the realm of the monsters. Furthermore, God robs him of his reason, stripping him into nothing but a beast. Heremod has lost his reason, demonstrated when he removes himself from society, an arguably irrational action. He loses intelligence, which relates back to the interpretation of the poet's use of the word *geweox*. One loose connotative meaning of *geweox* is to increase in intelligence. Heremod does the opposite of this, just as he inversely increases in every other way. As Heremod loses his reason and moves away from the realm of civilization and humanity, he becomes more beast-like, solidifying his role as a monster.

Heremod reaffirms his role as a cultural monster by thwarting the social conventions surrounding kingship. Heremod defies most of his responsibilities as king, most importantly because: *nallas beagas geaf Denum æfter dome* (1719-20) [he by no means gave rings to the Danes for their honor]. One of the most important customs in Anglo-Saxon England was the exchange of gifts. The ritual act of kings giving rings is so important that the Old English wisdom poem *Maxims II* instructs it: *Cyning sceal on healle beagas dælan* [A king must share rings in the hall]. *Maxims I* also depicts a generous king through gift giving:

> Cyning sceal mid ceape cwene gebicgan,
>
> bunum ond beagum; bu sceolon ærest
>
> geofum god wesan.   (81-83a)

[A king must buy the queen with goods, cups and beads; both should first be gracious with the gifts.][39]

These two Old English poems demonstrate the expectations held for kings. In both of these poems, generosity is lauded instead of avarice. *Beowulf* reflects this custom throughout the poem. Heorot is called *gifhealle* (gift-hall) in line 838, Hrothgar a *beaga bryttan* (giver of rings) in 352 and a *sincgyfan* (treasure-giver) in line 1012, and Hrothgar bestows treasures onto Beowulf such as swords, cups, and armor. When Beowulf returns home, he gives his newly acquired treasures to his lord, Hygelac. By giving gifts, warriors, kings, and kingdoms prove their loyalty to one another. Hrothgar expresses his gratitude through the gifts he gives Beowulf, and Beowulf solidifies his loyalty to Hygelac by passing Hrothgar's gifts on to him. These gifts create alliances between nations and grant security to the people. But Heremod does not give gifts, and through his greed, he alienates his people instead of fostering loyalty and trust like a good king such as Hrothgar should. This single action points to Heremod's refusal to "cement the bonds that hold society together" (Neville 117). His avarice parallels the dragon. The dragon is monstrous in the Geats' eyes because he hoards his treasure, just as Heremod hoards his. By refusing to participate in this one cultural practice, Heremod illustrates his perversion of kingly duties.

Even more significant in making Heremod a monster is his refusal to adhere to the kingly duty of keeping the peace. For most kings, violence was avoided at all costs within their halls because the hall provided a safe place for fellowship and community. *Beowulf* illustrates this concept when Beowulf first comes to Heorot and Wulfgar tells him they can only approach Hrothgar if they leave their weapons. This is an example of *grið*, which according to the

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[39] *Maxims I*

Bosworth-Toller means "peace limited to place or time, protection, security, safety," and then adds: "The *grið* is a limited or localized peace, under the special guarantee of the individual." The hall functions as a protected zone for the king and his subjects, the direct opposite of the dangerous liminal zones located beyond in the wilderness. Going against this peace "is not just a crime but, as the form of the prohibition indicates, a violation of sacred space" (Earl 112). Heremod violates his own *grið* when he *breat bolgenmod beodgeneatas* [enraged in mind destroyed his table companions] (1713). The act of cutting down his own table companions makes him the worst kind of monster because as a king, Heremod is the symbolic protector of his people. Yet he is the one, not an outside monster like Grendel, who kills his own table companions. The poet makes a point to state that Beowulf does not do this same deed:

Swa bealdode   bearn Ecgðeowes,

guma guðum cuð,   godum dædum,

dreah æfter dome,   nealles druncne slog

heorðgeneata.   (2177-80).

[So the son of Ecgtheow showed himself brave, the warrior known for battles, for good deeds, lived in honor, by no means slew drunken his hearth-companions.]

The poet purposefully places Heremod against the hero of the narrative through their actions. An honorable, brave hero would never cut down their table companions because socially that is a monstrous act.

All of Heremod's monstrous actions stem from the evil that has festered inside of him. Although Heremod had the potential to be a great man, the poet writes that: *him on ferhþe greow breosthord blodreow* [in his heart grew a bloodthirsty breast-hoard] (1718-19). The argument could be made that almost all heroes and monsters are bloodthirsty in some way. The

society is structured upon mediated violence between enemy nations, between hero and monster. For a hero, this violence begets fame, and the desire for fame could very easily lead to excessive violence. War becomes a means for warriors to acceptably perform violent actions and satisfy their aggression, and by focusing this aggression outward towards enemies instead of inwards towards their comrades, these warriors help maintain order (Earl 112). If warriors, like Beowulf and Heremod, are supposed to be guardians of social order, then that explains why the wise men looked to Heremod for protection against evils. The poem provides no motive for Heremod's actions. He does not kill the members of a conquered land nor does he appear to have

killed his people for fame. A possible motive for his actions is avarice since he refuses to give the Danes any rings, but the poem does not say that Heremod keeps the treasure for himself. He just kills his people because of the wickedness that had entered his heart. The lack of motive points to Heremod's violent excess, to violence for the sake of violence. The three monsters in the poem – Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon – all have reasons for their actions, regardless of how misguided. However, Heremod has none of these justifications. He is just an excessively violent monster.

4.4 Conclusion

Reading Heremod as a monster in light of his punishment and transformation in the poem deepens the understanding of *Beowulf* and illuminates some of the important aspects of the poem. Many parallels have been drawn between Beowulf and the monsters in the poem, most notably though the use of the word *aglæca*, which many gloss as *monster*, but probably means "awe-inspiring one." The poet draws attention to the potential dangers Beowulf poses through these connections; he further explores the hero's ambiguity through Hrothgar's sermon, warning Beowulf against the risks of being a bad king. Defining Heremod as a monstrous human

demonstrates what Beowulf could become if he gives into his violent desires and does not guide himself with wisdom. Though Beowulf represents violence through his role of hero and warrior, it is socially sanctioned and performative violence, not selfish violence independent of any rationality. Additionally, Heremod adds another layer to the monsters present in the poem because he upsets the cultural balance by bringing disorder to the social realm. Heremod is a human and described as such, and his status as human makes him that much more dangerous. He is not a fantastical beast that can easily be defeated by a hero, such as Beowulf. He does not live outside in liminal spaces, such as marshes or fens, but resides alongside other humans, a real threat inside the realm of humanity. Even more upsetting, his physical appearance has no markers of deformity or abnormality, making it impossible to visually identify him as a monster, which serves as a latent threat because the monstrosity is hidden. The monstrous human is a center of disorder in an otherwise rigidly defined social order within the poem. Because of his transgressions, Heremod mentally into a monster, losing all reason and being forcibly removed from human society into the marginal spaces of other monsters. As a monstrous human, Heremod subverts the normal rules established in the poem and instead follows no known rules. The poem presents no justification or reason for his actions. Heremod kills his table-companions, which completely rejects the established performative cultural norms and creates a monstrous mutation that leaves a void of understanding and existence. This disruption of the established rules of the poem makes him an even larger threat to the carefully constructed performative identity in the poem, and to the overall cultural identity of Anglo-Saxons.

The theme of monstrosity goes beyond the obvious three monsters Beowulf has to defeat in each section of the poem even though the three monsters are critically important to not only the understanding but also the enjoyment of the poem. By acting as a monstrous human,

Heremod opposes the narrow definitions of Anglo-Saxon monsters and instead fills in the gap left by the monstrous-in-human, which is a category of monster that appears not only in *Beowulf* but in other poems as well. Including this additional category of monster provides a new way to read the monstrous humans like Heremod, and makes the literature richer than some critics allow. Maybe Heremod is not the same kind of monster as Grendel, Grendel's mother, or the dragon, but it definitely would not be erroneous to claim that *Beowulf* contains at least two more half monsters than the traditional three.

5   CHAPTER FOUR: GRÆG OND GRIM: FINDING A DUPLICITOUS WARRIOR IDENTITY THROUGH PARANOMASIA AND METAPHOR IN BEOWULF

When the Geats land in Denmark their armor is described using words associated with brightness: *guðbyrne scan, heard hondlocen hringiren scir* (their battle corselets shone, hard, hand-linked, the iron-rings bright, lines 321-322). As soon as they first appear in *Beowulf,* the Geats present a visually formidable force that insists on drawing the gaze of the audience. The initial images are not however of the hero Beowulf, but of a carefully fabricated group of warriors presented in their armor. The focus of the Geats as a group of artificially constructed armored beings not only impresses upon the coastwarden the strength, might, and hope they bring to the suffering Danes, but also present the Geats as a transformed other removed from the normal realm of humans, who represent the monstrous power granted to them through their armor.

Old English has various words related to armor, many which appear in *Beowulf.* Two similar words, *gearwe* and *geatwe,* refer specifically to clothing and arms. When combined with the word *guð,* which means war/battle, the compound word becomes a battle garment. A related verb, *gierwan,* carries a secondary meaning of to put on or adorn and clothe oneself. Although

the primary definition of *gierwan* relates to preparation and readying, the verb connects to the act of putting on armor since armor is used when soldiers prepare for battle. Furthermore, the verb *werian* serves a dual meaning of to wear a garment and bear a weapon, while the verb *beran* means to bear arms. Used within the poem to describe items or actions related to armor, this set of words focuses the importance of the armor within the idea of covering one's body with the armor. Another similar verb, *berian,* holds the opposite meaning, which is to expose or make naked, making the verb about removal instead of adding. Also used within the poem, the noun *searu* holds both negative and positive connotations. The word has a lesser used definition of armor and arms, especially when compounded with *guð,* while another definition implies treachery and artifice. The dual meaning of the word connects armor with artifice, providing a connotation of illusion and disingenuousness.

These few examples of related words connected to arms and armor within Old English demonstrate not only the range of vocabulary dedicated to the topic, but also the variety of words used within *Beowulf* to refer to the objects. In many scenes, specifically the scene where the Geats arrive in Denmark, the words hold connotations that add a metaphoric layer to the poem and exposes the underlying negative aspects of the warrior identity. In some instances, like with the word *searu,* there are darker connotations that aid in depicting the characters in less blanket heroic terms and instead explore the underlying implications of armor's deception. Additionally, paronomasia is used throughout the poem, which is an important poetic technique focusing on "the establishing of an etymological or pseudo-etymological relationship between two or more words" (Frank 208n7). Roberta Frank in her landmark 1972 essay "Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse" claims that "the Old English poet was adept at putting similar-sounding words together" (207). Paronomasia is used in poetry through "the fitting together of

alliterative and assonant words to prove the mutual relevance of name and essence" (Frank 209).

In the case of *Beowulf,* the use of paronomasia draws connections between meanings of related

words to present an additional ironic or symbolic meaning. I contend that through the use of

connotation and paronomasia, the Geats are not just depicted as a shining heroic band of

warriors, but the duality of the language surrounding the armor implies the threatening undertone

of the warrior identity by transforming them into a dangerous hybrid monstrosity. By using

certain words when initially describing the Geats, the poem presents a transformed hybrid of

man and metal, and while wearing this armor, the Geats are not quite human but something

outside the realm of the traditional human and monster dichotomy. Through this transformation,

achieved both through armor and the metaphoric connotations of the vocabulary, the Geats

become a type of socially accepted monstrosity who are expected to participate in violence that

would be unacceptable without the transformation afforded them by the armor.

5.1   Armor as signifying objects

The use of armor in *Beowulf* is significant, partially because of the numerous ways it is

described throughout the poem. The Geats' first appearance in the poem is depicted through

references to their armor, armor and weapons are mentioned when the Geats first enter Heorot,

Beowulf fights Grendel without his armor, and swords serve as central objects within the

narrative. These examples represent only a few instances throughout the poem where armor is

brought to the forefront of a scene. Though part of a heroic warrior culture, the armor signifies

more than just the superficial indictor of heroism, and acts as part of the socio-semiotic

transformation that links the men with their human-monster hybrid identities.

George Clark's 1965 essay "Beowulf's Armor" explores how the armor and weapons

used within the poem serve as symbols of the heroic life. He claims that the armor and weapons

hold symbolic value that "depends upon the contextual meanings the poem allows them and the associations these meanings carry" (409). While the armor is aimed at dramatizing the heroic past, the poem presents an ambiguous view of the heroic world. Clark notes that the poem focuses on the monstrous violence carried out through Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon within the main narrative, yet the episodes suggest the dangers of human violence. For example, Clark argues that within the Ingeld episode the sword held by one of the Danish warriors serves a dual purpose: as an heirloom passed down from father to son, and as a trophy stolen from a slaughtered Heathobard. The sword then acts as a symbol of not only heroism, but of the violent deeds enacted to obtain the weapon from a fallen enemy. In the last part of the poem, a sword features in the story of Hygelac's death, detailing his violent death with a weapon at the hands of a human. In these few instances, swords become "a symbol for the heroic experience. An ungovernable and self-perpetuating violence lies at the root of that experience" (411). All of the fights, including the ones presented within the episodes, point to a dichotomy between "human order and a monstrous violence" (424).

The arms and armor within the poem aid in exposing men's inherent savagery. Clark describes the theme of the sword hitting the helmet, stating it "epitomizes the ferocious savagery of heroic warfare" (412). The fact that armor is used to proclaim the heroic qualities of the men presented in various scenes provides an association between the physical armor and the positive representation of the heroic ideal. However, the armor and weapons are not only presented as markers of heroic feats, but "edge our awareness of the chilling contrast between heroic strength and monstrous power, and allusions to arms ironically link human and bestial violence" (413). In a heroic world, Clark argues, sinister and dark figures are "dangerous and useful, even necessary", and this includes weapons that lead to monstrous violence, like swords (428).

When Clark analyzes the arrival of Beowulf and the Geats in Denmark, he argues that the depictions of the armor and weapons are positive. The descriptions denote brightness and pleasant sounds, all of which serve to aid in the introduction of the hero's journey across the sea and arrival on shore. Clark points out that the coastwarden's initial interaction with the Geats when they arrive "suggests a turmoil of conflicting responses: awe and suspicion, courtesy and caution" and "bespeaks the tensions of a violent age" (416-7). As he begins to discover who they are, the coastwarden pays attention to the armor, and then as the Geats march to Heorot, more focus is placed on the armor. The armor symbolizes "beauty, status, terror, and destruction" as Beowulf interacts with Hrothgar and reveals "the tensions, disorders, harmonies, and hopes of the heroic world" (418). The arms and armor highlight their status and allows the Geats to gain access to the shore and pass into Heorot. Through courteous and polite speech, the "aura of violence and destructiveness already surrounding the Geatish weapons" is lessened since the Geats have gained the respect of Wulfgar and the coastwarden, which was gained because of the symbols of their heroism (419). Though armor and weapons act as "the tools of war and violence," the also provide social context for the people wearing them (409). Thus, the "arms and armor are the hard currency of the heroic system" (440). Though the arms and armor hint at violence, they symbolize the heroic system inherent within the poem.

Though Clark acknowledges that there is a violence that underlies the armored objects, he does not explore the ways in which armor changes the wearer. His argument always comes back to the heroic ideal central to the wearing of armor instead of dealing with the transformative qualities. Recent scholars have also discussed various aspects of the socio-semiotic qualities of armor in *Beowulf* and Anglo-Saxon culture, but draw a stronger connection between the identity of the wearer and the armor itself. In "Rebuilding the Fabulated Bodies of

the Hoard-Warriors," Asa Mittman and Patricia MacCormack approach arms and armor as more than just meaningless objects, and instead posit that they are "embodied apparatuses inextricable from those who wore them and from the violence they were intended to fend off, yet accelerate" (356). The article explores the hybrid nature of armored warriors, claiming that the visual image of a man in armor would be both awe-inspiring and horrific. Armor is intrinsically connected with violence since the very use of armor and weapons promises violence from the warrior. To distinguish between warriors and monsters, they conclude that monsters hint at violence, but violence from monsters is not guaranteed unlike the violence associated with arms (357). Here, Mittman and MacCormack move beyond Clark's argument by admitting that the humans, though sometimes couched in heroic terms, function as violent figures in their armor. But the armor changes the wearer and creates something new in place of the original human. By fitting the warrior into three separate categories, they demonstrate how warriors construct themselves into a hybrid of cyborg, god, and monster. The covering of the body through armor turns the warrior into a type of cyborg creature, the heroic and powerful deeds make him god-like, and the savage violence creates a monster. Since armor represents violence, the Anglo-Saxon armored warrior acts as a "spectacle and affective icon" where the warrior dressed in his armor is "an event, a visual spectacle" (357). Unlike Clark's armor that only hints at violence, the armored warrior is a metal-clad hybrid that represents a violent identity.

Mask-helmets are one of the most important facets of armor that Mittman and MacCormack analyze in their article. The face is essential to characterizing the being as human or monster since it "place[s] the subject within recognizable categories of race, gender, age, class, or whichever binary options are most important for each geographical and temporal state." Thus, when a man covers his face with a mask, he erases all signifiers of humanity. By obscuring

the face, the mask-helmets turn the wearers into a type of cyborg, "confound[ing] and connect[ing] the face with the entire body as a newly organized corporeal expression. The Hoard-warriors were thus adorned and thereby recomposed." Additionally, mask-helmets give power to the wearer since they "empower the warrior by denying a gaze at his face" (362).

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen discusses the transformative nature of armor in his 1996 essay "The Armour of an Alienating Identity," relating it to the medieval construction of heroic masculinity. To construct a heroic identity, a male adorns himself in the different parts of a suit of armor, which provides "a powerful vision of masculinity" along with "behaviors formulated to be adopted and promulgated." Thus, the hero's body transforms into something artificial and constructed, which represents an invulnerable identity to the rest of the world (2). Cohen compares armor to an armoire and argues that it can be viewed as "a closed space, a closet, that dooms the subject through the construction of a constricting exterior to a lifelong struggle to reconcile the 'new' binarism inside / outside." The addition of armor onto a man creates a dualism, which Cohen terms the "alienating identity" since it is separate from the original one. The warrior inside never commits to the single act that the outward armor represents, yet the armor acts "as the wooden planks upon which [he] enact[s] the role of whatever character [he has] taken to be [the] essential, singular self" (1). This alienating identity is necessary because heroes are part of any society, but they do not naturally exist. Heroes must be constructed from other parts placed onto a human body, "producing both emobodied subjects and monsters" because "society needs heroes, but it must fear them" (2).

The arguments presented in these articles all agree that armor is an outside signifier of heroism but also human violence. Clark recognizes the human violence present in the episodes within *Beowulf,* but generally contends that the descriptions of the armor and weapons belonging

to Beowulf and Geats are described in positive terms. Though he acknowledges the tensions of a violent past and culture that underlies Beowulf and Hrothgar's first meeting, Clark quickly accepts that they instead interpret Beowulf's armor as a symbol of his heroism and settle on a positive opinion. Mittman and MacCormack argue for armor as part of a more drastic transformation, one that creates a new being. Since this artificial cyborg being is no longer human, it is something else entirely through the fabrication of the metal placed upon his body. Focusing on the construction of a masculine identity, Cohen uses armor as something that alters the wearer into a new, unnatural being that did not exist before. While Clark uses *Beowulf* as his evidence, both of the other articles mention *Beowulf* yet settle on a more wide-sweeping cultural focus. The arguments all share the common links that armor is read upon the body, and that this occurs because armor changes. My aim is to build upon these ideas and offer an additional way that armor transforms.

Using the language in *Beowulf,* I contend that though armor is tied to the heroic ideal, the vocabulary surrounding the description of armor and weapons provides a more negative connotation that connects to the human-monster hybrids created by the violent undertones represented. While the simplest way of reading the descriptions connects Beowulf and the Geats to heroism, the wordplay addresses the underlying threat of violence associated with the warrior identity. The violence is signified by the armor as Mittman and MacCormack and even Clark point out, but a close lexical analysis of the descriptions of armor in *Beowulf* adds to their arguments by tying those ideas directly to the metaphoric implications of the warrior identity present in the poem. While Clark's assertion that Wulfgar and the coastwarden view the Geats with respect because of their armor is true, glossing over the violent connotations of the Geats' arrival ignores the full significance that the armor holds in those initial scenes. Like Clark states,

both the coastwarden and Wulfgar are suspicious, but stopping here limits the full scope of the armor's transformative power in the scene. Similar to Mittman and MacCormack and Cohen, I agree that the placement of the armor over the body serves to change the wearer into something new. However, I additionally argue that armor acts as yet another type of transformation in Anglo-Saxon literature, which robs the human of their humanity and changes them into a hybrid human monstrosity. The transformed armored warrior is not punished or transformed as a punishment, but allowed to enact socially sanctioned violence without repercussions unlike other human monstrosities discussed in this dissertation who are punished for their monstrous violence. By wearing the mask-helmets when they first arrive, the Geats step onto the Danish shore as a threatening, monstrous other. If the face symbolizes humanity, then removing the face eliminates the rules placed upon the wearer by society. Power then is gained from the erasure of his identity, leaving him in a state of non-identity where he is not human, but not fully a monster. Instead, he is a hybrid being, able to enact monstrous violence through the power given to him by the armor. Thus, the armor in the poem signifies human-monstrosities, where the viewer immediately reads violence and monstrosity onto the body.

The human-monstrosities presented in *Beowulf* rest on the connotations of the language surrounding the description of armor. The lexical analysis used in this chapter's argument draws on Roberta Frank's explication of paronomasia in Old English literature, along with the semantics and connotations of specific words. Focusing on the individual words highlights the negative, threatening, and duplicitous connotations of the warrior's identity. In her essay, Frank argues that the use of paronomasia "'points' the poetic text and has, perhaps, the same impact on the meaning of a verse as has the pair of quotation marks just inserted into this sentence: a hint, a slight emphasis, that the words so enclosed may have other than a strictly literal significance"

(Frank 214). Frank's assertion that the paronomastic words have more than a literal significance relates directly to the use of the phonologically similar words that describe armor. The paronomasia in this instance serves to, as Frank argues, "quietly pinpoint the moments" of importance (211). The wordplay provides subtle nuances of the words, and using this principle, the weapons are not just symbols of the heroic ideal, but sinister and threatening markers of a socially sanctioned monstrosity enacted through violence. In many places in the poem, the paronomasia stems from the double meanings of specific words used to describe the armor. The double-edged words provide "an ironic and startling collocation of sound and sense"; furthermore, in all these examples "a new dimension is revealed in and by the poet's wordplay" (Frank 210; 214). In the examples from *Beowulf,* the irony lies in the tension inherent between the seemingly positive superficial definitions juxtaposed with the underlying negative connotations. Applying paronomasia to the poem's descriptions of the armor exposes the duality at the core of the warrior's identity and how armor provides a transformation into a threatening human-monster hybrid.

5.2   Armor, the *fyrd,* and the Anglo-Saxon Warrior

Knowledge of armor from the Anglo-Saxon period is scant. There is evidence that warriors used a type of mail that protected the legs by falling past the waist and protected the arms by including coverings for the shoulders and upper arms (DeVries and Smith 60-1). The mail-shirts or corselets described in *Beowulf* are composed of metal rings woven tightly together. An example of a similar mail-shirt was found in the remains at Sutton Hoo; however, it was of poor quality (Chickering 296). Another example of an Anglo-Saxon mail-shirt discovered in a barrow in Derbyshire was not made exactly like the ones described in *Beowulf* (Chambers 360). The Anglo-Saxon mail-shirt was made with connected links of chain of various lengths, but they

"all show the impression of cloth over a considerable part of the surface" instead of the full mail-shirt armor in the poem. Because of this, "it is therefore no improbable conjecture that they would originally constitute a kind of quilted cuirass, by being sewn up within or upon a doublet of strong cloth" (Bateman 32). Finds from Danish bog burials dating from the third and fifth centuries yielded two mail-shirts that contained rings with small diameters tightly woven together with approximately twenty thousand rings. These corselets may be a closer match to the armor described in the poem than the ones made by Anglo-Saxons (Chickering 296). The helmet is another important piece of armor described in *Beowulf.* Helmets from Sutton Hoo and Derbyshire have a boar's head on top of them, just like the boar-crested helmets described in the poem. These helmets also contain cheek guards, and were often gold-plated (Chickering 297; Chambers 358). While large amounts of armor were more than likely not worn by the Anglo-Saxon warrior, they would have carried shields for protection (DeVries and Smith 61).

The use of armor serves the basic function of protection, so warriors wear armor to protect the vulnerable flesh during battle. The design of armor corresponds to "the weapons likely to be used against it and of the degree of protection against them which is desired, or deemed practicable" (Ogorkiewicz 321). Therefore, the armor acts as a second, protective layer of skin, and this so-called skin denies everything on the outside access to the body. It creates a boundary that protects the wearer from the external environment. While archeological evidence of armor from the Anglo-Saxon period may be limited, armor and weapons are described often throughout *Beowulf.* In the poem*,* armor is connected to the heroic code and warrior culture, which occurs not only when the characters wear armor, but also when characters exchange swords and gifts of armor and weaponry are exchanged. In Anglo-Saxon culture, "men's social identity was bound up in the weaponry they carried" (Crawford 116). The depiction of the

characters wearing armor clearly identifies them as part of the heroic culture and the *comitatas*, and this armor serves as a performative gesture that helps establish their social identity.

While many Old English poems, such as *Beowulf,* "The Wanderer," "The Seafarer," and "The Battle of Maldon," depict a world where the *comitatus* was a strong ideal among the warriors and the lord-retainer relationship was prized, the reality of Anglo-Saxon military structure was not as romantic. The Anglo-Saxon army was built upon a military obligation system called the *fyrd,* which was part of the three-prong *trimoda necessitas.* Many scholars believe that the members of the *fyrd* were chosen through a hide system, making it a conscription army based on the size of an estate instead of a personal obligation or a duty chosen through loyalty.[40] In his book *Anglo-Saxon England,* F.M. Stenton claims that the military obligations of lords were related to their rank, and ignoring any summons would result in the lord losing his land (275). However, military duty was not reserved only for the upper class; freemen and peasants were also conscripted. Regardless of class, men were required to answer summons to military service if called and could be fined if they ignored their obligations (Chadwick 94, 127; Hollister 59). While ultimately the men were serving the king, members of the army were chosen based on the size of the lord's estate and answered to the lord directly (Chadwick 102). If called to serve, there were almost no exceptions that allowed a man out of their military duty (Hollister 71). The military service of an Anglo-Saxon warrior did not influence his status within the society since it was considered service to the lord of the estate because of the selection process and the fact that the lord would equip the warrior when called (Dressler 30). The reality of the Anglo-Saxon army is more one of required service than one based on blind loyalty to one's lord.

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[40] For more on the *fyrd*, see C. Warren Hollister, *Anglo-Saxon Military Institutions* (Oxford, 1962); F.M. Stenton, *The First Century of English Feudalism, 1066-1166: Being the Ford Lectures Delivered in the University of Oxford in Hilary Term 1929* (Oxford, 1932); H. Munro Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (University Press, 1905).

This military system extended beyond the conquest, well into the fourteenth century. However, just as in pre-conquest England, evidence suggests "that active participation was frequently honored more in spirit rather than in reality" since during the years 1277 to 1327, muster patterns illustrate that the number of knights who answered summons decreased (Dressler 34).

Imagining the Anglo-Saxon warrior within this more realistic paradigm frames the warriors in Old English literature as more complex figures instead of blindly loyal drones following their lord to their deaths. In fact, repercussions were put in place for situations where men ignored their summons, which implies that was at least enough of an issue to need regulations. In the *Domesday Book*, a passage relating to Worcestershire states, "if the freeman of another lord remains away from the army, and his lord leads another man to the host in his place, he pays 40s. to his lord who received the summons. But if nobody at all goes in his place, he shall pay his lord 40s. but his lord must pay the entire amount to the king."[41] Additionally, a passage relating to Berkshire states, "if anyone for the sake of remaining behind promised to send another in his place, and yet he who was to have been sent remained behind, his lord was freed of obligation by the payment of 50s."[42] These two examples from the *Domesday Book* illustrate that a hierarchy approach to the select fyrd was used where the lord answers to the king for his direct summons, but freemen living in the territory answer to the lord and the lord in turn has to answer to the king for the freemen. Though military support was a duty and obligation of both a lord and freeman, it was not necessarily voluntary, and the hierarchy created a disconnect between the freemen or peasants and king since the lord was the intermediary. Furthermore, the existence of a select fyrd implies that most men were not soldiers and would not fulfill the *comitatus* role found in so many Anglo-Saxon poems. For the most part, when not called the

[41] qtd. In F.M. Stenton, *First Century of English Feudalism,* p. 118n.
[42] qtd. In Stenton, *First Century of English Feudalism,* p. 56.

military service, men would be "engaged in the work of the villain, including agriculture" (Dressler 30). Since both examples provide consequences for situations where the freeman does not answer the summons, this suggests that though all men were required to fulfill their military obligations, that was not always the case. Bands of warriors were made up of everyday men who were legally mandated to join the army.

Despite the fyrd being built through conscription, war and military matters were an important concern during the Anglo-Saxon period. In addition to the poetry of the time, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle outlines multiple militaristic campaigns, and documents and law codes survive that address military topics. In John Hill's book *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic,* he argues that "a properly socialized retainer in this world must prepare himself for violent acts on his lord's behalf" (29). Hill's assertion suggests that the militaristic system within the culture leads to a socially sanctioned violence. The "properly socialized retainer" – that is, the lord, freeman, or peasant who fits within his proper social norm – accepts that eventually, he will be required to enact violence for his lord or king, when if the situation was different and he was never called to his military obligation, he would never have just cause to participate in this ritualized violence. Since the reciprocal blind loyalty lauded in the poetry is not realistic, the lord or king must provide incentive for the retainers to provide their services. The "lord gives [them] rings that materialize a relationship in the first place and bespeak the giver's continuing personal and social presence. Thus rings, weapons, treasures, and so on are not simply given away" (Hill 29). Each exchange holds significance and an understood agreement or payment between giver and receiver. Therefore the alliance is bought, or perhaps secured, through monetary means. This reward system often appears in the poetry. For example, Hrothgar rewards Beowulf and the Geats for defeating Grendel and Grendel's mother by giving them treasures and weapons, which

in turn Beowulf gives to his king Hygelac. In "The Wanderer," the unnamed warrior searches for a new treasure giver (*sinces bryttan,* line 25b) and remembers receiving treasures (*Gemon...ond sincþege,* line 34). This need for payment of services between the lord and retainer reinforces the notion that the loyal *comitatus* was the exception rather than the rule. Even the two poems dealing chiefly with the *comitatus, Beowulf* and "The Battle of Maldon", both demonstrate that the *comitatus* is not always to be trusted to remain with the lord until their deaths. At the end of *Beowulf,* Wiglaf is the only retainer who remains by Beowulf's side as he fights with the dragon while all the other men retreat. In "The Battle of Maldon," multiple warriors run away after Byrhtnoth is killed (lines 185-97). I present these examples to refocus the idea of the Anglo-Saxon warrior not as the loyal *comitatus* warrior, but as a regular man. The aim is to explore how men are called to violence by their duty and obligations, and how through this, they adorn themselves in armor, which transforms them into fabricated hybrid socially accepted monstrosities.

5.3   Armor as performative and monstrous transformation

Since armor is placed upon the body, wearing armor can be viewed as a performative action like wearing clothing or a costume. Though the primary use of armor is for protection, armor also acts as a symbol of the violent intentions of the men wearing it. When the poem introduces the Geats in their armor, they are not preparing for battle, yet the armor is described in detail as they arrive on shore. Not only do these descriptions establish the status of the men as warriors, but they also place them within a performative role. Armor sanctions the men to carry out socially accepted violence; furthermore, armor transforms them into a threatening presence that cannot be underestimated. Though heroes, the armor visually signifies the dangers of these men.

By acting as a warrior, the men are performing within the accepted norms of heroic culture. However, as previously stated, many of the men who populated an Anglo-Saxon army were not members of the *comitatus* or career soldiers, but regular citizens who would have had occupations tied to the land. When conscripted, the men would have equipped themselves with armor, and that armor allows the wearer to transform into a different self the moment they don their gear. The armor serves as a kind of second skin, and therefore the act of putting on armor changes the wearer into a different self. The armor yields a separation from the self through the newly applied skin of the mailed ring-shirt and the mask of the helmet. When the man has fully covered himself in the armor, he now adopts a performative role and with this new role comes new rules. Though the armor initially positions the wearer into the heroic paradigm, the armor itself leads to the idea of violence, and essentially, monstrosity.

Armor transforms the wearer into a type of hybrid being. The man becomes a combination of his human self and a potential metallic-covered savage monster, which he is covered by and transformed into by the armor. By adorning oneself with armor, the wearer creates a "fantasy of toughened skin, whether in the form of scales, leather or metal, which seems designed to produce a reassuring condition of impenetrability" (Connor n.p.). This outward layer changes the way the warrior looks, erasing much of the warrior's humanity by protecting the vulnerable flesh underneath. In *Beowulf,* the first moment the Geats step onto land, they "*on wang stigon/ saewudu saeldon syrcan hrysedon / guðgewaedo*" (stepped onto the land, secured their ship, the mail-shirts shook, the war-clothing, lines 225b-227a). The first description of the bodies of the Geats when they leave the boat is not of the flesh, but of the armor, which is described as moving. Since the action of the verb connects to the armor, not to the person, it makes the armor itself appear intrinsically part of the wearer, as if it is his actual skin. Giving

action to the armor emphasizes the life and actions performed through it, and animating it from the start helps establish the hybrid nature of the warrior. Additionally, the verb used to provide action for the mail-shirt, *hrisian,* is similar to the verb *hriran (a-hriren/a-hreosan),* which means to fall or destroy. Though the two verbs are completely different words, the paronomasia established through the similarity in sound, spelling, and forms presents a lexical association between the meanings, and this similarity hints that the armor is something dangerous from the moment that the Geats set foot in Denmark.

This second skin achieved through the armor adds a performative layer to the wearer that is not available without the armor. While the warrior wears the armor, rules and expectations transform for him as well. Though the ideas of blood feuds and vengeance killing are seen in *Beowulf*, such as in the Finn episode and Grendel's mother's killing of Aeshere, law codes from the period suggest that vengeance killing was discouraged. The laws of Edmund in the tenth century limits any reciprocal violence only to the person involved, and his kinsmen would face consequences if they enacted violence on his behalf. One of Alfred's laws made it illegal to enact violence on someone who killed a man found with a female kinsman. These examples show "that there were royal efforts to limit the taking of vengeance for killing" (Hudson 39-40). However, when the man enters into military service and wears armor, he is no longer like an every day citizen because of this transformation. Now wearing the armor, he is allowed to participate in socially accepted violence and monstrous acts that would not be acceptable when not wearing the armor.

The performativity extends to the way the armor is initially described in terms of brightness. As soon as the coastwarden sees the Geats, he describes *beorhte randas / fyrdsearu fuslicu* (bright shields, ready war-devices, lines 231b-232a). There is no mention that the

coastwarden sees people, only armor, and the first word used by a Dane upon seeing the Geats is *beorhte.* While the light imagery connected with the Geats' arrival is a motif of Anglo-Saxon poetic convention, the use of the word is more than just poetic trope.[43] By framing the Geats with their *beorhte randas*, the bright shining object draws all of the attention to them, reinforcing the performativity of the armored warrior. This transformed hybrid warrior wants to be seen, and if the intimidating and striking vision of the group of metal-clad hybrids are not enough to catch the attention of the coastwarden, then the sunlight reflecting off of the metal acts like a beacon that ensures visibility. Depicting the Geats as a shining object dehumanizes them and transforms them into a hybrid monstrosity. People cannot shine, and the shield becomes synonymous with the warrior because at this point, they are one and the same. Through the transformation of the armor, the metallic warrior now possesses a shiny skin that the coastwarden catches a glimpse of when he sees the *beorhte randas.* The shining outward layer of the hybrid being "metallizes or mineralizes the body," and therefore "the shining skin suggests a change of biological order – the human become mineral, reptile or mechanical" (Connor n.p.). The metallic covering that the armor provides the Geats solidifies the transformation, so when they appear to the coastwarden as more metal than a human, the visual evidence establishes the performative nature of the hybrid monstrosity they present themselves as in addition to the inherent threat of violence that they represent.

Wearing armor in the poem is a type of bodily transformation, much like the punishments presented in *Beowulf*, which result in some kind of removal. Grendel faces a double

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[43] For more on the motif of arrival in Anglo-Saxon poetry, see George Clark, "The Traveler Recognizes His Goal: A Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry" in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 64.4 (Oct 1965), p. 645-659; M.S. Griffith, "Convention and Originality in the Old English 'Beasts of Battle' Typescene" in *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993), p. 179-199; Robert E. Diamond, "Theme as Ornament in Anglo-Saxon Poetry" in *PMLA* 76.5 (Dec 1961), p. 461-468.

amputation through first the loss of his arm and then the post-mortem loss of his head. Beowulf even slices through Grendel's mother's neck and lands a blow on the dragon's neck, both of which serve as a symbolic decapitation. The decapitations of the monsters represent the removal of identity through the absence of the head.[44] In a related transformation, the addition of armor onto the body of a warrior changes the identity by creating a new layer of the wearer's identity. Thus, armor uniquely both adds and removes. When the Geats approach Heorot, the man who greets them mentions their *grimhelmas* (masked-helmets, line 334). By wearing helms that cover their faces, the Geats erase their human identity in favor of this new identity. For each subject, the face is a unique signifier, which is why removing the head through decapitation serves as a harsh punishment since it leaves the corpse without an identity. Removing the identity erases any vestiges of humanity since a subject's humanity is connected to their identity and head, where the head helps distinguish the body of a human from that of an animal. By wearing *grimhelmas,* the Geats present themselves as inhuman subjects as they approach Heorot. The *grimhelmas* are one of the key pieces of the armor that lead to the transformation of the person into a monstrous hybrid since the human face is no longer recognizable, but now a metal visage meant to incite fear. Though obfuscation, the warriors go through a type of beheading and lose the head which makes them human, replacing it with a metal façade that transforms them into something non-human, and this transformation makes the new identity visually imposing. The warrior transforms into a dangerous human-monster hybrid through the application of armor, and the new identity is characterized by an obscurity that implies a threatening deception.

Amputation punishments like beheadings restrict the movement of the monster. Armor, then, does the opposite and frees the social movement of the wearer. Armor signals a

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[44] For more on decapitation in Old English literature, see Ch. 1 of this dissertation

socially acceptable monstrous outward appearance that is able to break the societal norms so the

warrior can participate in savage, monstrous violence. The person wearing the armor can

perform monstrous acts and it is tolerated without threat of punishment. The warrior is not a pure

human monstrosity, like Heremod or Modthryth, because the armor reconfigures the violence

into socially sanctioned actions. Many critics and historians argue that the Middle Ages were

overall a violent era. Lesnick states that the pre-Conquest period was "a world of thin skins, short

fuses and physical violence" (72). Halsall agrees and adds, "It *was* a violent era; such can be said

easily and without controversy" (4). While Dean states that "the medieval man's first response to

any challenge or obstacle was a violent one," he furthers this assessment by claiming that

"medieval ideas of masculinity are therefore of great relevance to the problem of violence" (23).

However, violence was not random, nor does *Beowulf* provide evidence that people participated

in lawless violence. In fact, the violence enacted by Beowulf and the Geats – while perhaps

monstrous and devastating – follows a culturally accepted idea of juridical action. Peter Baker

asserts that "violence is a social practice, and every violent act is a social transaction. Like all

social practices, this one is governed by custom and law" (7). Within the poem, the violent

actions are socially sanctioned. In *The Anglo-Saxon Warrior Ethic,* John Hill argues that between

a "right-minded lord and right-minded retainer" and within the appropriate cultural situation, an

agreement arises to perform violence on behalf of the lord. For many of the situations in

Beowulf, such as Beowulf's discussion of the Heathobards, the violence is just and deserve. Hill

asserts, "Crime has been requited. A previous slaughter and a current taunt now have been

rectified. The juridical warrior in Beowulf sees nothing wrong with this" (57). Furthermore, he

claims that the revenge of the Heathobards against the Danes in this particular instance is

juridical because of their "legal or customary respectability" (58). In the case of Grendel, his

violence is outside of the socially acceptable violence because he attacks Heorot for twelve

years, with very little reason except being descended from Cain and hating the joyous sounds of

the hall. Thus, Grendel acts as the example of unsanctioned violence, which makes him a

monster. As Hill argues, when a monster becomes a threat and displays its "commitment to

terror", this violence "must be oppososed…so much is a true warrior's juridical responsibility"

(61). Therefore, the warrior dons the armor and transforms into something non-human, a hybrid

monstrosity, that now follows a different set of rules that allows him to perform socially

sanctioned violence and monstrous acts for a juridical purpose that would not have been accepted

before the transformation.

The warrior becomes a human-monster hybrid where the armor is a physical signifier of

the transformation. Warriors perform any number of violent acts while wearing armor, and the

armor acts as a constant reminder of the monstrosity of man's violence. During the Anglo-Saxon

period, "the early medieval sword, spear or shield, helmet or armour…were current symbols of

violent action" (Halsall 3). Within the confines of *Beowulf,* the armor "ambiguously proclaim[s]

man's humanity and reveal[s] his savagery; references to weapons edge our awareness of the

chilling contrast between heroic strength and monstrous power, and allusions to arms ironically

link human and bestial violence" (Clark 413). When viewed this way, Beowulf and the Geats are

complex warriors who ultimately save the day, but who also represent the destructive and

dangerous nature of the warrior culture. Through the use of wordplay, metaphor, and

connotation, ambiguous identities are implied for the Geats that on the surface appear as heroic

beacons of hope, but by examining the use of words associated with light and fire, the dark

reality of the violence represented by these warriors who ultimately save Heorot from the

monster is revealed.

5.4   Descriptions of light and fire in the armor in *Beowulf*

Words associated with light permeate *Beowulf.* Terms of brightness describe everything from armor and men to buildings, with a wide vocabulary used within the poem to denote these ideas. For example, Heorot is described most often with words of golden, glittering brightness: *lixte se leoma* (the hall's light glimmered, line 311); *goldfag scinon* ([the tapestries] gold-glittering shone, line 994); *beorhte bold* (bright building, line 997); *beahsele beorhta* (bright ring-hall, line 1177); *goldsele* (gold-hall, line 1253); and twice as *goldfah* (adorned with gold, lines 308 and 1800). Most of the words used in relation to Heorot are a form of *beorht* and *gold,* with the addition of *lixtan, leoma,* and *scinon.* With these descriptions, the hall's brightness is emphasized along with the gold façade, which helps establish the position and wealth of Hrothgar and his hall from their very first mention in the poem.

The words chosen to portray light that are associated with armor, arms, and warriors are much more varied, in both vocabulary and connotation. The word *beorht* is used to describe arms numerous times, such as *beorht frætwe* (bright arms, line 214); *beorhte randas* (bright shields, line 231); and *bordwudu beorhtan* (bright wood shields, line 1243). Additionally, line 1448 describes a helm as *hwita* (white or gleaming), iron-rings of the armor were *scir* (bright or glittering, line 322), and a helm was *hyrstedgolde* (adorned with gold, line 2255). Yet the most significant vocabulary words associated with light used to describe arms are the words *fah* (meaning colored or stained) and *fagian* (meaning to shine or glitter). The poem uses the following phrases in reference to armor and weapons: cheekguards that were *fah ond fyrheard* (glittering and firehard, line 305); a sword *since fage* (shining with jewels, line 1615); *fagum*

sweordum (shining swords, line 586); and a sword that was *fah ond fæted* (shining and golden, line 2701). However, the poem also contains a number of phrases using those same words with negative connotations to link swords with darker ideas: *dreore fahne* (stained with blood, line 898), *sweord swate fah* (blood-stained sword, line 1286), and the water *wældreore fag* (stained with the blood of the slain, line 1631). Though the words look similar, they carry very different connotations, despite the fact that both words are associated with something being visually reflected off the sword, whether it is light or blood. Furthermore, one of the other light-related words is used with negative associations. *Beorht* is used in two places connected with fire; in line 2313, the dragon opens fire to *beorht hofu bærnan* (burn bright houses), and in 2803, Beowulf instructs that his funeral pyre should be *beorhtne æfter bæle,* bright after the fire). While light words are used to denote glittering, shining objects in a positive way, the words are also used throughout the poem with darker negative connotations, making the idea of light a complex layered concept that aids in understanding the obscurity and threat connected to armor.

The polarity of light against the darkness of the monsters like Grendel is not a new concept for scholars. However, the ambivalent, and sometimes ironic or metaphoric, use of bright and dark related words in lines 307-434 is of particular interest. These lines of the poem cover Beowulf's arrival in Denmark, his approach to Heorot, and the first descriptions of the Geats and Hrothgar. The ambiguous language appears in two areas: the description of the Geats as they march to Heorot (lines 307-339), and Wulfgar's verbal description of the Geats when they first enter the hall (lines 391-404). Since the wording is primarily directed towards the Geats' armor and weapons, it makes them the focal point of these lines. The diction surrounding the arms and armor illustrates an ambivalent attitude towards Beowulf and his men, and Beowulf is ultimately introduced in layered terms. Superficially, Beowulf appears as the heroic savior,

and that is the standard way of reading him. However, the word placement and multifaceted meanings of the chosen words accentuates the duplicitous nature of the Geats and their warrior identity.

Beowulf and his men travel to Heorot as a collective shining image, with words that refer to light when describing the armor. Boars shone over their gold decorated helmets (*Eoforlic scionon/ofer hleorberan gehroden golde*, lines 303-304), their battle corselets shone (*guðbyrne scan,* line 321), and the iron-rings were bright (*hringiren scir*, line 322). Herbert G. Wright writes that "the landing of Beowulf and his followers in Denmark is the signal for the irradiation of the scene with a flood of brilliant light" (Wright 5). Beowulf and his men enter the poem as mighty, respected warriors, and they step off their boat in splendid armor (*guðsearo geatolic*, line 215). Not only does this initial description fit with audience expectations for the hero of this poem, but it also fits the motif of the heroic arrival and departure.[45] D.K. Crowne defined the hero on the beach theme as a hero and retainers arriving on the beach with some sort of shining light (362-72). Clark claims that Beowulf's arrival follows the traveler motif, and that the "usual tone of the theme [of arrival] is of gladness" ("Traveler", 647). Building upon these ideas, Griffith argues that the "flashing light" motif has many different forms, pointing out most importantly that the "gleaming helmet" is part of the motif of the heroic narrative (181). While these motifs occur within *Beowulf,* the arrival of the Geats on the shores of Denmark serve a larger purpose than fulfilling a formulaic motif.

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[45] For more about motifs in Old English literature, see M.S. Griffith, "Convention and Originality in the Old English 'Beasts of Battle' Typescene", *Anglo-Saxon England,* 22 (1993): 179-99; George Clark, "The Traveler Recognizes His Goal: A Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 64.4 (Oct1965): 645-659; D.K. Crowne, "The Hero on the Beach: an Example of Composition by Theme in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *NM* 61 (1960): 362-72; F.P. Magoun, "The Theme of the Beasts of Battle in Anglo-Saxon Poetry", *NM* 56 (1955): 81-90; D.K. Fry, "Old English Formulaic Themes and Type-Scenes", *Neophilologus* 52 (1968): 48-54; A. Bonjour, "*Beowulf* and the Beasts of Battle", *PMLA* 72 (1957): 563-73; A. Renoir, *A Key to Old Poems: the Oral-Formulaic Approach to the Interpretation of West-Germanic Verse* (University Park, PA, 1988).

Though in the initial scene the Geats are wearing gleaming armor, the arrival is couched in terms of dangerous imagery that establishes the imminent threat of violence and destruction that Beowulf and the Geats present. Based on the description of the armor, the Geats emerge as impressive and imposing strangers to the watchman. He sees them during the day; the sun's reflection on the metallic armor causes the Geats to appear bright and shining. Furthermore, they provide a stark contrast to Grendel, the darkness that has swept over the land, since these strangers invade the land of the Danes during the daytime, paralleling Grendel's invasion of Heorot in the night. While Grendel brings with him darkness, death, and evil, Beowulf and his men arrive as a shining image, bringing light to Hrothgar and his people. Though Robert Diamond contends that the coastwarden acts as part of "the sea-voyage theme" where he comprises the role of "the ceremonious greeting" to the shining visitors, the connotation, paronomasia, and metaphor used to describe the Geats positions them as dangerous figures (468). After the Geats physically enter Danish space and the coastwarden takes a closer look at them, the description changes in tone. The coastwarden says:

> *Hwæt syndon ge searohæbbendra*
>
> *byrnum werede*   (lines 237-8a)

[Who are you, warriors, protected by coats of mail]

The use of the word *searuhæbbendra* for "warriors" provides a connotation that furthers the duplicitous implications of the warrior identity. The standard reading of the word is "warrior" or "one who has armor," and the word is not meant to mean anything different. Beowulf and the Geats are warriors come to Denmark to seek glory by defeating Grendel. However, the connotations associated with the word provide implications for the warrior identity. The prefix *searo-* means "device, design, contrivance, art, craft, artifice, wile, deceit, ambush, treachery,

plot." Though the Bosworth-Toller dictionary addresses instances where the word has a positive connotation, most of the uses are either "in a bad sense" or "uncertain whether the word is used with a good or with a bad meaning."[46] The connotations of the word *searo* allow for an underlying implied meaning of the word apart from the literal "warrior" since numerous compounds exist in Old English containing *searo* that hold definitions dealing with treachery, trickery, or negative ideas. Pertaining to armor, three compounds using the word as a suffix include *beadu-searo, guð-searo,* and *fyrd-searu,* which all mean "battle-armor," but have the connotation of "war or army device/design" since *beadu* and *guð* mean "war or battle" and *fyrd* means "army." Additionally, *searugrim* also relates to weaponry since it means fierce in skill or fierce in armor. Therefore, these particular compounds containing *searo* are words related to weapons, thus they hold dangerous connotations of violence and death. While none of the words would be read that way in the basic form, breaking down the compound parts points to the threatening and duplicitous nature of the armor-bearing warrior.

Other uses of the word in compounds denote negative ideas connected to treachery and trickery. The noun *searu-cræft*, which means "a treacherous art, artifice, or plot," is used multiple times by Wulfstan in his homilies in connection with sin. In one homily, Wulfstan writes, "Uton forfleon man and morþor and searacræftas" (Let us flee away from wickedness and murder and treacherous arts), while in another he writes, "Swiðe forsyngod þurh swicdomas and þurh swicdomas and þurh searacræftas" (To sin exceedingly through deceit and through artifice). In both sermons, *searucræft* is a word used to denote a type of sin that Wulfstan is preaching against, which provides the word with a heavy negative connotation. Other related treachery words of note include *searuþanc* (a treacherous thought) and *searuwrenc* (a treacherous trick or

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[46] "*searu"*, Bosworth-Toller

device), while most importantly two more are used in *Beowulf – searubend* and *searunið.* The word *searunið* is used three separate times within the poem: line 582 (strife in conflict, when referring to Beowulf's fight in the water after the swimming match with Breca); line 1200 (treacherous enmity, in reference to Hama fleeing from Eormenric); line 2738 (treacherous hostility, when referring to Beowulf's good and peaceful ruling); and line 3067 (treacherous hostilities, when referring to the dragon fighting with Beowulf). When recounting his fight with Grendel to Hygelac, Beowulf describes a pouch that had *searobendum* (cunningly designed clasps), which was "eall gegyrwed deofles cræftum" (all prepared with devil's crafts, lines 2086-88). To return to *searuhæbbenedra,* because of the poem's use of *searu-* based words in negative contexts, applying a negative or threatening connotation to *searu-* where the definition of "craft, artifice, wile, or treachery" is at least implied frames the approaching Geats as a threat. Combining *searu-* with *hæbbenedra* is also significant since the compound could be broken down to mean "having treachery/artifice/device," which could mean that the Geats by their very nature as warriors represent deception because they cover themselves in artificial metal skin, or simply that they are threatening warriors because they have armor and weapons. In that sense, the line spoken by the coastwarden explicitly mentions that the warriors are protected by armor, meaning that they are covered by armor. Specially mentioning that the warriors are covered in armor emphasizes the idea that the identity and humanity of the warriors are obscured, and that they are arriving under the cloud of deception by hiding who they are. They do not arrive as men, but as hybrid armor-clad beings who visually signify the violence they will enact through the use of their armor and weapons. The connotations of the words used to describe them implies this threatening aspect of the warrior identity.

The use of *searuhæbbendra* for "warrior" provides negative connotations of the word to reflect the ambiguity of the Geats' identity. This word follows the coastwarden's mental note of how the Geats approached with *fyrdsearu fuslicu* [war devices ready, line 232]. Using the word *fuslic* here also furthers the image of the threat since their *fyrdsearu* are ready and prepared as soon as they step off the boat, suggesting that the Geats are equipped for any violence from the moment they appear. Having the coastwarden focus his attention on the armor and weapons allows those objects to become the visual signifier of this group's purpose, because whether or not it is aimed at the Danes or monsters, the Geats arrive at Heorot to cause violence. The entrance of Beowulf and the Geats is also missing what many scholars have identified in later medieval literature as the "hero arming for battle" scene.[47] When the Geats leave Geatland on the boat, they bring their armor but do not put it on (lines 213-5). Since the Geats were not going into battle when they left, there was no need for the poem to present a scene where they arm themselves; however, they are wearing armor when they land in Denmark. The arming scene functions to point out the importance of the hero within the text (Brewer 222). Yet, by eliminating that scene, the hero is not indicated in starkly clear terms and perhaps it "makes sharper the realization that this text…refuses to designate a hero" (Scala 382). While this does not hold for the entire poem, because Beowulf arms, or disarms, himself before each battle with the three monsters, this may hold true for this particular moment within the poem. As the Geats arrive, there is not one hero singled out, but a group of battle-clad men marching onto the beach. The ambivalent connotations of the coastwarden's words during his suspicious evaluation

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[47] For more on this, see Derek Brewer, "The Arming of the Warrior in European Literature and Chaucer," in *Chaucerian Problems and Perspectives: Essays Presented to Paul E. Beichner, C.S.C.,* ED. Edward Vasta and Zacharias P. Thundy (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979); Andrew Lynch, *Malory's Book of Arms: The Narrative of Combat in "Le Morte Darthur"* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1997); Elizabeth Scala, "Disarming Lancelot," in *Studies in Philology,* 99.4 (Autumn 2002): 380-403.

positions the Geats into the role of dangerous and threatening violence, just as Grendel, who has already been established as the main foe thus far in the poem. Yet as the coastwarden interacts with the Geats, he determines that Beowulf is a noble, heroic man, and this addresses the implications of the warrior identity in the poem. The shining image of Beowulf and his men acts as a metaphor representing hope and the possibility of light to drive out the darkness that covers Heorot and the land. However, the Geats are also a potentially dangerous and monstrous presence whose main objective is violence, and their arrival covered in armor obscures their bodily features and enhances the underlying threat and deception of identity.

When Beowulf and his men arrive in Heorot, they approach covered in their mail, which presents them as a transformed hybrid threat. As they interact with the king's court, the Geats are presented again as a formidable force. Wulfgar asks them:

Hwanon ferigeað ge   fætte scyldas,

græge syrcan   ond grimhelmas (lines 333-334)

[From where do you bring decorated shields, gray mail-shirts and helmets].

The *Dictionary of Old English* provides a definition of *fæt* stating that in poetry, specifically *Beowulf,* the word is used sometimes as gold plating. Similarly, according to the *Bosworth-Toller*, the word *fætte* means, "Covered with gold, gilt, golden, ornamented," and Grein's *Sprachschatz der angelsächsischen Dichter* defines the word as "ornamented." A secondary definition of *fæt* is a "plate, sheet of metal; especially gold plate." Both the *Bosworth-Toller* and *Groschopp's* define the word using the words "covered" or "ornamented," but all definitions lean towards a meaning of being decorated. However, the meaning of the noun form can be a plain sheet of metal, though especially (but not exclusively) gold, along with a vessel or object of some sort. The line containing *fætte* uses alliteration, *Hwanon ferigeað ge fætte*

scyldas, so the word choice was a deliberate metrical choice, but the choice surely depended just as heavily on the nuances of the word. In a poem so rich in vocabulary (with roughly 4,000 separate words used in the poem), it is difficult to claim solely "that the poet made one choice rather than another out of his wide resources simply to meet the alliterative demand" (Wrenn and Bolton 59). *Fætte* was likely chosen to fit into the overall alliterative scheme since the alliteration is so pivotal to the poem's structure, but the word also reflects a deliberate choice in meaning. Using another word, such as *fah,* may have fit into the alliteration of the line, but that would have made the shields glittering or shining instead of covered or decorated, which would not have aligned with the following line describing the armor as *græge* and *grim*. Changing the vocabulary at this point shifts the Geats from a shining – albeit dangerous and threatening – visual to something muted, darker, and even more obscured. Translating *fætte* as "covered" connects the idea of a "covered shield" back to the description of the Geats when they got off of the boat, where they were described as already armed and therefore obscured, which adds an ambivalent connotation to Wulfgar's description of the Geats and their armor.

Even if the word simply means "decorated", that word still implies that the Geats are covered and ornately adorned. Decoration and ornamentation is a transformation that is done to the original object, with the aim to change it in a way that makes it more visually appealing or presents a visual symbol to whoever looks at it. Just as the original object is no longer in its original form, the armor – whether decorating or covering – achieves the outcome of obscuring the true nature of the wearer and transforming the warrior into an identity surrounded by deception through the monstrous hybridity of their metal covering. Like the bright armor described in the arrival scene, the gold-plated shields function as the extension of the metallic, armored monstrosity they presented themselves initially. Just as the shining skin of the armor

suggests a change and hardened exterior that makes the warriors appear invulnerable, the literal

shining shield functions as another example of hardened skin on the hybrid beings that signify

"division, separation and cleavage" (Connor n.p.). The Geats are still not seen as men, but only

as their transformed armored metallic exteriors, which is suggested by Wulfgar's statement

directed at their armor and weapons. This change in connotations of the words emphasizes the

dangerous quality that has been building since the Geats stepped off the boat, and now they have

approached Heorot and Hrothgar's court as nothing but an animated unit of shields and grim

armor.

The word *fætte* may carry another lexical association important to reading armor as a

bodily transformation. The *Dictionary of Old English* also lists another definition for a different

fæt, meaning "vessel", which refers to many different types of vessels, such as those containing

fluids, earthen vessels, vessels used for religious purposes, and the womb of the Virgin Mary,

while the *Bosworth-Toller* defines the word as "vessel; receptacle, box; compartment" and Grein

defines it simply as "vessel." This different usage of *fæt* implies that the body is a "vessel" or

"receptacle" that can be added to or transformed to become a hybrid. The definition of this form

of *fæt* deepens the idea that armor is on some level a transformation. Cohen compares armor to

an armoire and argues that it can be viewed as "a closed space, a closet, that dooms the subject

through the construction of a constricting exterior to a lifelong struggle to reconcile the 'new'

binarism inside / outside" (1). With this alternate usage in mind, the translation of the phrase

fætte scyldas (decorated/covered shields) does not change; however, the paronomastic idea that

this "covering" is connected to a receptacle or vessel through the homonyms opens the

interpretation that armor covers a vessel or a body. Focusing on this concept of covering a bodily

vessel reintroduces the performative nature of armor mentioned earlier when the Geats arrive in

Denmark. Presenting themselves as they do, they fall into a performative heroism with "the

assumption of 'the armour of an alienating identity' – helm, hauberk, gauntlets, greaves" and

reflect the persona's "artificiality, its constructedness" while being "invulnerable (because it

must not fail)" (Cohen 2). This alienating armor that is constructed in place of something

authentic places a barrier between Hrothgar's people and the Geats. Though the Geats are the

heroes come to save Denmark, the performance they enact on the beach and the walk to Heorot

is completely executed through the covering on their bodies. The armor – or the vessel – acts as a

second skin, where skin is the "legible text upon which various identities and anxieties are

inscribed" (Tracy 3). The vessel-armor is inscribed, decorated, or covered with the new warrior

identity, which is surrounded by deception and makes it unclear if the wearer is a hero or a

threat. Thus, the covering of the vessel transforms the wearer of the armor into a hybrid metallic

warrior. The armor covers what is underneath, the human, while the covering or decoration

displays a different outside that everyone else now sees, creating a new and dangerous monstrous

identity.

      Although a decorated shield is covered with ornaments (such as a precious metal), *fæt*

can carry various other connotations. Though the most common translation of the poem would

be that the shields are gilded, bright, or decorated, the negative connotations of Wulfgar's

description of the shields as covered, meaning hidden, concealed, or of ambiguous meaning,

reflects the duality of the warrior identity. The word *fæt* is used numerous times in *Beowulf* as a

vessel, but the word is also used in some lines where the connotations are negative. For example,

during the fight with the dragon, Beowulf strikes "*þæt ðæt sweord gedeaf / fah ond faeted*" (so

that the sword plunged, blood-stained and covered, lines 2700-1). In this line, the decoration or

ornamentation that *fæt* refers to is blood from the dragon, therefore the word aligns with

violence. In another instance, *fæt* connects with decay: *duguð ellor seoc / sceal se hearda helm hyrstedgolde / faetum befeallen* (the warriors were sick elsewhere, must the hard helmet, adorned with gold, deprived of its ornaments, lines 2254-6). In the next lines, the *herepad* (armor) "*brosnað æfter beorne ne mæg byrnan hring / æfter wigfruman*" (decays after the men, nor may the armor ring along with the leader, lines 2260-1). In these phrases, the demise of the warrior is depicted through the description of the armor, which not only provides *fæt* with a negative connation, but also reinforces the idea that the armor signifies the hero. The armor decays, the byrnies no longer ring as in the past, and the ornamentation is removed from the helmet, erasing any covering the warrior may have had and contributing to his downfall. Therefore, the ornamental covering is an integral part of the construction of the warrior identity.

Wulfgar, who describes himself as the messenger and attendant of Hrothgar (*Ic eom Hroðgares ar ond ombiht*, lines 335-336), predictably reacts suspiciously when confronted with the troop of Geats. The definition of covered then serves two functions. One, the word describes Beowulf's deception through his hidden identity because at this point in the poem, Wulfgar does not know anything about Beowulf or where he comes from and asks them from where they have brought (*hwanon ferigeað ge*, line 333) their shields and armor. The armor acts as a second or additional skin, transforming Beowulf into something unrecognizable. A person's skin acts as their identifying marker, and "its removal erases and strips away that identity, or remakes it into something new…monstrous identity can be inscribed by removing the skin, rendering the beautiful into something horrific" (Tracy 3). The Geats' armor removes the skin from view by obscuring it, and that removal combined with the added, unnatural skin erases the identity of those underneath. Through this transformation, they become monstrous hybrids by removing the human skin and replacing it with metallic armor, and because of their obscured identity, they are

only identified as warriors who visually signify danger and violence. Thus far in the poem, the human individuals underneath the armor have not been seen, nor has any of the Geats said a word; they are the monstrous hybrid metallic skin they show to the coastwarden and Wulfgar. Because the lines clearly state that they are covered in armor, an obscured, hybrid, unknown body is the body they present to the people of Denmark. During the medieval period, "the body was *the* preeminent symbol of community" and it was the "most public" (Akbari and Ross 3). By erasing the body, the public symbol presented to the community is a newly constructed hybrid monstrosity, its identity built completely around deception, and that body presents a threat because of its unclear violent intentions, making it is as potentially violent and savage as Grendel, the monster that has been attaching Heorot.

Following the shields, Wulfgar identifies the Geats by their armor. He states that they wear *græge syrcan* (grey mail-shirts). The adjective grey used to describe the armor differs from the adjective used to describe the shield because instead of using a word that means decorated or ornamented, he simply describes them as grey. Grey (or possibly silver) is literally the color of the iron armor Beowulf and his men wear; however, the choice of the specific adjective *græge* instead of another one associated with light like the adjectives used previously reinforces the ambivalent tone of Wulfgar's words. The Anglo-Saxon conception of color differs slightly from modern day. Old English "emphasizes brightness or surface reflectivity over hue" (Ruff 225). The Old English emphasis on brightness makes the switch from shining mail-shirts (*guðbyrne scan*, line 321) to grey that much more deliberate. Like the intentional use of *græge,* the lack of shining or gold-related words in the description of the armor reframes the reception of the Geats into something more threatening. Though *fæt* can be defined as plated with gold, there are multiple instances within the poem where the word *gold* is specifically used with *fæt* in the

description: *fætgold* (line 1921), *fættan golde* (lines 1093, 2102, 2246), and *hyrstedgolde /*

faetum befeallen (lines 2255-6). Since gold is stated in multiple places elsewhere in the poem,

fæt may be intended to mean something more like covered when describing the Geats' shields

instead of decorated or ornate, especially combined with the *græge* armor. Through Wulfgar's

description, the Geats lose the bright descriptions awarded to them when they arrived, and this

more muted visual furthers the covered idea implied by *fæt* since darker, muted tones are

cloudier and more obscure. The color descriptions position the Geats as something ambiguous

since their intentions and threat level are unclear at this moment.

Following the depiction of the armor is the half line "*ond grimhelmas,*" meaning "and

helmets." The *Dictionary of Old English* and the *Bosworth Toller* define *grimhelm* as "a helmet

with a visor." The compound *grimhelm* is specifically used instead of the simplex *helm* to render

the helmet. The alliteration of **g***ræge* with **g***rimhelmas* influences part of the word choice, but the

composition of the compound creates a metaphoric effect*.* Andy Orchard argues that the *Beowulf*

poet uses a large number of compound words in the poem, making him both creative and

practical in his approach to the alliterative form (70). *Grimhelm* is one of these compound words

made up of two words: *grim* and *helm.* Both dictionaries define *helm* as helmet, and *grima* as a

mask, visor, or helmet. Translated, *grimhelma* means "mask-helmet." Literally, the word refers

to the piece of armor that covers both the head and the face.

Interpreting compound words more figuratively is a common practice for poetry. *Beowulf*

contains many compounds; some are kennings, some are just descriptive, while others say one

thing and mean another (Wrenn and Bolton 58-9). The meaning of the word *grim* according to

both dictionaries is sharp, bitter, severe, terrible, fierce, savage, cruel, grim, horrible, while the

Dictionary of Old English connects the fierceness and cruelty with the devil. Furthermore, the

DOE gives alternate meanings for *grima,* including "a spectre or ghost" and "an outward show or illusion." Interpreted together, *grimhelm* carries greater semantic significance than just a face-covering helmet; the helmet is something fierce, savage, cruel, grim, or horrible. The sight of the helmet should induce fear, and the deeper meanings of the word – savage, cruel, grim, horrible – hint at latent darker characteristics, which reminds the audience once again of the threat the Geats pose. Additionally, the choice of *grim* as the connecting word to the simplex *helm* creates a direct connection between Beowulf and the monster Grendel. Earlier in the poem, Grendel is called a grim demon or spirit (*wæs se grimma gæst Grendel haten*, line 102); the word *grim* also describes Grendel in line 121, and these are not the only uses of *grim* in relation to the monsters in the poem. Line 3041 refers to the dragon as *grimlic gryregiest* (terrible dreadful guest), which can be considered a play on words since the word *gryregæst* is a compound ending in *gæst,* which both means guest and spirit. The word *grima* is also used throughout other texts in Anglo-Saxon literature to denote ghosts or specters. For example, in Riddle 40 of The Exeter Book, a spectre is used in one of the clues: *Ic eom to ðon bleaþ, ðæt mec mæg gearugongende grima abregan* (I am so timid that a spectre going swiftly may frighten me, lines 16-7). By using the same adjectives in relation to both Beowulf and Grendel (and the other monsters), an underlying motif connects Beowulf with the monsters from almost the beginning of the poem. However, when translating the word, the definition of *fætte* as "covered" cannot be forgotten. If both *fætte* and *grimhelma* imply coverings, then Beowulf and his men hide behind masks, a metaphor for the grey and potentially terrible natures lurking underneath.

One significant detail about the new armor description is that it refers to the helmets since helmets are meant to cover and protect the head. Because the *grimhelmas* are helmets that also contain a *grima*, a face covering or mask, the mask makes the wearer *grim*, savage, cruel, fierce.

The helmet, then, becomes a token of transformation where the wearer puts it on and changes into a violent hybrid monstrosity. Since recognizing the face and head is one way to mark identity, removing the face by obscuring it with a helmet further erases the humanity of the man underneath as he is transformed into a metallic monstrosity.[48] Since the word *grim* is associated with actions and attitudes, the addition of the helmet makes the warrior like other monsters in the poem, such as Grendel, by allowing them to transform into the *grima (*a spectre or ghost) or a *grimma gæst* (grim spirit) like Grendel. Visually, the armor acts as an external cue that opens the possibility of dangerous actions by opening the wearer open to more bestial, savage ways, devoid of human reason and social cues, and allowing for the potential of being ruled by violence. Armor in the poem "reveal[s] [man's] savagery; references to weapons edge our awareness of the chilling contrast between heroic strength and monstrous power, and allusions to arms ironically link human and bestial violence" (Clark, "Armor", 413). Since armor represents violence, the Anglo-Saxon warrior represented in the poem becomes a "spectacle and affective icon" where the warrior dressed in his armor is "an event, a visual spectacle" (Mittman and MacCormack 357). The helmet completely changes the wearer, for while the byrnie and mail provide a new metallic skin that changes the body, the helmet completely covers and removes the last vestiges of the identity. Because heads are so important to humanity, the wearing of a face-covering helmet, a *grimhelm,* creates a stark boundary between the subject wearing it and the humans, and the donning of a helmet is the most important piece of the suit of armor that creates a new monstrous hybrid. Though the threat of violence is enough to create a monster from these beings, this creature, who is part man and part metal, is monstrous because of its divided nature. In Julia Kristeva's abjection theory, she states that abjection is "what disturbs identity, system, order.

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[48] For more on the relationship between the head and identity, see Chapter 1 of this dissertation

What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite"
(4). The armored warrior falls into Kristeva's idea of abjection through its duality. By
transforming themselves through armor, they have reconfigured their identity and disturbed the
order of things. The warriors exist within an in-between state, where their positions within
society have altered, and the rules governing violence have changed since they are now wearing
the costume of violence. The initial description has presented them as ambiguous figures located
in the in-between, making them abject, monstrous figures.

Armor breaks down the distinction between the wearer and the actions. While wearing
the armor, the wearer becomes the monstrosity, committing reprehensible violent acts, such as
bodily torture and murder. However, unlike a true monster, when the armor is removed, the
separation is there and the warrior is absolved of the monstrous crimes performed while
transformed. Furthermore, the masked helmets act as a boundary between the human and
outward acts because the mask provides a layer of protection that separates the human from the
monstrous acts, keeping them from being transformed into a monster completely like other
human monstrosities. That makes the warrior as dangerous as a monster because he is capable of
the same violent crimes. However, the armor provides social protection for him because he is
protected from monstrous condemnation and punishment since the armor keeps him from
transforming completely into a monster. In fact, the armor signifies the violence and the
monstrous acts are all part of the performativity of the warrior. The warrior is a manufactured
being made out of both flesh and metal, and since he does not completely transform into a
monster like other human monstrosities, all of the violence enacted are a performance as he plays
a role of the killer. The hybrid warrior operates under two conflicting identities – that of a
peaceful human and that of a violent war-machine – but he never commits to either while

transformed through his armor, thus he is both. The warrior inside never commits to the single act that the outward armor represents, yet the armor acts "as the wooden planks upon which [he] enact[s] the role of whatever character [he has] taken to be [the] essential, singular self" (Cohen 1). The hybrid nature of the transformation helps him maintain his humanity to some degree so that when he discards the armor, he discards the monster along with it, and the conflict between the two selves is resolved and the warrior is a man once more. Skin acts as memory, and when a warrior removes armor, he is metaphorically removing his second skin. In the Middle Ages, to flay someone alive would be to tear away the bodily surface onto which transitory memories and identities could be inscribed (Mills 68). When the soldier removes his armor, he removes the monstrous memories and identities inscribed upon the armor skin. By removing the armor, he once again is transformed from a hybrid into a simple human.

The coupling of *græge* and *grimhelmas* as descriptors adds a layer to the interpretation of Beowulf and his men previously not in the poem. Prior to Wulfgar's speech, terms of brightness and light describe the Geats. The new adjectives remove the light from their appearance, and as they enter into Heorot for the first time, they appear gray and grim. Separately, the words might be overlooked, but their combined meanings turn Beowulf and his men into threatening and dangerous figures. Wulfgar, Hrothgar's attendant, might be suspicious of these strangers, and the implications of their warrior identity reflect that they represent grim and horrible violence, and engage in savage act, while completely covered and adorned in their battle gear. When Beowulf and his men finally arrive in Heorot, their armor is described:

<p style="text-align:center">song in searwum,   þa hie to sele furðum</p>

<p style="text-align:center">in hyra gryregeatwum   gangan cwomon (lines 323-324).</p>

[sang in contrivances, when they came first to the hall in their terrible armor].

Once again, the Geats are described within the confines of Hrothgar's court with words containing negative connotations, shifting in tone from bright armor to terrible armor by replacing adjectives and verbs meaning "bright" or "shine" with the more muted and ambiguous ones. One significant word choice is the compound *gryregeatwe*, made up of *gryre*, which means "horror, terror, dread, something horrible, dreadful" and *geatwe*, which means "arms, trappings, garments, ornaments." Though the warrior culture more than likely would have praised strong warriors in grim armor, the metaphorical depiction of the Geats in these early introduction sections frame them within a negative connotation. Like *grimhelm,* the adjective used to describe the Geats elicits the idea of terror and fear, which is exactly what the Geats should do. Whether they are fighting Grendel or the Danes, they are a threat. The Geats come to Heorot in the guise of violence, and the armor functions as the performative display of the terror-inspiring group. They incite fear, both for the Danes and for the monsters, which is exactly what Heorot needs at this point since the Danes themselves are not threatening or dangerous enough to eradicate the monsters. Because they step on shore as ambiguous, dangerous hybrid monstrosities, they position themselves as the appropriate opponents for Grendel since no one has been able to fight them. By transforming themselves outwardly, they adopt a monstrous visage that allows them to be a danger to everyone, most importantly Grendel.

Along with the aforementioned compound, the above lines are a turning point in the description of the Geats. Once again, *searo/searu* (searwum, dative plural) has negative connotations. Previously, the coastwarden called the Geats *searohæbbendra*, which if viewed within the negative implications of the word and the ambivalent reception of the warriors could be defined as "having treachery/artifice/device." Here, *searwum* is used once again in relation to the armor. Clusters of double alliteration throughout the poem highlight key passages (Orchard

61). These two particular lines illustrate this idea. Both contain double alliteration (*song…searwum…sele* and ***g**ryre**g**eatwum…**g**an**g**an*), which reinforces the important change of tone when describing Beowulf and his men. After this half-line, the Geats wear terrible armor and shift to darker descriptions. The paronomasia in these lines emphasize the duality of the warrior's identities by emphasizing their deception. By Beowulf's armor singing in contrivances, which can also be translated as singing in treachery, artifice, or deceit, his armor becomes representative of those ideas of an obscured warrior identity and correlates with the description of the covered shields and masks. Within this context, *searu* and *grima* become metaphorically related descriptions. One translation of *grima* is "mask," while another is "spectre" or "illusion." A related compound, *eges grima,* is a "spectre; a horrible mask, a creature that has assumed a horrible form." This particular use of *grima* connects directly to transformation, just as the contrivance or artifice implied by the description of Beowulf's armor when they first arrive at Heorot aligns with the idea of a mask or a transformation of forms. The use of the word *searu* adds yet another way that Beowulf and his men are hidden and their true selves not represented. The base word *searo* can mean "a link, a bind, or a tying together" (Taylor 196). Though literally related to the manufacture of art and objects, this interpretation of the word can be taken metaphorically. By donning the armor, which *song in searwum*, Beowulf and his men have bound the human and the monstrous selves together and have transformed the two selves into one hybrid being. Their outward physical appearance is not their true forms, but their transformed, performative, monstrous selves. To reinforce the transformation, the entrance to Heorot turns into a spectacle, a performative action where Beowulf and the Geats demand the gaze of everyone else, including the audience.

Ironically, the saviors of the Danes induce terror the moment they walk into the door. They are not dark, like Grendel, but grey, the color between bright, white light and the dark, black absence of light, and this in-between state of the men demonstrates Wulfgar's (and therefore, the Danes') ambivalent description of them, which is fitting since the armor transforms the Geats into hybrid creatures existing in multiple in-between states. The armor presents a visual signifier of the transformative state between the "human" and "monstrous" selves. The Geats are not truly human nor monster, just as they are not truly bright nor dark. They are hybrids, and the use of words associated with hostility and fear sway this ambivalence. In addition, multiple terms relate to their metaphoric and connotative hidden state, which makes the Geats more suspicious and threatening. Beowulf and his men look threatening in their armor, but more importantly, they also represent a threat to the Danes. Even though Beowulf turns out to be the hero, he very easily could have been an invading enemy, but beyond that he is an extremely violent and dangerous man who single-handedly defeats Grendel, and the ambivalent, sinister description draws attention to that fact.

The word choice for armor intensifies the paronomasia that reflects Beowulf's underlying dangerous qualities. As Beowulf and his men travel to Heorot, the armor is identified through the compound word *guðbyrne* (line 321), a noun meaning "battle/war-corselet." This particular compound is a *hapax legomena*; the word only exists in the *Beowulf* manuscript, and the word functions in a group of other compounds created by the poet, where another word connects following the simplex *guð* to create a new word (Orchard 70). *Guð* attaches *byrne*, a noun meaning "a coat of mail"; however, the word is also a form of a different word *birnan*, a verb meaning "a burning." Using this particular form of the word draws on paronomasia with *byrne/birnan* since they are similar sounding words. The line reads *guðbyrne scan* (the battle-

corselet shone). As the Geats travel across the land, their armor reflects the sun, shining like fire. Throughout the poem, the fire becomes an important image, such as when Beowulf faces the dragon. The dragon is associated with fire in multiple lines: *fyre befangen* (surrounded by fire, line 2274), *fyre gefysed* (eager with flames, line 2309), and *wearp wæl-fyre* (throwing out fire, line 2582). Fire represents destruction in many places in the poem, especially in relation to the monsters, such as when describing the mere where Grendel's mother lives (*fyr on flode,* fire on the water, line 1366) every night, Beowulf's hand burning as he stabs the dragon, and then the fire weakening as he continues to strike the dragon with his sword (lines 2697, 2701). Because of the similar sound, the choice of *byrne* along with the choice of the verb *scan* reinforces the paronomasia because pairing these two words together associates the idea of burning like the sun, as in line 1965: *woruldcandel scan* (the world-candle shone). In this example from the poem, a kenning for the sun is paired with *scan,* referring to the bright, fiery shining of the sun. The paronomasia in the construction of the phrase connotes dangerous, violent fire, especially when considering the implied definition of the compound as "war burning." The connotations surrounding the term *guðbyrne* emphasizes the thin line between the "hero" and the "monster" since Beowulf and his men metaphorically represent a burning, fiery force that carries with it the potentially violent destructive power and brightness of fire. Just like the fire at the end of the poem which causes Beowulf's downfall, the Geats's metaphoric fire holds the potential for mass destruction.

Paronomasia is used once again when the Geats finally arrive at Hrothgar's hall. When they enter Heorot:

Byrnan hringdon,

guðsearo gumena;   garas stodon,

sæmanna searo,   samod ætgædere,

æscholt ufan græg (lines 327-330)

[the coat of mail rang, armor of the men; spears stood, contrivance of the seamen, together, grey spears above].

Yet again, the word *searo* is used in relation to the Geats, but in the space of six lines (from 323 to 329), the language shifts from the armor singing in contrivance to the contrivance belonging to the Geats (*sæmanna*, genitive plural of *sæman*). Additionally, *searo* is used a second time in the section in the compound *guðsearo,* referring to the armor. Together, this compound simply means "armor", but the connotations of the word influenced by the surrounding metaphoric and dual vocabulary allows for an alternate, less-used meaning of "war contrivances/artifice/treachery," which acts as yet another word that describes the Geats within the confines of an obscured nature. Through this section, a metaphor is used to connect the idea of the Geats as destructive and treacherous beings to burning. Once again, the noun *byrne* ("coat of mail") is used, this time the genitive singular *byrnan*. The form of the word chosen is exactly like another word: the verb *byrnan*, a form of the verb *birnan*, which means "to burn." The use of *byrnan*/*byrnan* is an example of paronomasia. In Roberta Frank's 1972 essay "Some Uses of Paronomasia in Old English Scriptural Verse," she explains the way Old English scriptural poets employed paronomasia in sacral poetry. She argues that the use of paronomasia in scriptural verse "'points' the poetic text and has, perhaps, the same impact on the meaning of a verse as has the pair of quotation marks just inserted into this sentence: a hint, a slight emphasis, that the words so enclosed may have other than a strictly literal significance" (Frank 214). Frank's

assertion that the paronomastic words have more than a literal significance relates directly to the phonologically similar *byrnan/byrnan.* Literally, the sound of the arms rings through the hall; however, following the build of metaphorical connotations and use of paronomasia leading to this line, assuming the weapons are only making noise robs the scene of the deeper implications. Through the paronomasia used with the phonologically similar words, the ability to burn, to injure and cause destruction, rings out through the hall of Heorot, presenting the Geats as a potentially hazardous affiliation. Other similar words, such as the verb *for-bearnan* (to consume by fire, to burn up) related to the verb *byrnan/beornan/birnan*, influence the play on words of this pair. The play on the double meaning of the word illustrates the presentation of a more complex narrative. The audience is not supposed to take the word at face value, that the Geats are just wearing armor; they are also supposed to recognize the layered implications of the word, this raising doubt in the audience's mind about Beowulf and his men, just as doubts are being raised in Wulfgar's mind. The placement of this use of paronomasia implies that Beowulf is a threat to Hrothgar the first time he speaks directly to him since *byrne* is used once again when introducing the exchange: *on him byrne scan* (on him shone a shirt of mail, line 405). Because his armor metaphorically shines like fire, representing both Beowulf's power and the threat he poses, the double meaning of the words allows Beowulf and his men to possess another semantic, and therefore metaphoric, dimension. The Geats are not supposed to be only strong, great warriors; the word choice emphasizes the knowledge of a lurking threat connected to their warrior identity. The armor visually identifies them as monster-human hybrid threats that can pose the same type of threat as Grendel, and through these descriptions, the men, especially Beowulf, become more complex characters with broader and conflicting traits instead of stock hero characters.

Paronomasia is not reserved just for those descriptions because the use of *grimhelm* is another example. *Grim/grima*, as noted earlier, refers to the adjective meaning "grim, horrible" and the noun meaning "mask." The paronomasia in this instance serves to, as Frank argues, "quietly pinpoint the moments" of importance (211). The word play crafts subtle nuances of the words, giving them depth and greater meaning that a listener and a reader must look more closely to find. The main difference between the examples in Frank's argument (and even those listed by Orchard) is the quantity of the words. Frank and Orchard show multiple words in adjacent lines providing paronomasia. For example, Orchard lists instances of wordplay in *Beowulf* as "*mær-/mearc-/mor*, line 103; *wer/weard-*, line 105; *-feah/fæfð-*, line 109" (63). In the *byrnan/byrnan* and *grim/grima* examples, the paronomasia does not exist within similar phonological sounds in the same or nearby lines; the wordplay stems from the double meanings of the specific words in those particular lines. The distinction does not lessen the paronomastic effect. The double-edged words still provide "an ironic and startling collocation of sound and sense"; furthermore, in all these examples "a new dimension is revealed in and by the poet's wordplay" (Frank 210; 214). In the examples from *Beowulf,* the irony lies in the tension inherent between the seemingly positive superficial definitions juxtaposed with the underlying connotations.

Paronomasia and the recurring metaphor of fire continues in the description of the Geats' spears. The spears are made of ash wood from and look grey at the top: *æscholt ufan græg* (grey spears above them, line 330). The word *æscholt* is generally glossed as an ash-wood spear, but given the poem's word play and metaphoric use of compound words, the definition needs a second look. The word is made up of two words, *æsc* (ash tree, spear, ship) and *holt* (a wood or copse). Though the word *æsc* refers to a tree, spear, or ship, the use of paronomasia

helps to elicit a metaphoric reading of the lines. A related word, *acse* (alternate forms *asce, æsce, axe*), carries the meaning of ash from a fire, and though the compound *æscholt* refers to a spear, the surrounding context and similar sound allows for the reading of *æsc* to connotatively mean fire ash. The half-line pairs *æsc* with *græg*, an obvious relationship since ash is the color grey, and aside from the relationship between *æsc/acse,* the paronomasia of *byrnan/byrnan* reinforces the reading of *æsc* as actual ash. In the previous lines, Beowulf and the Geats have been described metaphorically with the vocabulary of fire, and now their spears are reminiscent of ash. Four lines later, Wulfgar describes the Geats's armor as *græg*, which parallels the literal image of the grey spears, but furthers the metaphorical association with ash and fire. Entering the image of ash, the substance left over after the fire burns, into the poem strengthens the underlying motif of danger because the metaphor does not end with just fire, but continues until the fire has burned out and the destruction left behind. This is important since the metaphoric descriptions have been building this idea of threatening violence and fire through the armor, and the armor reflects the transformation Beowulf and his men have gone through since their armor is reminiscent of fire and ash. Another usage of *æsc* is used in relation to warriors in lines 2042-3: *eald æscwiga se ðe eall geman / garcwealm gumena – him bið grim sefa* (the old ash-warrior, he who remembers all, the spear slaughter of the men – in him a bitter heart). Here, Beowulf references the likely failure of Hrothgar's daughter's marriage, specifically through this *æscwiga,* who remembers past killings and encourages a younger man to enact revenge despite the marriage to garner peace. In these lines spoken by Beowulf, both *æsc* and *grim* are used together to describe the bitter, old, angry man who acts as the impetus for violence. Once again, the *æscwiga* metaphorically represents the violence, leaving only destruction behind because he had a *grim* heart or mind. These words provide a negative, darker depiction of the old man, just

as they do for the Geats earlier in the poem. Beowulf and his men are not just presented metaphorically as threats, but the audience also sees through their weapons the potential aftereffects of their attack, and this aside by Beowulf fully carries out the devastating results of *æsc* and *grim* warriors.

Hrothgar's initial description reinforces the motif of fire and ashes. When Wulfgar turns, Hrothgar sits on his throne old and extremely grey (*þær Hroðgar sæt eald ond anhar*, lines 356-357). Once again, grey is used as a descriptor in these early lines, even though later in the poem, Hrothgar is described in terms of brightness and strength: *sigedrihten min* (my victorious lord, line 391), *brego Beorhtdena* (lord of the Bright Danes, line 427), *eodor Scyldinga* (protector of the Scyldings, line 428). The use of *anhar* provides a stark contrast to these later brighter descriptions since using adjectives meaning old and grey present Hrothgar in a helpless, emasculated way, which is especially curious since the line is Hrothgar's introduction in the narrative. Social conventions cause Beowulf and Wulfgar to refer to Hrothgar in glowing terms; however, since the description takes place outside of the dialogue, the semantic implications around the word give a more realistic picture of Hrothgar. In this description, *græg* is not used, but instead *anhar/unhar*, with the word *anhar/unhar* being a form of the word *har.* The *Dictionary of Old English* defines the word as "grey-haired with age, old," and the Bosworth-Toller glosses *unhar*, "very grey," then adds a parenthetical "un- seems to have here the unusual force of an intensive." The intensity of the color description does two things. First, the initial image of Hrothgar is one of an old, decrepit man, and this frail man reflects the broken state of his kingdom and his inability for twelve years to do anything to stop Grendel's horrific attacks. His description demonstrates his weakened position as a king; although he rules over the Danes and is respected which is implicit in the use of *har*, he must rely on the strength of outsiders, the

Geats, to protect his land. Additionally, the word can also carry an association with frost, like with hoarfrost. Deliberately portraying Hrothgar using a word with connotations of frost and cold places him as the opposite of Beowulf and the Geats, who through paronomasia have been aligned with fire and burning. By setting the two characters within dichotomies of fire and ice, along with their respective peoples, the Danes are clearly positioned in a vulnerable weak state. A second figurative reading also presents itself. The color grey has appeared twice before in this section, once with the armor and once with the spears. Now Hrothgar joins the interrelated textual theme. By associating the king with grey, he is also associated with ashes. Since ashes have come to mean the after product of a destructive fiery force in this section of the poem, Hrothgar is introduced sitting among the ashes of his destroyed land.

The representation of Hrothgar connected with the description of Heorot illustrates an example of the poem's irony. When Beowulf and his men leave the watchman, he points to the bright court of Hrothgar (*Him þa hildedeor hof modigra torht getæhte*, lines 313-314). The reader already knows Grendel's destruction on Heorot, so describing the hall as bright seems misplaced since Heorot is not actually bright; the hall and its people have been terrorized for twelve years. As Beowulf and his men marched (lines 307-311):

> hy sæl timbred,
>
> geatolic ond goldfah,   ongyton mihton;
>
> þæt wæs foremærost   foldbuendum
>
> receda under roderum,   on þæm se rica bad;
>
> lixte se leoma   ofer landa fela.

[they could see the timbered hall, splendid and ornamented with gold; that was the most famous of buildings of humans under the heavens, the mighty king waited in there; the light shone over many lands].

Many scholars focus on the historical context of the gold-roof of Heorot. Rosemary J. Cramp argues that the gold roof of Heorot is the most unrealistic detail about it, and if there was ever an actual building with a gold roof, archeologists would not likely find evidence because of its monetary value (77). Karl P. Wentersdorf tries to trace the basis of the golden description of Heorot by examining sources of gold adorned buildings in various literatures such as Roman, but comes to the conclusion that there is no definitive evidence of Anglo-Saxon buildings covered in gold. He concludes by saying, "[i]n view, however, of the repeated emphasis on the golden appearance of Heorot, it seems probable that the feature was a calculated artistic device and that its primary purpose was metaphorical and didactic" (424). The metaphor then lies in what Heorot represents. When Hrothgar built it, it was meant to be the greatest of halls, and Hrothgar is well-respected as a ring-giver and king. Beowulf approaches Heorot with the reputation of the golden hall in his mind, but he also comes to Heorot not because of the reputation, but because of the darkness that has entered into it. The prosperity and joy of the hall does not actually shine over many lands anymore, making the description ironic. Heorot is gilded on the outside and projects a decorated cover, which parallels Beowulf and his men because both the hall and the Geats appear decorated with ornamental protections on the outside, but the bright exterior masks the darkness hiding on the inside. The shining light also recalls once again the image of fire since when Heorot is first described earlier in the poem, it foreshadows the destruction of the hall by fire (*heaðowylma bad, laðan liges*, lines 82-83). By including this foreshadowing, another textual connection is made between the images of light, fire, and destruction in the poem. Heorot

shines bright over the land, will eventually be consumed by fire and subject to total devastation once again.

5.5   The Boar's Head Helmet

The helmet serves as one of the most important pieces of armor depicted in *Beowulf*. The significance of the helm does not end at its description as a *grimhelm* because the decoration described on it serves a significant function. In multiple places in the poem, the helmet contains a boar crest. The symbol of the boar was important "in the early Germanic world" because it represented "protection and defence." The boar symbol was also used throughout the ancient world by cultures such as the Greeks, Celts, and Mycenaeans (Hatto 155). The Benty Grange grave contained a helmet with a boar crest, and there was also a boar crest on the Wollaston helmet (Underwood 103-4). Among the artifacts of the Sutton Hoo excavation archeologists found a face-helmet featuring a boar's head, and this helmet is "significantly important as a potent demonstration of contemporary military power and authority" (Halsall 3). Additionally, many examples of Germanic armor from Sweden also had the symbol of a boar (Spears 195). Generally, Anglo-Saxon design on objects was mostly zoomorphic (Taylor 196n12).

The description of the Geats' helmets contains this animal imagery, which further aligns the helmet with negative connotations. As soon as they descend from the ships, they are described:

eoforlíc scionon

ofer hléorberan   gehroden golde

fáh ond fýrheard   ferhwearde héold

gúþmód grummon   (lines 303b-306a)

[Boar-helmets shone over cheek-guards, decorated with gold; decorated and fire-hard,   life guardians of the helmeted war-minded.]

This short description connects the helmet to previous specific armor descriptions: the bright, shining, decorated armor; the metaphoric fire; and the grim, hostile warrior. The boar's head gleams bright at the top of the helmet, a magical protector for the wearer. In the Ongentheow digression, one of the men who attack the king is named Eofer, which means "boar." The connection of boars with armor deepens the idea that armor transforms the wearer into a savage violent creature, and the naming of one of Ongentheow's attackers as "boar" connects the animal with violence. In the digression, they attack Ongentheow, who is described as "goda" and "frod," so they become the monstrous figures for attacking a good, wise old man.

Those particular lines describing the boar helmets contain the word *fah.* Though the word serves an alliterative function (*fah ond fyreheard*), the varying uses of the word relates to the ambivalent, hybrid nature of armor in this section of the poem. *Fah* has two meanings: decorated or colored, and hostile or guilty. This puts *fah* into a similar category as other words discussed in this chapter, like *searu, grim,* and *byrnie,* since the words denote decorated armor, but have related negative connotations. *Fah* most specifically connects to *searu. Searu* relates to the artistry of crafting the object, but has the underlying connotation of treachery or deceit. In these lines, *fah* describes the helmet as decorated, but connecting the ideas of *fah* and *fyre* depicts a more sinister image because the helmet represents a hostile, destructive force like the rest of the armor, and just like the *byrnie* and *æsc* spears, the paronomastic connection to fire continues.

When Hrothgar remembers Æschere, he speaks of him in relation to boar-crested helmets. Hrothgar states:

ðonne we on orlege

hafelan weredon,   þonne hniton feþan,

eoferas cnysedan   (lines 1326b-1328a).

        [when we protected our heads in battles as the armies clashed and struck against

the boar-   crested helmet.]

        As Hrothgar pays respect to his fallen comrade, he mentions specifically that they

protected their heads and that they received blows against their helmet. These lines locate the

violence specifically against the helmet, which protects the head. Æschere's death is visualized

through the head; outside the mere, Beowulf sees Æschere's head on a pike. Hrothgar was able to

help Æschere protect his head in many battles, but when Grendel's mother attacked them, he was

unable to protect him. As Grendel's mother enters Heorot, the men do not have time to react and

put on their helmet: helm ne gemunde (none remembered the helmet, line 1290b). In a way,

Grendel's mother makes them lose their heads. She surprises them, and terror seized the men so

much that they were unable to protect themselves with the boar-crested helmets and transform

into the hybrid being that would be able to defend against her because without armor, they lack

the capacity for violence and destruction that could match the monster.

        Beowulf's helmet acts as an important physical marker for him during his first

interactions with the people in Heorot. Just before he speaks to Wulfgar and Hrothgar, Beowulf

is described as *heard under helme* (strong/brave in his helmet, lines 342, 404). The helmet serves

as a visual signifier of Beowulf's power, strength, and potential violent destruction as he speaks

to Hrothgar and his people. When Wulfgar grants Beowulf passage to approach Hrothgrar, he

tells them they can proceed *in eowrun guð-getawum / under here-griman* (in your armor, in your

mask-helmets, line 395b-396b), though they have to put their weapons aside. Since the armor

stays, the Geats remain the threatening, hybrid beings they were when they arrived on shore and

arrived at Heorot because they do not transform back to their original selves. When Beowulf

speaks to Hrothgar, he still wears the *here-griman,* the mask-helmet, the mask that hides his

human self, so the first encounter Hrothgar has is with this transformed, masked, monstrous

hybrid stranger, which increases the threat that Beowulf poses. As Beowulf begins to speak, his

armor once again is the focus of the description: *on him byrne scan* (in his shining armor, line

405b). Beowulf stands inside the hall, yet his armor gleams and shines, which draws all the

attention to him since the description centers on the armor that has been so carefully described

thus far. Just before Beowulf utters a word to Hrothgar, the visual attention is directed to the

shining armor, where Beowulf stands before Hrothgar in his mask-helmet and bright armor, a

final concluding image. Beowulf represents this hybrid being, transformed by his armor, but

ultimately becomes an ally to Hrothgar who can contend with the monster that has been

terrorizing his people for the past twelve years.

5.6   Removal of the Armor

The description of the armor as the Geats arrive to Heorot introduces the idea that

armor transforms the wearer into a potentially monstrous hybrid creature. Through this, Beowulf

and his men are potentially serious threats who are capable of dangerous, destructive violent acts.

After Beowulf speaks to Hrothgar and is established as the hero who will attempt to eliminate the

monster, armor becomes less important. Beowulf and the Geats have already been presented as

strong, formidable warriors and established the ambivalent nature of warriors. When Beowulf

decides to fight Grendel, the scene unfolds differently. Instead of focusing on the destructive

power given through armor, which has characterized Beowulf and his men thus far in the poem,

Beowulf fights Grendel without any armor at all. Since Grendel has been terrorizing Heorot for

twelve years, he's a supernatural threat "against which men must arm themselves and stand

prepared" (Hill 38). Though the Geats never meet Grendel while clad in their armor, entire

transformation presented at the beginning of the poem creates a violent, destructive hybrid

monstrosity that visually signifies the impending fight with Grendel. While the Geats are

stronger and representative of more violence than the Danes, and pose a potential threat to them,

the performative show is not to intimidate or overtake the Danes, but to prove to Heorot – and

therefore, the audience – their awesome power so they can fight the monster. In the confrontation

with Grendel, however, Beowulf strips himself of all of the performative and visually signifying

items, yet loses none of his power. The removal of the armor demonstrates the impressive raw

power that Beowulf possesses, pointing to a strength so impressive that he does not need to use

armor or weapons. This is exactly the type of hero that Heorot needs, since "no matter how

efficacious that preparedness" against Grendel, "it is futile. Grendel is charmed against weapons"

(Hill 38). The monster itself does not use armor, since any armor would make Grendel, already

protected against weapons, beyond defeat. The knowledge that Beowulf does not need the armor

to fight Grendel renders the armor unnecessary, except as a symbolic and performative visual.

Thus, the procession of the Geats from the ship all the way to Heorot acts as a spectacle of their

power and the promise of violence that they bring.

Beowulf chooses to fight Grendel with his bare hands. The act of fighting a battle without

armor is a convention that appears in Germanic literature, where "the casting-off of arms is...an

indication of a hero's superior martial prowess" (Damico 417). However, fighting Grendel

without armor results in a similar bestial violence that was present while wearing the armor.

Beowulf battles Grendel with his bare hands, which reinforces the idea that humans, even heroes,

are capable of savage violence even without the help of outside forces, like armor. His decision

to fight Grendel unarmored removes "the artificial strength of swords and the mechanical

protection of shields." Beowulf does not rely on the transformative power armor provides, but asserts himself as the hero by only relying on his own capabilities. When fighting unarmed, there is "an elemental savagery about an encounter in which the participants hit and tear each other's flesh with bare hands" (Culbert 15). The fight pits the raw power of each individual against each other. However, though Beowulf has stripped down out of his armor, the level of violence he employs against Grendel makes him as savage and bestial as a monster. The scene presents an additional example of hybridity because heroes like Beowulf are capable of monstrous, savage violence with their bare hands, yet the stripping of the armor also reveals their humanity. Just as the armor presents a specific outward physical image, the stripping of the armor visually reminds the spectators and the audience that what lies beneath the armor is a human, transformed through the armor into a hybrid violent being.

Even though Beowulf comes to save Heorot and the Danes, the initial description of him as a violent and dangerous figure encourages a deeper reading of the character, and therefore, the poem. The ambivalent description illustrates the thin line between hero and monster – the hero is only a hero to the side for which he is fighting. If Beowulf would have fought against the Danes instead of for them, he would have been an evil, terrible opponent. This paradox is at the core of the duplicitous description; the culture admires the qualities in Beowulf and lauds the things that make him a hero. However, being a hero blurs the line, and through the hero's proclivity for violence, the hero can easily turn into a monster since monstrous violence is associated with his warrior identity. Similar descriptions position Beowulf and Grendel both as monsters; the so-called heroic deeds performed by the hero are in fact monstrous acts, but monstrous acts performed on the side of good. Therefore when Beowulf is introduced early in the poem, he is presented not solely as a glowing hero, but as something much more complex and dangerous.

The descriptions of armor underlie this ambivalent representation of Beowulf through the use of paronomasia, metaphor, and connotation. The evolving descriptions, from shining and bright to grim and hostile to fire-related, provide numerous examples of word play, negative connotations, and metaphoric interpretations, which identify the layers of complexity within the characters of Beowulf and the Geats. These men are not stock heroes, and though the poem contains certain conventions, the nuanced and clever word choice emphasize the performative characteristics of the armor as visual signifiers, and accentuate the transformation of the men into hybrid warriors.

Armor within the poem reflects the ability of the wearer to transform into a monstrous hybrid, where savage violent actions are socially acceptable. The armor acts as a second skin, protecting the wearer from outside threats from opponents, but also as a covering that changes the wearer into something different. Unlike a true monster, the wearer does not receive a punishment. However, the ritual of removing armor becomes parallel to removal punishments of certain monsters. Just as Grendel and his mother receive amputations as punishments in *Beowulf*, warriors who wear armor go through a similar removal process. The act of putting the armor on transforms the wearer into something more, and adds a second layer of skin and identity to the warrior. Removing the armor results in loss, and this amputation of the armor results in a removal of identity, while the armor serves as the skin that holds the memories of the hybrid monster. When the warrior removes the armor, they go through a similar ritual as a punishment removal that leaves them with a loss of identity. The warrior amputates the monstrous self that is half of their hybrid transformation, so the monster is discarded and removed. The world is safe again because the monster is neutralized and order is restored. However, the armor allows the

warrior to transform into the hostile, savage hybrid being at a future time, only by putting on their *byrnie* and *grimhelm.*

6   CONCLUSION

Most scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature define the term *monster* within highly specific parameters. An Anglo-Saxon monster generally is considered neither man nor beast, with defining features that forces it outside of categorization or society because of the unnatural state of its being (Cohen; Friedman; Mittman; Verner). These monsters are most obviously exemplified by Grendel and Grendel's mother in *Beowulf* as a result of their status as entities that defy nature. Other monsters in Old English literature found in texts like *The Wonders of the East* include fantastical creatures*,* such as the blemmyes, donestra, and cynocephali. Yet, as I have argued in this dissertation, an additional category needs to be added to fully understand and explore Anglo-Saxon monsters – that of human monstrosities. This category should be situated in the liminal space between humans and monsters since human monstrosities demonstrate characteristics of both types of beings. These human monstrosities are found in numerous Anglo-Saxon poems, including *Beowulf, Daniel, Judith,* and *Genesis A&B,* and because of their prominence in some of the most fundamental poems of the period, they deserve a closer examination.

Human monstrosities function not only as simple monstrous antagonists, but serve as warnings. Each human monstrosity acts outside of societal and cultural norms, causing their actions to violate accepted rules of conduct. Through their defiance, they demonstrate unacceptable codes of conduct that go against nature and cause them to become something unnatural. Because of their human appearance, monstrous humans are more threatening than other types of monsters since their monstrosity is hidden underneath the guise of a normal

human. This hybrid figure severely disrupts normal society and has to be eliminated to reaffirm that this behavior is unacceptable. As a result of their transgressions against society, human monstrosities undergo transformation punishments, which physically or mentally alter them. In most examples from Anglo-Saxon literature, the monstrous human transforms mentally, with their reason stripped and removed as they succumb to bestial ways. However, the transformation is not the end of the character's significance as the poem focuses on the monstrous human post-transformation. Detailing the loss of reason and resulting consequences serves as spectator punishment that underlines significant cultural anxieties. Law, order, and peace were crucial to medieval culture, so human monstrosities represent the dangers of defying these ideals and explore the consequences of thwarting the social order.

In this dissertation, I have examined key important human monstrosities in Anglo-Saxon poetry: Holofernes, Nebuchadnezzar, Heremod, and the armored Geats. Each of these human monstrosities experiences a type of transformation that alters them in some significant way, whether it is physical or mental. In *Judith,* Holofernes undergoes the most significant physical change because he is beheaded. This punishment is fitting for him since his transgressions all occur around the head. Applying Kristeva's abjection theory to Holofernes allows a reading of the character where he represents refuse and disgust, which originates near the mouth and eyes. By engaging in excess, Holofernes overconsumes vices in multiple ways – from gluttony and overeating, to loud speech, to lechery. This display of disgust and overconsumption pushes Holofernes outside of the acceptable social norms and into the realm of monsters. Thus, he is physically transformed when Judith decapitates him, and this removal of the head erases the source of all his excess and vice, resulting in a balance to society.

Though Holofernes is the most dangerous example of human monstrosities, Nebuchadnezzar in *Daniel* and Heremod in *Beowulf* are also categorized as human monstrosities. Unlike Holofernes, their monstrosity does not derive from refuse and disgust, yet it is also rooted in vices. Much like Holofernes, Nebuchadnezzar participates in drunkenness, which is only one of the ways he loses his reason. Both Nebuchadnezzar and Heremod are examples of kings who abuse their power, act outside of the accepted social customs, and engage in violent acts. Because of their actions, both characters are driven outside of the community and forced to live in the wilderness. This expulsion from the city situates them in the realm of monsters since traditional Anglo-Saxon monsters all reside outside of the boundaries of civilization within liminal spaces separate from humanity. Each character has a different outcome of their transformation punishment. Heremod remains as a bestial monster and does not return to civilization; however, after living for years without clothing or reason in the wilderness, Nebuchadnezzar atones and returns to the city. By engaging in actions that cause them to lose their reason, they demonstrate their monstrous qualities, and as consequence, they lose all the markers of their humanness as punishment for their crimes against humanity.

Another type of human monstrosity is explored through Beowulf and the armored Geats. The Geats represent the quintessential warriors, but they also illustrate the ambivalence of the categorization between human and monsters. The warrior identity is one of duplicity, where the man is a hybrid figure – both human and monster. The armor acts as a second skin, allowing for his socially sanctioned violence. Yet, the violence is monstrous. In *Beowulf,* the Geats, and Beowulf especially, are introduced as threatening figures instead of perfect heroic warriors. Through the language surrounding their descriptions, the warriors are presented in dubious terms, specifically in vocabulary of muted tones, savagery, and ambiguous intent. The word play

that describes the Geats exposes their inherent violence and savagery. The monstrosity of the warrior occurs because of the nature of the warrior – the purpose of the warrior is to cause violence. The difference between a hero and a monster is only the side for which the warrior fights. For these warriors, the armor provides a socially acceptable way to transform into a human monstrosity, since the armor becomes a facet of their performative identity. The donning of armor is a transformation the turns the human into a monstrous human hybrid, and the armor allows the wearer to engage in the monstrous savagery without repercussions. Though they do not experience any punishment, the warrior does undergo a removal like other human monstrosities. However, the warriors do not lose their heads or reason, but their armor. The removal of the armor eliminates the threat to the social order and returns their humanity.

Prior to this dissertation, many scholars have discussed the place of monstrosity in Anglo-Saxon literature. One of the most influential scholars of medieval monstrosity is Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, and his work was the beginning of my interest in Anglo-Saxon monsters. After reading "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)", a few of the theses really stuck out: Thesis 1, The Monster's Body is a Cultural Body; Thesis 3, The Monster is the Harbinger of Category Crisis; Thesis 4, The Monster Dwells at the Gates of Difference; and Thesis 5, The Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible. Additionally, as I read through Old English poetry, the same concepts kept reoccurring – humans who act like monsters lose their reason and lexical connections between the humans and other more traditional monsters elsewhere in Old English literature. With these key ideas in mind, I began to research medieval monsters even more, and found numerous sources detailing ideas of how to interpret and analyze medieval monsters. Yet, each source focused on one distinct type of monster, but with Cohen's assertions of monsters reflecting cultural anxieties, defying categorization, and policing borders, I have attempted to

demonstrate through close lexical analysis, investigations of historical thoughts of humanity, reason, and sin, and contemporary application of theory that a new category of Anglo-Saxon monster needs to be addressed.

These human monstrosities found in Anglo-Saxon poetry deepen and expand the definition of monster for Old English literature. Though each of the above are different types of human monstrosities, they all share similar characteristics. Most importantly, they all experience a removal because of their transgressions. This lack is significant since they all lose something because they are a monster – they lose their humanity. Thus, the transformation punishments they endure all emphasize their lack by creating a greater lack through the removal of something important, like the head, civilization, or reason. All human monstrosities presented in this dissertation function in some way outside of the social norms and serve as examples of how those behaviors are not acceptable. Through their position as vice-ridden antagonists, they act as spectator punishments, except the Geats, who still exist outside the norm and demonstrate that their violence is only acceptable if one wears armor. By inhabiting the nebulous space between humans and monsters, the human monstrosities exhibit characteristics of both. Though clearly the opposition to the good and pure characters, the characters examined in this dissertation are not only "bad guys" or "villains." Through the lexical descriptions of these specific characters, along with actions that align them with monsters or beasts, they operate in similar ways to monsters like Grendel and Grendel's mother. These characters that fit into the human monstrosities categories are fascinating amalgamations of normal physical appearances and crippling vice, with an underlying savagery that creates the monster. Each one is a danger to the world in which he lives by hiding the monstrosity beneath a benign human appearance, making it even easier and more devastating when he upsets the social order. While some scholars may

choose to keep a narrower and more traditional definition of Anglo-Saxon monster, I have attempted to argue the need and significance of a possible additional type of monster that takes the form of a human and perverts the social system. Even if Anglo-Saxon poets did not consciously write human monstrosities into their literature, the cultural and social monsters are still present and should be studied, along with their transformations and punishments, together with the traditional, physical monsters.

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