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BREAKING WITH TRADITION(?):
FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS OF HEROISM IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

By

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B.A., University of Louisville, 1987
M.A., University of Louisville, 2012

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Humanities

Department of Comparative Humanities
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

May 2018

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Dissertation Approved on

April 19, 2018

by the following Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Blake Beattie

Dr. Pamela Beattie

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to
my mother, Joyce Green, for her selflessness
and unconditional love—a timeless heroine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is made possible through the commitment and encouragement of my committee members. I would to thank my chair and faculty advisor Professor Blake Beattie for his guidance, kind words, and historical perspective which made this a better interdisciplinary project. I would like to thank Professor Pamela Beattie, my mentor, for her constructive criticism, immense patience, thought-provoking comments, and gifting me with several interesting articles and books including *Key Concepts in Medieval Literature*, which was not only timely but provided the foundation for this dissertation. I am grateful to Professor Simona Bertacco, my program director, for her incredible organizational skills and her straight-forward direction. Her attention to detail and expertise in translation concerns made me a better writer. I also want to thank her for introducing me to Brian Friel's *Translations* and Juno Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*: two unforgettable modern texts that inspired my thinking. I am also grateful to Professor Andrew Rabin, my outside reader, for his support and expertise in Anglo-Saxon studies and the Old English language. His class "Women in Medieval Literature" introduced me to a variety of female characters who appear in this dissertation. My committee has been extremely influential in my thinking and supportive during my entire tenure at the University of Louisville. I humbly thank you.

I also want to thank Professor Elain Wise for her encouragement and all of her efforts on my behalf, and Professor Alan Golding for sound advice and inspiring my love

of female poets and women in poetry. I am appreciative of Brenda Mary Walker whose early and thorough investigation of the women in Anglo-Saxon literature informed my research and got me started. I am also grateful to Professor Carmen Hardin for our long conversations, her generosity, and her passion for Ecclesiastical Latin.

I especially want to recognize the Anglo-Saxons and the Old English poets for their beautiful literature and language. It has been my tremendous privilege and my joy to engage with them on such an intimate level.

Finally, I want to express my deepest thanks and appreciation to my family: Donna DeLucia, Samuel DeLucia-Green, Kellye Green, and Donald and Joyce Green, who throughout my academic career have put their lives on hold to be physically and emotionally supportive in the best possible ways. Because of their love, I have been able to pursue my dreams.

ABSTRACT
BREAKING WITH TRADITION(?): FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS OF
HEROISM IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Kathryn A. Green

April 19, 2018

For the Anglo-Saxons, strength, bravery, and the willingness to put oneself in harm's way for king and kingdom were not only part of contemporary society but recurring themes in Old English literature. Poems like *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon* reinforce the important bond between lord and retainer and the heroic ethos key to that relationship. Women were not historically part of this relationship and, therefore, not subject to the heroic code in the same way; consequently, they are rarely seen as anything more than conventional mothers, queens, wives, sisters, daughters, and virgins, all identified by their relationships to men, the "real" heroes in the literature. The poets of *Beowulf*, *Judith*, and *Juliana*, expanded this tradition by introducing the Anglo-Saxon world to a new kind of female character, a physically powerful heroine. By constructing heroines that connect Germanic tradition with changing Christian sensibilities, poets not only reveal their appreciation for strong women in literature but their willingness to afford women the opportunity to break with tradition and perform autonomously.

The characters of Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana serve as primary examples for this analysis. This dissertation identifies these three figures as exhibiting a heroic ethos, explores how they fit into and deviate from the defined Old English heroic

ideal, and examines select character traits in order to reveal how their unique performances broaden the conventional definition of a hero. Chapter I centers on the Anglo-Saxon heroic ideal and situates both men and women within the tradition. It emphasizes how the motivational factors driving heroic behavior differ between the sexes by examining specific performances within the genre. Chapters II, III, and IV, are individual case studies focusing on Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana, respectively, emphasizing one significant way each serves to shape a new version of the heroic ideal. Chapter V focuses on four of the major similarities identified between the characters and the texts in which they appear—the trope of self-sufficiency, the “manly” woman, the symbol of the head, and the female voice—which demonstrates how these specific females engage with certain themes and symbols embedded within heroic poetry. Finally, the conclusion provides a collective view of the three characters which shows how Old English poets created powerful, engaging female heroines that audiences could believe in.

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INTRODUCTION

*Let us by all means esteem the old heroes; men caught in the chains of
circumstance or of their own character, torn between duties equally sacred, dying
with their backs to the wall.*
—J.R.R. Tolkien¹

Tolkien's eloquent salute to Anglo-Saxon warriors provides one way to envision Anglo-Saxon history, that is through considering and memorializing the remarkable male heroes of Old English literature. Yet, after prolonged study of the poetry of the Anglo-Saxons, one of my first observations was that women were also present, not just as complacent maidens, mothers, and widows, but as independent role models and heroes in their own right. In the corpus of Old English poetry there are few women afforded the status of hero, which makes them prominent and all the more striking. These heroines transform literary traditions bridging the gap between the heroic past and flourishing Christian ideologies. This dissertation argues that poets introduced a new kind of female character to the Anglo-Saxon world, whose multidimensionality and unique motivations deviate from the defined, traditional, Germanic² heroic ideal. To support this thesis I carefully examined three of these characters: Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana, and

¹ J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," in *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, trans. Seamus Heaney, ed. Daniel Donoghue, Norton Critical Editions (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 114. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins, from "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 1936, 245–95.

² This dissertation uses the word "Germanic" to refer to the Germanic speaking peoples, and their literature, of Northern Europe, including the Germans, Danes, Norwegians, Scandinavians, and Icelanders. A word of caution: There have been discussions regarding the use of the word "Germanic" in association with the Anglo-Saxons. Roberta Frank argues, "The concept of Germanic was not shared by the early Anglo-Saxons. The literary category we call 'Germanic Legend' is ours, not theirs." In "Germanic Legend in Old English Literature," *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcom Godden and Michael Lapidge, 88-106 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 92.

posed the following questions: Why are certain women in the poetry able to act with more authority than other women? Are they able to perform great heroic feats conventionally attributed to men? And, if so, how do they do it? This project began with my attempt to answer these perplexing questions.

The examination of these three heroines collectively is critical to the understanding of the transformations of the genre of heroic poetry. Our modern perception of Anglo-Saxon heroism has largely been affected by the extant battle poetry; those texts are identified as directly relating to specific battles such as *Maldon*, *Brunanburh*, and *Finnesburh*, where men meet their enemies on bloody battlefields, “dying with their backs to the wall.” However, other texts exist, like *Beowulf* and *Judith*, which are not strictly depictions of armed confrontations but include battles as part of a bigger story and use images of war and heroic conflict in rather new and interesting ways.³ This dissertation explores one primary way each of the three female figures under investigation here are exceptional in the poetry as well as some of the major narrative similarities identified between their characters and the texts in which they appear. As a result, these examinations offer a more intimate perspective on women’s participation in the male-dominate heroic ideal and reveal how the treatment of their characters forever influenced the Anglo-Saxon and British literary tradition.

Within the discipline of Old English literary studies there has been a growing interest in the past few years in the exploration of themes related to women and gender. In my study, I bring three female characters together, and, by doing so, impart a tripartite structure to my work that seems particularly suitable to the subject matter. This tripartite

³ Elizabeth Solopova and Stuart D. Lee, *Key Concepts in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 86. Specifics are outlined in Chapter I.

formula is prevalent in medieval literature and traces its root in Christian theology to Paul the Apostle (Corinthians 1:13). As it relates to women, the model was popularized later in literature. It brought a sense of order to women's lives which were always under scrutiny.⁴ The formula also acted as a system of political social order of medieval life: those who work, those who fight, and those who pray. By the fourteen century, "it was a major shaping principle in women's lives."⁵ Although this model did not exist as an understood social framework in Anglo-Saxon England, Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana, as a group, fit neatly into the formula in a variety of ways. For example, the three stages of womanhood emerged during my analyses—the maiden (Juliana), the wife/mother (Grendel's mother), and the widow (Judith). The examination also elucidated a tripartite view of the human experience: the past (Grendel's mother), present (Judith), and future (Juliana); and even the three theological or "ordinal" virtues—faith (Grendel's mother's death), hope (Judith), and charity/love (Juliana), positions which will be made clear in the following chapters.

My project begins with a brief overview of continental Germanic women and women in Anglo-Saxon society and literature, which is included at the end of this introduction. Chapter I, on the heroic ideal, introduces Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry, including some of the major characters and specific acts of heroism most representative of the genre. It situates a selection of female characters within the tradition, highlighting specific roles and behaviors associated with their character types; these include the weak Eve of *Genesis B*, the sorrowful female narrator of *The Wife's Lament*, the longing

⁴ Chaucer (1342–1400 C. E.) writes of pure virgins, faithful wives, and steadfast widows in his *Legend of Good Women* composed in the late fourteenth century.

⁵ Margaret Hallissy, *Clean Maids, True Wives, and Steadfast Widows: Chaucer's Women and Medieval Codes of conduct* (Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1993).

female voice of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, and the *Beowulf* poets' variety of female characters who exhibit some of the roles available to women, including "peace-weaver" (Wealhtheow), the grieving wife (Hildeburh), and the bad queen (Modthryth). I also consider how women fit into (if they do) and deviate from the male heroic ideal, and introduce the new female heroine. This effort leads to an analysis of the motivations driving the heroic actions of men and women, revealing how poets must have taken female reasoning and desire into consideration in order to construct powerful and believable heroines.

The following three chapters are case studies that focus directly on the individual poems and heroines identified above. Chapter II, an exploration into the nature of Grendel's mother, establishes her as a classical warrior demonstrating a heroic ethos in certain ways. While she may appear misplaced among the other two females under investigation, as she is typically viewed as a monstrous creature rather than human; a descendent of evil, she exemplifies two important aspects associated with heroic poetry, bravery in battle and the revenge obligation. She also exhibits what some scholars have called a "conflicted gender identity,"⁶ that is, she is seen possessing a female's physique but a "masculine" spirit. This notion is explored in this chapter but at greater length in Chapter V. For the purposes of this study, and because the *Beowulf* poet tells us that she is a "mother" (*modor*, 1258b), a "monstrous woman" (*ides aglæcwif*, 1259a), and has

⁶ There are critics who have hypothesized Grendel's mother was created as a sexually ambiguous character. Andy Orchard detects a conflicted gender identify in her and cites a grammatical reference as proof. The details regarding his argument are made available in Chapter V. See also Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 189. In the same chapter I explore some of the gendered vocabulary and descriptions of her character which I feel aligns her character with the female sex more so than the male.

“the shape of a woman” (*idese onlicnes*, 1351a),⁷ and he employs the use of feminine pronouns and conventional vocabulary associated with women throughout his poem, I will refer to Grendel’s mother as both a “woman” and “female” throughout this dissertation but do my best to draw attention to the fact that her gender is a polemical interpretive problem requiring careful consideration in order to draw any reasonable conclusions. Furthermore, by demonstrating both heroic and, through her role as mother, sympathetic tendencies, the impulses behind Grendel’s mother’s actions are comparable to those of Judith and Juliana. This chapter establishes that Grendel’s mother marks a transition, a shift from the Germanic heroic past to an Anglo-Saxon Christian climate, and, consequently, in her death, at the hand of the Christian hero Beowulf, audiences see God’s plan and are instilled with renewed faith.

Chapter III focuses on Judith, a Jewish widow from Bethulia whose narrative origins can be traced to the Hebrew and Greek Bibles. Because of her oral history, Anglo-Saxons would likely have been familiar with her story perhaps long before the poet wrote his Old English account, and because Judith is portrayed as both violent and female, audiences are forced to reconcile and justify her behavior before envisioning Judith as a true Anglo-Saxon heroine. In this chapter, I trace the history of her story as well as the evolution of her character through time, which has positioned Judith both as seductress and a militant Christian female leader. Through this effort I uncover ways these portrayals relate to the representation of Judith in the Anglo-Saxon poem. Then, with careful analysis of the Old English Judith’s motives behind developing a military strategy and personal execution of the plan (beheading her enemy), I am able to present a

⁷ Modern English translations and Old English quotations of *Beowulf* in this chapter are those of R. M. Liuzza, ed., *Beowulf*. 2nd ed. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2013), unless otherwise stated.

vision of her that extends beyond the parameters of heroic convention to a time and place where females have leading roles, alongside men, and some control over their own experiences. I show how her unique leadership style offers a vision of hope for Anglo-Saxon audiences.

Chapter IV studies Juliana and positions her within the tradition of hagiography and reveals how her treatment both engages with and expands the virgin martyr character popularized within the genre. Like Judith, Juliana's story begins back in time. Her account takes place during the Roman rule of Diocletian (r. 284–305 C. E.), an emperor renowned for his particularly ambitious persecution of early Christians. The Anglo-Saxon version of Juliana is credited to the poet Cynewulf, whose signature was made in runes on the manuscript. Of the three texts studied in this dissertation, this is the only one with an identified author. In this chapter, I consider the history of Juliana's story and her character in relationship to the Old English *Juliana*. I also consider the poet himself. Juliana is his personal intercessor and the poem his prayer. Cynewulf's treatment of her character blends qualities of both a conventional aristocratic Anglo-Saxon woman (i.e., "peace-weaver) with the virgin martyr tradition (i.e., intense verbal exchange), but extends those characteristics, which enables me to draw a range of conclusions about the ways in which her character impacts and even broadens our understanding of the heroic ideal. Juliana's voice, her charitable role as saint, and the poet's personal need for absolution all have particular significance in the text.

Chapter V focuses on four narrative similarities that my work identifies between the Grendel mother episode in *Beowulf*, the *Judith* poem, and Cynewulf's *Juliana*, as well as between the protagonists themselves. These are not the only discernable connections

between the texts but worked well as examples of the heroic ethos because they are prevalent in the Old English poetic corpus and relevant to both men and women.

Although these three Old English poems may be representative of distinct periods in Anglo-Saxon history, a closer look at the parallels can help us delve further into the nature of the heroic female figure. The similarities between the texts are numerous; therefore, I focus on four of the major elements: the “recurrent trope of self-sufficiency,”⁸ the “manly” woman, the symbol of the head, and finally, the female voice. The result of this effort revealed three important insights: that males and females perform heroically in different ways for different reasons; that female heroism manifests via internal forces and is shaped through personal experience, whereas male heroism is primarily born during public performance; and that Anglo-Saxon poets were close observers of women’s lives.

Finally, in the appendix, there is a list of female characters appearing in the Old English poetic corpus, categorized by the texts in which they appear.⁹

1 METHODOLOGY

In order to show how and why Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana, emerge from the poetry as unique character types I used a three-fold approach. First, I conducted a comprehensive survey of women in the extant Old English poetry, taking note of their various performances and functions. Next, I examined the characterizations of Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana, as they appeared in both the classical and Anglo-Saxon traditions. Finally, I weighed these findings against their expressions in Germanic legend

⁸ A notable phrase borrowed from John Arnold, “Gender and Sexuality,” *A Companion to the Medieval World*, eds. Carol Lansing and Edward D. English (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 169.

⁹ To date, I am unaware of any single document that contains a list of women appearing in Old English poetry. The list is provided as Appendix A of this dissertation. It has been my attempt to provide a full and complete listing, if omissions are detected and brought to my attention an update will be provided at a later date in my future research.

and heroic poetry, against other women and the heroic males in the literature, and then against each other. At times, I drew on important contemporary critical theories to productively inform my readings. Comparative historical analysis, for example, helped me develop the premise of this project and to identify the signs, symbols, and events for examination. It also informed my reading in terms of the importance of tribes, communities, and outsiders; important social elements found in all heroic poetry.

Christine Fell's comprehensive study of heroic female figures in Anglo-Saxon literature¹⁰ investigates English secular and religious prose and poetry from the seventh to the eleventh centuries and provides the foundation from which much of the scholarship regarding Anglo-Saxon women has emerged. Her study opens discussions regarding gender differences in characters and its impact on the heroic image, which is paramount for my investigation and has been for others as well. The concept that gender is established through action becomes enticing as we look at females whose behaviors land on the fringes of social expectations. Gender theory provided me with a way of examining the relationships between the heroic men and women in Chapter I; confronting issues such as the "manly" saint, which I look at in Chapter IV; and, explaining why Grendel's mother is able to kill a man, with no weapon, and drag his body through hilly woodland terrain without difficulty, as I analyze in Chapter II.

During the course of my research, I encountered several challenges, one of which presented itself in the phrase "woman as hero in Anglo-Saxon literature."¹¹ The study of heroines in Old English poetry has generated much attention in the recent past, coinciding with the rise of women and gender studies and feminist scholarship on historical texts

¹⁰ Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

¹¹ Title of Jane Chance's seminal book on women's lives in Anglo-Saxon England. See *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

(roughly beginning in the 1970s). While this means there is an abundance of excellent secondary criticism to consider, it also means that the subject has been well researched. Because of this, a solid organizational system for reading was also imperative. I reviewed materials in groups; taxonomized by character, then by subject, themes, motifs, symbols, etc.

Translation also proved to be a challenge. With many excellent transliterations and translations of the texts at my disposal, much effort was expended evaluating the primary texts from which I drew my evidence for this study. Many of these I often found to be in conflict with one another. Although most shared a broad sense-for-sense translation, in some cases it became problematic for my analysis of individual words and phrases. For instance, in Chapter V, I consider the Old English word *mægð*, and variations thereof, a term interpreted by different translators in a variety of ways: as maiden, virgin, girl, woman, and wife. I have also found it translated multiple ways in reference to the same character within the same text; in R. M. Liuzza's translation of the word Judith is a *mægð* ("maid") and a *mægð* ("woman"). This presented an enormous challenge when comparing and contrasting three women, one of whom is a virgin, one a wife, and one is technically not a woman (at least not a human one); the translation of this term has biological, social, and age-related implications. Another translation concern I encountered was that the Old English language has only one past tense and modern English has several available options for expressing the past. Therefore, a translator may opt to rearrange or add words which can change the pattern and the organization of the original. This presented difficulties for me in terms of the chronology of events. Translation studies allowed me to compare available options and when dissatisfied, or

was unable to come up with the “perfect” term, propose one of my own. The discipline and its considerations were critical to the success of my project.

Another challenge to overcome was the Anglo-Saxon poets’ tendency to depict both historical and fictional characters together in their texts, more often than not. At times, it was difficult to discern which attributes of the characters are rooted in society and which are particular to the literature. Because of this, it became necessary for me to also rely on a variety of historical documents to garner reasonable grounds for directing my inquiries into these narratives. Therefore, periodically, in this dissertation I refer to both historical and fictional characters to support my claims, though I always differentiate between the two. For historical grounding, I found Tacitus’s *Germania* to be helpful in terms of providing a general portrait of Germanic warrior society. Although the text is recognized for its subjectivity, it offers specific examples of some of the social behaviors emphasized in my analyses.¹² I also rely upon the works of Bede, Aldhelm, Ælfric of Eynsham, and selected biblical writings such as those of St. Jerome to confirm my historical assumptions and filter Christian ideologies. Close reading, digital humanities, feminist theory, and comparative literature studies, too, informed my arguments and conclusions throughout this dissertation.

Lastly, this dissertation is a product of interdisciplinary research. While an interdisciplinary approach to research provides more opportunities for discovery, it is a complex process without a standardized model or generally accepted practices. From the onset, I was acutely aware that the success of this project relied on my competence in

¹² This dissertation relies on Tacitus’ *Germania* as one resource of Anglo-Saxon ancestry. However, Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe advises caution against relying too heavily on the text. She writes that “*Germania* should be read as a text with a political and moral bias,” 113. In “Heroic Values and Christian Ethics,” *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 107–125.

not only the discipline of medieval literature, my area of speciality, but history, philosophy, the arts, and the social sciences as well (in addition those already mentioned above). Because interdisciplinarity relies heavily on trial and error, my investigations, led me to an abundance of information, from a variety of fields, to be considered and prioritized. For example, an interdisciplinary reading of the texts examined in this dissertation offered distinct ways to think about how power and ideals appearing in Old English literature intersect with both contemporary and modern assumptions about those beliefs and values, not only as they are expressed in Germanic societies but in other cultures of the world; a worthwhile but time-consuming endeavor. While it is not necessary to become a specialist in all disciplines to reap the benefits of an interdisciplinary approach, great care had to be taken with the questions and languages pertinent to the different fields of study which required additional flexibility, planning, time, and patience.

Of note, this dissertation does not include an examination of the shared elements of poetic structure and formatting in Old English prosody and Anglo-Saxon oral traditions, as these have been previously identified and well-defined and are outside the scope of this project.¹³

2 ISSUES OF DATING OLD ENGLISH POETRY

The dating of Old English texts is speculative and based on educated assumptions regarding dialect, grammar, contextual markers, etc., and usually pertains to the manuscripts. It is generally considered that Old English works date from about the mid seventh-century to the Norman Conquest of 1066. Because of the poem's unusual meter,

¹³ See *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, eds. Alex Preminger, Frank J. Warnke and O. B. Hardison, Jr. (Princeton University Press, 1965).

Judith is thought to have been composed and written down later in the Anglo-Saxon period, sometime in the mid-ninth century.¹⁴ Cynewulf's *Juliana* was initially dated to the eighth or ninth century, based on observations of meter and "the presence of early West Saxon forms," but further evidence places it in a timeframe following *Beowulf*, citing commonalities between the two texts, the use of certain adjectives, and the absence of contractions, among other fine points.¹⁵ It is generally accepted that the *Beowulf* poem, in its written form, is a product of the late tenth to early eleventh century, making it the text produced last in the series of the three texts studied here. Although some scholars have indicated a date as early as 700 C. E.,¹⁶ I incline toward the majority recognizing *Beowulf* as a tenth-century manuscript.

For the purposes of organizing content in this dissertation, I introduce the three texts in the following order: I begin with an examination of Grendel's mother in Chapter II, then move to *Judith* in Chapter III, and finally to *Juliana* in Chapter IV. All three texts are discussed together in Chapter V. This order serves to draw attention to the tripartite model as described above before providing a more formal review of the topic in the Conclusion at the end of Chapter V.

3 GERMANIC SOCIETY AND ANGLO-SAXON WOMEN

Before the Anglo-Saxons of Britain produced any written literary texts, their ancestors told oral stories in northern continental Europe. Legendary accounts and depictions of gods and goddesses pervade these Germanic narratives, their portrayals fueled by human experience and the need for comfort and encouragement born of the

¹⁴ Liuzza, 229.

¹⁵ Woolf, 5.

¹⁶ See J. R. R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, (Gale, 1997).

more rigorous aspects of daily living. Unfortunately, aside from the mythological legacy left by Northern Germanic peoples, scholars have access to few credible historical accounts. Tacitus (ca. 56–120 C. E.)—Roman orator, historian, and public official—writes that Germanic peoples are “like no one but themselves, a particular people and pure, untainted by other races.”¹⁷ In his first-century historical and ethnographic text, *Germania*, he provides detailed descriptions of the fertile geography and cold climate of this forested northerly area occupied by the mysterious, fierce blue-eyed, red-haired people, who have no use for gold or breastplates. The text has been considered helpful in understanding the practices of northern Germanic European peoples as well as faulted for forwarding a personal agenda. In regards to Germanic tribes Tacitus writes, “They take their kings on the ground of birth, their generals on the basis of courage: the authority of their kings is not unlimited or arbitrary; their generals control them by example rather than command, and by means of the admiration which attends upon energy and a conspicuous place in front of the line.”¹⁸ Although *Germania* places no particular emphasis on women, it contains sections which appear to offer a perspective on females as integral members of society, who provide a veil of protection, guidance, and nurturing to this under-explored (by the Roman’s) land of the barbarians. Even of women in battle he writes, “[...] some lost or losing battles have been restored by the women, by the incessance of their prayers and by the baring of their breasts.”¹⁹

¹⁷ 269.4 (*Ipse eorum opinionibus accedo, qui Germaniae populus nullis aliarum nationum conubiis infectos propriam et sinceram et tantum sui similem gentem exitisse arbitrantur*). Tacitus, *Dialogus Agricola Germania*, trans. William Peterson and M. Hutton (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946). This book is a side-by-side translation. My footnotes will provide the page number for the English followed by the numbered section of the Latin text found on the adjacent page. .

¹⁸ Tacitus, 274.7 (*Reges ex nobilitate, duces ex virtute sumunt. Nec regibus infinita aut libera potestas, et duces exemplo potius quam imperio, si prompti, si conspicui, si ante aciem agant, praesunt*).

¹⁹ Tacitus, 275.8 (*Memoriae proditur quasdam acies inclinatatas iam et labantes a feminis restitutes constantia precum et obiectu pectorum [...]*).

While *Germania* is recognized among today's scholars as largely a literary effort, as well as a subjective satire on Rome, the work is thought to be based on reliable sources and has been considered an invaluable historical text. It is important, however, to keep in mind that Tacitus' evidence is certainly based on only those areas and tribes with which the Romans came into contact.²⁰ According to Tacitus, Germanic girls were brought up much the same as the boys; that is without any special consideration just because they were female. Children were fed by their own mothers and when they were tall enough and equaled in strength they were wed.²¹ Adult women also dressed the same as men, with the exception of the occasional "trailing linen purple striped garments" (*ned alius feminis quam virus habitus, nisi quod feminae saepius lineis amictibus velantur eosque purpurs variant*, 289.17). Tacitus' description further states that "Their arms [adult women's] and shoulders [are] bare, as is the adjoining portion of their breast" (*nudae brachia ac lacertos; sed et proxima pars pectoris patet*, 289.17). Virginity and chastity are prized for both sexes as chastity was believed to increase strength and stature, traits highly regarded in Germanic society. As such, both young men and women for the most part came to the marriage union unspoiled. Tacitus recognizes "the marriage tie" as being strict and finds "nothing in their character to praise more highly," and is dumfounded by the barbaric custom of "one wife apiece" (*nam prope soli barbarorum singulis uxoribus contenti sunt*, 289.17).²² Unlike the Roman custom where the wife's family bestows a dowry on the husband, the Germanic tradition does this the opposite way, and the gifts must be approved by the bride's parents. Typical gifts were oxen,

²⁰ M. J. Toswell, "Quid Tacitus . . . ? The *Germania* and the Study of Anglo-Saxon England," *Florilegium* 27 (2010): 27–62.

²¹ Tacitus, *Germania*, 293.20.

²² Tacitus, 18.

horses, and shields and swords. The wife, in turn, delivers armor to her husband, and all gifts are shared. Tacitus makes special note that these gifts are particularly telling in terms of women's role in the marriage. Because there is nothing specifically feminine about them, a bride is aware from the onset of the marriage that she too will share the work of her husband. The giving of arms as gifts shows how the couple will physically support one another and the family; it suggests that women will take up arms when called for. In this ritual, Tacitus reports no objection on the part of men; it is a practical way of life. Just as girls received no special treatment before marriage, neither did married adult women. It is important to note that marrying for love is a fairly modern concept, and in actually, for Germanic people at this time, it was the girl's father who selected her mate; both fathers agreed upon the dowry prior to the marriage.²³

Between the years 410 and 560 C. E., Germanic tribes from continental Europe migrated to the island of Briton comingling with indigenous peoples who adopted aspects of their language and culture. These people became known as the Anglo-Saxons. Historically, they flourished as a recognizably distinct culture from about 450 to 1066 C. E. In terms of Anglo-Saxon women in Briton, the scholarship reveals that society at large recognized Anglo-Saxon women as "human beings" and that it was not rare for females to be educated, administrators, and fighters.²⁴ This view of women as active members in their communities is evident in both the historical texts and accounts of historical and fictional women in the literature. The research also cites some women

²³ F. B. Gummere, *Founders of England, with Supplementary Notes by F. P. Magoun, Jr.* (New York: Stechert, 1930), 145.

²⁴ Betty Bandel, "The English Chroniclers' Attitude toward Women," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 16, no. 1 (1955): 113–114, JSTOR. www.jstor.org/stable/2707530.

participating in public affairs and recounts stories of certain female legendary figures.²⁵ Aristocratic women holding prominent positions in the Church have also been observed. For instance, the Domesday Book contains an entry for a woman called Eddiva, who held numerous estates during the mid-eleventh century.²⁶ There are also accounts of nuns, such as Leoba, Eadburg, and Bucge, who correspond with prominent religious leaders like Boniface and who are consulted by male clergy for their wisdom on ecclesiastical matters.²⁷ Jane Tibbets Schulenburg examines the lives of saints as a source of women's social history, observing monastic leadership opportunities for women within the guidelines of the Church and pointing to large building programs undertaken by women.²⁸ Like their secular counterparts, many of these patron saints or abbesses drew praise for their charitable work.²⁹ Some of these admirable roles for women are clearly modeled in the literature studied here. There have been attempts to document the varied cultural roles available to high-status Anglo-Saxon women. Although, these women represent a small selective group within society, Stacy S. Klein says “[...] royal women

²⁵ See Doris Mary Stenton, *The English Woman in History* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957), 2. In the first chapter of her book, Stenton's remarks lead one to conclude that certain or “outstanding” Anglo-Saxon women were capable of garnering a semblance of fame because her name was written down, inferring that for some reason it was worth remembering.

²⁶ The *Domesday Book* is a 1086 survey of land for much of England and parts of Wales by order of King William the Conqueror. Fell cites an entry for a land-holding woman named “Eddiva” who is referred to as beautiful (*pulcra*) and rich (*dives*). In Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 89.

²⁷ Fell, 111. St. Boniface (672–754 C. E.), leading figure in the Anglo-Saxon mission to the Germanic parts of the Frankish Empire in the eighth-century, is known to have exchanged letters with Anglo-Saxon nun Leoba (ca. 710–782 C. E.), Abbess Eadburg in Thanet (d. c. 759), and Abbess Bucge (d. c. 760) among other notable religious women.

²⁸ Sainted abbess of Laon, Salaberga was born in France and died circa 665. She married a Frankish noble and together they had at least six children. Upon her husband's death, she became an active church member, took the vows of a nun, and gained a widespread reputation for her piety and generosity—which included providing the funds for building seven churches. Her feast day is September 22.

²⁹ Jane Tibbets Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500–1100* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), 90.

stand apart as legends, and writers use what they know.”³⁰ It appears likely, then, that these aristocratic and religious women were inspirational for poets, as models of female behavior. But, for every independent female figure located in the chronicles, there are many, many more men, whose authority undercuts women’s efforts. More often than not, women took care of the sewing, the home, and the children, while their husbands worked and participated in the public sphere.³¹

The ethos of heroism is inextricably linked with Old English literature which reached Briton via oral tales rooted in Germanic myth. Traces of female characters found in Germanic legend can be located in Anglo-Saxon art and in both oral and written storytelling, revealing that Old English poets had some knowledge of continental and Scandinavian literatures. Additionally, religious Latin works circulating in Anglo-Saxon England literature provided inspiration for poets and is likely the basis for two of the poems under consideration here, *Juliana* and *Judith*; the heroine of the latter poem is actually the subject of the Old Testament Book of Judith.³²

Recent scholarship is linking classical aesthetics with Anglo-Saxon England which provides a path for archetypal analysis. Rita Copeland presents new research on

³⁰ Stacy S. Klein, *Ruling Women: Queenship and Gender in Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 2006), 191.

³¹ See Fell, 39–55.

³² Samantha Zacher promotes Malcolm Godden’s position in her book, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse*, that Latin translations of the Old Testament sources were a “chief resource and source of inspiration for Anglo-Saxon literary production” and believes this is because “Old Testament narratives were infinitely more compatible with the traditional Germanic heroic ethos than were their New Testament counterparts” She reports that “Old Testament poetry comprises roughly a third of the extant corpus of Old English poetry,” Malcom Godden, “Biblical Literature: The Old Testament,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, 206–226, quoted in Samantha Zacher, *Rewriting the Old Testament in Anglo-Saxon Verse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 4. Godden also reminds readers that early medieval cultures did not regard the Old Testament as a separate history of the Jews, which becomes important to the discussion of *Judith*.

ways in which medieval British writers engaged with classical literature.³³ Scholarly essays have clarified the role of antiquity in early medieval poetry and revealed reminiscences of specific classical authors and the influence of classical philosophy, historiography, biblical epics, and so on, in these texts. Bettina L. Knapp reminds us that Virgil wrote the words: “A woman leads,” as Dido set sail from the Tyrian harbor to Carthage. With this phrase, Knapp proposes that Dido is “Assuming the power ordinarily allotted to a man.”³⁴ As noted above, similar “manly” behavior is observed in Anglo-Saxon literature nearly a thousand years later.

While this dissertation is focused on the females of Old English poetry, who appear in but a small selection of the literary corpus produced by the Anglo-Saxons, it is in those relatively few pages that I suggest some of the most memorable characters of the era come to life. My analysis of Grendel’s mother, Juliana, and Judith will show the importance of women in the Old English poetic corpus; they are not “emotionally confined” as other females in the literature appear to be,³⁵ or powerless as has been suggested, but typify the heroic ethos of a Germanic past and the Christian sensibilities prevalent in their changing and developing nation. It is through this study that I offer a means for classifying the heroine of Old English poetry, and by illustrating how male heroism does not overshadow the heroics of women, these heroines stand on their own merits.

³³ Rita Copeland, ed., *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature: Volume 1: 800–1588* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

³⁴ Bettina L. Knapp, “Virgil’s Aeneid: Let Us Sing of Arms and Women – Dido and Camilla,” in *Women in Myth* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 119.

³⁵ Anne Klinck’s *The Old English Elegies*, a result of her examination of female poetic characterization, finds that female characters are confined—literally, conventionally, and emotionally—but hypothesizes that such captivity adds a psychological dimension, which the poet, in turn, might artistically exploit. This point has been questioned.

CHAPTER I
THE HEROIC TRADITION

1 THE MASCULINE HEROIC IDEAL

Anglo-Saxon scholars have observed that an understanding of the heroic code “is based much on the reader’s preconception of what is honorable and noble.”³⁶ Anglo-Saxon audiences must have found something “honorable and noble” in the characters of Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana, as evidenced by the popularity of the texts in which they appear. While multiple male and female figures have been examined for their heroic performance in the Old English poetry (notably Andreas, Elene, and numerous martyred saints) the three characters examined here are exceptional in the corpus. Because of their unique brand of heroism, they have drawn much attention from scholars. Judith has been called “a heroine in every sense of the word,”³⁷ and both “a sacred and secular heroine.”³⁸ Juliana has been identified as “performing unlike Byrhtnoth in *The Battle of Maldon*” displaying “a new kind of heroism.”³⁹ Her dialogue, in particular, establishes the saint as distinctive in the poetry. The women in *Beowulf* have been viewed as inconspicuously heroic. In revisiting the treatment of Grendel’s mother,

³⁶ Elizabeth Solopova and Stuart D. Lee, *Key Concepts in Medieval Literature* (New York: Palgrave, 2007), 86.

³⁷ Christopher Fee. “Judith and the Rhetoric of Heroism in Anglo-Saxon England,” *English Studies* 5 (1997): 401.

³⁸ Patricia A. Belanoff, “Judith: Sacred and Secular Heroine,” in *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period*, eds. Helen Damico and John Leyerle (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publication, 1993), 247–64.

³⁹ Claude Schneider, “Cynewulf’s devaluation of heroic traditional in Juliana,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978): 118

Wendy Hennequin argues that Grendel's mother "is presented as a noble and brave opponent and even as a somewhat sympathetic character."⁴⁰ Other scholars have also observed some "admirable and heroic qualities" in the characterization of Grendel's mother.⁴¹ These more favorable evaluations of her figure have opened up new ways of thinking about female heroism in the literature in general. The indomitable nature of Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana reveals a heroically complex, powerful, and unique multi-dimensionality that sets them apart from other male heroes and women in the corpus. They do not fit neatly into the conventional definition of Germanic heroic conduct, yet they are nonetheless viewed as heroic. How is this possible?

To simplify matters, I draw from the widely accepted source of Solopova and Lee who have conveniently identified six key concepts that make up the Anglo-Saxon "heroic ideal."⁴² They are as follows:

1. Bravery in the face of overwhelming/impossible odds
2. Acceptance of a (usually harsh) situation
3. The resolve to carry out declared intentions willingly
4. A desire to forge a reputation for yourself (posthumously if need be) – encapsulated by the Old English work *lof* ("praise, glory")
5. A desire to be judged favorably by your companions – *dom* ("judgement")
6. Loyalty to one's superiors

⁴⁰ Wendy M. Hennequin, "We've Created a Monster: The Strange Case of Grendel's Mother," *English Studies* 89.5 (2008): 504.

⁴¹ Setsuko Haruta explains that the Beowulf poet "betrays too much sympathy for Grendel's mother to allow us to brush her aside as a villain." In Setsuko Haruta, "The Women in Beowulf," *Poetica* (Tokyo) 23 (1986): 11; and Kevin S. Kiernan concludes, "a devil's advocate can find plenty of evidence for defending Grendel's mother as a heroic figure." In Kevin S. Kiernan, "Grendel's Heroic Mother," *In Geardagum* 6 (1984): 31.

⁴² Solopova and Lee, 86–7.

To this list Solopova and Lee added a blending of “wisdom” and “bravery,” as recognized by Robert E. Kaske as qualities of a Christian hero.⁴³ The list encapsulates not only characters exhibited by heroic performance—pagan or Christian—but also certain motivations driving the behaviors, such as the “desire for glory” and the “desire to be viewed favorably.” Later, it will be made evident how “motivation” serves to differentiate male and female heroes.

Curiously, there is no word for “hero” in Old English. The *Thesaurus of Old English* provides around seventy options for the term “warrior,” which speaks to the importance of the role within the heroic ideal. With the rediscovery of the classical world and the written accounts of battles, audiences became enthralled with these super-human fighting men of action.⁴⁴ Consequently, it is the adventures of these few brave warriors, going to battle for their kingdom against impossible odds, that established a special set of values recognized today as a heroic ethos or the heroic code.

Before I explore how female characters fit this model, it is important to illustrate how this concept traditionally manifests in Anglo-Saxon poetry. A good example can be found in *The Battle of Maldon* which depicts courageous men fighting against the Viking enemy, shields clashing on a bloodstained battlefield:

This was a fierce confrontation: firm stood
the warriors in the whirl of battle. War-men fell,
on the ground, cut-weary collapsed lifeless
Oswald and Eadwold all this time,

⁴³ Throughout this dissertation I will refer to this list of key concepts to illustrate the unique performances of Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana within the poetry. Solopova and Lee, 87. Solopova and Lee cite R. E. Kaske’s argument that “the model hero from a Christian perspective would also have to have both of these [sapientia and fortitude], drawing on models outlined in earlier patristic writers (thus fusing the two), and applied his theory to the characters in *Beowulf*. R. E. Kaske (1958) “*Sapientia et Fortitudo* as the Controlling Theme of *Beowulf*” SP 55, 423–456; also in L. E. Nicholson, ed., *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 269–310.

⁴⁴ Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., “Old English Heroic Literature,” in *Readings in Medieval Texts* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 76.

brothers, encouraged the battlers,
told their friends this phrase
that now when it mattered most they must make the effort,
unsparingly use their swords.⁴⁵

This passage depicts the fierce loyalty demanded of Anglo-Saxon warriors on the battlefield. Eodwold's and Oswald's dedication to their lord is confirmed by encouraging others to stand firm in the face of crushing odds. This courageous performance is meant to earn them respect, celebrity, and later, a share in the plunder—battle equipment, swords, horses, etc. Similar examples of gallantry are observed in the handful of extant Old English poems that have been classified by scholars as “battle-poetry” or heroic poetry⁴⁶: *Deor*, *Beowulf*, *The Fight at Finnsburh*, *The Battle of Brunanburgh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Waldere*, and *Widsith*: each demonstrate various degrees of heroic display. For example, *Deor* does not depict a brutal hand-to-hand clash of strength but rather a heroic past where the adventures of valiant men are immortalized, as compared to other poems that emphasize combat and nerves of steel in the heat of battle.⁴⁷ Hence, warfare is not the only condition in which a heroic ethos emerges. However, the actions of a brave warrior were greatly admired by contemporary audiences.

In *Beowulf*'s speech at Hrothgar's court, we find a hero exhibiting another quality associated with the heroic ideal, namely boasting. Boasting effectively demonstrates

⁴⁵ 302–8 (*þær wæs stið gemot; stodon fæste wigan on gewinne, wigend cruncon, wundum werige. Wæl feol on earþan. Oswald and Eadwold ealle while, begen þa gebroþru, beornas trymedon, hyra winemagas wordon bædon þæt hi þær æt ðearfe þolian sceoldon, unwaclice wæpna neotan*). Bill Griffiths, ed. and trans., *The Battle of Maldon*, (Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003). All modern English translations and Old English quotations for *Maldon* in this chapter are from this text unless otherwise noted.

⁴⁶ Solopova and Lee, 85. Solopova and Lee break down heroic Old English poetry into four groups: 1) those that contain battles as part of the story, 2) those alluding to battles or past conflict, 3) those incomplete and may have originally contained a battle, and 4) those consisting of battle imagery and heroic conflict in new interesting ways.

⁴⁷ Alexander, “Deor,” *The First Poems in English* (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 69.

Beowulf's bravery before he ever physically slays Grendel. It speaks to his confidence and competence. He states:

I resolved when I set out over the waves,
sat down in my ship with my troop of soldiers,
that I would entirely fulfill the wishes
of your people or fall slain,
fast in the grip of my foe. I shall perform
a deed of manly courage, or in this mead-hall
I will await the end of my days!⁴⁸

After this announcement, the narrator tells us that Beowulf's words "well pleased" Hrothgar's queen (*wel licodon*, 639b). His well-chosen words serve to not only state Beowulf's purpose in Denmark, but also bring a certain level of comfort to the king and his court. With the arrival of Beowulf and his men there is potential relief from Grendel's rage, which has plagued the kingdom for "twelve winters" (*twelf wintra*, 147a). It is the hero's intention that his boast will build confidence in his capabilities, offer solace to the Danes, and that the other warriors will approve of him from the onset. Beowulf did not state that he would "do his best" to rid the Danes of their monster or that he "may be able" to perform a certain task that could mitigate the situation; these hedging words would have been met with skepticism. By stating his "deed of manly courage" (eliminating Grendel) Beowulf has shown his resolve to complete the task; there is no question that the hero will do what he set out to do—or else die in the process. Through this custom, Beowulf ensures that he will be glorified whether he lives or dies. Thus, his motivations for visiting the Danes are clear; based on preconceived notions of a heroic

⁴⁸ 632–638 (*Ic þæt hogode, þa ic on holm gestah, sæbat gesæt mid minra secga gedrigt, Þæt ic anunga oewra leoda willan geworhte oþðe endedæg on þisse meoduhealle mine gebiden*). Roy M. Liuzza, ed., *Beowulf*. 2nd ed. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2013). All modern English translations of *Beowulf* as well as Old English quotations in this chapter are Liuzza's unless otherwise noted.

ideal, contemporary audiences would have understood that Beowulf was there to make a name for himself.

Another example of a heroic ethos in *Beowulf* is found when Grendel's mother attacks Heorot seeking to avenge the death of her son. Her actions illustrate the customary code of revenge⁴⁹ whereby a death is claimed for a death. By seizing Hrothgar's most beloved thane, Æschere, and killing him, in exchange for her son's life, Grendel's mother participates in the heroic ideal in the conventional manner.

Consequently, the stunned and saddened Hrothgar once again finds himself in the need of a great warrior and turns to Beowulf. The hero replies:

It is always better
to avenge one's friend than to mourn overmuch.
Each of us must await the end
of this world's life; let him who can
bring about fame before death—that is the best
for the unloving man after he is gone.⁵⁰

In this passage, the imagery and values of a heroic ethos are articulated by the warrior himself. In Old English poetry, heroes perform time and time again as skilled warriors on the battlefield; however, rarely do they articulate so clearly and with such great eloquence their intentions. Here, Beowulf's words are more than a hero's boast; he is relating wisdom gained by living the life of a warrior. Through these words the poet encapsulates Beowulf's past gallantries, showing audiences his character has evolved—

⁴⁹ Among other principles, the Anglo-Saxon heroic code traditionally honors a "revenge obligation." If a man is killed, it is the duty of his kinsmen to avenge him in kind. If that proves impossible, he fights to his own death in the attempt to seek revenge. In *Beowulf*, we find an example of this when Beowulf takes revenge for the death of his king Heardred: "In days to come, he contrived to avenge the fall of his prince. The feud was settled on a comfortless campaign when he killed Onela," in Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, 2391–2396. Like Beowulf, it can be argued that Grendel's mother supports the obligation of revenge by claiming Æschere's life for the death of her son, Grendel.

⁵⁰ 1384b–1389 (*Selre bið æghwæm, þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne. Ure æghwylc sceal ende gebidan worolde lifes; wyrce se þe mote domes ær deaþe; þæt bið drihtguman unlifgendum æfter selest*).

from a young warrior out to prove himself to a seasoned warrior who has learned from experience. By speaking to King Hrothgar with wisdom and authority, Beowulf discloses an awareness that transcends the performance of other warriors in the battle-poetry. He understands that because a fighter's life is one of danger and shorter than most, there is little time to waste, better to help where one can and focus on generating a name for oneself. Heroic deeds on the battlefield are an Anglo-Saxon man's assurance of remembrance as a champion, lest his life be in vain and he is forgotten over time. Because Beowulf is an "unloving" man—without a wife or family to keep his memory alive—he is inspired to catch the attention of a poet who will sing his praises for future audiences.

Poets also illustrate for audiences which behaviors are unacceptable and not viewed as heroic. In these cases, the names of the spineless are preserved for posterity. *The Battle of Maldon* provides an example of acts not considered as part of a heroic ethos:

Godric,
the coward son of Odda, has betrayed us all:
most men thought, when he rode off on that mare.⁵¹

Here, the poem instructs that heroes are not deserters. It also shames those who abandoned their post and their fallen leader. Those identified are not celebrated as legends but long remembered as cowards, evidenced by their inclusion in the poem. Deserters and the fearful have no place in Anglo-Saxon poetry or society; we are given some examples of failing to uphold the heroic code in the literature, although examples of rewards that await the courageous warrior and faithful friend are far more frequent.

⁵¹ 187–189a (*Godric fram guþe, and þone godan forlet þe him mænigne oft mear gesealde; he gehleop þone eoh [...]*).

Another example of the heroic ideal can be detected in Hnæf's command at *The Fight at Finnsburh*:

But awake now, my warriors!
take up your shields, think of valor,
fight in the vanguard, and be resolute!
Then many a gold-laden thane arose, girded his sword⁵²

In this passage we find Hnæf refers to his men as “my warriors.” These words speak to Hnæf's expectations and position as leader. He has no reason to believe his men would be anything other than brave, trustworthy, and loyal. Likewise, Hnæf's open acknowledgement of his willingness to keep fighting regardless of outcome shows his loyalty to the men while confirming his favorable reputation as a fearless warrior and leader; his desire for fame and glory are demonstrated by his actions.

2 WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE HEROIC IDEAL

Heroic women of Old English poetry also exemplify various examples of the heroic ideal. While most do not exercise super-human strength during battle, certain women can be viewed as exhibiting a sort of “social-heroism.”⁵³ Traditionally, heroism in female characters manifests in their portrayals of accepted and admired social behaviors, whether as part of the family unit (i.e., mother) or in a public situation (i.e., queen), rather than a martial contest. For example, of the females appearing in *Beowulf*, excluding Grendel's mother, it is Queen Wealhtheow who has been recognized as

⁵² 10–12 (*Ac onwacnigeað nu, wigend mine, habbað eower linda, hicgeap on ellen, winnað on orde, wesað on mode! Ða aras mænig goldhladen ðegn, gyrde hine his swurde*). Frederick Klaeber, “The Fight at Finnsburh,” in *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburh*, 3rd ed. (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1950), 245–249. Modern English translation provided by Liuzza in *Beowulf*, 258.

⁵³ My words.

possessing exemplary heroic qualities.⁵⁴ Due to the “multiplicity of her character” Wealhtheow has attracted much attention from scholars.⁵⁵ She has not only been recognized as an ideal queen, but the embodiment of the essence of an Anglo-Saxon *ides* (lady); she is honorable, wise, elegant, and *goldhrodene* (adorned with gold), a hue and brilliance bestowed only on aristocratic and holy women deserving of admiration and reverence. Yet Wealhtheow remains far from heroic as defined by the heroic ideal described previously. Her place is in court, not fighting off dangerous adversaries—although she openly admires and praises men that do. Her heroics are depicted by remaining “mindful of customs” (*cynne gemyndig*, 13b). She shows her loyalty to her husband, the king, by bestowing compliments and treasure on Beowulf after his heroic defeat of Grendel (“Beowulf, beloved warrior, wear this neck-ring in good health”; “*Beowulf leofa, hyse, mid hæle, and þisses hrægles neot*, 1216–1217). As queen and wife, she skillfully performs some of the criteria required of a traditional hero. For example, although fearful for the safety of her kinsmen when they go off to war, she remains brave; she desires to forge a positive reputation for herself; she seeks favorable judgment from the court; and she is loyal to the king. Audiences find her exercising her power as queen in a positive, even heroic, fashion when she speaks openly to the Danish court asking that her two sons share in the inheritance of the kingdom;⁵⁶ it takes a woman of great courage to advise a king (even if one is the queen) on a matters of great importance like inheritance, especially in public. However, in these lines, the focus of

⁵⁴ Grendel’s mother meets the criteria for a new type of heroine created by the poets, as will be argued later. Wealhtheow, antithetically, is more of a social heroine, someone women should aspire to be and men respect and hope to wed.

⁵⁵ Helen Damico, *Beowulf’s Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 179.

⁵⁶ See lines 1169–87 for Wealhtheow’s complete speech.

the episode is the heroics of Beowulf, not Wealhtheow's mettle. This is made clear by the poet who chooses to have Wealhtheow acknowledge Beowulf as "warrior." To Hrothgar she states, "I have been told that you would take this warrior for your son" (*Me man sægde, þæt ðe for sunu wolde hererinc habban*, 1175–1176). The poet does not reciprocate with a compliment for Wealhtheow, nor does he even refer to her as "noble" or "honorable" in this episode as elsewhere in the poem. This passage, which appears after Beowulf has defeated all the known "Grendel-kin," serves to delineate the "real" heroes as the men in the poem.

Hildegyth, wife of Waldere, also has been viewed as a type of heroine, in that she meets some of the criteria understood as part of the heroic ideal; like Hnæf's speech, her diction is meant to motivate and spur men to heroic action. Held in captivity by the Huns, Hildegyth "emboldened him [Waldere]" (*hyrde hyne geonre*, 1), and continues to inspire Waldere with her daring words: "The day is now come when you must simply do one of two things: let go your life or have lasting fame among men" (*[...]is se dæg cumen þæt ðu scealt aninga oðer twega life forleosan oððe l[...]**gne dom agan mid eldum*, 8–11a).⁵⁷ As the faithful wife, Hildegyth offers Waldere words of encouragement. Her commanding demeanor, eloquent speech, and her willingness to let Waldere enter into a perilous situation convey her bravery; she cares for him and certainly understands the possible outcome of such risk. Under duress she is poised and calm, reminding Waldere that "God cares for him" (*ðenden ðin god recce*, 23). Hildegyth's rhetorical urgency lends weight to her words but these words are only intended for Waldere, not an army of

⁵⁷ S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), 511–512. All modern English translations of *Waldere* in this chapter are taken from this text unless otherwise noted. All Old English quotations are those Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ed. "Waldere," *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems, The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: a collective edition*. Vol. 6. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968, unless otherwise noted.

warriors. As a female her speech is delivered only to her husband who will take action against the Huns for the both of them. Like Wealhtheow, she displays an unwavering decorum among men. She reminds Waldere that he will not flee the course and humiliate himself, reminding readers what happens to those men who do. In the spirit of the *Beowulf* poet, this poet writes that Waldere can have “lasting fame” if he fights well. It is Waldere who will reap the glory from his battle; Hildegyth’s role in the matter—her drive and motivating words—will not garner her any accolades. If she is remembered for her heroism, it is that she performed as a woman of her position should perform under hostile conditions; she supported her lord like Wealhtheow.

Wealhtheow and Hildegyth are unique among women in Old English poetry, not because of their social roles but because they interact comfortably with male warriors, are given broader roles than many women in the literature, and perhaps most importantly, they speak: they are afforded speaking roles that influence the men with whom they interact. Audiences not only see them perform as honorable and supportive queens and wives (both familial roles), but get to hear them as well, which adds depth to their characters and enhances their virtues. In the case of Hildegyth, because of her inspiring speech audiences readily recognize her fearlessness in the midst of crushing odds, perceive the gravity of the danger shared by the couple, and admire her tenacity. Her elocution distinguishes her as noble and serves to highlight her resolve to impact the situation. Likewise, Wealhtheow’s diction, while not as provocative, reveals her appreciation and recognition of the Danes and Beowulf as battle-hardened warriors; she rewards them with treasure and praise for their heroism. After she gives Beowulf a ring, she speaks: “Be while you live blessed, o nobleman! I wish you well with these bright

treasures” (*Wes þenden þu lifige, æþeling, eadig! Ic þe an tela sincgestreona*, 1216–1220). Wealhtheow is not a warrior but her role helps to validate what is considered heroic for Anglo-Saxons.

Because Wealhtheow and Hildegyth exhibit a social type of heroism, as women they fit comfortably within the traditional heroic ideal. However, their virtuous and noble performances, as well as the support they provide their menfolk, do little to elevate them to the type of hero we see in the battle-hardened Byrhtnoth who stands bravely on the embankment of a bridge fending off Vikings, or the resolute Beowulf who vows, “I shall perform a deed of manly courage, or in this mead-hall I will await the end of my days!” (*Ic gefremmann sceal eorlic ellen, oþðe endedæg on þisse meoduhealle mine gebiden*, 636b–638). Furthermore, neither woman even appears in Widsith’s list of champions.⁵⁸ Some Anglo-Saxon poets, however, do seem to go to some trouble to construct women of noble character who exhibit spirited qualities whose actions move beyond those of the more conventionally portrayed women of the elegies.⁵⁹

Elegiac poems also tend to depict aristocratic females in acceptable social roles, but unlike those examined thus far their dispositions are far from imposing. They are perceptibly emotional and open about their feelings and display troubled states of mind. They are rendered without options or means for impacting current events. It is

⁵⁸ Referring to the Old English poem *Widsith*, a name understood as both title of the poem and author, which is essentially a long listing of legendary kings and kingdoms the poet visited during his career. Exeter, Cathedral Library, Dean and Chapter MS 3501, fols. 84v–87r. All modern English Translations of *Widsith* in this chapter are those of R. M. Liuzza, “Widsith,” *Old English Poetry: An Anthology* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2014), 266–272, unless otherwise noted.

⁵⁹ Scholars have identified a number of Old English poems as *elegiac*: a term loosely used to describe serious meditative lyric poems. Liuzza cautions the word can be misleading; however, it has been beneficial for the study of this particular group of poems: *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife’s Lament*, and *The Ruin*. Liuzza also includes *Deor* in this group; however, for this project *Deor* will also be considered as a heroic poem sharing similarities with *Waldere*. I would also be inclined to include *The Husband’s Message* on the list.

understood that in Anglo-Saxon society a good wife loves her husband; when they are together she cares for and supports him, and when they are apart, as when he is off to battle, she is patient, faithful, and pines for his return. Elegies, such as *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which are appreciated for their intensity and their language of desire and longing, provide unsettling examples of the faithful wife with no power in a relationship or marriage.⁶⁰ Both fragments are considered love lyrics and have somber and heart-rending effects on audiences. For the female speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, the mood is sad and melancholy. Yet, the last stanza shows some spark of wisdom on part of the speaker; her lamentation informs readers "One can easily split what was never united..." (*þæt mon eaþe tosliteð þætte næfre gesomnad wæs*, 18)⁶¹ which adds a sort of moral to the poem that reveals the speaker is more than just a one-dimensional female character. In much the same way, *The Wife's Lament* voices suffering because of a separation. In this case, it is the speaker, a female, who is exiled. Here, we find a "weeping" woman. Nowhere in the heroic ideal is it acknowledged that weeping is a heroic trait; however, Tacitus' *Germania* records that "Lamentation becomes women: men must remember" (*feminis lugere honestum est, viris meminisse*).⁶² Aside from the agony of the sorrowful and solitary speaker she exhibits appropriate grief thus fulfilling her role as a good wife by Germanic and Anglo-Saxon standards. Liuzza

⁶⁰ See Jane Chance, "The Errant Woman as Scop in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*," *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 81–94.

⁶¹ R. M. Liuzza, ed. and trans. "Wulf and Eadwacer," *Old English Poetry: An Anthology* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2014), 40. All modern English translations of this poem are taken from this text and all Old English quotations are those of George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds. "Wulf and Eadwacer." *The Exeter Book. The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: a collective edition*. Vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936). 179–180.

⁶² Cornelius Tacitus, *Dialogus Agricola Germania*, trans. William Peterson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), 301.27. In this chapter going forward, citations for this *Germania* will use the following model: Tacitus, page number of modern English, facing page number of corresponding Latin text.

points out these two elegiac poems “are largely framed in the heroic language of lordship and loyalty,” which also could place them perhaps among the less battle-hardened heroic poems like *Deor* and *Widsith*.

While the social estate of the women speaking in *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament* remains uncertain, the women of *Deor* and *Widsith* are understood as royalty and appear to act with more authority than the wistful females of the elegies, or the middle- or lower-class women found performing household duties in the *Riddles*. In *Widsith*, Ealhild, the wife of the Gothic king Eormanric, demonstrates some authority through her role as “peace-weaver” (“*fælre freopuwebban*”), an important role for women in Anglo-Saxon society. Wealhtheow’s character is often credited with demonstrating the qualities of the ideal peace-weaver.⁶³ In *Deor*, Beadohild, the daughter of the Norse king Nithhad, according to legend gives birth to Widea who becomes famous as one of Dietrich von Berne’s warriors in the Norse *Thidrekssaga* (Saga of Theoderic). Although not a hero herself, she can be viewed as socially heroic through her relationship to her husband and her role as mother; she is a model wife and gives birth to a son that will grow to become a powerful warrior in the *comitatus* (war-band/retinue) of Dietrich von Berne. It is evident that women have positive roles in Old English poetry.

Just as poets provide audiences with accounts of both admirable heroic behaviors as well as examples of cowardice in men, so too do they depict models of women that are both admirable and objectionable by Anglo-Saxon standards. For instance, the *Beowulf* poet, in juxtaposition to the honorable Queen Wealhtheow, presents unsettling images of

⁶³ In Anglo-Saxon literature some women were referred to as “peace-weavers,” women betrothed to create alliances thereby keeping peace between rival tribes.

queens and peace-weavers in Freawaru and Hildeburh. Upon his return to Hygelac's court, Beowulf recounts the story of Freawaru's marriage to the king of the Heathobards, Ingeld, noting that Hrothgar thought it advantageous to settle a feud through the marriage of his daughter to the king ("that he might settle his share of the feud and slaughter with this young woman"; *ond þæt ræd talað, þæt he mid ðy wife wælfæhða dæl, sæcca gesette*, 2027–2029). However Freawaru's position is weakened when Ingeld sees his bride's attendant wearing the sword that killed his father; a "bitter violent hate" swells and Ingeld's "wife love grows cooler after his surging cares" (*ond him wiflufan æafter cearwælmum colran weorðað*, 2064–2066). Hildeburh, wife of Finn, is also presented in a tragic light, her attempts at peace-weaving ending in catastrophe and sadness. When Hrothgar's scop recounts the *Battle of Finnsburg*, we hear of Hildeburgh suffering the deaths of both her son and brother when fighting breaks out between the Scyldings and Frisians ("she was deprived of her dear ones in that shield play, her sons and her brothers, sent forth to their fate, dispatched by spears; she was a sad lady"; *unsynnum wearð beloren leofum æt þam [lind]plegan bearnum ond broðrum; hie on gebyrd hruron gare wunde; þæt wæs geomuru ides*, 1072–1075). However, these disastrous images of women as victims and failed peace-weavers hardly speak to their capacity for having any control over the situation. Unlike male heroes, who boast of their intentions and then carry them out, females are placed in their positions by men and remain at the mercy of men during their tenure as wives and mothers. Thus, while poets on one hand provide clear pictures of male heroics, female representations of heroism in Old English poetry appear more complex.

Wisdom is a highly desirable, and heroic, quality for both males and females; however, it can be problematic when applied to women. In *Wulf and Eadwacer*, for example, without a concrete, pragmatic social application, a wise woman alone is little more than just a woman, but as we have seen in *Wealhtheow*, a woman who uses wisdom to support her husband and his war band can be viewed as exhibiting a heroic ethos. Women of high position tend to be praised for providing wise counsel, and exercising wisdom and prudence in their roles. *Maxims I* reminds us that a noble women must “keep confidences” (*rune healdan*, 86), and “know what is prudent for them as rulers of the hall” (*ond him ræd witan boldagendum bæm ætsomne*, 91b–92).⁶⁴ In *Beowulf*, *Wealhtheow* “thanked God with wise words” (*Gode þancode wisfæst wordum*, 625b–626a). In Hrothgar’s court, we also find queens as “peace-weavers,” “cup-bearers” (*Wealhtheow* and *Hygd* carry the mead cup around the hall offering it to warriors), and “gift-givers” (*Wealhtheow* gives *Beowulf* a neck-ring for his bravery). In *Widsith*, *Eahhild* also passes out treasure; after *Eormanric* gives the poet a ring, Queen *Eahhild* bestows upon him another.⁶⁵ In these women, audiences are afforded models of good behavior, astute aristocratic women offering practical advice, not just passing out a random nugget of wisdom. In this way readers are able to ascertain which behaviors are admired in which class of woman. Of note, wisdom has also been recognized as an attribute of a Christian hero; Helen Damico likens *Wealhtheow*’s hallmark traits of “wisdom, acumen, and eloquence” to those she has identified in Christian female warriors (*Juliana*, *Judith*, and *Elene*). In Chapters III and IV, which focus on *Judith* and

⁶⁴ All modern English translations of *Maxims I* in this dissertation are from S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), 344–50. The Old English source is George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, ed., “Maxims I,” *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems. The Anglo-Saxon poetic records. A Collective Edition*, Vol. 6 (New York: Columbia UP, 1968), 156-63.

⁶⁵ Liuzza, *Widsith*, 89–98.

Juliana, respectively, I examine elements of the heroic ideal as they appear in Christianized texts and stories of saints' lives.

Chance observes that the spectrum of social roles for women in Old English poetry, for the most part, tends to reflect the roles of women in Anglo-Saxon society. In historical documents they appear to be “identified mostly in terms of a relationship with a male parent, brother, or husband by means of phrases like ‘daughter of,’ ‘sister of,’ ‘wife of,’ and rarely by the title of queen or abbess.”⁶⁶ This language is reflected in the poetry, as is evident early on in *Beowulf*: “and Halga the Good, I heard that... was Onela’s queen, dear bedfellow of the Battle-Scylfing” (*ond Halga til, hyrde ic þæt [... wæs OnJelan cwen, Heaðo-Scilfingas healsgebedda*, 61b–63). The only “warrior female” appearing in *Beowulf* is defined in terms of motherhood (Grendel’s *modor*); Judith is branded “the Savior’s Handmaid” (*scyppendes mægð*, 78a); and Juliana is labelled “daughter” (*dohtor*, 68b)⁶⁷ and “bride” (*bryd*, 41a). All of these epithets support Chance’s point above; however, it can be argued that when these social roles are performed by these particular female characters, a unique brand of heroism emerges. These figures are not only admired for the Anglo-Saxon virtues of faithfulness and wisdom; they are eminently resourceful and physically capable of defending themselves without the assistance of male caretakers. The language employed by poets to describe Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana points to a physical dexterity indiscernible in other female characters in the corpus. Grendel’s mother is “bold” (“killed a soldier, boldly at

⁶⁶ Chance, “The Saint, The Abbess, the Chaste Queen: Wise, Holy, and Heroic,” *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 61.

⁶⁷ Modern English translations of the text of *Juliana* in this chapter are those of Aaron K. Hostetter, “Cynewulf, Juliana,” The Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project, Last modified April 5, 2017. <https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/juliana/>, and all Old English quotations for this chapter are those of—George Philip Krapp, and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., “Juliana,” *The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: a collective edition*, Vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 113–133.

once”; *beorn acwealde ellenlice*, 2121b–2122a) and “mihtig” (*merewif mihtig*, 1519);⁶⁸ Judith is “brave” (*ellenrof*, 146a) and “boldly daring” (*ellenpriste*, 133b); and Juliana is “mindful of her strength” (*eafoda gemyndig*, 601b). These terms serve to highlight both the physical and intellectual talents of these women.

Physically powerful females in poetry are few. Of the seven Anglo-Saxon texts identified as battle poetry,⁶⁹ only four of them include female characters (*Deor*, *Beowulf*, *Waldere*, and *Widsith*) and of those only two can be identified as including women exercising great physical or mental strength; in *Beowulf* and *Waldere*,⁷⁰ Grendel’s mother’s brute force and Hildegyth’s provocation of Waldere, respectively, are recognized as qualities of a heroic nature. In the case of Grendel’s mother, her corporal abilities exist to draw Beowulf into another battle (after the first with Grendel) further authenticating his gallantry.⁷¹ Likewise, Hildegyth’s character serves to spur Waldere’s heroics. In the passages where their stories unfold, poets make heroes of both men and women; the two women are more than supportive of their men, they are part of the heroic action, Grendel’s mother engaging in hand-to-hand combat with Beowulf, and Hildegyth doing everything she can to incite a battle with the exception of taking up the sword

⁶⁸ My translation. Liuzza translates *merewif mihtig* as “great mere-wife” in line 1519a. The word *mihtig* appears six times (when not used as a compound) in the poem. In each case, Liuzza translates it into modern English as “mighty” with the exception of line 1519a.

⁶⁹ Solopova and Lee identify *The Battle of Brunanburgh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, and *The Fight at Finnsburgh* as “battle-poetry”; *Judith* and *Beowulf* as “including battles as part of a wider-story”; suppose that *Waldere* is “incomplete and thus may have contained a battle”; *Widsith* and *Deor* as “alluding to battles or conflicts”; and *Exodus*, *Genesis*, and *The Dream of the Rood* as “using battle imagery and heroic conflict in new and interesting ways,” 86. Alexander lists *Deor*, certain episodes from *Beowulf*, *The Fight at Finnsburgh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *The Battle of Brunanburgh*, and *Widsith* as heroic poems in his table of contents in *The First Poems in English* (London: Penguin Books, 2008). *Juliana* and *Elene* fall into the genre of hagiography, which focuses on the heroics of saints and will be defined later in this chapter, along with *Judith*, also a heroic poem but unique in many ways.

⁷⁰ While Hildegyth does not perform any physical feats of strength, her mental competency and prowess are apparent in her resolve to free both herself and Waldere, as well as her provocation of Waldere to fight their enemy. Moreover, Solopova and Lee remind us that *Waldere* is incomplete and could have contained a battle, perhaps one in which Hildegyth plays a larger role.

⁷¹ In Chapter II, I argue that Grendel’s mother’s power exists for a variety of reasons.

herself. That she is enflamed, agitated, aroused and bent on immediate action is apparent (“Do not you, a soldier of Attila’s vanguard, yet awhile allow your courage to falter, nor your dignity today”; *Ætlan ordwyga, ne læt ðin ellen nu gy[.] gedreosan to dæg cumen, dryhtscipe* *** [..] *is se dæg cumen*, 6–8a). However, regardless of their determination and intention to battle for justice, Grendel’s mother is doomed to act alone, without the benefit of a *comitatus*, and Hildegyth is not in a position to fight on her own, even if she could.

In heroic poetry, male heroes like Byrhtnoth, Hnæf, and Beowulf are bound by community; their lives are defined by their relationship to the *comitatus*.⁷² They act and fight as one unit, each seeking glory and accolades from the leader. Tacitus writes of the importance of the Germanic war band where there is great rivalry among the retainers seeking first place with the chief, but when it is time for battle they function as a unit: “the chief fights for victory, but the retainers for the chief” (*principes pro victoria pugnant, comites pro principe*).⁷³ He writes of lord and retainers feasting and sharing treasure in solidarity. Male warriors appear social, naturally communal, and pack-driven. Anglo-Saxon audiences understood the significance of this vital social relationship; their survival depended upon its protection. For *Beowulf*, feud and vengeance is not only practical, it is a way of maintaining a reputation. In *Maldon*, Byrhtnoth recognizes the value of his war band:

Then Byrhtnoth set to sort his battle-groups
he rode round, showed the recruits

⁷² In *Germania*, Tacitus recounts how each “well-born man” was part of the *comitatus*, a bond existing between a Germanic warrior and his lord. According to Solopova and Lee, each man participated in the *comitatus* as “either a retainer serving his leader or as the leader who counted on the loyalty of his followers. The hero could be part of the *duguð* (tried and tested warriors) or the *geoguð* (young warriors eager to receive glory),” 88.

⁷³ Tacitus, 285.15.

how to be placed and hold position,
and their round-shields hold right,
firm in fist; to feel no fear.
When all the people were properly stationed
The he alighted where he most longed to be,
With his own house-troops he knew wholly loyal.⁷⁴

In this passage, Byrhtnoth articulates the bond that holds the *comitatus* together, a heroic leader and his loyal men. It is largely through gift-giving, the distribution of the spoils of war, property, and land that ensures the loyalty, bravery, and service of men to their chief. Byrhtnoth was most generous, according to his old retainer, Byrhtwold, who speaks at the end of the poem:

Here lies our lord, lethally wounded,
good man on the ground. May he grieve forever
who from this war-work would consider withdrawing.
I am old in age, away I won't,
but myself by my master,
by so beloved a man, would finally lie.⁷⁵

The social structure of the *comitatus* is designed so that each man is dependent upon the other; Byrhtnoth's loyal men never leave him, not even in death. In reality, according to Solopova and Lee, "to be without the support of your tribe, lord, friends, and family was one of the bleakest prospects that could be faced by someone in the Anglo-Saxon period,"⁷⁶ as is evident in *The Wanderer* and *Deor*. It makes sense that this disconcerting prospect would be addressed in verse. Anglo-Saxon poets dedicated much effort to

⁷⁴ 17–24 (*Ða þær Byrhtnoð ongan beornas trymian rad and rædde, rincum tæhte hu hi sceoldon standan and þone stede healdan, and bæd þæt hyra randan rihte heoldon fæste mid folman, and ne forhtendon na. þa he hæfde þæt folc fæ.g ere .g etrymmed, he lihte þa mid leodon þær him leofost wæs þær he his heorðwerod holdost wiste*).

⁷⁵ 314–319 (*Her lið ure ealdor eall forheawen, god on greote. A mæg gnornian se ðe nu fram þis wigplegan wendan þenceð wendan þenceð. Ice om frod feores; fram ic ne wille, ac ic me be healfe minum hlaforde, be swa leofan men, licgan þence*).

⁷⁶ Solopova and Lee, 88.

extolling the war band. Their heroism, rituals of identification, boasting, fighting and bearing arms, and gift-giving are prevalent in heroic poetry.⁷⁷

The benefit of the *comitatus* appears only available to men and male heroes. Female heroines of Old English poetry tend to act alone. Employing unwavering determination, wits, and strength of character and body, these women carry out heroic acts independently and successfully. Grendel's mother goes alone to Heorot to seek revenge and, when Beowulf invades her lair, she fights him single-handedly; Juliana goes to her prison cell alone with no assistance and no aides; and Judith's only helper, a young female slave, does little more than carry the sack containing the head of Holofernes home to Bethulia. Even Cynewulf's Elene, who is sent by her son Constantine to Jerusalem in search of the cross of Christ, travels alone on her holy mission. Curiously, if *Elene* does bear some truth, it seems unlikely that the mother of an emperor would journey alone without ladies to assist her. However, because there is no mention of attendants, much less retainers, it seems reasonable to conclude that in this war band tradition prevalent in heroic verse, featuring male heroes is an unimportant or omitted detail in the stories featuring women as heroines. To summarize, in Old English poetry males benefit from the support of a trusted band of men and women, if they want to exercise their heroism, must act alone.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Roberta Frank, "Germanic Legend in Old English Literature," In *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 89–90.

⁷⁸ Women can also be viewed as victims of the masculine *comitatus*, Liuzza's translation of *The Wife's Lament* reads: "First my lord left his people over the tumbling waves; I worried at dawn where on earth my leader of men might be. When I set out myself in my sorrow, a friendless exile, to find his retainers, that man's kinsmen began to think in secret that they would separate us, so we would live far apart in the world, most miserably, and longing seized me," 6–14) which references the language of the *comitatus* ("leader" and "retainers") and demonstrates how women get left behind when men go off to war with the band.

An important difference between the heroic treatments of the sexes is rooted in their differing motivations; poets appear to have considered that men and women are inspired differently. As established earlier, male heroes express a grand desire for eternal fame.⁷⁹ We see this articulated through a hero's vow-making, boasting,⁸⁰ and winning battles. After Grendel's mother attacks Heorot and drags Æschere away in a death-grip, Beowulf makes a vow to Hrothgar that he will hunt down and kill Grendel's mother in retaliation or not return ("with Hrunting I shall win honor and fame, or death will take me"; *ic me mid Hruntinge dom gewyrce, oþðe mec deað nimeð*, 1490b–91). Beowulf makes good on his boast; he fights her, wins, and reappears at Heorot to boast of his heroism. Females, on the other hand, appear largely driven by self-preservation; their actions are in response to a personal threat or attack. For example, Grendel's mother kills a man at Heorot in retaliation for her son's death. Stricken with grief, she was moved to vengeance out of both maternal anguish and a revenge obligation. Audiences are first introduced to Grendel's mother when her son returns home from Heorot mortally wounded by Beowulf; her appearance at the mead hall is the direct result of an attack on her family. The second time Grendel's mother takes action is when Beowulf comes to her lair uninvited. She fights him to defend herself and her kingdom. His motivation is twofold: 1) to make good on his vow to Hrothgar to kill Grendel's mother for her role in Æschere's death, and 2) to wipe out the Grendel kingdom and return to Hrothgar with the

⁷⁹ Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe writes, "The poetic articulation of the heroic ethos, a warrior's paramount goal is the achievement of a lasting reputation, *Dom biþ sekast*, Glory is best, *Maxims I* 80," 108.

⁸⁰ According to Michael Murphy a "vow" refers to the future and a "boast" refers to the past, and both activities are closely linked with a heroic literary image: "The man who vowed to do a certain heroic deed was often the man who could and did boast about heroic deeds already achieved and the man who boasted about deeds performed could be expected to perform heroically again." Michael Murphy, "Vows, Boasts and Taunts, and the Role of Women in Some Medieval Literature," *English Studies* 2 (1985): 105.

plunder. Beowulf was motivated by a desire for glory, while Grendel's mother reacts to the death of her son and in self-defense.

For Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana, confirmation of desire for a legendary reputation is never articulated in the poetry. Grendel's mother is voiceless and cannot make a statement. Judith's heroics did result in "fame on this earth" (*mærðe on moldan rice*, 343a); however, nowhere in the text does she announce her desire to win this acclaim or boast that she will perform heroic feats of action. She sets out to help free her people from the terrorizing Assyrian army under whose oppression her community had been living for some time (thirty-four days according to the biblical account). Although Judith had a plan in mind (to enter the Assyrian camp and slay their leader), as the poem exists there is no language to indicate that she wanted to undertake a role in a battle with the Assyrians in order to be looked upon with favor or garner a heroic reputation for herself. On the contrary, in the first few lines the poet credits God for Judith's emboldened behavior:

...the grace of God who gave favor
renowned Ruler when she needed it most:
protection came from the primal Power against pure terror⁸¹

While it must be remembered that the poem is a fragment and a number of pages may be missing from the opening,⁸² it seems reasonable to point out, based on what content is available, that no declared intentions or boasting are present. Judith speaks three times in the poem. First she prays aloud for strength to carry out her plan to execute Holofernes;

⁸¹2-4 (*Heo ðar ða gearwe funde mundbyrd æt ðam mæran þeodne, þa heo ahte mæste þearfe, hylde þæs hehstan deman, þæt he hie wið þæs hehstan brogan gefriðode, frymða waldend. Hyre ðæs fæder on roderum torhtmod tiðe gefremende, þe heo ahte trumne geleafan a to ðam ælmihtigan*).

⁸² The *Judith* poem survives in one manuscript (London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius A xv.) that also contains four other texts including *Beowulf*. It is not known how much material is missing from the beginning of the poem, but the first numbered section is "X" which infers that there may have been as many as nine previous sections.

she speaks again announcing to the people of her village that Holofernes is dead; and finally, she gives an inspiring speech to the Bethulians to spur them to war. Through her act of prayer she exhibits humility, which is in direct contradiction with boasting.

Though there are variations, the figures of Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana each espouse some semblance of a conventional heroic ethos. They exhibit bravery in the face of overwhelming odds; they accept their harsh situations; they are resolved to carry out their intentions; and they also demonstrate a practical wisdom by remaining loyal to kin, community, and—in the cases of Judith and Juliana—to God. Yet, other traits traditionally understood as part of a heroic ethos, like the desire to forge a reputation for oneself (posthumously, if need be) or to be judged favorably by ones companions, are not expressed by these three figures. This deviation from the ideal, along with an enigmatic strength shared with classical and Germanic male warriors, serves to distinguish them from male Anglo-Saxon heroes as well as from the social heroism as demonstrated by Wealhtheow and Hildegyth. To fight is part of what makes an Anglo-Saxon literary hero. It is not enough to merely be present; a battle must take place so readers are able to experience the heroic action. By shifting focus from what Frank calls “a masculine pride of life”⁸³ to a heroic community in which woman are afforded space as fighters, poets constructed a tenable, engaging, female hero.

This new female character type, influenced by a synthesized classical, Germanic, and growing Christian culture, can be considered for both its praiseworthy social performance as well as displaying certain aspects of a traditional heroic ethos. These figures serve as extensions of the women who have been “positioned within the

⁸³ Frank, 90.

Germanic heroic tradition,” such as Wealhtheow,⁸⁴ and “breathing more than a female spirit,” like Seaxburh.⁸⁵ They exercise more agency than the saints acknowledged for their heroism, such as Elene and the myriad of virgin martyrs whose stories were circulating in Britain at the time. These new heroines transcend the traditional Old English hero. Because their stories appear during a time and place in history that was in the midst of transformation, when the Church was actively converting pagans in Britain, poets likely understood that literary heroes, too, were part of this change.

While the mother of Grendel may not immediately come to mind as such a figure, she too has some admirable qualities; she is first a mother, a station which most human beings identify as natural and reputable. Some scholars have noted that both she and Hildeburh perform motherhood in a similar fashion because they have both lost sons.⁸⁶ Like Hildeburh, who is a “sad lady” (*geomuru ides*, 1075), Grendel’s mother too is “sad” (*sorhfulne*, 1278a), which shows her as operating with the sensibilities of a caring mother who suffers the loss of a child in any period in history; the explicit physical manifestation of her sorrow evokes a mother/child bond. That she also takes her son’s remains (“the famous hand”; *heo under heolfre genam*, 1302b) with her when she flees Heorot could reveal a maternal temperament or that she wishes a burial ritual for her dead son, one that includes a body with all its parts.

⁸⁴ Damico, 90.

⁸⁵Phrase from William of Malmesbury’s *Chronicle of the Kings of England from the Earliest Period to the Reign of King Stephen*, transl. by J. A. Giles (London: Bell & Daldy, 1866), 30; and in Christine Fell, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 61, as a reference to Seaxburh (died ca. 674) queen of Wessex.

⁸⁶ Hennequin, 216.

Women in Old English poetry appear infrequently and play limited roles, if any, in events as they unfold.⁸⁷ Even Wealhtheow's expanded performance gives readers little insight into her character apart from her role as Hrothgar's consummate queen. The poets of *Juliana*, *Beowulf*, and *Judith* must have considered this for they created major female characters with depth and breadth that are capable of not only exercising control over their own experiences, but over those of men as well. Without doubt, this is innovative in the literature. Poets understood that for females to participate in the heroic ideal that tradition would naturally change. The examples I have given showcase a few of these identifiable shifts. The following three chapters highlight one way each of these female figures, serving as bridges between the heroic past and an evolving Christian worldview, disrupts Anglo-Saxon literary conventions.

⁸⁷ We see this change with the Christianization of Anglo-Saxon literature when Saints Lives and martyrdoms of men and women become a popular genre; one in which women are often cast as protagonists. This topic is examined in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER II

GRENDDEL'S MOTHER: SYMBOL OF FAITH

Grendel's dam, as she appears in the heroic epic of *Beowulf*,⁸⁸ has long been a subject of much conjecture and provocative hypotheses. Upon early investigations many scholars dismissed her as monstrous, a terrifying figure whose presence only served to elevate Beowulf's heroic role.⁸⁹ Keith Taylor wrote that she is a character "whom scholars tend to regard as an inherently evil creature who like her son is condemned to a life of exile because she bears the mark of Cain."⁹⁰ Later, much of the language that once supplied arguments for this malevolent image was reconsidered and passages in which

⁸⁸ MS. Cotton Vitellius A.xv of the British Museum. To date, there has been no confirmed definitive timeline for the composition of the *Beowulf* poem, however, most scholars agree to place it in the first half of the eighth century; estimates range from 600 to 1000 C.E.. Events described therein take place between the years 450–550 C.E., and the manuscript itself can be dated to about the year 1000 C.E. The first surviving mention of the poem is in 1705 in Humphrey Wanley's catalogue of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts. A hundred years later, Sharon Turner translated roughly 165 lines of it into English verse. The first edition of the poem was published in 1815 by Grimur Jonsson Thorkelin, an Icelandic-Danish scholar who was also involved in its transcription several years earlier. John M. Kemble completed the first English translation in 1837. The first American edition was published in 1882 by James A. Harrison, and the first American translation was by James M. Garnett that same year. This brief history of the composition of *Beowulf* is supplied by Donald K. Fry, *The Beowulf Poet: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Ed. Donald K. Fry (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1968).

⁸⁹ Late nineteenth-century debates among medieval scholars included the ambiguity of certain Old English words in reference to Grendel's mother in the original *Beowulf* manuscript. Because the poet did not supply readers with much information about her nature, appearance, and origin, attention grew and opposing translations developed. In addition to the supposition that both she and her son, Grendel, descended from the biblical murderer Cain, a key contention focused on the Old English compound *ides aglæcwif* (l.1259a) which was likely influenced by the publication of Frederick Klaeber's notable *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (1922). According to Klaeber, *aglæc-wif* translates as "wretch," or "monster of a woman." More specifically, he defines "aglæca/æglæca" as "monster/demon/fiend," when referencing Grendel or Grendel's mother and as "warrior/hero" in reference to Beowulf. Other notable translations of the phrase "aglæc-wif" have included "monstrous hag" (Charles W. Kennedy, 1940), "monster-woman" (Howell D. Chickering, 1989), "Ugly troll-lady" (Richard M. Trask, 1998), more recently, "monstrous hell bride" (Seamus Heaney, 2001), "woman, monster-wife" (E. Donaldson Talbot, and Nicholas Howe, 2002), and, "monstrous woman" (Liuzza, 2013).

⁹⁰ Keith P. Taylor, "The Inherent Nobility of Grendel's Mother," *English Language Notes* 31.3 (1994): 13.

she appears further illuminated enhancing her tarnished image to include more admirable, even honorable, attributes. Kevin Kiernan argues that “by putting aside her monstrous pedigree and the ugly fact that she gave birth to Grendel, a devil’s advocate can find plenty of evidence for defending Grendel’s mother as a heroic figure.”⁹¹ Linguistic evidence that supports this point of view recognizes the Old English *ides* (“lady”) as a term used to describe both Grendel’s mother and women of nobility in the poem.⁹² Nora Kershaw Chadwick and Helen Damico have found evidence linking Grendel’s mother to the Norse Valkyrie tradition. Damico writes:

In both their benevolent and malevolent aspects, the valkyries are related to a generic group of half-mortal, half-supernatural beings called *idisi* in Old High German, *ides* in Old English, and *dis* in Old Norse, plural, *disir*. Both groups are closely allied in aspect and function: they are armed, powerful, priestly. They function as arrangers of destinies and intermediaries between men and the deity [...] The Beowulf poet follows the tradition of depicting the valkyrie-figure as a deadly battle demon in his characterization of Grendel's Mother. As Chadwick has argued, Grendel's Mother, that *wælgæst wæfre* 'roaming slaughter-spirit' epitomizes the earlier concept of the Valkyrie.⁹³

Damico later argues in *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* that Wealhtheow and Grendel’s mother represent different aspects of the Valkyries.⁹⁴

Larry D. Benson pointed out that stories like “Beowulf and its monsters most likely originated in pagan times but have been assimilated into a Christian world view” and identifies the poet’s compassion for the “sad but admirable pagans of his own

⁹¹ Kevin S. Kiernan, “Grendel’s Heroic Mother,” *In Geardagum*, 6 (1984): 31.

⁹² Taylor asserts the term *ides* suggests “Grendel's mother is a woman of inherently noble status.” In “Beowulf 1259a: The Inherent Nobility of Grendel's Mother,” *English Language Notes* 31.3 (March 1994): 18.

⁹³ Helen Damico, “The Valkyrie Reflex in Old English Literature.” In *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, Eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990: 176-190.

⁹⁴ For example, Damico sees Grendel’s mother as “ambisexual as are the *skjaldmeyjar* whom Saxo describes as possessing the bodies of women... but the souls of men.” She states that Grendel’s mother has the “likeness of a woman but is characterized as a *sinnigne secg* (“sinful man”, 1379a). See Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 46; Saxo Grammaticus, *The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus*, trans. Oliver Elton, Norroena Society; rpt. (Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), 310 (Bk. VIII).

time.”⁹⁵ As testament, Wendy Hennequin writes that “the poem expresses both sympathy and admiration in its construction of Grendel’s mother,”⁹⁶ a female whose sensibilities as a parent and tribal leader are undercut only by her violent nature. Most recently, James Paz writes, “Through her ability to signify as more than one thing, Grendel’s mother generates a variety of contradictory readings – and the contradictory character of such readings means she is not, in the end, read at all.”⁹⁷ It appears scholars agree that Grendel’s mother may be viewed in a variety of ways and her character remains largely enigmatic, but this in no way lessens her significance.

The introduction of Grendel’s mother into a fairly traditional Old English heroic poem surely presented a fresh perspective for contemporary audiences. Without doubt, the *Beowulf* poet constructs a variety of noteworthy females performing as wives, queens, mothers, peace-weavers, and weepers. But, halfway through the poem, readers meet an unnamed female distinguished by her relationship to the villain of the story, her silence, her single-parenting, her revenge-seeking ethos, and her warrior combat style; as such, Grendel’s mother presents new considerations for Anglo-Saxon audiences. Is she good or evil? Is she a queen like Wealhtheow or a warrior like Beowulf? Where is Grendel’s father? What of her origin? And, for this author, most perplexing is that Hrothgar knew of her existence (1345a–1357a), so why was her appearance at the mead hall unexpected?

⁹⁵ Larry D. Benson, “The Pagan Coloring of Beowulf,” Reprint from *Old English Poetry: fifteen essays* (Providence: Brown University, 1967), 193.

⁹⁶ Wendy M. Hennequin, “We’ve Created a Monster: The Strange Case of Grendel’s Mother.” *English Studies* 89.5 (2008): 517.

⁹⁷ James Paz, “Æschere’s Head and the Sword that isn’t a Sword: Unreadable Things in *Beowulf*,” in *Nonhuman voices in Anglo-Saxon literature and material culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 40. file:///C:/Users/Kathryn/Downloads/631090%20(2).pdf

For a figure historically “viewed as largely extraneous,”⁹⁸ to quote Jane Chance, she has left readers curious and baffled for decades.

Perhaps the bewilderment arises not from the character of Grendel’s mother but from our assumptions about how the poet and Anglo-Saxons understood the heroic ideal during the time in which they were writing. This chapter will examine how the character of Grendel’s mother marks a transition, not merely a “transition between two great crises,” as in Beowulf’s fight with Grendel and his later encounter with a dragon,⁹⁹ but rather a shift from the Germanic heroic past to a new Anglo-Saxon Christian ideal. I will show that by killing Grendel’s dam, Beowulf is silencing the past (a pagan history that no longer comfortably figures into the current and future Christian climate) and argue that with her death audiences see evil cleansed from the earth and find a renewed faith in mankind.

1 THE CENTRALITY OF GRENDEL’S MOTHER

The entire epic of *Beowulf* can be read as a reflection of change. The story begins in transition with the passing of one king, “good king” (*god cyning*, 11b)¹⁰⁰ Scyld Scefing, to another, Beowulf Scylding, then to the great Healfdene. Like most Old English heroic poems it recounts the achievements of these men as warriors and leaders. Healfdene had four children and one who was most successful in war, Hrothgar. Through his bravery and conquests Hrothgar draws a following, loyal tribesmen willing

⁹⁸ Jane Chance Nitzsche, “The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The Problem of Grendel’s Mother,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22.3 Fall 1980. JSTOR. 136.165.238.131.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Jane Chance, “The Structural Unity of Beowulf. The Problem of Grendel’s Mother.” *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*. Ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 248.

¹⁰⁰ R. M. Liuzza, *Beowulf* (Broadview Editions, 2013). All modern English Translations of *Beowulf* are those of Liuzza unless otherwise noted. All Old English quotes from *Beowulf* are also those of Liuzza unless otherwise noted.

to serve and die for him, so he decides to build a great mead-hall where his troops can gather, boast about their accomplishments, and receive spoils for their efforts on his behalf. According to the poet, this hall is full of joy and music where a talented scop sings Hrothgar's praises and those of his ancestors ("loud in the hall, with the harp's sound, the clear song of the scop. He who knew how to tell the ancient tale of the origin of men [...]").¹⁰¹ In this phrase audiences find familiar examples of the Old English hero and the heroic ideal—a warrior king generous with treasure, and his war band, who is brave and ready to fight and die for the king—a familiar scenario depicted in Tacitus' *Germania* that reinforces traditional ideologies as and found throughout the Old English corpus.¹⁰²

However, the storyline soon changes when readers become aware of a "grim spirit" (*grimma gæst*, 102a) that "the Creator had condemned" (*him Scyppend forscrifan hæfde*, 106) lurking out in the dark and misty fens. The text thereafter becomes a feud between good and evil, light and dark, the Danes against all others; Beowulf as hero and God's representative serving Hrothgar's kingdom versus the Grendel kin, the pagan evil-doers in need of extermination. Once Beowulf kills Grendel, readers are confident that good can prevail but, to the Danes' astonishment, the mother of all evil—Grendel's mother—storms Heorot. The episode in which she appears is in the center of the text. The *Beowulf* poem is comprised of 3180 lines. Jane Chance assigns approximately five hundred lines to the episode with Grendel's mother (1251–1784) and has suggested extending those parameters to one thousand lines (1251–2199).¹⁰³ With either count, this

¹⁰¹ 89–91 (*hludne in healle þær wæs hearpan sweg, swutol sang scopes. Sægde se þe cuþefrumsceaft feorran reccan...*).

¹⁰² See Chance, "The Structural Unity of Beowulf," 249.

¹⁰³ Chance, 248.

places Grendel’s mother at the heart of the story. Others have also recognized this curious positioning. Chance sees the mother’s battle with Beowulf in the middle of the poem as not simply a scene to fill space between Beowulf’s destruction of Grendel and his killing of the dragon.¹⁰⁴ Just as poets and writers of today consider formatting an important part of their work, it is reasonable to suggest an artisan of the past would as well. Hence, the poet positioned Grendel’s mother at the pivotal part of the text for good reason.

Certainly, the scene focuses on and underscores the heroism of Beowulf the Geat; risking his life, he “hasten[s] boldly” (*efste mid elne*, 1494a) to “the surging sea” (*brimwylm onfeng*, 1494b), the “brave soldier” (*hilderince*, 1495a) to battle the “she-wolf” (*brimwylf*, 1506) on her own turf. Therefore, it is undeniable that her character plays a central role in building the hero’s reputation and future career; after all, it is the outcome of this fight with the mother that propels him to fame, glory, and kingship.¹⁰⁵ After Beowulf conquers the Grendel kin and returns to Geatland and King Hygelac, the narrator reveals his local reputation:

He had long been despised,
as the sons of the Geats considered him no good,
nor did the lord of the Weders wish to bestow
many good things upon him on the mead-benches,
for they assumed that he was slothful
a cowardly nobleman.¹⁰⁶

But “reversal came to the glorious man for all his griefs” (*Edwenden swom tireadigum menn torna gehwylces*, 2188b–2189). Like the heroes of many of stories, Beowulf left his home to forge a reputation for himself. Because he performed successfully as heroic

¹⁰⁴ Chance, 248.

¹⁰⁵ See lines 1518–69.

¹⁰⁶ 2183b–2188a (*Hean wæs lange, swa hýne Geata bearn godne ne tealdon, ne hýne on medobence micles wyrðne drihten wereda gedon wolde; swyðe wendon, þæt he sleac wære, æðeling unfrom*).

tradition demands, he earned the respect he desired and became a legend.¹⁰⁷ Before the episode with Grendel's mother, Beowulf was building this reputation; afterward, he had it. In this sense, Grendel's mother serves as king-maker, her overwhelming evil serving as an apt opponent for a man searching for glory.

Prior to Beowulf tracking down Grendel's mother, he found acclaim as the slayer of her son, a crooked monster depicted as a descendant of the biblical murderer Cain, trasher of mead halls, and eater of men. Hrothgar rewards the warrior lavishly for his efforts with great wealth and treasure, and claims him as his adopted son (915–1231). The Danish court now trusts him completely as shown when Queen Wealhtheow personally and publically delivers “wondrous ornamented treasure” (*wratlicne wundurmaððum, ðone þe him Wealhðeo geaf*, 2173–2174). She announces, “men will praise you far and near, forever and ever, as wide as the seas, home of the winds, surround the shores of earth” (*Hafast þu gefered, þæt ðe feor ond neah ealne wideferhþ weras ehtigað efne swa side swa sæ bebugeð windgeard weallas*, 1221b–1226a). There is no denying that Beowulf is moving toward legendary status. Hrothgar tells Beowulf he *will* cherish him, and Wealhtheow declares that men *will* praise him. Certainly, he is known throughout the land of the Danes for his heroism. However, after the defeat of Grendel's mother, Hrothgar declares that Beowulf's glory “*is* exalted throughout the world, over every people” (*Blæd is arærd geond widwegas, wine min Beowulf, ðin ofer þeode gehwylce*, 1703b–1705a); his fame is immediately global. Hence, after his fight with Grendel's dam, Beowulf's journey to manhood, hero, and kingship is complete; he

¹⁰⁷ Like a true Anglo-Saxon hero, Beowulf finds a situation which would ensure his legendary fame: bravely he set out to beat overwhelming odds, accepts the impossible situation, is resolved to carry out his boasts, desires to build a reputation of respect and heroism, and remains loyal to his lords, Hygelac and Hrothgar.

is a living legend no longer in the making. Indeed, the central episode with Grendel's mother is a climactic scene. The encounter alters the course of Beowulf's life, reinforcing his heroic ethos and his status as God's instrument for good.

So, why do modern audiences find Grendel's mother so puzzling and frightening? One reason, perhaps, is that her treatment varies greatly from that of the other female characters. The women of *Beowulf* are largely a reflection of the roles that are afforded them in actual society—in this case queens and aristocratic females dominate. Grendel's mother's depiction is not that of a conventional Anglo-Saxon female. In an important contrast, she lives outside of society, past the woods, “over the murky moor,” over “steep stone cliffs,” in a marshy bog of “troubled water” full of “hot gore” and “strange sea creatures,” “home of sea-monsters”¹⁰⁸ Undoubtedly, this is not conventional lodging for a human being. Heorot is a symbol of the civilized world, a place where kings and nobility gather and feast. Grendel's mother lives outside of this organized world in darkness and isolation and is, therefore, a monster to be feared.

Compared with the men of *Beowulf*, female characters are few. Of the eleven appearing,¹⁰⁹ only six have major roles—Wealhtheow, Hygd, Freawaru, Hildeburh, Grendel's mother, and Thryth—and of those, only two have active parts, Wealhtheow and Grendel's mother. All of their parts are important to the study of Old English

¹⁰⁸ See Liuzza, 1405–1450, for the description of the path taken to and first look at Grendel's mother's realm, before the scene moves under water.

¹⁰⁹ The eleven are as follows: Elan—possibly an incomplete name for Hroðgar's sister; Yrs(e)—a character borrowed from Norse tradition that appears in some translations (e.g., Burton Raffel) as an edit of line 62, where Hrothgar's sister is mentioned; Hroðgar's sister (unnamed here but known as *Signy* in Norse tradition (*Skjöldunga saga* and *Hrólfr Kraki's saga*); Beowulf's mother (unnamed but identified as Hrethel the Geat's daughter in lines 374–375); Freawaru—the daughter of King Hroðgar and Queen Wealhtheow and wife of Ingeld, king of the Heaðobards; Grendel's mother—one of three antagonists (along with Grendel and the dragon); Hildeburh—the daughter of the Danish king Hoc and wife of the Finn, king of the Frisians; Hygd—queen of the Geats and wife of King Hygelac; Thryth (or Modthryth)—a princess, later queen, who punished inferiors for looking at her directly in the eye, marries Offa of Angel; Wealhtheow—queen of the Danes, married to Hroðgar; Weeping woman at Beowulf's funeral.

literature and no matter how small the roll, speaking or silent, each has an impact on readers in some way. Here, however, it is Grendel's mother under investigation, and the presence of the other characters reminds readers that she is an anomaly and an exceptional figure in the story.

Significantly, it has been suggested that the women of *Beowulf* are defined by their relationships to their men and those behaviors deemed appropriate for their supporting roles. Setsuko Haruta writes:

The audience often forgets that meadhalls shelter not only men but also women. Our attention is first attracted to the male characters in the poem since, in that masculine-oriented society, only men can assert themselves in dramatic moments, as warriors and as decision-makers. The female characters, on the other hand, appeal to the audience chiefly through their passive sufferings. In *Beowulf*, all but one out of eleven female characters are introduced chiefly in connection with their husbands or fiancés or with their children. They are obviously expected to play subordinate roles.¹¹⁰

Haruta goes on to identify these roles as peace-weavers, royal hostesses, and queen mothers. While it is clear that Grendel's dam, too, is defined by one male, her son, her role transcends the traditional; we do not know her as a peace-weaver, a hostess, or a queen mother, although this last point should be qualified as a "queen mother" in the traditional sense.¹¹¹ Thus, one of the ways the portrayal of Grendel's mother can be viewed as a break with tradition is by comparing her to the other females in the text.

¹¹⁰ Setsuko Haruta, "The Women in Beowulf." *Poetica* (Tokyo) 23 (1986): 1.

¹¹¹ Haruta, 1.

Perhaps the most recognized role for the women of *Beowulf* is that of “peace-weaver” (*freoðu-webban*).¹¹² Here, both queens Wealhtheow and Thryth (or Modhryth as she is also known) are declared peace-weavers by the poet.¹¹³ The custom of marrying a daughter to the son of a rival tribe in effort to settle the feuding between them can be an interesting prospect but often their only noteworthy performance is as cup-bearer during assemblies and securing futures for their offspring. A male heir can strengthen the bond between families. Unfortunately, the peace-weaving tradition is also risky and can end with tragic consequences; the rekindling of an old grudge or a childless marriage can result in the lady being sent away from the household in shame. Wealhtheow as a successful peace-weaver is generally viewed as the proverbial “good queen,” benevolent and subservient to her husband the king and caring for their children. Her status as hostess to the royal house and queen mother affords her an honored place in the narrative. Helen Damico has observed “a corroboration outside *Beowulf* for the concept of Wealhtheow as an ideal queen.”¹¹⁴ These lines underscore her ideal behavior:

¹¹² Jane Chance defines a peace-weaving, or “peace-pledge” (*frīðusibb*) as a political and social function whereby a noble woman is expected “to make peace between two tribes by literally mingling their blood.” In Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1986), 1. Elements of the peace-weaving tradition can be found throughout Old English poetry (The Wife’s Lament, Wulf and Eadwacer, and Beowulf). The notion of peace-weaving, and the term itself, has been of interest to many scholars for some time whereby some have studied both literary and historical figures to get a better handle on the essence of the term and how it is used. Notably, the actual term peace-weaver (*freoðuwebbe*) is only found three times in the entire Old English corpus.

¹¹³ The term *freoðuwebbe* is used only once in the poem; line 1942 in reference to Thryth; “That is no queenly custom for a lady to perform—no matter how lovely—that a peace-weaver should deprive of life a friendly man after a pretended affront” (*Ne bið swylc cwenlic þeaw idese to enfanne, þeah ðe hio ænlicu sy, þætte freoðuwebbe feores onsæce æfter ligetorne leofne mannan*, Liuzza, 1940b–43). And, in line 2017, Wealhtheow is described as “bond of peace of nations.” At times the famous queen [Wealhtheow], bond of peace to nations, passed through the hall, urged on her young sons; often she gave twisted rings before she took her seat” (*Hwilum mæru cwen, frīðusibb folca flet eall geonðhwearf, bædde byre geonge; oft hio beahwriðan secge (sealed), ær hie to setle geong*, Liuzza, 216b–19.) While it has been noted that these expressions differ somewhat, in that a peace-weaver implies the woman holds a significant position within the group to which she was married and the other suggests a link between two rival clans, both essentially carry the same sentiment.

¹¹⁴ Helen Damico, *Beowulf’s Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 21.

Wealhtheow went forth,
Hrothgar's queen, mindful of customs;
adorned with gold, she greeted the men in the hall,
then that courteous wife offered the full cup¹¹⁵

In this passage we witness the actions of an exemplary peace-weaver and queen. She is “mindful of customs,” “courteous,” as well as “excellent of heart” (*mode gepungen*, 623). She also speaks “wise words” (*wisfæst wordum*, 626) and provides sound advice. All of these social graces earned her the respect of the Danes and helped her maintain her honorable reputation. Hygd, Hygelac's queen, is also presented as an admirable peace-weaving queen. Of her, the poet writes:

...Hygd very young,
wise, well-mannered, though few winters
had the daughter of Hæreth passed within
the palace walls—yet not poor for that,
nor stingy of gifts to the Geatish people,
of great treasures.¹¹⁶

Similar to the portrayal of Wealhtheow's character, the poet provides us a depiction of Hygd as a noble lady; she is “wise,” “well-mannered,” and “not stingy” in gift-giving. Through the commendable performances of both queens audiences are able to recognize the values admired in and upheld by women in society.

Another sign of a genteel queen is her performance as hostess, an essential task for a queen and peace-weaver as they are often found serving men from other clans within the halls of their own kingdom. A hostess is in charge of the all-important mead cup which is offered to the thanes in a defined order; the king is first, followed by the next highest in rank (or those being recognized, celebrated, or received), and so on.

¹¹⁵ 612b–615 (*Eode Wealhþeow forð, cwen Hroðgares cynna gemyndig, grette goldhrodene guman on helle, and þa freolic wif ful gesealde*).

¹¹⁶ 1926b–1931a (...*Hygd swiðe geong, wis welþungen, þeah ðe wintra lyt under burhlocan gebiden hæbbe, Hæreþes dohtor; næs hio hnah swa þæh, ne to gneað gifa Geata leodum maþmgestreona*).

Understanding the correct procedure and order is crucial to performing the role correctly. Dorothy Carr Porter writes, “This [role of hostess] appears to be a relatively unimportant function until one reads carefully and examines how this duty is carried out.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, as the king’s agent, the hostess serves to strengthen the bond between the king and his men, as well as between the king and neighboring tribes whose fragile moment of peace can shatter in an instant. The ritual is demonstrated in lines 1169–1191 when Wealhtheow, acting as cup-bearer, first presents the cup to Hrothgar while flattering him with kind words, then to Beowulf as she provides sound advice, then to the others.¹¹⁸ Thus, performing successfully according to social customs is key for a woman who wants to establish herself and earn the respect of not only her husband, the king or lord, but also the *comitatus*, and keep peace between rivals.

In addition to being hostesses, both Wealhtheow and Hygd are also named by the poet as gift-givers, yet another indication of an ideal queen. Generosity (as seen through Hygd’s openhandedness in passing out treasure) is not only socially appropriate; it is required of kings, queens, and heroes, and, it is a custom valued by the king’s loyal retainers. Examples of charitable queens can be found throughout Old English literature. In *Beowulf*, we see Wealhtheow presenting the Geat with breast-mail and a neck-torque from the Danes’ armory (1216–1218). Another example is found in *Widsith* when Ealhild, Eadwine’s daughter and wife of Eormanric, provides Widsith the scop with a bejeweled collar and he, in turn, pays tribute by singing her praises throughout the land

¹¹⁷ Dorothy Carr Porter, “The Social Centrality of Women in *Beowulf*: a New Context,” *The Heroic Age* 5 (2001), <http://heroicage.org/issues/5/porter1.html>. n.p.

¹¹⁸ Porter, 1169–1191.

for years to come.¹¹⁹ By having female characters presented as model weavers-of-peace, hostesses, and treasure-givers, like Wealhtheow¹²⁰ and Hygd, audiences are able to discern what is and what is not appropriate for women, at least in the literature.

In addition to the successful peace-weaver, audiences encounter women who are ineffective and, no matter how great their effort, succumb to the shortcomings of social practices. Haruta draws attention to Hildeburh, who appears in the *Finnesburh* episode¹²¹ underscoring that she is the only female among six male characters who are all active and all have names but one, stating that “Hildeburh’s appearance is confined to the embodiment of innocence and helplessness, she makes no decisions on her own and the only act assigned to her is to mourn the dead.”¹²² Like Ealhild, Hildeburh is lauded by a scop.¹²³ Unfortunately, however, as her story unfolds, audiences learn she is a “sad lady” (*geomuru ides*, 1075b). As daughter of a Danish king, she is sent as peace-pledge to wed Finn, the Jute and king of the Frisians; however (and there is some confusion as to how this occurs), a battle breaks out once again between the Danes and the Frisians and her “dear ones” fall during the slaughter - her brother, Hnæf, and her son, who fought against

¹¹⁹ The figure of Ealhild can be found in the anachronistic Old English poem *Widsith*, a name understood as both title of the poem and author, is essentially a long listing of legendary kings and kingdoms the poet visited during his career. It is located in The Exeter Book, a manuscript compiled in the late tenth-century containing approximately one sixth of all surviving Old English poetry. Exeter, Cathedral Library, Dean and Chapter MS 3501, fols. 84v-87r. Identified by the poet as a “beloved peace-weaver” Ealhild is sent to the wed and create a bond with the notorious Gothic King Eormanric. In one instance, after Eormanric bestows a “collar in which there was six hundred coins/ worth of pure gold,” Ealhild generously gives him another.

¹²⁰ It should be noted that Helen Damico received much attention for her comparison of Wealhtheow to a Norse mythological Valkyrie figure, a review which this author finds somewhat of a stretch and still includes Wealhtheow’s character among the more traditional familial female roles. While it is certain that Wealhtheow cannot be dismissed as simply a passive female character, her actions largely support those traditionally afforded women in Old English poetry. Helen Damico, *Beowulf’s Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984).

¹²¹ The *Battle of Finnesburh* is considered a “digression” in the main story of *Beowulf*. In Liuzza, 1070–1159.

¹²² Haruta, 2.

¹²³ 1071–1158. Hildeburh was the daughter of the king of the Danes who was wed to the king of the Jutes, Finn. Her story is recounted in a lay by a scop to Hrothgar’s court after Beowulf’s victory over Grendel.

each other, are killed, and her husband, Finn, also dies at the end of the lay. With no men and, therefore, no household, the victorious Scyldings take the failed peace-weaver back to the Danes.

This scene of mourning is reminiscent of another role afforded women in Old English poetry, the weeping female, as she is described in Chapter One and recounted in Tacitus' *Germania*.¹²⁴ Among others in the literature, a weeping female can be found in the last episode of the *Beowulf* poem, XLIII; when King Beowulf dies after fifty years of ruling the Geats, among the lamenting is heard "a sorrowful song" sung by a "Geatish woman" (*swylce giomorgyd Geatisc meowle æfter Biowulfe bundenheorde sang sorgcearig*, 3150–3152).¹²⁵ Evidently, a weeping or crying woman is a mark of esteem for the man whom she is grieving. Like the weeping female, we are told that Grendel's mother's demeanor is grieving and sad, but she is not depicted as shedding actual tears.

Freawaru, Hrothgar and Wealhtheow's daughter, is also cast as failed peace-weaver. Betrothed to Ingeld, son of Froda and king of the Heaðobards, she fails to cultivate harmony between two nations (the Heaðobards and the Danes). Her story is recounted at the Geatish court by Beowulf upon his return home from Daneland and serves to highlight the fragile state of a bond between two previously feuding tribes and the risk it places on the woman involved; all it takes is a moment when the old enemy recognizes a symbol, such as a sword, worn during a prior battle and old differences

¹²⁴ "Close at hand, too, are their dearest, whence is heard the wailing voice of woman..." Tacitus, *Dialogus, Agricola, Germania*, trans. by William Peterson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1946), 143. Other examples are found in the sorrowful voice of *The Wife's Lament* as she "weeps out the woes of exile" (trans. by Michael Alexander, *The First Poems in English*, Penguin Books, 2008), 63; and, in the narrative voice of *Wulf and Eadwacer* where she "wept by the hearth" thinking of her Wulf (also translated by Alexander, same edition).

¹²⁵ Liuzza notes some questions regarding this passage because of damage to the manuscript.

become rekindled.¹²⁶ As peace-weaver and good hostess, she appropriately passes the mead-cup to the “earls in the back” (*eorlum on ende*, 2021b) of the hall in lines 2022–2025.¹²⁷ Although “young” and “gold-adorned” (*geong goldhrodene*, 2025a) and hopeful of bringing two feuding kingdoms together as Ingeld’s wife, she too appears condemned to a heart-rending fate when the poet writes, “But seldom anywhere after the death of a prince does the deadly spear rest for even a brief while, though the bride be good!” This foretelling reminds audiences that peace-weaving is risky and can easily end in tragedy. As such, it appears, women’s fates, at least textually, are truly in the hands of men.

Gillian R. Overing sums it up accurately when she writes:

I want to emphasize the most outstanding characteristic of the peace-weaver, especially as we see her in *Beowulf* is her inevitable failure to be a peace-weaver; the task is never accomplished, the role is never fully assumed, the woman is never identified. [. . .] It is, as we shall see, an essentially untenable position, predicated on absence.¹²⁸

This being the case, the implication is that the fates of these women are predetermined; the demands placed upon them are insurmountable and any success is short-lived at best. As Overing explains, “Women have no place in the death-centered, masculine economy of *Beowulf*; they have no space to occupy, to speak.”¹²⁹ This supports much of the contention and discussion presented in chapter one of this project: because Anglo-Saxon culture is patriarchal and chiefly centered on war, death, the *comitatus*, and other qualities subject to the heroic ideal, and women do not participate within in this system the same way as men, it is inevitable that many literary female characters meet heartbreaking ends.

¹²⁶ See lines 2020–2069.

¹²⁷ “At times before the hall-thanes the daughter of Hrothgar bore the ale-cup to the earls in the back - Freawaru, I heard the men in the hall call her, when the studded treasure-cup was passed among them. She is promised, young, gold-adorned, to the gracious son of Froda.” Liuzza, 2022–25.

¹²⁸ Gillian R. Overing, *Language, Sign and Gender in Beowulf* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 74.

¹²⁹ Overing, xxiii.

2 BREAKING WITH TRADITION

Thus far, I have provided examples of some of the traditional roles afforded to aristocratic women in poetry whose performances support ideal Anglo-Saxon behaviors. Although their outcomes vary, many of these roles find their roots in Germanic heroic tradition.¹³⁰ Yet, the poet also presents female characters whose traits meet with disapproval. There is a tendency here among scholars to include Grendel's mother with this group. However, because she is not represented as completely human and not part of (or associated with) the Danish or Geatish kingdoms, like all of the others in this story, I do not situate her among them.

For some, Thryth represents the proverbial evil or wicked queen whose story is told in order to contrast her cruelty—she is known for killing men who look upon her—with Hygd's gentle behavior. The poet describes her as a bad queen, guilty of “terrible crimes” (*firen ondrysne*, 1932), who abuses her power.¹³¹ Conversely, she is also a “famous folk queen” (*fremu folces cwen*, 1932), “lovely” (*þæg ðe hio ænlicu sy*, 1941), and a “peace-weaver” (*freoðuwebbe*, 1942). In some ways, like Grendel's mother, she too is an enigma. In addition to the juxtaposition in language, there are questions about her left unanswered. For instance: Who is the prince that can look upon her when all

¹³⁰ As a precaution, I refer to Patrizia Lendinara's short 2001 article when she writes: “The advent of another Germanic power, the Norman empire, was also a political upheaval for England, and effectively put an end to the Anglo-Saxon period. In several instances, because of these cultural intersections, it is not easy to decide if a certain ‘Germanic’ feature is a common inheritance of Germanic Western Europe, or the result of the relations of England with the rest of north-western Europe. The poet using a certain literary topos (such as the ‘ideal of the men dying with their lord’ in *The Battle of Maldon*) did not necessarily look backwards to Germania, but rather, around the corner to Europe.” In Patrizia Lendinara, “The Germanic Background,” *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, eds. Philip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 132.

¹³¹ Thryth was famous for punishing subordinate men of court who looked at her the wrong way. She appears in lines 1931b–1962.

others cannot? How can she be a peace-weaver before she is married to Offa?¹³² Yet, these answers, while not easily explained away, do not include a supernatural spirit associated with her character. Some conclude she was married twice; the “prince” mentioned could have been her husband and when he left (either he died or rejected her), she remarries. It also seems reasonable that, as Liuzza interprets, no man dared look upon her “except the prince himself” (i.e., her father). It has also been pointed out that because the leaves in which she appears are damaged, some of the writing cannot be effectively deciphered. Tom Shippey surmises, for example, that “the first half-line with which she is introduced, *mod þyðo wæg*, has been read in at least five different ways to produce the names Modthrytho, Thrytho, or Thryth, but the simplest if at the same time least attractive solution to the crux would be to take *modþryðo* as not a name at all, being instead a compound noun exactly parallel to *Genesis 2238b*, *hygeþryðe wæg*, ‘showed violence of character.’”¹³³ Like Grendel’s mother, then, her epithet is telling. However, in contrast to the mother, once Thryth becomes Offa’s bride her “bad” ways are reformed and she becomes “famous for good things, used well her life while she had it, held high love with that chief of heroes” (*ðær hio syðan well in gumstole, gode mære lifgesceafta lifigende breac, hiold heahlufan wið hæleþa brego*, 1951b–1944). Damico suggests once wed, she is transformed from an evil to virtuous queen, “from fierce war-demon to gold-adorned warrior-queen.”¹³⁴ While this appears an overstatement, as I do not find evidence Thryth is a “warrior” in the literal or traditional sense, she is rewarded for her conversion. The primary indication is that she lives while Grendel’s mother dies. The poet shows us

¹³² Offa is a fourth-century king of the Angles also appearing in Norse tradition, not to be confused with King Offa of the Mercians (d. 786 C.E.).

¹³³ Tom Shippey, “Wicked Queens and Cousin Strategies in Beowulf and Elsewhere,” *The Heroic Age* 5 (2001): 14 April 2007. <http://heroicage.org/issues/5/Shippey1.html>.

¹³⁴ Damico, 180.

that Thryth is able to reform and lead an honorable life whereas Grendel's dam is "justifiably" killed by Beowulf ("Ruler of the heavens, decided it rightly"; *rodera Rædend hit on ryht gesced*, 1555); Thryth is embraced by society while Grendel's mother is rejected.

Although Thryth is considered a disturbing character, separated from the other queens by her viciousness, she is still respected in some ways. The poet writes "that is no queenly custom for a lady to perform" (*Ne bið swylc cwenlic þeaw idese to efnanne*, 1939b–1940a). With this phrase he makes clear her behavior is not that of a "queen," but she is a queen. A few lines later we are told her actions "caused less calamity" and "malicious evil" (*læs gefremede inwitniða*, 1946b–7) after she was married; it is understood that she is not a benevolent figure, though she is not described as innately monstrous. On the contrary, we know her as a "peace-weaver" (*freoðuwebbe*, 1942), "lovely" (*ænlicu*, 1941b), and "gold-adorned" (*goldhrodene*, 1948a). It is her behavior that is rebuked, not her nature. There are scholars who have labelled both Thryth and Grendel's mother as "strife-weavers,"¹³⁵ antitheses to the "peace-weavers" like Wealhtheow and Hildeburh, who are praised highly for their conduct throughout the poem. I disagree. The flattering epithets credited to Thryth place her among the four conventional queens. We know she is a "peace-weaver" and Wealhtheow is a "bond of peace to nations" (*friðusibb folca*, 2018a). Also, once married to Offa and reformed, she becomes "famous for good things" (1952b) and Wealhtheow is a "famous queen" (2017b). Additionally they are both are "gold adorned" (Wealhtheow, 614a and 640b, and Thryth, 1948a), as is Freauwaru (2025a). Furthermore, Thryth "used her life well"

¹³⁵ "Strife-weaver" is a term used by Dorothy Carr Porter in "The Social Centrality of the Women of *Beowulf*: A New Context 5 (2001) 29 August 2017. <http://heroicage.org/issues/5/porter1.html>.

(*lifgesceafta lifigende breac*, 1953). As testament to her goodness, Thryth *lives* to wed Offa and possibly have children. With the destruction of Grendel's mother, any hope of a future for her people is destroyed forever.

3 MALE DOMINATION

Thryth, like all *Beowulf* women except one, is subject to the patriarchal system. After her mysterious "prince" is gone, her father marries her to King Offa of the Angles, sending her away to live abroad with a new husband of his choosing "over the fallow sea at her father's wish" (*ofer fealone flod be fæder lare siðe gesohte*, 1951a–1952a), where she must live according to the dictates of the new dominant man in her life. Likewise, when Hildeburh's male relations are no more, she is "led" (*Læddon to leodum*, 1159) over the sea back to Daneland. Freawaru is betrothed to "Froda," (or Ingeld, prince of the Heathobards), as "the ruler of the Scyldings has arranged this" (*gladum suna Frodan; hafað þæs geworden wine Scyldinga*, 2025b–2026); thus, Hrothgar, her father, decided her fate although he was aware of the risks, as her episode (2020–2029) warns of broken pacts, dead husbands, and the hopeless wife. While these women are powerless without a male relative, Grendel's mother appears emboldened by death of her son. When he is gone, she is not banished from her land or subject to control. There is no male to return her to her people as there was for Hildeburh,¹³⁶ who suffers terribly, not because she does anything wrong, for we know she was exemplary, but because she is her father's daughter and her husband's wife; nor does any man send her as peace-weaver, for what appears to

¹³⁶ 1154–1158a ("The Scylding bowmen... On their sea journey they bore that noble queen [Hildeburh] back to the Danes and led her to her people"; *Sceotend Scyldinga... Hie on sælade drihtlice wif to Denum feredon, læddon to leodum*).

be a second time, to a faraway land as with Thryth.¹³⁷ Grendel's mother is not sent anywhere; she decides, in haste and alone, to attack the people that took her child from her. On her own authority, she takes charge exercising the code of revenge for the wrong done her family.

The poet makes clear that Grendel's mother lived without other males in the household except her son before he died ("They knew no father"; *no hie fæder cunnon*, 1355b). Grendel was her "only offspring" (*angan eaferan*, 1547a) and only two figures have been seen in the moors by the Danes ("they [Hrothgar's men] have seen two such creatures, great march-stalkers holding the moors, alien spirits. The second of them, as far as they could discern most clearly, had the shape of a woman; the other, misshapen, marched the exile's path in the form of a man.")¹³⁸ Thus, without a husband, father figure, son, or male relative to make decisions for her, she is left to her own devices; again, the poet provides her agency. It seems reasonable to explore the notion that her fate rests with Beowulf. While he is not her relation, he is the man that kills her, so one could infer that men do have determinative power over women in many ways. However, this idea is quickly dispelled by the uncertainty regarding Beowulf's effectiveness against the "she-wolf" (*brimwylf*, 1506a) as well as outcome of their fight. Beowulf had no assurance of triumph. On the contrary, the troops accompanying him on his task "did not expect that nobleman would return" (*þæt hig þæs æðelinges eft ne wendon, þæt he sigenreðing*, 1596–1597a), and at one point he would have died "had not his armored shirt offered him help" (*nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede*, 1552). The win could

¹³⁷ 1949b–1951a ("when to Offa's floor she sought a journey over the fallow sea at her father's wish, where she afterwards on the throne..."; *syðan hio Offan flet ofer fealone flod be fæder lare siðe gesohte...*).

¹³⁸ 1347–1352 (*þæt hie fesawon swylce twegen micle mearscapan moras healdan, ellorfæstas. Ðæra oðer wæs, þæs þe hie gewislicost gewitan meahton, idese onlicnes; oðer earmsceapen on weres wæstmum wræclastas træd*).

easily have been hers. This language serves to empower Grendel's mother with some authority, leaving readers believing, if only temporarily, that she is capable of victory. Therefore, and unlike the other women in the narrative, she resists his efforts to suppress her.

Her fate, along with Beowulf's, rest with the Almighty. After their encounter, the narrator informs readers that God made the ultimate decision regarding the outcome of the battle, ("holy God brought about war-victory"; *ond halig God geweold wigsigor*, 1553b–1554a). This line, above all others, explains the new world order. Before the hero's battle with the *merewif*, Beowulf was acting on his own accord. He did not seek Heorot at God's behest nor did he slay Grendel with God's help. At the beginning of the poem, Beowulf and the Geats appear, in the words of Larry D. Benson, "emphatically pagan and exceptionally good."¹³⁹ As a good man and Hygelac's thane, Beowulf heard of the Dane's plight and "commanded" his king (*het hm yðlidan*, 198b) to allow him to go to Heorot. Before he left on his journey "wise men" (*snotere ceorlas*, 202b) "inspected the omens" (*hæl sceawedon*, 204b). However, after the encounter with Grendel's mother, when Beowulf had made good on his boast and ridded the Danes of "the sinful creature" (*sinnigne secg*, 1379a), the poet tells us "the wise Lord, Ruler of the heavens, decided it rightly" (*witig Drihten, rodera Rædend hit on ryht gesced...*, 1554b–1555); that God had given Beowulf the "greatest might of all mankind" (*ac he mancynnes mæste cræfte ginfæstan gife, þe him God sealed*, 2181–2182). From this, audiences glean that God now holds sway over all mankind. There is no place for heathens here, and God strikes down evil where it exists.

¹³⁹ Benson, 194.

The death of Grendel's mother is a sign that this conversion is taking place. The poet must have been aware of this changing world-view, constructing his story in such a way that good Christians would understand how Beowulf is only made more powerful through God's command. As such, the episode builds faith for audiences as they see Beowulf and God make the world a safer place.

3.1 A Masculine Heroic Ethos

Although we find that Grendel's mother meets with a miserable end, it is not a byproduct of literary conventions (i.e., she is not exiled as a failed peace-weaver) or a traditional heroic ethos. Grendel's mother is neither passive nor accepting of her fate, nor does her nature fully embrace social female norms. She does, however, share a couple of similarities with the other women in *Beowulf*: she is identified as having a female form (*idese onlicnes*, 1351a), she is a mother (*modor*, 1258b), and she grieves upon her son's death, appropriately so. Thus, another reason for her startling impact is her ambiguity. Her abstruse character can only be likened to two others in the Old English poetic corpus, Judith and Cynewulf's Juliana, whose female bodies are also said to be conflated with the masculine heroic ideal. While saints are not depicted as monstrous, like Grendel's dam, they do possess some supernatural qualities that make audiences hesitant; the first and foremost of which is what Gillian Overing has called "her particular brand of otherness"¹⁴⁰ whose true nature "escapes definition";¹⁴¹ she is a nameless, voiceless "female" who acts outside gender conventions by engaging in what Anglo-Saxons would have considered masculine violence.

¹⁴⁰ Overing, in James Paz, *Nonhuman voices in Anglo-Saxon literature and material culture* (Oxford University Press, 2017). Accessed 8 August. 2017. n.p.

¹⁴¹ Carolyn Anderson, "Gæst, Gender and Kin in Beowulf." *The Heroic Age* 5 (2001). 14 Sept. 2017. <http://heroicage.org/issues/5/Anderson1/html>.

Grendel's mother embodies both female sensibilities and a traditional male heroic ethos in a variety of ways. First, she is a mother. That the poet refers to her only as "Grendel's mother" (*Grendles moðer*, 1258b) surely means that audiences are supposed to understand her from this perspective. We know that for Anglo-Saxons motherhood was a respected state; giving birth and raising children with the goal of grooming an heir is a cultivated value observed by Tacitus and found throughout the *Beowulf* text.¹⁴² Gwendolyn A. Morgan points out that five ladies (*idesa*) in the story share the common bond of motherhood and concern for their children; of those, Grendel's mother, Hildeburh, and Hygd each suffer the loss of a child.¹⁴³ Early on it is clear that Grendel's dam is more than just a villain. From her first appearance in the poem (1258), we learn she is a mother and that she is "sad" (1278) because her son has been mortally injured in a brawl. Her reaction to his passing is a human one which enables audiences to see her as more than a vile monster's mother. It softens her persona, making her more complex; grieving the loss of a loved one is a human trait, one that links contemporary and modern audiences. While we have no way of knowing if Grendel's mother experiences "love" as we know it, her grief makes her human (or at least partly human), and enables readers to view her in a more sympathetic light. In her angst, audiences are also able to appreciate the full impact of Grendel's passing. That is, as a mother during Anglo-Saxon times, she loses both a child and an heir, for we are told that Grendel was "her only

¹⁴² Examples are numerous. In *Germania*, "a soldier brings his wounds to mother and wife" (7); and, children of the lawful wife were the first heirs (20). We also see the importance of motherhood reflected throughout the *Beowulf* poem, most notably is Wealhtheow's plea to Beowulf to be kind to her sons "keeping them in joys" (1170–1192).

¹⁴³ Gwendolyn A. Morgan, "Mothers, Monsters, Maturation: Female Evil in *Beowulf*," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 4.1 (1991): 60. Wealhtheow asks Beowulf to protect her young sons, Hreðric and Hroðmund, and reminds her nephew, who eventually does usurp the throne, of his obligations; Thryth reforms when she marries Offa and eventually produces a son who rules as well as his father; Hildeburh loses both her son and her brother in a blood feud; Hygd, Hygelac's queen of the Geats, loses her son, Heardred, in a feud; Grendel's mother attacks in retaliation for her son's death.

offspring” (*angan eaferan*, 1547), and with his passing the bloodline dies out. In the Germanic tradition, having no heir can have real, negative consequences.¹⁴⁴ An heir ensures that the tribe lives on and the kingdom is secure; Anglo-Saxon aristocratic women were not just rearing sons: they were grooming kings and, as such, drew much of their importance from this highly regarded position. Unlike women in reality, and without regard for tradition, Grendel’s mother retaliates in a warrior-like fashion not unaccepting of her fate.

Grendel’s dam is a warrior in a customary sense as seen via Tacitus’ examples of Germanic women going to war with their men to show their support and fight.¹⁴⁵ At *Aquae Sextiae*¹⁴⁶ women fought when it was obvious that their encouragement was no longer enough. On this battlefield remains of armed women were found after a Germanic raid into Rhaetia. Another historical account of the battle recalls Aeronic women “frenzied with rage and grief,” and “smiting like fugitives and pursuers.”¹⁴⁷ Grendel’s mother is depicted in much the same light, “grim-minded” (*gifre ond galgmod*, 1277a) and “sad” (*sorhfulne*, 1278a). The poet also tells readers she lives in “some sort of battle-hall” (*nathwylcum niðsele*, 1513) and upon the first strike of Beowulf’s blade he

¹⁴⁴ According to Julie Mumby, “for Anglo-Saxons customary rules are thought to have governed the cross-generational transmission of family land (i.e., land passed from one generation to the next within a small group of closely-related persons), but the surviving sources reveal little of what these rules involved. From the *Historia abbatum*, Bede’s early eighth-century history of the foundation of his monastery at Wearmouth-Jarrow and of its abbots, it has been inferred that family land was divided among sons, with the first-born taking precedence.” Found in “Anglo-Saxon Inheritance,” *Early English Laws*, University of London—Institute of Historical Research / King’s College London, 2017. Of note, it has been discovered that there are instances in which a female may have inherited land(s) under certain circumstances. In the early ninth century, the West Saxon King Ecgberht confirmed the possession of ten hides at Woolland (Dorset) by three sisters, Beornwyn, Ælflæd and *Walenburch* (S 277). The charter states that the women had inherited the estate and partitioned it among themselves.

¹⁴⁵ Tacitus, *Germania*, 143. 8.

¹⁴⁶ The Battle of *Aquae Sextiae* took place in 102 B. C. E. in Aix-en-Provence, France. After many defeats, the Romans under Gaius Marius finally triumph over the Teutones and Ambrones.

¹⁴⁷ Victor Duruy, *From Its Origin to the Establishment of the Christian Empire*, Vol. 2 (K. Paul, Trench & Company, 1884), 449.

discovers that her head is impenetrable, even more dense than the helmets and war-garments the blade had previously destroyed; thus, her dwelling can be likened to a warrior king's hall, and her skin, or her dressing, can be equated to battle armor or protective coverings worn by men during battle. Moreover, she fights like the men of *Beowulf* fight, with her bare hands, handling her attacker one-on-one, throwing him to the ground and slashing at him with a knife (*hyre seaxe*, 1545). The poet acknowledges both contestants as bold, powerful, and capable; Beowulf grabs Grendel's mother by the shoulder and she falls, but "quickly she gave him requital for that with a grim grasp" (*Heo him eft hraþe handeleaƿ forgeald grimman grapum*, 1541–1542a). These realistic details of fighting certainly provide a harrowing description of two dangerous warriors in combat, as exciting as any others in the battle poetry.

Grendel's mother may also be "lord of her manor," for there is no husband/king to be found. The poet tells us, "They [the Grendels] knew no father" (*no hie fæder cunnon*, 1356b); thus, it is the mother who oversees the realm. And, the fact that she avenges the death of her son, alone, implies she may be the last of her clan. Lisa M. Bitel reminds us of Anglo-Saxon England's most famous example of an independent female ruler:

Æthelflæd, daughter of King Alfred the Great, governed Mercia jointly with her husband until his ill health and death in 911 left the kingdom in her hands. She assumed all the public powers that went with governance until her own death in 918. She maintained the law, oversaw the army, and played politics with other rulers of England.¹⁴⁸

As is evident, it was not entirely a foreign concept for a female to hold land and act accordingly.

¹⁴⁸ Lisa M. Bitel, *Women in Early Medieval Europe, 400–1100*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 89.

Moreover, it is clear that the Grendel kin live in some sort of kingdom. The poet tells us “she who held that expanse of water... for a hundred half-years” (*se ða floda begone heorofigre beheold hund missera*, 1497b–1498) which is fifty years, the same amount of time that Hrothgar rules the Danes and Beowulf rules the Geats. Hrothgar confirms his awareness of an occupied area in the fells when he tells Beowulf of “great march-stalkers holding the moors” (*micle mearcstapan moras healdan*, 1348) protected by surging water making it difficult to breach. It takes Beowulf more than a day’s swim to reach the bottom¹⁴⁹ where he perceives the “battle-hall” (*niðsele*, 1513a) filled with “fire-light” (*geseah fyrleoht*, 1516b) containing “armor” (*searwum*, 1557a) many “precious treasures” (*Ne nom he in þæm wicum, Weder-Geata leod, maðmæhta ma, þeh he þær monige geseah*, 1612–1613), a “victorious blade” (*signeeadig bil*, 1557b), and a “couch” which held Grendel’s corpse (*to ðæs þe he on ræste geseah*, 1585b). There appears, here, to be all of the accoutrements which are typical in descriptions of fine halls at the time. Hrothgar’s grand Heorot is a “shining building” that is embellished with “many a wondrous sight” where “gold-dyed tapestries shone on the walls” (*Goldfag scinon web æfter wagum, wundorsiona fela*, 994b–995; *Wæs þæt beorhte bold...*, 997a). Kevin Leahy and Michael Lewis find archaeological evidence for furniture in finer Anglo-Saxon dwellings such as tables and benches.¹⁵⁰ As queen of the Grendel kingdom, Grendel’s mother’s lair would be no less decorated.

Most reminiscent of a masculine heroic ethos is Grendel’s mother’s performance of the “code of revenge”; her aggressive, decisive action not only separates her from the

¹⁴⁹ This could imply that the site was well planned, naturally protected by a rough terrain, with hidden and difficult access, a strategic position for battle defense.

¹⁵⁰ Kevin Leahy and Michael Lewis, “Domestic Dwellings, Workshops, and Working Buildings,” in *The Material Culture of the Built Environment in the Anglo-Saxon World*, eds. Gale Owen-Crocker and Maren Clegg Hyer (Oxford University Press, 2016), 72.

other females in the poem but earns her the “monstrous woman” label as well as “problematizes the traditional active/male and passive/female roles.”¹⁵¹ Feuding and revenge-seeking are typically male activities and prevalent in Old English battle poetry. To this point, in *Beowulf*, the poet refers to the concept of “feud” (*fæhð*) thirteen times,¹⁵² and feud and revenge go hand in hand. Because of this, according to Richard Fletcher, “There is a sense in which a feud can never be terminated.”¹⁵³ Consider lines 107 to 108 when the poet writes in reference to Grendel, “when he [Cain] killed Abel the eternal Lord avenged that death. No joy in that feud...” (*þone swealm gewræc ece Drihten, þæs þe he Abel slog; ne gefah he þære fæthe...*),¹⁵⁴ or the on-going feud between Hrothgar and Grendel lines 151–154a:

it became known, and carried abroad
in sad tales, that Grendel strove
long with Hrothgar, bore his hatred,
sins and feuds, for many seasons,
perpetual conflict¹⁵⁵

After Grendel’s demise, it is his mother who continues the feud. As “queen mother,” she swiftly acts in a traditional heroic fashion, steeling away to Hrothgar’s mead hall where

¹⁵¹ Bridget Peach, “The Suppression of the Powerful, Avenging Woman in *Beowulf*: Beowulf’s Encounter with Grendel’s Mother,” *Old English Newsletter* 33, 3 (Spring 2000): Paper presented at the Thirty-Fifth International Congress on Medieval Studies, The Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, May 4–7, 2000, Session 347: “*Beowulf* I.”

¹⁵² Richard Fletcher, *Bloodfeud: Murder and Revenge in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 10.

¹⁵³ Fletcher, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Of course, numerous examples of the bloodfeud and revenge can be found outside of *Beowulf*. For additional examples see *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. and trans. Bill Griffiths, whereby the death of Byrhtnoth lays an obligation for his men to seek revenge upon the Vikings (“...they all wanted one of two things to avenge their lord or lay down their lives, 207–208) Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003. 49; and, *The Husband’s Message* (“A feud drove him from this war-proud people”) Exeter Book, translated by Michael Alexander, *The First Poems in English* (Penguin Books, 2008) 65; and Hereward’s revenge attack on the drunken Normans who took over his estate as translated by Michael Swanton and described in his “Deeds of Hereward,” in *Medieval Outlaws: Twelve Tales in Modern English Translation*, ed. T. H. Ohlgren, 2nd ed. (West Lafayette, 2005), 62.

¹⁵⁵ 151–154a (*gyddum geomoru, þætte Grendel wan hwile wið Hroþgar, heteniðas wæg, fyrene ond fæhðe fela missera, singale sæc*).

she “means to “avenge her kin” (*wolde hyre mæg wrecan*, 1339b) by dragging off and beheading Hrothgar’s most beloved thane, Æschere. At this, Hrothgar is “grieved at heart” (*on hreon mode*, 1307b) and sorrowful, reminiscent of Grendel’s mother at her loss; here, Hrothgar and the mother can be seen on a more equal level in terms of their humanity. As avenger, Grendel’s mother is brave and proactive, operating on her own authority as she performs this long-standing, respected custom. Moreover, she not only kills Æschere in retaliation, but removes a body part, just as Beowulf removed Grendel’s arm; she decapitates the thane and plants his head on a mound near her mere.

Throughout Old English poetry, the head appears as a symbol of triumph and power. The strategic placement of Æschere’s head (*syðþan Æscheres on þam holmclife hafelan metton*, 1420b–1421) ensures that Beowulf and his men will see it reinforcing Grendel’s mother’s deadly deed and furthering her sense of power, even the upper-hand if only temporarily.

The decapitation also shows that Grendel’s dam is a female who can fight and inflict pain as well as Beowulf. The vision of the head was “a grief to every earl” (*oncyð eorla gehwæn*, 1420a) and strengthened Beowulf’s resolve to seek out the Grendel lair, home to “sea-monsters” (*nicorhusa fela*, 1411b) where he would, in turn, take his revenge and fulfill his promise to Hrothgar by killing the last of the Grendel-kin, ending the “perpetual conflict,” and putting an end once and for all to the demonic, heathen, bloodline. “I avenged them all so that none of Grendel’s tribe needs to boast anywhere on earth...” (*ic ðæt eall gewræc, swa begylpan ne þearf Grendeles maga ænig ofer earðan...*, 2005b), Beowulf says. Grendel’s mother’s character is a formidable warrior, evenly matched with our hero in terms of determination, strength, and prowess. This

equilibrium is important in Old English heroic poetry, for the hero must meet his match with great difficulty so that when he finally kills the enemy it is revered as true heroics. Only as God's weapon, he is able to defeat the evil mother. As we know, "holy God brought about war-victory" (*ond halig God geweold wigsigor*, 1553b–1554a) and later, celebrating his triumph with Hrothgar in the great hall, Beowulf announces "the battle would have been over at once, if God had not guarded me" (*ærihte wæs guð getwæfed, nymðe me God scylde*, 1167b–1668). With this proof, audiences witness something more powerful at work than just man or woman. It seems clear that the poet sacrifices Grendel's mother for two reasons: 1) to make Beowulf a hero and king, and 2) to reinforce for Christian audiences that faith in God conquers all.

4 THE SCARIEST THING ABOUT GRENDEL'S MOTHER

Grendel's mother is an unsettling figure. Why was it that Hrothgar did not fear retaliation from her for Grendel's death? Given that the bloodfeud is understood as part of the Anglo-Saxon heroic code, he should have at least warned Beowulf and his men of the possibility of her arrival at Heorot. Some call this a "gap in the text." I believe this omission speaks to one reason readers find her so disturbing. Elaine Tuttle Hansen argues that Grendel's mother "represents an earlier, more primitive world, where woman must fight when her men have been killed,"¹⁵⁶ if this is true, then Grendel's dam exists outside contemporary Anglo-Saxon society. As a woman, she is not part of the *comitatus* tradition nor would she have been understood as a warrior from a neighboring civilized kingdom. Therefore, she is not entitled to or obligated to seek retribution for her offspring's death. Because she is operating outside of any comprehensible standard the

¹⁵⁶ Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "Women in Old English Poetry Reconsidered," *The Michigan Academician* 9 (1976–1997), 114.

Danes would not have anticipated her arrival. This negates conclusions drawn by some that she is a sympathetic character and provides the justification for her killing.

Therefore, the poet must have constructed a chilling figure to upset the standard. This is indeed scary.

While Grendel's mother's actions indicate an alignment with Germanic heroic tradition, the Dane's shock at her arrival at Heorot indicates a change in that tradition. If Hansen is correct in placing the mother in a "primitive world," then Grendel's dam operates as a transitional figure with no distinct connection to either the heroic past or the world in which she resides rendering her enigmatic. Chance writes that it is "monstrous for a mother to avenge her son (2121) as if she were a retainer, he were her lord, and avenging more important than peace making."¹⁵⁷ However, in response to this claim, I suggest that she is not simply monstrous because she is an avenging mother, but rather that her actions in general no longer make sense when embroidered with contemporary literary conventions. For Anglo-Saxons the heroic ideal was shifting to make room for Christian sensibilities, where a warrior hero can also be seen as God's instrument. Therefore, Grendel's mother can never be a hero in a true Anglo-Saxon literary sense. She is a pagan whose actions make her an evil murderer operating outside of any written or moral code. That fact that she mirrors a traditional heroic ethos in any sense serves to highlight one major quality that separates her from the social norm—she is a heathen. Contemporary audiences would not have sympathized with her as has been hypothesized. Thus, there is no place for a character like Grendel's mother in Old English poetry except as a transitional figure and icon, and she must be destroyed.

¹⁵⁷ Chance, *Woman as Hero*, 101. See footnote 26.

5 GRENDEL'S MOTHER AS A CHANNEL OF FAITH

Renee Trilling writes, “Grendel’s mother stands in for that which exceeds representation.”¹⁵⁸ Obviously, there is trouble categorizing her character. The poet refers to her as a “lady” (*ides*), a term applied to other females in the poem and one which Porter claims enables her to be identified as human.¹⁵⁹ Yet, the poet describes Grendel’s dam as *ides aglæcwif* (1259), implying something other than human. Over time, the phrase has been translated several different ways and has undergone much scrutiny; Liuzza translates *ides aglæcwif* as a “monstrous woman,” but Seamus Heaney glosses it “monstrous hell-bride,” while Frederick Klaeber interprets it as “monster of a women” or “wretch,” all epithets implying she is not quite human.¹⁶⁰ By contrast, Sherman Kuhn translates the term as “warrior woman,” and Christine Alfano concludes, “It is time to relieve Grendel’s mother from her burden of monstrosity and reinstate her in her deserved position as *ides, aglæcwif*: ‘lady warrior-woman.’”¹⁶¹ Perhaps if Grendel’s mother could speak she could enlighten us; is she a descendant of Cain or of a race of giants. I suggest she is both, drawing her power from her silence. Her muteness forces readers to examine her actions closely and speculate her motives. Regardless of whether she is labelled once and for all as a “hell-bride” or “lady warrior,” it is the audience’s responsibility to think this through—what is she, an evil villain or hero? This line of questioning becomes more complicated by Anglo-Saxon cultural values, especially when those values are relatively new. The poet tells us that some of the Danes were so

¹⁵⁸ Renée R. Trilling, “Beyond Abjection: The Problem with Grendel’s Mother Again,” *Parergon*, 24.1 (2007) 20.

¹⁵⁹ Porter, n.p.

¹⁶⁰ R. M. Liuzza, 2013; Seamus Heaney, 2000; Frederick Klaeber, 1950. However, in the fourth edition of Klaeber’s *Beowulf* (2008), he chooses to translate the term as “troublemaker, female adversary.”

¹⁶¹ Christine Alfano, “The Issue of Feminine Monstrosity: A Reevaluation of Grendel’s Mother,” *Comitatus*, 23 (1992): 12. In 1994, the Dictionary of Old English (DOE) changed the definition to “female warrior, fearsome woman.”

horrified by Grendel, who “bore God’s anger” (*Godes yrre bær*, 711b), that they returned to their heathen ways. He writes:

At times they offered honor to idols
at pagan temples, prayed aloud
that the soul-slayer might offer assistance
in the country’s distress. Such was their custom,
the hope of heathens – they remembered hell
in their minds...¹⁶²

This passage reveals that some people were in the process of converting, vacillating between the old world and new, or at risk of becoming one of the “*lapsi*.”¹⁶³ Perhaps the poet, who appears to favor monotheism over polytheism, took it upon himself to intervene. The scene ends with a strong warning:

Woe unto him
who must thrust his soul through wicked force
in the fire’s embrace, expect no comfort,
no way to change at all! It shall be well for him
who can seek the Lord after his deathday
and find security in the Father’s embrace.¹⁶⁴

In this passage the poet reveals the consequences of paganism; there is “no comfort” after death unless you “seek the Lord.” Hence, to ensure the message is understood God sends a “soul-slayer” down to earth to remind readers of His might.¹⁶⁵ Grendel and his mother are soul-slayers who serve as a warning to present and future generations of a monstrous,

¹⁶² 175–180a (*Hwilum hie geheton æt hærgtrafum wigweorþunga, wordum bædon, þæt him gastbona geoce gefremede wið þeodþreaum. Swylc wæs þeaw hyra, hæpenra hyht; helle gemundon in modsefan*).

¹⁶³ Frances Margaret Young provides us with a brief overview of how the term *lapsis/lapsi* was historically understood. “In a time of the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire, many Christians failed to hold firm. They were referred to as the *lapsi* (those who had slipped and fell) as opposed to the *stantes* (those who stood firm). Different attitudes developed within the Church towards the lapsed: some held they should never be readmitted to the Church before death, others were for demanding serious penance of them before readmitting them, while others again were still more lenient.” In Frances Margaret Young, Margaret Mary Mitchell, and K. Scott Bowie, eds., *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 389.

¹⁶⁴ 183b–188 (*Wa bið þæm ðe sceal þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan in fyres fæþm, frofre ne wenan, wihte gewendan! Wel bið þæm þe mot æfter deaðdæge Drihten secean ond to Fæder fæþmum freoðo wilnian!*).

¹⁶⁵ “Soul-slayer” translated as “the Devil.” According to Liuzza, in the Middle Ages the gods of the pagans were often regarded as demons in disguise. See Liuzza, *Beowulf*, Footnotes, page 65, 3.

pagan past, and the consequences of a world without God; the effects of which are made clear as we watch the Danes, great men, courageous warriors, fall into hopelessness, despair, and fear, when Grendel enters their mead hall.

With Grendel's demise, the Danes are relieved and audiences see an evil monster die, his reign of terror ended. However, our respite is short-lived because Grendel's mother soon appears to remind us that fighting evil is a constant battle; like the bloodfeud and its code of revenge, it is eternal. Moreover, Grendel's mother, possessing a female form biologically, has the potential to produce additional evil monsters; this is the quality that makes her more dangerous and terrifying than her son. Her existence, then, not only serves to remind readers of a pagan past, but of a grim, Godless future as well. When Beowulf kills her, he is essentially removing the vehicle which breeds evil. With her death, then, audiences can conceive of a brighter future, one of hope and eternal reward.

It may be an oversimplification or a modernism to state that evil lurks all around us; however, I believe the character of Grendel's mother's was created to be terminated in order to bring comfort to those who side with our hero. As Beowulf plunges into the rushing waters of the Grendel's lair and destroys its evil source, a hero, along with the Christian ideologies he represents, is born. Beowulf's figurative baptism is our renewal of faith. His spiritual cleansing is made clear when the poet tells us his dubious reputation as a youth has been expunged ("Reversal came to the glorious man for all his griefs"; *Edwenden swom treadingum menn torna gehwylces*, 2188b-2189). The poet writes, when Beowulf was a young man "the sons of the Geats considered him no good" (*swa hyne Geata bearn godne ne tealdon*, 2184). However, upon completing his boasts he garners a *good* reputation. Thus, through his trials and his faith, a Christian worldview is ordained.

This biblical vision also manifests in the symbol of “the ancient giant-sword strong in its edges” (*ealdsweord eotenisc ecgum þyhtig*, 1558) that Grendel’s dam possesses. When Beowulf enters her hall he sees among the armor a “victorious blade” (*signeeadig bil*, 1157b) and later, after he kills her with it and decapitates Grendel, he presents its “gold hilt” (*gylden hilt*, 1677a) to Hrothgar who studies the runes written upon it. Exactly which words are etched into the gold is never definitively revealed;¹⁶⁶ however, we are told it conveys the following:

the origin
of ancient strife, when the flood slew,
rushing seas, the race of giants—
they suffered awfully. That was a people alien
to the eternal Lord.¹⁶⁷

Embedded within this passage is a Biblical allusion to the creation story and Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6–9). It describes a horrible ordeal for those who do not believe in the “eternal Lord.” Like the Bible, the hilt provides a message leaving it up to audiences to decipher its true meaning. As such, it too becomes an instrument of faith. This sword has been in Grendel’s mother possession perhaps for decades and therefore she provides the “scripture” and the opportunity for audiences to interpret its message. Thus, it is not Grendel’s mother’s ambiguous nature or actions that are of greatest significance, but her death and her sword, for they serve as symbols of a living God.

Warrior women are not unique in literature; they have made several classical appearances and are found in Northern Germanic, Scandinavian, and Icelandic literatures

¹⁶⁶ Beowulf presents only the hilt to Hrothgar because the blade melted (*þa þæt sweord ongan æfter heaþoswate hildegicelum, wigbil wanian*, 1605–1607a).

¹⁶⁷ 1687–1692a (*Hroðgar spoke maðelode —hilt sceawode, eald lafe, on ðæm wæs or written fyrngewinnes, syðþan flod ofsloh, gifen geotende giganta cyn, frecne geferdon; þæt wæs fremde þeod ecean Dryhtne*).

as well,¹⁶⁸ but from the seventh to the eleventh centuries Anglo-Saxon poets were busy developing characters and stories that supported a changing world order. While historically not all characteristics of these females may have been viewed as positive, their figures can be appreciated for presenting audiences with alternative ways of seeing women perform and providing models from which later authors were able to draw. If Grendel's mother "stands in for that which cannot be represented" then her character can be read as an intersection of a monstrous, female, pagan warrior and Christian present; and by extension her death channels faith for those who seek eternal salvation.

¹⁶⁸ Linguistic archetypes of the "warrior woman" can be identified throughout literary history in warrior females such as the Amazons of antiquity, whose description in Old English appears in Orosius (I.x.29.14ff). Additional examples include Virgil's Camilla and the Celtic queen Boudica (ca. 30–61 C.E.), which can be viewed as reimagined examples of the literary construct. Virgil tells us that Camilla is "fearless on foot and armed like [a man] with a naked sword" (*The Aeneid*, trans. by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 2006) IX.839). Lorraine Kochanske Stock names her as "a prototype for the literary female warrior" ("Arms and the (Wo)man in Medieval Romance: The Gendered Arming of Female Warriors in the Roman d'Eneas and Heldris's Roman de Silence." *Arthuriana* 5.4 (1995): 56, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869148>). In the early second-century, Tacitus wrote of the Celtic Queen Boudica, a figure in Briton's history whose legend as a warrior has been reinterpreted over time, stating that she "took the field, like the meanest among them, to seek revenge." As leader of the Celtic Iceni tribe, after her husband's death, she is said to have led a revolt against Roman occupying forces in Briton slaying more than 70,000 men. Tacitus, *The Annals*, trans. by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, *The Internet Classics Archive*, 2009. <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.html>. And, Jenny Jochens describes the legendary warrior woman and Swedish princess, *þornbjörg*, of the thirteenth century *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* "who is proficient both in womanly skills and in combat" Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996) 100.

CHAPTER III
JUDITH: LEADER OF MEN

The *Judith* poem follows *Beowulf* in the Old English manuscript.¹⁶⁹ Without doubt, Anglo-Saxon audiences would have been equally astounded reading the exploits of both heroes. In the previous chapter, I introduced the character of Grendel's mother, who has much in common with Judith in terms of her proactive, independent spirit, and her militant vitality. How Judith demonstrates these qualities and expands the heroic tradition, as it exists in *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon battle poems, is the subject of this chapter. I trace the historical origins of Judith, which variously emphasize her persona as a seductress and as a militant pious female leader and suggest how these portrayals relate to the representation of Judith in the Anglo-Saxon poem. It is during this period, perhaps more than any other, that Judith is bestowed with an exceptional power that enables her to perform in extraordinary ways. Modern scholars have characterized her in various ways, describing her as a killer¹⁷⁰ and as a "warrior

¹⁶⁹ Cotton Vitellius A XV, in the British Museum, pp. 202a–209b. B. J. Timmer points out, "It is the last poem in the manuscript and follows immediately upon *Beowulf*. The same hand that wrote *Beowulf* from line 1939b, *moste*, onwards (the second scribe of *Beowulf*) also wrote our poem, but cautions the two poems probably have not always been together in one book." In B. J. Timmer, ed., *Judith* (London: Methuen, 1952; rpt. New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1966), I.

¹⁷⁰ Christine Thijs writes "The *Judith* poet went to some lengths in order to ensure acceptance of her role as a killer," in "Feminine Heroism in the Old English Judith," *Leeds Studies in English*, Essays for Joyce Hill (2006): 41; For Mark Griffith "the moral interest Judith's character lies in the discordance between her holiness and murderousness," in *Judith* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997), 55; Tracy-Anne Cooper writes of Judith's ambiguity "addressing the ambiguity between her roles as both murdering seductress and virtuous instrument of God," in "Judith in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2010), 170.

woman.”¹⁷¹ Some view her as “manly,” possessing the body of a woman but the spirit of a man,¹⁷² a position and term that will be discussed at greater length in Chapter V of this dissertation. Still others see Judith as a Christian heroine (although she is Jewish), a sort of “fighting saint” or *miles Christi* (warrior of Christ).¹⁷³ Jane Chance writes that Judith “provides a model for Anglo-Saxon women who themselves strove to be chaste, holy—and heroic.”¹⁷⁴ It is Judith’s strength of character, bravery, and willingness to sacrifice her life to save her people that best establish her as a traditional heroic figure. However, I argue, it is her motivations and desires, recognized by the poet, that serves to create a new brand of hero thereby extending the conventional parameters of Anglo-Saxon literary culture. Judith is an engaging rhetorician and an effective leader of men, with the power to shape lives and tradition.

1 THE HISTORICAL JUDITH/JUDITH

¹⁷¹ See Stoker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (Yale University Press, 1998); Helen Damico calls her a “warrior-woman,” alongside Elene and Juliana, “whose treatment corresponds closely to the Old English male warrior,” in *Beowulf’s Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 26–27; Stacy S. Klein notes Judith’s “martial exploits” and acknowledges her as a “female warrior” in “Gender,” *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, First Edition, eds. Jacqueline Stodnick and Renee R. Trilling (Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012): 40, 42.

¹⁷² The theme of women behaving “manfully” is not unique in medieval heroic literature. See Gopa Roy, “A Virgin Acts Manfully: Ælfric’s Life of St. Eugenia and the Latin Version,” *Leeds Studies in English*, 23 (1992): 1–27; Hugh Magennis has suggested, that by killing Holofernes Judith “transcended female weakness and acted ‘manfully,’” in “Gender and Heroism in the Old English Judith,” in *Writing Gender and genre in medieval literature: approaches to old and Middle English texts* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002): 10; Christopher Fee notes Judith’s reliance on “the agency of masculine military might” in “Judith and the Rhetoric of Heroism in Anglo-Saxon England,” *English Studies* (1997): 406.

¹⁷³ Timmer observes Judith performing the deeds of “a fighting saint” and refers to her as “a religious heroine,” in *Judith*, 7. The *miles Christi* (warrior of Christ) is a Christian allegory based on New Testament military metaphors, especially the “Armor of God,” a metaphor of military equipment standing for Christian virtues (Ephesians 6:14–17). By the fifth century, the Church allowed Christians to go into battle in order to convert infidels or spread the Christ’s teachings. The metaphor has its origins in early Christianity of the Roman Empire, and serves as a model for the “warrior saint.”

¹⁷⁴ Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1986), 52. Also see Patricia A. Belanoff, “Judith and Secular Heroine,” *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies In Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* (1993): 247–64; and, “Judith and the Woman Hero,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992): 17–27.

The Anglo-Saxon poem of *Judith* relates the story of a Hebrew woman from Bethulia, Judith, who catches the eye of the wicked leader of the Assyrians, Holofernes, whose intentions are to destroy her village and have his way with her. In an effort to foil his plans, she travels with her female servant to his encampment where a rowdy banquet takes place. As events unfold, her plan is realized: She waits until Holofernes is well intoxicated and sends his men for her. Willingly, she allows herself to be taken to his private tent where she decapitates him with a sword, steals away with his head, and returns home. Her surprising success and the motivational speech she delivers to a crowd gathered at the city gates rallies the Hebrews to form an army and move against the Assyrians. As we learn, they win the battle, and Judith is celebrated for her heroic efforts.

Carey A. Moore characterizes Judith in a collection of essays dedicated to her and her story. She writes:

Although shapely, beautiful, and wealthy, she lived an abstemious and celibate existence, one filled with prayer and self-denial. Childless, she gave new life to her people. She not only prayed for a deceitful tongue, but actually begged Israel's merciful God for strength to cut off a defenseless man's head. The ultimate irony, of course, is that a deeply religious woman became revered, not for her piety but her murderous act.¹⁷⁵

But how do audiences know that Judith was “shapely” and “childless,” and that she lived an “abstemious and celibate existence”? Aside from what little information the Old English poet provides, Anglo-Saxons' understanding of Judith would likely have been much broader, influenced by versions of her story that were already circulating.

¹⁷⁵ Carey A. Moore, “Why Wasn't the Book of Judith Included in the Hebrew Bible,” in James C. VanderKam, ed., “*No One Spoke Ill of Her: Essays on Judith*,” (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1992), 65–66.

Most scholars agree that Judith enters Anglo-Saxon poetry through St. Jerome's Vulgate Bible or the *Vetus Latina* (OL).¹⁷⁶ Jerome's version emphasizes the chastity of Judith. In his prologue he writes:

Receive the widow Judith, example of chastity, and with triumphant praise acclaim her with eternal public celebration. For not only for women, but even for men, she has been given as a model by the one who rewards her chastity, who has ascribed to her such virtue that she conquered the unconquered among humanity, and surmounted the insurmountable.¹⁷⁷

Working from a number of manuscripts, Jerome prefaces his translation with a description of a woman so pure that she appears the model of virtue for all mankind, so pure and chaste that she can overcome even the worst of evils. Some have followed the tradition of St. Jerome while others emphasize her nature in a variety of ways, as we shall see.

The story of Judith originates in the Bible—as well as in a variety of commentaries and explications of the biblical text—centuries before the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes migrated to Britain. The narrative gained popularity and eventually it was

¹⁷⁶ The Vulgate Bible, a late fourth-century Latin translation of the Greek and Hebrew Bible by the Roman theologian *Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus*, or St. Jerome. In 382 AD, he was commissioned by Pope Damasus I to revise the *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin) Gospels used by the Church. In this work, Jerome extended his task to include most of the books of the Bible.

¹⁷⁷ Andrew S. Jacobs, trans., *St. Jerome, The Preface on the Book of Judith: English translation*, 2004. http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_preface_judith.htm. This was translated and released to the public domain by Andrew S. Jacobs, University of California Riverside, to whom many thanks. The text used was the Patrologia Latina text, which reads: *PRAEFATIO HIERONYMI IN LIBRUM JUDITH*. [Col. 0037D] *Apud Hebraeos liber Judith inter apocrypha legitur: [Col. 0038D] cujus auctoritas ad roboranda illa quae in [Col. 0039A] contentionem veniunt, minus idonea judicatur. Chaldaeo tamen sermone conscriptus, inter historiarum computatur. Sed quia hunc librum Synodus Nicaena in numero sanctarum Scripturarum legitur computasse, acquivi postulationi vestrae, immo exactioni: et sepositis occupationibus, quibus vehementer arctabar, huic unam lucubrationem dedi, magis sensum e sensu, quam ex verbo verbum transferens. Multorum codicum varietatem vitiosissimam [Col. 0040A] amputavi: sola ea, quae intelligentia integra in verbis Chaldaeis invenire potui, Latinis expressi. Accipite Judith viduam, castitatis exemplum, et triumphali laude, perpetuis eam praeconiis declarate. Hanc enim non solum feminis, sed et viris imitabilem dedit, qui castitatis ejus remunerator, virtutem ei talem tribuit, ut invictum omnibus hominibus vinceret, et insuperabilem superaret.* (PL 29:37–39).

translated into Greek, Latin, Syriac, Sahidic, and Ethiopic.¹⁷⁸ In the Septuagint, Judith appears alongside Esther, another female biblical heroine. Bernard F. Huppé locates the *Book of Judith* in Latin patristic and poetic treatments up until the eighth century.¹⁷⁹ One of the earliest known references appears in The First Epistle of St. Clement of Rome to the Corinthians (ca. 90 C. E.). Clement writes:

Many women have received power through the grace of God and have performed many deeds of manly valor. The blessed Judith, when her city was besieged, asked the elders to suffer her to go out into the camp of strangers. So she gave herself up to danger, and went forth for the love of her country and her people in their siege, and the Lord delivered over Holofernes by the hand of a woman.¹⁸⁰

While modern readers may instantly take note of Clement's attempt to highlight Judith as a woman, he also clearly marks her as a hero despite that fact. References to Judith and her deeds are found in a wide range of writings of the early Greek and Latin Church fathers, including those of Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Tertullian, and later in those of Ambrose, Augustine of Hippo, and Jerome.¹⁸¹

In 405 C. E. a Spanish-born Latin poet named Prudentius, known as the father of Christian allegory, focused on Judith's chastity and credited her sexuality as the weapon that defeated Holofernes. In his *Psychomachia*¹⁸² Judith wears "beauteous armor"¹⁸³ and her enemy is the vice of "lust," which tries to blind her by pushing a lit torch in her

¹⁷⁸ These translations are mentioned in: Morton Enslin and Solomon Zeitlin, eds., *The Book of Judith* (Philadelphia: E.J. Brill, Leiden, 1972).

¹⁷⁹ See Bernard F. Huppé, *The Web of Words* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), 138–141.

¹⁸⁰ Clement refers to Judith as "manly," a term adopted and employed by many modern scholars, which will be further explored later in this chapter and in more detail in Chapter V. Clement, LV. I-LVI. I. Kirsopp Lake, trans., *The Apostolic Fathers*, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 103.

¹⁸¹ For more detailed descriptions of Judith appearances in the writings of Church fathers, as well as her canonical status, see Bernard F. Huppé, *The Web of Words* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), 138.

¹⁸² For the complete text of Prudentius' *Psychomachia* in Latin see <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/prudentius/prud. psycho.shtml>.

¹⁸³ H. J. Thomson, ed., *Prudentius*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), 283.

face—to make the point that lust blinds man, no doubt. About the narrative, Margarita Stoker states, “*Psychomachia* is an allegorical representation of conflicting impulses in a single human personality,”¹⁸⁴ a statement which captures nicely its ambiguity. Judith is represented as both a desirable and attractive female and a chaste widow; thus, her sexuality is balanced by her virtue.

Writing on Judith’s virtue, Ambrose (337–397 C. E.) suggests that she is only able to perform her heroic feat because of “the grace of her form and beauty of her continence.”¹⁸⁵ Being a woman, and therefore “weaker of mind” than men, her heroism is all the more admirable. Thus, Judith’s heroism largely stems from her ability to overcome her human flaws and perform as God wills her. Ambrose applauds her for two heroic feats in particular: “First, that she preserved her chastity, and second, that as a woman she was able to conquer a man and thereby eliminate the enemy.”¹⁸⁶ He emphasizes her steadfastness and sobriety, as well as her chastity, which in addition to her sensuality are the weapons she uses to defeat Holofernes. Ambrose concludes, “The temperance and sobriety of one widow not only subdued her own nature, but which is far more, even made men more brave.”¹⁸⁷ Here, asserting that Judith’s actions qualify her as a role model by emphasizing the virtues prized by a Christian society, he recognizes Judith as a leader, someone for both women and men to follow. His Judith is a message of inspiration and hope: “She raised their spirits, and dispirited the enemy.”¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁴ Margarita Stoker, *Judith: Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (Yale University Press, 1998), 25.

¹⁸⁵ In Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. VI St. Jerome: Letters and Select Works* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), 81. See also *Liber de viduis* (CCSL, 24, 16–18) for Ambrose writing on Judith’s exemplary virtue.

¹⁸⁶ Huppé, 156.

¹⁸⁷ Wace and Schaff, 397.

¹⁸⁸ Huppé, 156.

Isidore of Seville (560–636 C. E.) commented on Judith from multiple perspectives. He has suggested she is a symbol of “the Church”; focusing on her courage and achievements, he writes, “Her triumph was a victory for her people.”¹⁸⁹ In his *Etymologies*, he included her in his list of Old Testament prophets (VII.viii.29): *Judith laudens, vel confitens* (“Judith, she who praises” or “Judith, she who proclaims”).¹⁹⁰ Reading Judith as a prophet “who proclaims” has interesting implications and adds weight to her speech at the city gates, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter Five. Focusing on her virginity, in *Book II* of his *De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, Isidore categorizes Judith as a widow (XIX.XVIII) and writes, “The rank of Widows is almost joined to virginity. Thus, it was a widow who first recognized Christ whom a virgin bore,”¹⁹¹ and names Judith as an admirable chaste widow among many he locates in biblical scripture.

The Anglo-Saxon writer Aldhelm (ca. 639–709 C. E.), who has been recognized for his work in the popular “virginity tract” genre, writes of Judith’s triumphant chastity in his *De Virginitate*,¹⁹² where she is described as “taking up the weeds of widowhood and rejecting the wedding dress.”¹⁹³ Chance observes that “Aldhelm characterizes the

¹⁸⁹ Huppé, 156. A point of view supported by Jane Chance who also views Juliana and Elene in the same vain. Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, 31–52. Here, in chapter three titled “Brave Judith, Juliana, and Elene: Allegorical Figures of the Soul, Christ, and the Church” she argues that these figures share important similarities: first, an emphasis on chastity; second, an emphasis on martial spirit conceived as a spiritual weapon against vices, the Devil, or Synagogue and the heathen; and third, a particularly English bond in that all manifests topical historical or political significance in relation to the defense of the nation or the newly established English Church.” 33.

¹⁹⁰ Brine, Kevin R., Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann. *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*. Cambridge: Open Book Publishers. 2013. <http://books.openedition.org/obp/999?lang=en>.

¹⁹¹ Thomas Louis Knoebel, trans., *Isidore of Seville: De Ecclesiasticis Officiis*, Ancient Christian Writers—The Work of the Fathers in Translation, No. 61, Paulist Press, 2008.

¹⁹² Aldhelm’s *De Virginitate* is considered a “virginity tract” or treatise sharing similarities with early Christian hagiographic texts. It focuses on virginity and is formatted as a discussion or sermon. *De Laude Virginitatis* (the prose *De Virginitate*), Aldhelm’s best known work, is a Latin treatise on virginity addressed to the nuns Barking monastery. The long preface praises the merits of virginity. Later, he writes a much shorter, poetic version known as *Carmen de virginitate* (the poetic *De Virginitate*).

¹⁹³ Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, trans., *Aldhelm: The Prose Works* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), 126.

virgins of Christ as types of the soul battling vices with the breastplate of virginity and the shield of modesty.”¹⁹⁴ His treatise attracts readers’ attention to Judith’s real weapon, her chastity, without which she would never have been successful. He asserts, “having kept the honor of her modesty intact, she brought back a renowned trophy to her fearful fellow-citizens and a distinguished triumph for these timid townsfolk—in the form of the tyrant’s head and its canopy.”¹⁹⁵ The phrase implies that if she had lost herself to passion, or succumbed to sexual violation, she would not have succeeded in her efforts. That women are to be commended for their virginity is a major theme in Aldhelm’s work.

Another Anglo-Saxon writer, Ælfric¹⁹⁶ (955–1010 C. E.), continued the tradition of Judith as chaste widow,¹⁹⁷ but also celebrates her military prowess, viewing the Old English poem as a call-to-arms. His homily, *On Judith*, thought to have been composed between 1002 and 1005 C. E., recognizes the narrative’s nationalistic elements, establishing the heroine as a warrior and protector of her people and country. His treatment celebrates Judith as master of her own will and actions. Some scholars recognize the timeliness of Ælfric’s Judith, her story appearing during a period of flux and instability, somewhere around the 990s when the Viking raids began again, “just three generations after Alfred’s victory over them.”¹⁹⁸ Prudent, brave, patriotic, and virtuous, she leads the charge against the Assyrians by modelling for the Bethulians the behavior of a warrior. If Judith, a mere female, could impact Assyrian oppression in

¹⁹⁴ Chance, 35.

¹⁹⁵ Aldhelm, *De virginitate*, cap. 57, 127, quoted in Chance, 38.

¹⁹⁶ Ælfric, Bishop of Eynsham, was a prolific writer in Old English of hagiography, homilies, biblical commentaries, and other genres.

¹⁹⁷ Chance finds that “the general emphasis on chastity in Anglo-Saxon England seems to have derived from the patristic contrast between Eve and the Virgin,” 33.

¹⁹⁸ Tracey-Anne Cooper, “9. Judith in Late Anglo-Saxon England,” in *The Sword of Judith: Judith Studies Across the Disciplines*, eds. Kevin R. Brine, Elena Ciletti, and Henrike Lähnemann, Open Book Publishers, 3. <http://books.openedition.org/obp/999?lang=en>.

some way then perhaps Anglo-Saxons could resist and even overcome the relentless Viking incursions. For Ælfric, Judith is a warrior and a reminder of possibilities: a symbol of hope during trying times, which I find to be a main feature of her character.

In summary, the historical accounts of *Judith* are wide and varied providing the Old English poet with ample material from which to draw his inspiration. As we have seen, the Greek and Latin Church fathers, as well as the Anglo-Saxon writers, show little enthusiasm for the actual story detailed in the Book of Judith, focusing mainly on Judith as a moral exemplum. Huppé observes:

They show no interest in the historical purpose of the Book of Judith as a work of Hebrew patriotism. Concentrating their attention on Judith and Holofernes, and ignoring the other main characters, like Nebuchadnezzar and Holofernes, they celebrate Judith as a chaste widow, wise through her faith in God, whose triumph over Holofernes is the triumph of virtue.¹⁹⁹

Thus, the figure of Judith, at least prior to her appearance in the Old English poem, largely served as an educational role model for Christians. It makes sense, then, that the Anglo-Saxon poet would make use of the climactic episode of the Book of Judith; it is in this episode that audiences are able to best observe Judith exercise her most important virtues—prudence, justice, temperance, and courage—as expressions of her faith.²⁰⁰

2 THE ANGLO-SAXON POET'S JUDITH

The surviving Old English version of Judith's story is a fragment of 350 lines. Scholars disagree as to how much of the original poem may be missing. B. J. Timmer believes that we have only the last part of section IX and the complete sections of X, XI, and XII, and that, based on the average number of lines located the last three sections, the

¹⁹⁹ Huppé, 139.

²⁰⁰ Traditionally, the seven Christian virtues combine the four classical cardinal virtues (also called "pagan" virtues) of Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Courage (Fortitude) along with the three spiritual or theological virtues (also called "ordinal" virtues) of Faith, Hope, and Charity (Love).

estimated length of the entire poem may be about 1344 lines.²⁰¹ This would be a fairly brief text compared to *Beowulf* but substantial in comparison to other extant Old English poems. However, Huppé argues that the poem is “virtually complete as we have it,” making it even shorter. He accounts for the brevity of the poem by suggesting that it is a creative rendition centered on the climactic episode of the longer biblical story where Judith beheads Holofernes.²⁰² The poem, then, is a scaled-down version focusing on one part of the broader narrative.

Judith is also considered somewhat unusual in comparison to other poems of the time in that it consists of hypermetric lines (lines with more than the four stresses normally found in Old English poetry), irregular alliteration, and rhyme, which is rare for the genre. The unusual and distinctive prosody is matched by the unique characterization of the poem’s protagonist.

The beginning of the poem, as it comes down to us, describes Judith as a “radiant lady, elf-lovely” (*ides ælfscinu*, 14)²⁰³ who is protected by “the primal Power against pure terror” (*þæt he hie wið þæs hehstan brogan gefriðode, frymða waldend*, 4b–5a). We find that she had come to the Assyrian camp four days earlier. Underway is the banquet where the feasting and drinking are out of control and most of the men, including Holofernes, are drunk:

Old Holofernes, heroes’ gold-friend

²⁰¹ B. J. Timmer, ed., *Judith* (London: Methuen, 1952). Reprinted (New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1966). 2; and Timmer, “Sectional Divisions of Poems in Old English Manuscripts,” *MLR* 47 (1952): 319–322.

²⁰² Huppé, 147.

²⁰³ Linguistically, this phrase has drawn much attention; the word *ælfscinu* has been translated many ways and attached to a variety of meanings, in modern English “elf-lovely” has been widely acknowledged. Unless otherwise noted, all Old English quoted in this chapter is from Elliott van Kirk Dobbie, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*, IV (New York: Columbia University Press, 1953). All modern English translations are those of Roy M. Liuzza, “Judith.” *Old English Poetry: An Anthology* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2014).

sunk in wine-joy, screamed with laughter,
roared and ranted, raged and chanted,
so no man afar could fail to hear
him storm with pride while plunged in mead,
demanding brave war-deeds from bench-sitters.²⁰⁴

The tension builds as the poet reveals him as a “treacherous schemer” (*dryhtguman*, 29a) who at nightfall orders the “blessed maiden” (*eadigan mægð*, 35a) brought to his tent. His men do as they are told, bringing Judith to a grand bed around which a curtain, a “fly-net all golden” (*eallgylden fleohnet*, 46b–47a), flows in such a way that he can see through it but others cannot see him. As the audience anticipates Holofernes’ violation of Judith, we find that God “would not allow it” (*Ne wolde þæt weldres dema geðafian*, 59b–60a). Suspense continues to build as Judith prays for strength to thwart the situation:

“Prince of heaven:
give me triumph and true belief; let me take this sword
And cleave this murder-monger!”²⁰⁵

With this, she grabs an available sword, takes “that heathen man by the hair fast” (*genam ða þone hæðenan mannan fæste be feaxe sinum*, 98b–99a), then “with her fists tugging stretched him deftly” (*teah hyne folmum wið hyre weard bysmerlice*, 100b–101a) cuts his head off. The poet describes her as “wielding control” (*eaðost mihte wel gewealdan*, 102b–103a) as she “carves half way through his neck” (*þæt heo healfne forcearf þone sweoran him*, 105). However, it takes another swing of the sword to successfully sever his head. Having accomplished this, she hands the head to her travel companion, a handmaid, who places it into a “supply pouch” (*fætelse*, 127a) they had brought with them to carry food, and together they return home to Bethulia in triumph.

²⁰⁴ 21b–27 (*Ða wearð Holofernus, goldwine gumena, on gytesalum, hloh ond hlydde, hlynede ond dynede þæt mihten fira bearn feorran hehyran hu se stiðmoda styrmeded ond gylede, modig ond medugal, manode heneahhe bencsittende þæt hi gebæron wel*).

²⁰⁵ 88b–90a (*Forgif me, swegles ealdor, sigor ond soðon geleafan, þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote geheawan þysne morðres bryttan*).

The poet bestows many accolades upon the two women; they are “boldly daring” (*ellenpriste*, 133b), “steadfast maidens” (*eadhreðige mægð*, 135a), “adorned with rings” (*beahhrodene*, 138b), and Judith is especially “brave” (*ides ellenrof*, 146a) and “clear-minded” (*gleawhydig wif*, 148a). When the two women reach the gateway to the city, thousands crowd around as the servant holds high Holofernes’ bloody head. Judith makes a speech giving God credit for the deed, and encourages the Hebrew men to take up arms against the remaining Assyrian forces. She addresses the masses:

Yes, Holofernes
now lies lifeless. Our most loathsome foe,
[...]
But, God refused
him longer life—didn’t let him commit
more atrocity: for I took his life
with the help of God. Now, each good man here
in this town dwelling: I tell you all,
shield-bearing men: you must make haste now
and gird for war.²⁰⁶

This powerful speech, along with the display of the head, reinvigorates the waning Hebrews. The next morning an armed band of men, “heroes under helmets” (*hæleð under helmum*, 203a) effectively meet the enemy on the battlefield and emerge victorious.

With the many versions of *Judith* available to Old English audiences, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Anglo-Saxon poet drew from a variety of images to construct his heroine, her narrative shortened and refashioned to create a concise portrait of a pious woman who, through a series of trials, becomes a warrior and leader. It is through this creative spark that the writer moves the heroine from a traditional past, where women serve to support male roles, and repositions her within a new heroic ideal.

²⁰⁶ 178b–188a (*Holofernus unlyfigendes, þe us monna mæst morðra gefremede, sarra sorga, ond þæt swyðor gyt ycan wolde, ac him ne uðe god lengran lifes, þæt he mid læððum us eglan moste; ic him ealdor oðþrong þurh godes fultum. Nu ic gumena hehwæne þyssa burgleoda biddan wylle, randwiggendra, þæt ge recene eow fýsan to gefoeht*).

In this the poet shows us a woman exercising complete self-control and restraint under extreme conditions. By Anglo-Saxon standards this would contradict the accepted view of a woman's very nature, which is understood as weaker than man's.²⁰⁷ Judith, then, can be viewed as a true warrior, possessing both the physical and mental strength with which men are often depicted.

The representation of Judith in the Old English poem suggests that the poet refashioned Judith's biblical story in order to make some connection between the narrative it contains and Anglo-Saxon sensibilities and/or a Germanic heroic past. This is significant. In their poetry, scopos memorialize people to be honored, emulated, and remembered; the fact that we have the *Judith* poem means that the poet, or his patron, found something in the character of Judith that resonated with contemporary society and felt she was worth aggrandizing and immortalizing. Like the exaggerated emphasis placed on one's chastity in society,²⁰⁸ one detects an exaggerated heroism from Judith colored with Christian ideals. For example, the lengths to which a group of nuns went, in response to both religious and social custom no doubt, were extreme. According to the

²⁰⁷ In regards to St. Euphrosyne, Robin Norris observes that disguised as a man, the saint was able to protect her virginity, be acknowledged as a bride of Christ, and become an example of spiritual strength. "Such wonders are miraculous" she writes, "because they have been worked through a woman, whose nature is of course assumed to be weak," in "Gender Trouble: Reading the Old English Vita of St. Euphrosyne," *Writing Women Saints in Anglo-Saxon England*, G - Reference, Information and Interdisciplinary Subjects Series, Vol. 14 of Toronto Anglo-Saxon series, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (University of Toronto Press, 2013), 138.

²⁰⁸ As a reminder, during the Viking raid years in Anglo-Saxon England, most notably from about the eighth through the tenth centuries, protecting one's virginity was paramount. According to Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "the rigors of the chaste life were equally upheld for both sexes..." but, "from the beginning, virginity was not emphasized for men in the same way as it was for women. It never dominated the total mode of perception of the male religious" (Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998). 127. Outside as well as inside religious life, where chastity was expected, war could constitute real concern for one's purity. For nuns, invasion meant fleeing monasteries with relics and treasure (Schulenburg, 143). To stand and fight surely, in many cases, meant loss of virginity and death, the fear of which may have led to the first case of self-mutilation by a group of nuns in Cassian in a heroic attempt to protect themselves from sexual assault (143).

Lessons of the Office of Saint Eusebia, “as the Vikings burst through the doors at Cassian, in the territory of Marseilles, Abbess Eusebia and the other holy virgins, caring more for their purity than their lives, cut off their noses in order to create a bloody spectacle in an effort to extinguish the passions of the barbarians.”²⁰⁹ Yet, Judith, our new kind of heroine, does not cut off her nose in panic; she cuts off the enemy’s head instead. Furthermore, she does not meet with a fate like that of other women in Old English poetry. In *Beowulf*, for example, Wealhtheow and her daughter, Freawaru, are peace-weavers and hostesses to men; Hildeburh, as failed peace-weaver, is sent home by the Danes; and Thryth, a “bad queen,” is sent across the sea to her husband. Other Old English poems provide examples of women with no power in their relationships with men, as observed in *Wulf and Eadwacer*, or of women who are exiled, as seen in in *The Wife’s Lament*. These examples show the importance society placed on marriage and, as a reflection, the limitations placed on women in their literary roles; this speaks to the mindset of the *Judith* poet who chose to remove Judith from this tradition. Judith, though a widow and chaste, is larger than life; she is “bold” (*collenferhðe*, 134b), “courageous” (*ellenpriste*, 133b), and prays for the ability to kill (“grant me vengeance; let my mind’s fury inflame my heart!”; *torhtmod tires brytta, þæt me ys þus torne on mode, hate on hreðre minum*, 93–94a). With this atypical treatment of her character, somehow the *Judith* poet manages to elevate her; instead of promoting the limitations placed on women in contemporary culture, he liberates them.

The poet must have detected something of the Germanic heroic ideal in Judith. In addition to the pious treatment of her character, Judith is a radical woman, resolute and

²⁰⁹Gonzague de Rey, *Les Saints de l’église de Marseille* (Marseille, 1885), 227–228, quoted in Schulenburg, 145.

gritty, willing to get her hands dirty, like the Valkyries of Norse legend, or the Amazon figure rooted in the literature of antiquity. H. R. Ellis Davidson describes different conceptions of Valkyries, or female spirits; some wear armor and ride on horseback carrying out Odin's commands, others are powerful female guardians attached to certain families and "even to certain women who armed themselves and fought like men."²¹⁰ She points out that Anglo-Saxon writers were surely aware of these beings and notes Wulfstan's (ca. 1002–1023) mention of "choosers of the slain" referring to the Valkyries in his eleventh-century *Sermo Lupi*.²¹¹ Davidson also identifies two other women associated with battle among the pagan Germanic peoples. She cites as evidence two spells which appear in Christian times. The first from southern Germany is a charm for unfettering in which a female releases a captured man from his chains; it concludes "Leap forth from the bonds, escape from the enemy."²¹² The other is an Old English charm against a sudden pain, which includes the phrase "mighty women made ready their power and sent out their screaming spears."²¹³ These charms, like examples provided by the Valkyries, show women physically engaging in warfare. While Judith is not depicted in a public hands-on fight with the Assyrian army, she does physically participate in the war by strategizing a way to rid the enemy of their leader and, then, killing the man in his tent; thus, modeling militant heroic behavior.

²¹⁰ H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (Penguin Books: 1964), 61.

²¹¹ In Davidson, 62. *Sermo Lupi* is the title of a homily composed in England between 1010–1016 by Wulfstan II, English Bishop of London, Bishop of Worcester, and Archbishop of York.

²¹² Davidson, 63. The charm has been attributed to the Thuringian Tribe of the late fifth century. See Pierre Daniël Chantepie de la Saussaye, *The Religion of the Teutons, ATLA monograph preservation program, Volume 3 of Handbooks on the history of religions*, trans. by Bert John Vos (Boston, USA, London: Ginn & Company, 1902), 126–127.

²¹³ Davidson, 63. For approximate dating see Russell Gilbert Poole's *Old English Wisdom Poetry*, Annotated Bibliographies of Old and Middle English Literature, Vol. 5 (D.S. Brewer, 1998), 154. Poole detects a "widespread feeling that certain of the metrical charms embody early Germanic heathen material even though in their extant forms they show signs of later Christian interpolation." 154.

It is important to remember that not all warfare is conducted on the battlefield; much preparation goes into a successful campaign. *The Battle of Maldon* celebrates the death of the historical Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, killed on the battlefield fighting a campaign against the Vikings, dated in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to 991 C. E. On this day, the Anglo-Saxons lost to the enemy. As we have it, the poem begins with the Anglo-Saxon warriors dismounting their horses to prepare for battle; they are getting instructions, planning their formations, and testing weaponry,²¹⁴ before actually going onto the field. Likewise Judith, in an effort to defend herself and her community, engages in strategic war preparation and planning. Because the Bethulians are not yet ready to fight the enemy, she takes steps to instigate war on the Hebrews' behalf. She prepares by dressing the part, planning how she will kill the enemy's leader, gathering her handmaiden and a food bag, and traveling to the Assyrian camp where she will enact her plan. Once there, she draws a weapon and uses it to carve Holofernes' head off his shoulders.²¹⁵ Like a true warrior, when one hack does not fully decapitate him, she "swung the sword a second time" (*Næs ða dead þa gyt, ealles orsawle; sloh ða eornoste ides ellenrof oðre siðe*, 107b–110a); speaking to her resolve to complete the mission. This is clearly heroic behavior, for a hero does not leave a battle before killing the enemy or dying in the attempt. After her successful mission, she returns home to her village. While she does provide the encouragement needed for the Bethulians prepare for combat, she does not personally participate in the later battle that ensues between the Bethulian and Assyrian

²¹⁴ *The Battle of Maldon*, ed. and trans. Bills Griffiths, see page 21 for battle preparations.

²¹⁵ In the Book of Judith she takes Holofernes' "*scimitar*" (a short sword with a curved blade that broadens toward the point, used originally in Eastern countries) from the head of the bed. In the Old English version, it is unclear where she gets the sword.

armies. Nonetheless, for the Anglo-Saxons her heroic feat ensures the triumph of Christianity over the heathens.

Rebecca A. Tierney-Hynes sees “the definition of heroism as necessarily masculine and results in restrictions on the characterization of heroic women.”²¹⁶ She credits Jane Chance with helping us understand issues Anglo-Saxon poets faced in defining women within a heroic, male-dominated warrior-ethic. Quoting Chance she explains:

A few women are portrayed as politically active and heroic primarily because they shed all affinity with the female sex and sexuality by demonstrating singular chastity and spirituality. These women are frequently depicted in masculine dress to emphasize their honorary masculinity and thus their official entrance into the ranks of heroes in accordance with the heroic ethos.²¹⁷

While one can find many examples fitting the observation above, the treatment of Judith’s character largely deviates from this standard. While she indeed demonstrates “chastity” and “spirituality,” it is difficult to say without qualification that she loses her femaleness. However, it is without doubt that Judith uses her female sexuality to hold Holofernes’ interest; she knows of his “lustful spirit” (*galferð gumena ðreate*, 62a) and dresses and ornaments herself to keep his attention. She does not clothe herself as a man, nor does she approach Holofernes as a warrior; she willingly goes to his camp “circlets rich all ring adorned” (*beagum gehlæste hringum gehrodene*, 36a–37b). While there appears to be no focused attention on Judith dressing as a temptress in the Old English poem, I detect in Judith an unassuming sensual nature.²¹⁸ Although she is certainly in

²¹⁶ Rebecca A. Tierney-Hynes, “The Heroic Ethos: Reality and Representation,” 2000. WEB. 12 Oct. 2017. <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~cpercyc/courses/1001TierneyHynes.html>.

²¹⁷ Jane Chance, “The Anglo-Saxon Woman as Hero: The Chaste Queen and the Masculine Woman Saint.” *Allegorica* 5.2 (1980): 142, in Rebecca A. Tierney-Hynes, 2000.

²¹⁸ Judith’s accessories of *beagum hehlæste* and *hringum gehrodene* (36b–37a) are customary adornments in Anglo-Saxon culture, but Lucas notes two words the poet employs which could serve to “Judith’s sexual allure” (*elfscinu* and *wundenlocc*). See Lucas, 19.

control of it, as we are repeatedly reminded of her presence of mind and unwavering determination and piety, for she is a “holy woman” (*halgen mægð*, 35a), I would encourage us to consider how Judith uses her sexuality to confront Holofernes’ lust.

Some scholars have noted the role of Judith’s sexuality in her heroism (seducing and then slaying Holofernes) but suggest that in order to see her violence as heroic her chastity had to be emphasized while her sensuality eliminated.²¹⁹ Again, I suggest our heroine’s sexuality is not completely “obliterated” but observable. For example, aside from Judith’s obviously feminine clothing and accessories, twice the poet mentions her hair. During her heroic act (of decapitation), the poet describes her with “Her locks entwined” (*wundenlocc*, 77), and again “with her hair knotted (*wundenlocc*, 103b). In regards to this notable description, Christine Fell remarks, “A favorite epithet of the poet who describes Judith in the poem of that name is *wundenlocc* but I am not sure whether that refers to curled or plaited hair.”²²⁰ It could also be braiding of the hair, which appears to be a fairly common styling practice among Anglo-Saxon women. That the poet feels compelled to include the state or style of Judith’s hair at all calls attention to her sex; I know of no Old English heroic text where the poet draws similar attention to the condition of a male hero’s hair. Judith grabs “the heathen man by the hair fast” (99b–100a), but the poet does not comment on Holofernes’ hairstyle; it may be long, short, up, or down; obviously, his hair is not a concern. Historically, hair symbolizes physical strength and virility. For females in particular it can be a symbol of seduction and physical attraction. Loose hair is usually kept by a young maiden or a woman suspected

²¹⁹ Patricia Belanoff “cites the elision of the role of Judith’s sexuality in her heroic act (seducing, then slaying Holofernes) by the *Judith* poet, suggesting that in order to view Judith as a hero, her chastity had to be established, and her link to femininity thus obliterated.” See Belanoff, 247–264.

²²⁰ Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 106.

of adultery, while hair tied up, like Judith's, is worn by married women or virtuous women.²²¹ Although the biblical Judith is a Jewish widow, she is portrayed in the poem as conventionally Anglo-Saxon, and typically, Anglo-Saxon women kept their heads covered,²²² but the poet makes no mention of a covering on Judith's head. I speculate this could be explained in three ways: 1) she was ready for bed and removed her covering, 2) she purposely had not covered her head, or 3) not *all* Anglo-Saxon women covered their heads. Regardless of the reason behind the lack of covering, by mentioning Judith's hair not once but twice, the poet emphasizes Judith's hairstyle, which culturally speaks to her gender and is an expression of her sexuality.

Indeed, her sexual nature is detectible, and she wields it as a weapon to manipulate the situation. At the beginning of the poem, her sensuality is not downplayed, but rather emphasized. The poet addresses her beauty, an essential part of her sensuality, early on; she is "elf-lovely" and "radiant" (*ides ælfscinu*, 14a) and dressed in "circlets"²²³ rich all ring adorned" (*beagum gehlæste hringum gehrodene*, 36b–37a). She has dressed herself adhering to social custom of a woman in her noble position. Throughout the narrative, we are reminded of Judith's disposition "adorned with rings" (*beahhrodene*, 138b), "adorned with gold" (*golde gefrætewod*, 171b), and as a "bright maiden" (*tortan mægð*, 43a; *beorhte mægð*, 254b); these words chosen by the poet distinguish her as

²²¹ Allison Protas, Geoff Brown, Jamie Smith and Eric Jaffe, eds., *Dictionary of Symbolism*, University of Michigan, 1997–2001. Accessed 10 Oct. 2017.

<http://umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html/H/hair.html>.

²²² Peter Lucas writes, "In accordance with the teaching of the Church (see I Corinthians II.55–6) it was customary in Anglo-Saxon England for women to cover their hair." He quotes G. R. Owen-Cocker, when he states, "In Anglo-Saxon art, women's hair is almost always hidden except for the occasional suggestions at the forehead." In "Judith and the Woman Hero," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22, Medieval Narrative Special Number (1992): 20. See G. R. Owen-Cocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester, 1986), 144 ("in relation to the tenth and eleventh centuries); similarly for the seventh to ninth centuries"), 102. However, I would note that it is unknown whether it was customary for a woman to cover her head at bedtime.

²²³ A *circlet* is a piece of headgear, sometimes ornate made of metal and bejeweled.

specifically female and feminine. I do not find in *Beowulf*, for example, the words “bright” or “lovely” to describe the hero. This language distinctly marks Judith as a female and draws readers to her femaleness. She is a “bold-minded maid” (*mægð modigre*, 334a), not just bold-minded. She is a “holy woman” (*halgan mægð*, 260a), not just holy. It seems clear that the poet places special emphasis on Judith’s sex and its implications.

Additionally, Judith redefines the role of hero. She appears in stark contrast, for example, to Hildegund of Germany²²⁴ who disguises herself as a man for years in order to protect her virginity, or Euphrosyne of Alexandria who dressed as a man in order to avoid drawing unwanted attention during her monastic tenure; she even accepted the tonsure from a fellow monk. In *Judith*, the heroine is presented largely as a traditional noble female. The poet does not describe her as dressed in any unusual clothing, remarking only that she is “lovely” and “adorned with rings.” That her hair is tied up implies chastity, as it implies traditional feminine dressing habits. That it is uncovered may also imply she is trying to draw Holofernes’ carnal attention. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that the poet was not downplaying Judith’s sexuality; he was presenting her as an attractive Anglo-Saxon female.

²²⁴ Hildegund (d. 1188) is frequently viewed as a saint (feast day April 20) though her cult was never formally approved. At twelve years old after her mother dies, her father, a knight of Neuss in Germany, takes her on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. For her protection he dresses her as a boy and calls her Joseph during their travels. On the way back, the father dies and Hildegund is abandoned by the man who is charged with protecting her. Poor Hildegund manages to make her way to Germany where she becomes a servant to an old cleric in Cologne. Together, they journey to Italy to see the Pope. However, along the way Hildegund is accused of robbery and condemned to death; she is saved by undergoing “the ordeal of red hot iron,” but is later hanged and once again survives. She returns to Germany once more and there joins the Cistercian order but never takes her final vows. This entire time she remained dressed as Joseph and her true sex was not discovered until her death in 1188 C.E. Alban Butler, Herbert Thurston, and Donald Attwater, “St Hildegund, Virgin,” *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, 2nd ed. (Christian Classics, 1981).

Contemporary audiences, too, may have been aware of her sexual assertiveness through their knowledge of other source materials. In the biblical story, audiences are told that Judith

took off her haircloth and put away the garments of her widowhood and she washed her body and anointed herself with the best ointment, plaited the hair of her head and clothed herself in the garments of her gladness and put sandals on her feet and took her bracelets and lilies and earlets and rings and adorned herself with all her ornaments.²²⁵

Although we are informed by the Latin author that “all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality, but from virtue, and therefore the Lord increased her beauty so that she appeared to all men’s eyes incomparably lovely,”²²⁶ it could have been a challenge for Anglo-Saxons, as it is today, to remove the sexual complexity of this imagery from their minds. In other words, one could determine that Judith’s representation in the poem is not “manly,” as some contend, but womanly and colored with a Germanic heroic ethos. Judith’s attractive persona could also be considered a disguise of a sort; that is, she is concealing her virtue and piety from the licentious Holofernes. However, it is precisely this method of “attacking the enemy” (luring the enemy into a trap by false pretenses) that could be considered one of the “weapons of war” available to women. Hence, she is not performing as a male.

For some scholars, Judith’s “manliness” is exposed through her violence; that she subdues Holofernes with her bare hands and uses a sword to lop off his head is

²²⁵ Edgar Swift, ed., *The Vulgate Bible*, vol. 2, part B, Douay-Rheims Translation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1709. (*Vocavitque abram suam, et descendens in domum suam abstulit a se cilicium et exiit se vestimentis viduitatis suae, et lavit corpus suum et unxit se myrro optimo et descriminavit crinem capitis sui et inposuit mitram super caput suum et induit se vestimentis iucunditatis suae induitque sandalia pedibus suis adsumpsitque dextraliola et lilia et inaures et anulos et omnibus ornamentis suis ornavit se*).

²²⁶ Swift, 1709 (*Cui etiam Dominus contulit splendorem quoniam omnis ista compositio non ex libidine, sed ex virtute, pendebat, et ideo Dominus hanc in illam pulchritudinem ampliavit ut incomparabili decore omnium oculis appareret*).

considered traditional masculine Anglo-Saxon warrior behavior. However, this it is my contention that this show of aggression, which ultimately prevents her own rape, establishes Judith as fundamentally female because most men do not have to protect themselves from rape. Thus, it is not the show of strength (which could be viewed as male heroics as well) but the motivation driving the brutality that is essentially female, and therefore Judith's performance disrupts the Germanic heroic ideal. That the Anglo-Saxons recognized rape as a form of warfare is understood.²²⁷ Mary Flavia Godfrey argues that the *Judith* poem is "aimed directly at an English audience that would have included women who are potential or actual victims of rape."²²⁸ Because Judith is able to defend herself from Holofernes' advances, female Anglo-Saxon audiences are able to view her as a self-reliant woman of power and authority.

Here, it is important we remind ourselves of the *Judith* poet's grand task—merging his early female, Jewish, middle-Eastern, biblical inspiration with a Christian, Anglo-Saxon, male-dominant, "warrior-ethic" whose beloved heroes are wrapped in Germanic myth and legend, which includes females being linked with Valkyries and Amazons. This being the case, the poet did not bestow upon Judith qualities that de-sexualize her, as seen in figures like Hildegund.²²⁹ Rather he likely based her character on what he knew, Anglo-Saxon male and female heroes drawn from legend, where some of the women are depicted as characteristically less feminine than women in reality.

²²⁷ See Kathryn Powell, "Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the Beowulf Manuscript." *The Review of English Studies* 57.228 (2006): 6; Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* (ca. 1014 CE), in which he writes "And often ten or twelve, each after the other, insult disgracefully the thegn's wife, and sometimes his daughter or near-kinswoman while he looks on" (Quoted in Dorothy Whitelock, *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1976. Lines 116–118, 59.

²²⁸ Mary Flavia Godfrey, "Beowulf and Judith: Thematizing Decapitation in Old English Poetry," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 1.35 (1993): 28.

²²⁹ For more information on gendering male and female saints in history and literature, see John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography*, Oxford University Press, 1998.

Part of Judith's power is located in her proactive temperament. She waits for no male escort to the enemy camp; she goes alone with a handmaid. When the day of feasting comes to an end and Holofernes' bids her brought to the "high tent" where with "filth and vice he'd ravish the radiant lady" (*Ða wearð se brema on mode bliðe, burga ealdor, þohte ða beorhtan idese mid widle ond mid womme besmitan*, 157b–159a), Judith defends herself with ingenuity and God's help. Because this is a female performance, it also serves to send a message that women can prevail if they exercise wisdom and keep faith. Some scholars read this as an "inverted rape" scene. A close reading of lines 99b–112a describing the decapitation reveals language reminiscent of a violent rape, except that here a woman overpowers a man.²³⁰ The symbolism of Judith beheading Holofernes is shaming and metaphorically strips him of his manhood rendering Judith the male-like aggressor in the scenario. However, I believe her performance is clearly that of a heroic female. Holofernes is so drunk on wine that he loses his faculties and passes out on the bed,²³¹ making him docile and no immediate threat. The only physical strength Judith requires here is being able to position him in such a way that is conducive to beheading and that facilitates a solid chop through his skin and bones; she is able to accomplish this with the aid of her servant. It also takes her two swings of the sword to remove his head, not one, which reflects a weaker, less battle-hardened physique. However, she kills the evil-doer and takes the trophy head. The Old English poet's Judith is certainly female, her treatment informed by the poet's understanding of the past and a current changing

²³⁰ Alexandra Hennessey Olsen writes, "A brief examination of the lines describing Judith's preparations to kill Holofernes suggests that if the masculine and feminine pronouns were reversed, the same lines could easily describe the rape of a woman by a man." Hennessey, Alexandra Olsen. "Inversion and Political Purpose in the Old English Judith." *English Studies* 63.4 (1982): 291.

²³¹ 73b–77a (*Ða wæs nergendes þeowen þrymful, þearle gemyndig hu heo þone atolan eaðost mihte ealdre benæman ær se unsyfra, womfull, onwoce*).

socio-cultural environment. A comparison of the characters of Judith and Beowulf will enable us to better discern some of the ways in which Judith both shapes and fulfills a changing heroic code.

As they impact the overarching narrative, Judith's actions parallel the heroic conduct of Beowulf. Proactively, she sets out to stop the evil attacks against her people. To do this, she leaves home and goes to the enemy camp, kills the leader, returns home with his head, and publically boasts of her accomplishment. Likewise, Beowulf takes initiative with the goal of stopping Grendel's attacks against the Danes. To do this, he leaves Geatland and goes to Heorot where he beheads Grendel and his mother and returns to Heorot with Grendel's head. He boasts at the Danish and Geatish courts of his accomplishments. If *Beowulf* provides us with an image of the ethos of heroic life, *Judith* too can easily be read with this heroic vision in mind. Upon examination of the characters' motivations, however, we see they differ in many ways. For example, "From his home," Beowulf, "the thane of Hygelac, a good man among the Geats, heard of Grendel's deeds..." and "He commanded to be made a good wave-crosser, said that he would seek out that war-king over the swan's riding, the renowned prince who was in need of men."²³² Promptly, he enlists a war band and sets out to relieve the Danes of their curse. Conversely, Judith's village is under attack; her plan to kill the enemy's leader in his own encampment is born out of self-defense and in an effort to protect her own people. Beowulf's actions are based on the laws of hospitality understood as part of a

²³² 194–201 (*þæt fram ham gefrægn Higelaces þegn god mid Geatum, Grendels dæda... Het him yðlidan godne gegyrwan, swæð he gudcýning ofer swanrade secean wolde mærne þeoden, þa him wæs manna þearf*).

heroic ethos.²³³ Conversely, Judith's are in response to extreme oppression and suffering. Thus, Beowulf's actions are proactive and Judith's reactive. Beowulf, eager to make a name for himself, seeks out battles and ways to showcase his physical prowess (i.e., he rips the arm off of Grendel in a grand mead hall full of warriors) in contrast to Judith's covert actions to improve her personal situation (i.e., she beheads Holofernes behind the protective fly-net bed covering). Furthermore, Judith's heroic power is rooted in spiritual rather than physical strength alone. And, the fact that Judith is a woman, a Jewish woman, removes her further from Old English literary conventions and adds to the mystery of her character.

3 EXPANDING THE HEROIC IDEAL

Judith the hero, like the *Judith* poem, is unique, supporting both the genres of heroic poetry and hagiography as well as straying from their conventions. As argued in Chapter One of this dissertation, Anglo-Saxon women were not historically part of the traditional heroic ideal the same way as men, and therefore not subject to its rules and consequences in exactly the same way; this is one reason they often appear in conventional roles—as mothers, queens, wives, sisters, daughters, and virgin saints—identified by their relationships to men, and thus only entering the *comitatus* through these associations. As we have seen, the character of Judith was constructed to work within this established system while expanding its parameters.

I see two major ways in which Judith's character specifically expands the heroic ideal. First, she is motivated to action differently than male literary champions, and

²³³ Because of the missing leaves, we are unable to without doubt determine if Judith proactively devises a plan to go to the Assyrian camp or if she is summoned or seized and physically taken there. Regardless of the conditions when put her in the camp, it certainly appears she was expected to be there ("Then to the feast they fared and found their seats"/ *Hie ða to ðam symle sittan eodon*, 15).

second, she participates in a broadened version of the *comitatus* tradition. Of the six criteria required of an Old English hero (bravery, acceptance of a harsh situation, resolve to carry out declared intentions, a desire to forge a reputation for oneself, to be judged favorably by one's companions, and loyalty to one's superiors) Judith skillfully demonstrates the first three: 1) she bravely journeys to the enemy's camp, 2) at the risk of discovery and rape, she still goes to the camp thus demonstrating her acceptance of the difficult situation, and 3) in her fervent prayer to God for the vengeance and anger required to perform a violent deed, we clearly see her resolve.²³⁴ However, unlike most male heroes, Judith seems to have no desire to forge a reputation for herself or to be judged favorably by her peers, and she certainly displays no loyalty to her human superiors, only to God. Of these last three conditions, the first two speak to a traditional hero's motivation for his actions (the desire for a reputation and to be judged favorably). It is here where Judith's imposing character most obviously strays from conventions; her only desire is to save her chastity and her village, not to make a name for herself while she is in the process of trying to make this happen. In this way, Judith's character serves to reimagine cultural ideologies and define space for women within the heroic tradition.

Old English heroic poetry emphasizes the desire to forge a reputation and to be judged favorably. We find clear confirmation of these traits when Beowulf, speaking to Hrothgar, agrees to hunt down and kill Grendel's mother. The hero states, "Each of us must await the end of this world's life; let him who can bring about fame before death—that is best for the unloving man after he is gone" (*wyrec se þe mote domes ær deaþe; þæt bið drihtguman unlifgendum æfter selest*, 1388b–1390). This phrase, more than any other

²³⁴ Judith is resolved; however, "declared intentions" only figure in if readers are aware of the biblical story. In the poem, she does not declare her intentions before setting off on her mission. And this declaration comes in the form of asking permission from the elders.

in the poem, explains a man's incentive for his courageous and dangerous behavior. Since leaving Geatland, Beowulf has consistently risked his life building a lasting reputation and reinforcing his heroism with every battle and win, until finally he dies a glorified death in battle with a dragon. Beowulf's trials and boasts indeed pay off, for at the end of his life his legacy lives on. The poet writes:

So the men of the Geats lamented
the fall of their prince, those hearth-companions;
they said that he was of the kings of the world
the mildest of men and the most gentle,
the kindest to his folk and the most eager for fame.²³⁵

These are the last lines of the *Beowulf* poem and provide confirmation of the male hero's legacy, ensuring he will be remembered in song and heart. Judith, of course, does not die at the end of the poem, and the reputation of her heroism lives on. However, she did not purposely look to build this legacy. The reward that she has been longing for is not remembrance on this earth as the poet tells us, but a heavenly afterlife.²³⁶ This point, as well as the language, will be elaborated upon in the next subsection.

Like Beowulf, Judith wins acclaim through her heroic actions. Though she does not initially set out to win fame, her heroics earn veneration—a side effect of her heroism. As asserted, the females of heroic poetry appear driven by self-preservation; that is, they are reacting to a personal threat or affront, and until that time, they are busy leading their lives. Anglo-Saxon men are trained as youths to perform as warriors.

Beowulf, the son of Scyld,²³⁷ was trained from a young age “so that later in life loyal

²³⁵ 3178–3183 (*Swa begnornodon Geata leode hlafordes hryre, heorðgeneatas; swædon þæt he wære wyruldcyninga manna mildest ond monðwærust, leodum liðost and lofgeornost*).

²³⁶ See the last five lines of the *Judith* poem in Liuzza (344–348) and Dobbie for the Old English equivalent. The poet's words will be examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

²³⁷ Not to be confused with Beowulf, the Geat, and hero of the poem.

comrades will stand beside him when war comes.”²³⁸ Conversely, a young Anglo-Saxon girl is traditionally schooled as weaver or cloth-maker and embroiderer.²³⁹ Where a male warrior is long and well prepared to perform heroically should he find the opportunity, a female, by contrast, has no such training and must perform some act of self-defense or lose her chastity and her home; Beowulf did not have to go to Daneland, but Judith must perform or lose everything. Moreover, Judith does not go looking for opportunities to showcase her military talents, for she has none. Judith, therefore, is motivated to action in the heat of the moment; her strategic planning and the decapitation taking place all within a few days. Because Judith’s life has not been one of regimented training for battle, and she is nonetheless able to perform with great physical strength and mental agility, the poet reveals that a woman’s heroic status can be earned in a very short time frame. There is no need to for Judith to showcase an impressive family tree or train for battle; for the Anglo-Saxon poet, she is without boundaries. This shift in heroic tradition speaks to the poet’s willingness to carve out new space for women in the literature that may not be available to them in reality.

Importantly, the only other man of status in the poem is Holofernes, the enemy, who is depicted as unworthy of homage even from his own men; he is unable to control himself with drink and separates himself from them with a “fly-net” (*fleohnet*, 47a), so that he can watch what they are doing but they are unable to see him. Thus, the poet depicts a tyrannical leader spying on his own men. From this perspective, and in contrast

²³⁸ 18–25 (*Beowulf was brene—blæd wide sprang—Scyldes eaferan Scedelandum in. Swa sceal geong guma gode gewyrcean, fromum feohgiftum on fæder bearne, þæt hine on ylde eft gewunigen wilgesipas, þonne wig cume, leode gelæaten; lofdæd um sceal in mægþa gehwære man geþeon.*)

²³⁹ Christine Fell observes that Anglo-Saxon society “places a good deal of emphasis on the fighting qualities of the male, and many glimpses that we get of great ladies show them at the occupations of weaving, spinning or embroidery. In Fell, chapter 2, “Daily Life,” 40.

to the evil Holofernes, one can see how the holy Judith was developing as the real leader of change from the onset. Her willingness to begin the war effort against the Assyrians, at great bodily risk, with no material reward in mind—no desire for loot or glory—reveals a new kind of leader: one that was not born a leader, but who becomes a leader because of circumstances. Perhaps this is the condition under which women of Old English poetry are allowed to participate more fully. That Judith’s reward for her heroism is found “in heaven to come” (*swyce eac mede on heofonum, sigorlean in swegles wuldre*, 343b–344a) also transcends the heroic model.

The second way the treatment of Judith’s character serves to expand the customary Germanic heroic ideal is by her participation in a modified version of the lord/retainer relationship; an opportunity rare or non-existent for Anglo-Saxon women.²⁴⁰ This observation speaks to my contention that women of Old English poetry operate in isolation, without the benefit of a traditional *communal* war band. In this case, however, the *Judith* poet redefines conventions, enabling his heroine to participate in an alternative version of the custom, in a private, one-on-one, lord/retainer covenant: Lord (God) and vassal (Judith). The poet tells us in return Judith’s “faith in the Almighty forever” (*þe heo ahte trumne geleafan a to ðam ælmihtigan*, 6b–7a), she is given “an outstanding gift” (*Hyre ðæs fæder on roderum torhtmod tiðe gefremende*, 5b–6a), “protection” (*gefriðode*, 5a); this language is reminiscent of an oath of fealty.

²⁴⁰ Dorothy Whitelock sees female characters enter Anglo-Saxon heroic literature through their personal relationships. In “Chapter 2: The Bonds of Society,” *The Beginnings of English Society* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1952).

The traditional Germanic hero is incomplete without a *comitatus*, and this is one heroic quality that Judith lacks in a conventional sense.²⁴¹ However, as shown above, the poet does afford Judith the security of this special relationship in a more intimate way. In the poem, Judith has no communal war band, only the companionship of a lady's maid, a "fair-faced maiden" (*blachleor ides*, 128a) who accompanies her to the Assyrian camp. While one might argue that this woman and Judith share a certain rapport, the poet gives us no reason to believe, nor provides any language that would imply, that theirs is an organized relationship of fidelity like that associated with a traditional *comitatus*; the maid makes no pledge of fealty nor is Judith observed providing her with spoils and treasures of war, as would be expected as part of the lord/retainer bond. In fact, after the Bethulians' defeat of the enemy Judith is presented with gifts in her honor: "old Holofernes' gory helm and broadsword beside his byrnie so wide, arrayed in gold so red, with goods that the ring-warriors' prince in pride and power had owned: his heirlooms and riches and gems, all his glittering wealth and his rings,"²⁴² but she accepts none of it and "devoted it all to the glorious God of high hosts" (*Ealles ðæs Iudith sægde wuldor weroda dryhtne*, 341b–342a).

Rather than distribute the loot or booty that resulted from her heroic actions, as a warlord would do for his *comitatus*, Judith donates it as a gift to God. The poet does not inform readers how this happens. Regardless, Judith sees her reward in heaven. The poet tells us "In the end there could be no doubt about the reward she's cherished so long"

²⁴¹ Christine Thijs writes that "Another essential attribute of a traditional hero is a *comitatus* of retainers, part of the socially determined code of honor in [Joyce] Hill's definition. Judith's lack of *comitatus* is one of [Mark] Griffith's objections to viewing Judith as an epic heroine." In "Feminine Heroism in the Old English Judith." *Leeds Studies in English*, Essays for Joyce Hill (2006): 46.

²⁴² 334b–339 (*Hi to mede hyre of ðam siðfate sylfre brohton, eorlas æscrofe, Holofernes sweord ond swatigna helm, swylce eac side byrnas gerenode readum golde, on eal þæt se rinca baldor swiðmod sinces ahte oððe sundoryfes, beaga ond beorhtra maða, hi þæt þære beorhtan idese ageafon gearoþoncolre*).

(*huru æt þam ende ne tweode þæs leanes þe heo lange gyrnde*, 345b–346a); her reward is “God’s mercy” (“bliss in His heaven above,” *ðurh his sylfes miltse*, 349b),²⁴³ eternal bliss with the Lord God Almighty. This is the lord/retainer relationship the poet creates for Judith: Judith as retainer and God as her true and only Lord. It is in this “long” relationship, clearly presented in the beginning of the poem, that readers become aware of the profound bond between God and Judith. The poet writes:

...nor ever upon earth’s broad surface could she be brought to doubt
the grace of God who gave favor—
renowned Ruler—when she needed it most:
protection came from the primal Power against pure terror,
help from the highest Judge when our heavenly Father
in glory bestowed an outstanding gift,
thanks to her full belief, her faith in the Almighty forever.²⁴⁴

This passage reveals language that is reflective of the obligation of fealty. To Judith, God “gave favor” and “protection” and bestowed an “outstanding gift” in exchange for “her full belief and faith” in Him. Several lines later, the poet refers to Judith as his handmaid (“the Savior’s handmaid”; *scyppendes mægð*, 78a). Theirs is an unbreakable, relationship no doubt.

4 JUDITH AS A LEADER OF MEN

Judith challenges the *comitatus* tradition by depicting a woman with extraordinary authority. From this perspective, and in contrast to the evil Holofernes, one can see how the holy Judith was developing as a leader from the onset. Her willingness to begin the war effort against the Assyrians, at great bodily risk, with no

²⁴³ “God’s mercy” is my translation; “bliss in His heaven above” is from Liuzza.

²⁴⁴ 1–7 (...*tweode gifena in ðys ginnan grunde. Heo ðar ða gearwe funde mundbyrd æt ðam mæran þeodne, þa heo ahte mæste þærfe, hyldo þæs hehstan deman, þæt he hie wið þæs hehstan brogan gefriðode, frymða waldend. Hure ðæa fæder on roderum torhtmod tiðe gefremede, þe heo ahte trunne geleafan a to ðam ælmihtigan*).

material reward in mind—no desire for loot or glory—reveals a new kind of leader on several levels: Judith is a female, not born or trained to lead but who driven to lead because of dire circumstances. In her “undefined” leadership capacity she destabilizes the customary template. That Judith’s reward for her heroism is found “in heaven to come” (*swyce eac mede on heofonum, sigorlean in swegles wuldre*, 343b–344a), and not on this earth, also transcends the heroic model.

The character of Judith not only presents us with a new type of heroine but also a new style of leadership. In Old English poetry, heroes, leaders, and protagonists typically are one and the same; Beowulf and Byrhtnoth are notable examples of this confluence. One skill of an Anglo-Saxon heroic leader is the ability to inspire followers with persuasive speech.²⁴⁵ In the poem, Judith’s oration echoes the speeches of other warriors in battle poetry. For example, we see this language at the end of *The Battle of Maldon* when we hear Byrhtwold, “an older warrior” (*se wæs eald geneat*, 310a), address his comrades: “Minds must be the firmer, hearts the bolder, soul’s strength the greater, as our resources lessen...” (*Hige sceal þe heardra, heorte þe cenre, mod sceal þe mare, þe ure mægne lytlað...*, 312–313).²⁴⁶ We can detect this same forceful delivery in Hnæf’s rousing speech at *The Fight at Finnsburgh*²⁴⁷ as he urges his men to take up arms against the Frisians: “But awake now, my warriors, take up your shields, think of valor (*Ac onwacnigeað nu, wigend mine, habbað eower linda, hicgeaþ on ellen*, 10–11).²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ The voice of Judith, including her speech, is discussed in great detail in Chapter V.

²⁴⁶ Bill Griffiths, ed. and trans., *The Battle of Maldon—Text and Translation* (Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003), 312–326.

²⁴⁷ There is inconsistency among sources regarding the spelling of *Finnsburgh*. Liuzza spells it as recorded in this chapter, while Klaeber spells it *Finnsburg*; ending with a “g.” See Frederick R. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd Edition (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950).

²⁴⁸ Liuzza, “Appendix A: Characters Mentioned in Beowulf,” 10–13. 5. *The Fight at Finnsburgh* [Source: Text in Klaeber, 3rd ed., 245–249].

Then, with Hnæf's instructions and encouragement, many men made ready to fight, just as they did for Judith. As illustrated by this phrase, the use of imperatives and an unmistakable sense of urgency are critical to an effective heroic proclamation; both of these devices are detectible in Judith's moving speech to the Bethulian people. The speech takes place at the village fortress-gate. A horde of all ages gathers, amazed and jubilant at her safe return; they rush to greet her. She begins by stating that she has something that will make all of them grateful (*Ic eow secgan mæg þoncwyrðe þing*, 152b–153a). She instructs her maidservant to take the “bloody trophy” (*heaford onwriðan*, 173b; *blodig ætywan*, 174b) from the pouch and hold it up so all can see it. At the height of her speech she commands:

Now each good man here
in this town dwelling I tell you all,
shield bearing men: you must make haste now
and gird for war.²⁴⁹

Similar to the language used by the *Finnsburh* and *Maldon* poets, Judith's address is direct, powerful, and stirs the people to take up arms. There is no hedging in her voice and her message is clear: “gird for war.” This manner of speaking is reminiscent only of a hero and leader in Old English poetry.

Although Judith may not have the official credentials of a leader, she steps in when no other is to be found. Finding the confidence from her successful mission to the Assyrian camp, she delivers a well-spoken speech that is welcomed by a group of desperate, weakened people in need of inspiration and guidance. It is unclear how the Bethulians actually form into an army of warriors; but they do so at her command. We are told Judith speaks at the gate to multitudes (*heapum*, 163), young and old (*eald ge*

²⁴⁹ 186b–189a (*Nu ic gumena gehwæne þyssa burghloda biddan wylle, randwiggendra, þæg e recene eow fýsan to gefeohte*).

geonge, 166a). She refers to them as “victory-famed troops, valiant commanders” (*Her ge magon sweotole, sigerofo hæleð, leoda ræswan*, 177–178a); it is as if her speech carries the power to engender an army from the ordinary masses. Her words indeed evoke military rhetoric: Judith “ordered” (*bebead*, 14) and “bade” her servant (*het*, 171).²⁵⁰ She instructs the troops that God has sent a signal that it is time to fight; they must “bear linden shields forth boards before breasts and byrnie-jackets under gleaming helms to the host of the foe!” (*berað linde forð bord for breostrum ond byrnhomas, scire helmas in sceaðena gemong*, 190b–192). Her inspiring words are heeded; “The heroes under helmets left the holy town at dawn of day” (*hæleð under helmum, of ðære haligan byrig on ðæt dægred sylf*, 202a–202a), to engage the Assyrians in battle. Judith’s confidence, motivating speech, clear and direct orders, as well as the visual display of Holofernes’ head, serve as proof to the Bethulians of her leadership capabilities. Furthermore, the poet leads us to understand that the Bethulians may have viewed Judith as a potential leader before she ever left her village for enemy camp. The poet tells us:

Warriors sat there
 holding watch then, wakeful guardsmen
 at the mighty fort—just as, with mournful heart
 but good judgment, Judith had ordered
 before setting forth filled with courage.²⁵¹

This passage shows that some Bethulian soldiers obeyed her commands even before she demonstrated her competence by killing Holofernes. Judith, then, began her career as a leader before she proved herself physically. Thus, in her “wise counsel” (*gleawe lare*, 333b), and bravery (*ides ellenrof*, 146a), as depicted through the strategic development of

²⁵⁰ Hugh Magennis points out “the poet employs the language of a military leader.” In “Gender and Heroism in the Old English Judith,” *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts*, ed. Elaine Treharne, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 8.

²⁵¹ 141b–145b (*Wiggend sæton, weras wæccende wearde heoldon in ðam folce ær geomormodum Iudith bebead, searōdoncol mægð, þa heo on sið gewat*).

an action plan to stop the invasion, volunteering to personally execute the plan, carrying out that plan by killing Holofernes, and returning to her village successful, she earns the rank of battle-hardened hero and leader, like Byrhtnoth, and Hnæf. However, it is specifically Judith's abilities to strategize, advise, and inspire, that transforms the conventional military hero to a new type of military and spiritual leader. Kathryn Powell argues that the true theme that binds *Beowulf* and *Judith* together in *The Nowell Codex* is leadership.²⁵² Confirmation of this assertion, notable in the characterization of these two heroes, is manifest by their destruction of evil and their ability to boast about their deeds. Both Byrhtnoth and Hnæf are fallen leaders, but Beowulf and Judith remain living proof of humankind's ability to overcome evil.

Finally, Judith's spirituality aids in reshaping heroism which is a focus of Old English poetry. Thus far, I have identified similarities between her character and some of the notable male heroes in the corpus. I have also provided evidence that positions her as a "new kind of legendary hero."²⁵³ I suggest that it is her faith and spiritual connection with the divine that enables this reading. We can see this by comparing key passages from both *Beowulf* and *Judith*. After Beowulf kills Grendel's mother and beheads Grendel, the poet tells us that God protected him.²⁵⁴ Indeed, throughout the *Beowulf* epic God is omnipresent. However, the poet does not tell us that Beowulf is God's warrior nor does he use language that implies that Beowulf's relationship with God is more or less important than any other relationships in the poem. Conversely, we know Judith is

²⁵² Kathryn Powell, "Meditating on Men and Monsters: A Reconsideration of the Thematic Unity of the Beowulf Manuscript." *The Review of English Studies* 57.228 (2006): 1–15.

²⁵³ Frank, 100.

²⁵⁴ 1550–1556 (*Hæfde ða forsiðod sunu Ecgþeowes under gynne grund, Geata cempa, nemne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede, herenet hearde, ond halig God geweold wigsigor; witið Drihten, rodera Rædend hit on ryht gesced yðelice, syþðan he eft astod*).

described as a “blessed maiden” (eadigan mægð, 35), a “holy woman” (*halgan mægð*, 260a), and “God’s handmaid” (*metodes meowlan*, 261a), which deliberately highlights a personal relationship between Judith and the divine, as has been argued earlier in this chapter.

That God’s presence can be discerned in both *Judith* and *Beowulf* is without question. However, the *Judith* poet places special emphasis on the heroine’s extraordinary relationship with God. It can be said that, technically, God did not come to the aid of the Bethulians, he came to Judith’s aid, at her request; it was her desire that the Bethulians be saved from evil heathens and her prayer that was answered. Because of her “full belief” and “faith,” Judith was deserving of God’s favor. She prays to him:

Heaven’s Defender
 she addressed by name—[...]
 mercy I need now
 Trinitarian strength! [...]

 Prince of heaven:
 give me triumph and true belief; let me take this sword
 and cleave this murder-monger! [...]

 Grant me vengeance;
 let my mind’s fury inflame my heart!²⁵⁵

In this passage Judith calls upon God’s assistance to help her accomplish her deed; he comes to her side when she needs him most (“I’ve never had greater need for your mercy before”; *Nahte ic þinre næfre miltse þon maran þearfe*, 91b–92a). Unlike Judith, Beowulf does not invoke God, and it appears he does not share her same sense of security in terms of his capabilities. At one point, during his fight with Grendel’s mother, the poet tells us “The son of Ecgtheow would have ended his life under the wide ground, the

²⁵⁵ 83–94a (*Ic ðe, frymða god one frofre gæst, bearn alwaldan, biddan wylle miltse þinre me þearle ys me nu ða heorte onhæted ond hige geomor, swyðe mid sorgum gedrefed. Forgif me, swegles ealdor, sigor ond soðne geleafan, þæt ic mid þys sweorde mote geheawan þysne morðres bryttan; geunne me minra gesynta, þearlmod þeoden gumena. Nahte ic þinre næfre miltse þon maran þearfe. Gewrec nu, mihtig dryhten, torhtmod tires brytta, þæt me ys þus torne on mode, hate on hreðre minum*).

Geatish champion, had not his armored shirt offered him help, the hard battle net” (*Hæfde ða forsiðod sunu Ecgþeowes under gynne grund, Geata cempa, numne him heaðobyrne helpe gefremede, herenet hearde*, 1150–1553a). There is also a moment when Grendel’s mother has the upper hand, which suggests Beowulf could lose the fight. In *Judith*, there is no language to indicate that the heroine would not be successful. During the passage where she is beheading Holofernes there is no language to imply that she doubts her abilities or that she may lose the fight. Throughout the ordeal she is “wielding control” (*eaðost mihte wel gewealdan*, 102b–103a). Furthermore, from early in the poem, Judith is introduced as a “blessed maiden” (*eadigan mægð*, 35a); she has God’s blessing, and her victory is confirmed from the onset.

According to the poets, both Beowulf and Judith are victorious because of God’s help. Following Beowulf’s triumph the poet writes, “God brought about war-victory—the wise Lord, Ruler of heavens, decided it rightly” (*ond halig God geweold wigsigor; witig Drihten, rodera Rædend hit on ryht gesced*, 1553b–1556). However, in the *Judith* poem, it is the victorious protagonist herself who draws attention to this point. After she slays Holofernes and returns to her village, Judith proclaims, “I took his life with the help of God” (*ic him ealdor oðþrong þurh godes fultum*, 185b–185a). It is in the heroine’s own words that audiences learn of God’s role in her efforts. Judith’s warrior’s strength and courage are balanced by her humility (*Eaðmedum*, 170a). The last lines of the *Beowulf* poem describe the hero as “the mildest of men and the most gentle, the kindest to his folk and the most eager for fame” (*manna mildest on monðwærust, leodum liðost ond lofgeornost*, 3181–3182). While this language hints at a humble nature, it is coupled with an eagerness for “fame,” and it is a focus on the latter quality throughout the poem

that positions Beowulf as essentially a traditional Germanic hero. This language serves to widen the gap between his character and Judith's. Because Judith does not seek fame, and she espouses a humble, spiritual nature, her heroism may have resonated more openly with contemporary Christian sensibilities.

Of particular interest are the endings of the two poems. Notably, Judith lives and Beowulf dies. Also of significance is the poets' renderings of the rewards the characters each receive for their heroism. Beowulf, in death, ultimately receives the reward for which he has worked and hoped all of his life, fame and glory. At his funeral, Beowulf's "hearth companions" "lament" his passing (*Sea begnornodon Geata leode flafordes hyre, heorðgeneatas*, 3178–3179) recalling "his proud deeds" and "prowess" (*eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc duguðum demdon*, 3173b–3174a). They build a beacon, placing treasure in the ground, and send him off as is customary by Anglo-Saxon standards. Beowulf, who was "the most eager for fame" (*lofgeornost*, 3182a), achieves it. Judith also receives the reward that "she cherished so long" ("In the end there could be no doubt about the reward she'd cherished so long"; *huru æt þam ende ne tweode þæs leanes þe heo lange gyrnde*, 345b–346a), God's grace, which will come after her death at some undefined time in the future. Thus, both heroes ultimately reap the rewards of their heroism, though these differ greatly.

The *Judith* poet, while underscoring that she earns the favor of her people (although this was not her intention), removes the heroine from a material, earthly realm, and resituates her with the divine. It is telling that in the last lines of the poem, which audiences would have considered important, the poet chooses to emphasize Judith's desire for God's grace while the *Beowulf* poet elects to underscore Beowulf's desire to be

glorified by his comrades. It is in this last passage that the poets make clear, once again, that Judith's motivation for her actions are rooted in spirituality and not the physical world, in addition to self-preservation.

Ultimately, Judith delivers a message of hope to the men and women of Bethulia, the Anglo-Saxons, and all people who hear her story. Judith is a magnificent role model with the ability to uplift mankind as she does her people ("each uplifted—all their minds hopeful"; *Æghwylcum wearð men on ðære medobyrig mod areted*, 165b–166a). As a female demonstrating a heroic ethos, her actions differ from those of men, but in essence the message remains the same: freedom and honor require strength of character, wisdom, and faith in God. By summoning God's help to defeat the Assyrians, Judith shows that each one of us, through divine guidance, has this power to lead, stand against evil, and earn God's grace. At the end of the poem, Judith lives to lead her Anglo-Saxon audience into the new age.

CHAPTER IV

JULIANA: WEAVER OF PEACE

The story of Juliana of Nicomedia is a graphic account of a virgin Christian martyr executed during the persecutions of Diocletian (r. 284–305 C. E.) in modern-day Turkey. Circulating in a variety of sources, her life, likely first written down during the reign of Constantine (r. 306–337 C. E.), was well known in England possibly as early as the late sixth century. Like most in the “virgin martyr” hagiographic tradition, hers is a story of a young maiden whose refusal to marry results in confrontation with local authorities, gruesome tortures, and ultimate death.²⁵⁶ Cynewulf’s *Juliana* remains faithful to the genre in terms of its narrative arc, but expands the tradition in some ways by revealing a heroine that reimagines roles for women within both the Church and the secular arenas.

The character of the “virgin martyr” is a common part reserved for literary figures

²⁵⁶ According to William Strunk Jr., “The typical virgin martyr is a girl of noble rank (St. Juliana, St. Agatha, St. Anastasia, St. Catherine, St. Basilla, St. Cyrilla), devout and learned (St. Juliana, St. Susanna), sought in marriage by some heathen proconsul or prefect or prefect’s son (St. Agatha, St. Juliana, St. Agnes). She rejects her suitor and refuses to sacrifice to Apollo (St. Anastasia, St. Euphemia, St. Juliana). Brought before the prefect for trial she adheres to her faith whereupon she is subjected to atrocious torture and humiliation. She is stripped naked (St. Agnes, St. Barbara, St. Juliana), scourged and cudged (St. Agatha, St. Anastasia, St. Dorothea, St. Euphemia, St. Lucia), hung by the hair (St. Juliana, St. Symphorosa), torn by a wheel in which are set swords or sharp hooks (St. Juliana, St. Catherine, St. Euphemia, St. Christina); placed in a hot cauldron (St. Juliana, St. Lucia, St. Fausta) and in the flames (St. Agnes, St. Juliana, St. Euphemia, St. Macra, St. Cecilia). Instead of harming her, the fire burns out and consumes the miscreant bystanders (St. Agnes, St. Juliana, St. Christina). Her executioners become converted by her constancy, and meet death for their faith (St. Juliana, St. Anastasia, St. Fausta). After another imprisonment (St. Juliana, St. Lucia, St. Anastasia), she is beheaded (St. Agnes, St. Juliana, St. Dorothea, etc.; almost all perish in this way) and is thenceforth enrolled in the great army of the Church Triumphant, while her memory is tenderly and reverently cherished by the devout in this world.” William Strunk Jr., ed., *Juliana* (Boston, U.S.A., and London: D. C. Heath and Co., 1904), xxx–xxxii.

of both sexes during the time period. Atypical of Juliana's story, however, is her significant and prolonged verbal exchange with the devil and her address during her martyrdom, which is more reminiscent of a sermon rather than a speech. In Cynewulf's poem, Juliana's customary role as intercessor is expanded to incorporate the essence of the Anglo-Saxon peace-weaving tradition; instead of creating a bond between two rival tribes, Juliana strengthens the bonds between God and man, and the ecclesiastical and secular worlds. In this chapter I argue that Juliana's character, though obviously subject to the limitations of the genre as well as the conventions of Old English poetry, embodies certain qualities of the heroic peace-weaver that serves to imagine space for women within the authority of the Church.

1 CYNEWULF'S POEM

Cynewulf's *Juliana* exists in the Old English manuscript known as The *Exeter Book*.²⁵⁷ Included with *Juliana* is a compendium of sacred and secular texts, including Cynewulf's *Christ II*, as well as *Wulf and Eadwacer*, *The Wife's Lament*, and *The Husband's Message*. The extant manuscript contains two known gaps appearing after lines 288 and 558.²⁵⁸ The number of leaves missing is unknown and of significance in that the gap after line 288 appears to have included Juliana's initial encounter with Satan; we will never know the complete extent of Juliana's verbal power. What is available is thought to follow its Latin source quite closely, although some variation has been

²⁵⁷ Given to the Exeter Cathedral Library in 1072 C. E. by Bishop Leofwine (fl. 953 C. E.).

²⁵⁸ According to Rosemary Woolf, the gaps appear "after lines 288 and 558, which conclude folios 69b and 73b respectively. A comparison with the *Vita* suggests that not more than one leaf is missing at either place (it would contain about forty-five lines of writing, approximately equivalent to sixty-five to seventy lines of poetry." In Rosemary Woolf, ed., *Juliana* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), 1.

identified, including the significant addition of lines spoken by the devil to Juliana while she is held in prison.²⁵⁹

Unlike other available versions of *Juliana* with no confirmed author, Cynewulf signed his poem in runic letters, just as he did on the other three Old English works attributed to him (*Fates of the Apostles*, *Christ II*—also known as *The Ascension*—and *Elene*). Garnett places Cynewulf in Northumbria and dates his work sometime during the second half of the eighth century. He believes Cynewulf had access to the Latin works of Aldhelm²⁶⁰ and Bede, as well as to some of the accounts that later appear in the *Acta Sanctorum*.²⁶¹ Because of certain linguistic qualities, others have suggested Cynewulf was possibly a monk writing in Mercia in the early ninth century.²⁶² Little else is known about the author, and we can never be certain about his source(s). It should be noted, however, that Cynewulf's poem, while certainly a work of the imagination, is the earliest known English version of the English life of Juliana.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ For a detailed comparison of the Latin life of Juliana and Cynewulf's version, see James M. Garnett, "The Latin and the Anglo-Saxon Juliana." *PMLA* 14.3 (1899): 279–298; and, Daniel G. Calder, "4. Juliana," in *Cynewulf* (Twayne Publishers, 1981), 75–103.

²⁶⁰ Juliana, however, does not appear in Aldhelm's *De uirginitate* or *Carmen de uirginitate* nor does she appear in Ælfric's Homilies, although her legend was circulating in England at the time.

²⁶¹ The *Acta Sanctorum* (Acts of the Saints), a project undertaken by Jesuit hagiographer, Heribert Rosweyde (1569–1629 C.E.) was continued by the Jesuit scholar Jean Bolland (1596–1665 C.E.) and eventually completed over time by the "Bollandists." In 1899 James Garnett traced the origins of *Juliana*. In the *Acta Sanctorum*, Volume II, for February (Volume V of the whole work), he found two lives both edited by John Bolland; one of these lives is from an anonymous author and the other is by a man named Peter. He also found a Greek *Life of St. Juliana*, by Symeon Metaphrastes, a Byzantine hagiography of the early tenth century, which was translated into Latin and incorporated by Surius into his *Lives of Saints* and printed in Migne's *Patrologia Graeca*, Vol. 114. Numerous references to Juliana also appear in the Martyrologies. Garnett, 279–298. Rosemary Woolf recognizes the *Acta Sanctorum* of Bolland (*Acta Sanctorum*, Februarii II, 873 ff.) as the earliest extant printed life of Juliana. It appears under the heading *Acta auctore anonymo ex xi veteribus MSS* in the form of a critical text. Woolf, 11.

²⁶² Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., "Changing Perspectives on a Saint's Life: Juliana," in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994) 205; Kenneth Sisam, *Studies in Old English Literature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 6, 28.

²⁶³ The next English version, although brief, is found in the thirteenth century *Legenda Aurea*.

Most scholars tend to believe that the Old English *Juliana* was written for a female religious audience.²⁶⁴ This makes sense in that Juliana is contrasted with all of the men in the poem—Eleusius, her father, and the devil (although the devil is not human)—which would have been inspirational for women of the time who embraced a life of celibacy. Kimberly Joy Tanner sees Juliana as “demonstrating her religious independence” when she refuses the arranged marriage.²⁶⁵ This action puts the heroine in direct opposition with cultural practices. Pat Belanoff points out that Old English poetry describes many women as “shining”²⁶⁶ and asserts that “Cynewulf’s Juliana is the significant female in Old English poetry whose ‘shiningness’ is least connected to material objects.”²⁶⁷ While Juliana’s independence, resistance to patriarchal society, and holy glow all serve to align her with the saints’ lives tradition, she exhibits other qualities that serve to promote her from within conventions. Cynewulf’s enlightening depiction of Juliana performing certain social and religious rites, a function typically reserved for men in the Church, enables the transformative power of her character.

Some scholars have criticized Cynewulf’s portrayal of Juliana, observing little depth of personality in the heroine.²⁶⁸ In the poet’s defense, Joseph Wittig believes that “the writer’s concern was not so much to present a versified historic narrative of the Latin

²⁶⁴ Shari Horner, “Spiritual Truth and Sexual Violence: The Old English Juliana, Anglo-Saxon Nuns, and the discourse of Female Monastic Enclosure,” *Signs* 19.3 (1994): 659.

²⁶⁵ Kimberly Joy Tanner, “Radical saints and conservative churches: Cynewulf’s Juliana in its cultural context” (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 2010), 8. PROQUEST (Order Number 1479955).

²⁶⁶ 166–167a (“My sweetest shine of sun, Juliana, what gleam you have?”; *Min se swetesta sunnan scima, Juliana. Hwæt, þu glæm hafaast*)

²⁶⁷ Pat Belanoff, “The Fall(?) of the Old English Female Poetic Image,” *PMLA* 1045 (1989): 822–831.

²⁶⁸ Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr. is quick to remind us that “Cynewulf has been seriously criticized for the way he has portrayed Juliana,” offering S.A.J. Bradley’s comments as example: “He seems barely fired emotionally or imaginatively by his heroine who is assigned little charisma.” S.A.J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, Everyman’s Library (London: Dent, 1982), 302. Quoted in Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., “Changing Perspectives on a Saint’s Life: Juliana,” in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, eds. Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994). 208; Rosemary Woolf takes a similar position citing the author’s “absence of imagery” and “a uniformity verging on monotony.” “The style,” she writes, “is generally unrelieved by any emotional or rhetorical emphasis or by any other gradations in tone,” 17;

life as to rearrange the contents in such phrasings as to give the poem a figural narrative, creating an extreme moral opposition.”²⁶⁹ For Wittig, from a figural point of view, Juliana stands for the “City of God” while Eleusius represents the “City of the Devil” and posits Juliana also as a figure of *Ecclesia*.²⁷⁰ Such a figural reading can help us see how Cynewulf refashioned his source to unveil a deeper significance in her character.²⁷¹ This new dimension, I argue, stands in contrast to those that believe Juliana’s character lacks charisma. I support Horner’s observation that Juliana’s story is meant to inspire, as the saint demonstrates a new brand of heroic spirit.

Cynewulf’s Juliana is uniquely representative of a Germanic ethos and a Christian tradition enabling audiences to reimagine certain established social and literary traditions.²⁷² As discussed in Chapter I, an Anglo-Saxon hero is brave, accepting of the situation, resolved to carry out declared intentions, desires to forge a reputation, loyal, wise, and resilient.²⁷³ In the same spirit, Juliana courageously confronts villains, accepts her eminent death, and is resolved to see it through. Her wisdom is made apparent by the devil’s words (“It is clear to me that you have become in all things unabashed and wise in mind”; *Is on me sweotul þæt þu unscamge æghwæs wurde on ferþe frod*, 551b–553a) and throughout the poem she proclaims her loyalty to her faith and God. With these heroic qualities she is able to extinguish the devil and his human representatives,

²⁶⁹ Joseph Wittig, “Figural Narrative in Cynewulf’s Juliana,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 4 (1975): 37–55.

Quoted in Bremmer, “Changing Perspectives,” 211.

²⁷⁰ Bremmer, “Changing Perspectives,” 212.

²⁷¹ Bremmer, “Changing Perspectives,” 213.

²⁷² Roy Liuzza rightly observes, “Anglo-Saxon literary tradition is one in which pagan heroic diction and Christian virtues become gradually intertwined. In “Beowulf: monuments, memory, history,” *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*, eds. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 103.

²⁷³ See Chapter I, 4–5.

ensuring her redemption and an eternal resting place in heaven. Juliana thus perpetuates a heroic past in which the male hero was glorified in life and after death.

Linguistic elements of a heroic ethos are also detectable in the poem in passages where Juliana does not appear, specifically in lines 671b through 688a when Eleusius seeks the “sea-stream” (*ehstream sohte*, 673b) in shame with his “thanes” (*þegnas*, 683a) who no longer have need of treasure and “rings,” (*beagas*, 687b) because “death seized them all (*swylt ealle fornom*, 675b), the “underlings with their lord” (*wigens cynnes heane mid hlaford*, 680b–681a);²⁷⁴ these words and phrases are linked with battle-poetry vocabulary.²⁷⁵ The importance of the *comitatus* relationship (between thanes and their lord) is emphasized here.

²⁷⁴ Like *Beowulf*, the poem opens with the familiar Old English oral form, *hwæt*, which is recorded in *Bosworth and Toller* as an adverb or interjection (“why, what! ah!”), as well as the neuter singular of the interrogative pronoun *hwa* (“what”). The use of *hwæt* as the opening word is not unique to *Beowulf* and *Juliana*; seven other Old English poems begin the same way (See Matt Garley, Benjamin Slade, and Marina Terkourafi, “Hwæt! LOL! Common formulaic functions in *Beowulf* and blogs.” *Proceedings from the Annual Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society*, 45.1 (2009), 111–126. The dialect employed, also like most extant Old English poetry, is predominately Late West Saxon interspersed with a number of Early West Saxon forms and a few Anglicanisms (Woolf, 2). In the first few lines we learn of “heroes” (*hæled*, 1), and “deed-brave men” (*deman dædhwate*, 2a) language which recalls the stories of Byrhtnoth and Hnæf, and the numerous champions and conquerors chronicled in *Widsith* as described in Chapter I. Like Judith, Juliana speaks among a “multitude of men” (*on wera mengu*, 45b), but unlike her and more in line with Germanic literary heroic male tradition she declares her intentions: “I would immediately, without faltering, be prepared to submit to your desire” (*...ic beo gearo sona unwaclice willan þines*, 49b–50). Here, she speaks of her readiness and willingness to commit herself to the daunting ordeal that awaits her; she is prepared to sacrifice her life to show others her depth of faith in the one “True God” (*soðne god*, 47b). This language, peppered throughout the poem, is reinforced by tropes associated with Germanic folktales and myth that would have also felt familiar to contemporary audiences.

Bremmer reads details of *Juliana* through a folktale lens by comparing and contrasting narrative elements of the poem with fairy tales. See also Vladimir I. Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, 2nd rev. ed. (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1968). It is worth considering that this lens may be another avenue through which audiences are able to perceive the traditional Germanic hero. When Africanus hands Juliana over to Eleusius to be punished, Bremmer reads it as her being forced to leave home and assigns Africanus to role of the wicked parent, who “sets the chain-reaction of the plot in motion” (209). He writes that a common feature of fairy tales is that the hero must overcome obstacles to reap a reward and that these hardships can be seen as tests of will power or resolve. One also detects a similar narrative formula in classical “quest” narratives or epics. For example, Hercules, hero of the Greco-Roman world, is well-known for his adventures such as those illustrated in *The Labours of Hercules*, and *Jason and the Argonauts*.

²⁷⁵ See Chapter I, 21.

Juliana hears the voice of God while in her jail cell, and He wants her to ask the “origins” of her surprise visitor. This identification ritual too is indicative of a heroic ethos identified in Anglo-Saxon poetry. In Seamus Heaney’s translation of *Beowulf*, the Scylding watchman speaks to Beowulf and his band for the first time upon their landing in Daneland. The watchman questions, “I have to be informed who you are and where you hail from” (*Nu ic eower sceal frumcyn witan, ær ge fyr heonan*, 251b–252),²⁷⁶ to which Beowulf supplies an answer of considerable length which includes the name of his homeland, his lord, family lineage, who he is with, and why he has come. This exchange is important because contemporary audiences recognize the ritual and understand the outsider as speaking the truth. It is the heroic code that binds him to the truth and, as such, readers know to trust the answer. Like Beowulf, Satan provides Juliana with his true identity, which also serves to empower her. The more the devil exposes himself to Juliana, the wider the gap between her goodness and his badness: she is truly virtuous and he is truly evil. This binary encourages readers to make a choice, between a life devoted to Christ or a life of sin. Consequently, and surely as Cynewulf planned it, Christian audiences allied themselves with Juliana and her unique ability to extract truth and control a difficult situation. Yet, as Bremmer cautions, it would be a mistake, however, to see Juliana only as a Germanic heroine,²⁷⁷ because her treatment is complicated by a Christian environment.

The Christianization of Juliana alters the essence of her character and upsets the heroic tradition. Eleusius and his warriors are the pagan villains of the story and Juliana, as a Christian, represents the side of good. Those who follow Eleusius as their lord are

²⁷⁶ Liuzza translates this phrase as “Now I must know your lineage [...]”

²⁷⁷ Bremmer, “Changing Perspectives,” 213–214.

“deprived of comfort” (*hropra bedæled*, 681b) and end up in hell while those who follow Juliana, “the holy woman” (*lic haligre micle mægne*, 689b–690a), share a special “fellowship” (*þeodscipe*, 695a) by forming a kind of *comitatus* of kindred spirits.²⁷⁸ St. Polycarp puts it quite nicely when he states: “We worship Christ as God's Son; we love the martyrs as the Lord's disciples and imitators, and rightly so because of their matchless devotion towards their king and master. May we also be their companions and fellow disciples!” (Martyrium Polycarpi, 17: *Apostolic Fathers* II/3,396). As we see, a Christian community shares a special relationship with their Lord, and Juliana as a martyr and saint fortifies this link. From this perspective audiences are able to view one way Juliana upsets heroic conventions—by participating in an alternative version of the *comitatus* in a new and interesting way.

2 THE HISTORICAL JULIANA/JULIANA

According to Latin authors, the major details of Juliana's life are as follows: She was the daughter of Africanus of Nicomedia who was martyred for her Christian faith during the reign of Galerius Maximianus (r. 305–311 C. E.). At nine years of age she was betrothed to the prefect Eleusius; however, at eighteen she refused to marry him unless he rejected his pagan gods and accepted Christianity with its one true God. The action unfolds as Africanus and Eleusius attempt to persuade her to marry, at first with verbal threats then through torture. She is scourged, hung by her hair, and thrown into a heated bronze vat and burned. When these pains produce no corporal effects, Eleusius has her imprisoned. While locked away, the devil comes to her disguised as an angel in an effort to test her faith and lead her astray. To his chagrin, she exposes his true nature

²⁷⁸ After her martyrdom and death “a great many” brought her body back within the city walls while they sang “praise-songs” with great majesty among that “fellowship” (*lofsongum* and *þeodscipe*, 688b–695a).

as Satan (or his representative),²⁷⁹ seizes and beats him, and compels him to confess his countless offenses. As he begs for his release, she drags him with her before a tribunal ordered by Eleusius. While Juliana undergoes further torments, one hundred thirty men and women convert to Christianity and are beheaded.²⁸⁰ After the frightful scene, Juliana is put into a vat of molten lead, which has no effect on her but splatters on seventy-five pagan bystanders and kills them. Ultimately, in an effort to silence her forever, she is beheaded. After her martyrdom, a woman took Juliana's body with her to Rome; however, she did not reach her destination and the body was interred at Pozzuoli and later transferred to Cumae. In the early thirteenth century, she was moved to a convent in Naples but some of her bones are thought to be housed in other churches across Europe.

Earlier Latin references to an historical figure named Juliana are unclear; for instance, the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*²⁸¹ celebrates the martyrdom of Juliana of Nicomedia on February sixteenth while other sources change the spelling of her name. One edition even changes her gender as well as her feast date.²⁸² Regardless of whether or not Juliana's story is historically accurate, it is true that some early Christians suffered outrageous treatment at the hand of the Romans for their beliefs. During the Roman Empire, persecutory actions against Christians occurred sporadically over a period of two

²⁷⁹ There is some controversy regarding the "false angel"; in both the prose and poem versions, he is named as both Satan and a representative of Satan. He is generally regarded as one and the same. To simplify matters, throughout this dissertation I will consider this figure as the devil or Satan and not a representative.

²⁸⁰ Garnett notes that there is a number missing from the Metaphrastes text which may change the 130 converts in total to 500 men and 130 women for a total of 630 converts.

²⁸¹ The *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* or "martyrology of Jerome" is the oldest surviving martyrology and the precursor to all later Western martyrologies.

²⁸² According to Michael Lapidge, "the redactor of the Echternach recension has turned a male martyr of Nicomedia into a female St. Juliana." Michael Lapidge, "Cynwulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*." *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving Jr.*, eds. Katherine O'Brien O'Keefe, Edward Burroughs Irving, and Marke Amodio (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 148–149.

centuries until the year 313 C. E. when the Edict of Milan²⁸³ legalized Christianity. Until then, the brutality was carried out by not only state and local authorities, but often by individual communities as well. The total number of Christians who lost their lives is unknown.²⁸⁴

According to Woolf, references to St. Juliana (by name or brief entry) before Cynewulf was writing can be found in martyrologies, the earliest of which is found in the *Martyrologium Vetustissimum* attributed to St. Jerome (d. 420) where under the date *xiv kal. Mart.* the entry reads: *Nicomedia, passio S. Julianæ virginis, et Martyris.* Similar entries are located in other Latin martyrologies printed in Migne's *Patriologia Latina* as well as in Bede's *Martyrologium* which includes the following description:

And in Cumae, the commemorative festival of St. Juliana, virgin: who, in the time of emperor Maximianus, having first been beaten and seriously afflicted by her father Africanus, and having been beaten, naked, with rods and hung up by her hair, and drenched from her head down with molten lead by the prefect Eleusius, who she had taken as her husband, and having been taken back again into prison where she openly contested with the devil; and having been called back out again, she vanquished the torments of torture wheels, the flames of fire, a boiling-hot pot and accomplished martyrdom by the cutting off of her head.²⁸⁵

This passage supports details found in Cynewulf's *Juliana*, leading S. T. R. O. d'Ardene to suggest that Bede based his life on a Latin version that was the likely the source for Cynewulf as well.²⁸⁶ By the time Cynewulf's poem was completed, it is thought

²⁸³ The Edict of Milan was a letter written and signed in 313 by the Roman emperors Constantine and Licinius that proclaimed religious toleration in the Roman Empire.

²⁸⁴ Woolf, *Juliana*, 12.

²⁸⁵ Bede, *Martyrologium*. PL 94, Col. 843C–844B. (*Et in Cumis natale sanctae Julianae virginis, quae tempore Maximiani imperatoris primo a suo patre Africano caesa, et graviter cruciate, deinde et a praefecto Eleusio, quem sponsum habuerat, nuda virgis caesa, et a capillis suspense est, et plumbo solute capite perfuse, et rursus in carcerem recepta, ubi palam cum diabolo conflixit, et rursus evocate rotarum tormenta, flammam ignium, ollam ferventem superavit, ac decollatione capitis Martyrium consummavit.*). For an English translation of Bede's *Martyrologium*, see Felice Lifshitz, trans., "Bede, Martyrology," in *Medieval Hagiography: An Anthology*, ed. by Thomas Head (New York: Routledge, 2001), 169–189.

²⁸⁶ S. T. R. O. d'Ardene, "De Liflade ant de Passiun of Seinte Iulienne," *Early English Text Society*, 248 (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), xviii–xxiv, quoted in Daniel G. Calder, *Cynewulf*, (Twayne Publishers, 1981), 75.

hagiographies were commonly read and possibly one of the most popular genres in medieval Europe,²⁸⁷ and Juliana's story was already widely known.²⁸⁸

During the early Middle Ages, the Church recognized and promoted hagiographies. Of particular interest were those about young women who rebel against male authority in the name of their faith. The genre often draws upon women's roles in society can be identified verified through its use of repetition to emphasize those important aspects of the narrative. Generally speaking, these often depict scenes of temptation and/or seduction, proclamations of faith by the saint and her intention to preserve her virginity, courageous public speeches, various tortures particular to females (St. Lucy is threatened with some time in a brothel), and death by beheading to silence the voice.²⁸⁹ Of particular note in *Juliana* is the intense "verbal dueling," also defined as "heroic flyting." Common to many accounts, the saint and her male persecutor(s) have a sort of "battle with words" which leaves the saint victorious, overtaking the enemy with justice and truth. Ward Parks, however, "excludes Juliana from flyting of the heroic type" because she participates in no "martial resolution."²⁹⁰ However, since Juliana's verbal battle with the devil is instrumental in defining her heroism, I argue that it should be understood in this vein, as is explored at greater length in Chapter V of this

²⁸⁷ For the Anglo-Saxons, most notably the prose narratives found in the late tenth century *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*. See *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church, Edited from Manuscript Julius E. VII in the Cottonian Collection, with Various Readings from Other Manuscripts*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, *Early English Text Society, Original Series*, 76, 82, 94, 114, 2 vols. (London: Trubner, 1881–1900).

²⁸⁸ Lapidge, "Cynewulf," 149. Lapidge points out that "St. Juliana was commemorated in Anglo-Saxon England from the very earliest period."

²⁸⁹ Clare A. Lees and Gillian R. Overing describe the narrative repletion of details in *Double Agents: Women and Clerical Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 110–132; and, Michael Lapidge examines the *passiones* and *vitæ* of saints in "The Saintly Life in Anglo-Saxon England" in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. Malcom Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 243–263.

²⁹⁰ Ward Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 88.

dissertation. Undoubtedly, these persecutions must have had a significant impact on society.

The worship of saints has long been reflected in the literary culture of Anglo-Saxon England. As testament, Bremmer notes that there are more extant poetic saints' lives than heroic poems; he includes *Juliana*, *Elena*, *Fates of the Apostles* (all attributed to Cynewulf), *Andreas*, and two native poems—*St. Guthlac (A)* and *St. Guthlac (B)* (attributed to the monk, Felix)—among the most widely recognizable, and excludes prose lives of English saints such as *St. Cuthbert* (Bede) and *St. Edmond* (Ælfric).²⁹¹ Among Cynewulf's poems, Juliana's heroism is remarkable, especially with respect to her autonomy. For example, Elene (Saint Helena) seeks the cross upon which Jesus died at the behest of her son, Constantine the Great,²⁹² while Juliana acts on her own accord standing against authorities rather than acting on their behalf. Although St. Juliana is categorized as a martyr and St. Elene a confessor,²⁹³ Cynewulf composed both lives, endowing his heroines with qualities unique to his age. The term "confessor" is derived from the Latin *confiteri* (to confess, to profess) and was first used by Christians. Bestowed as a title of honor, it was meant to designate champions of the Faith who had "confessed" Christ publicly in time of persecution and often suffered imprisonment,

²⁹¹ Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr., "Changing Perspectives on a Saint's Life: Juliana," in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, ed. Henk Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr. (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 203–204.

²⁹² Roman Emperor from 306 to 337 B. C. E.

²⁹³ Bremmer, "Changing Perspectives," 201. "Saints in the medieval sense are men and women who through their exemplary beliefs and deaths were believed to have gained sufficient merits to be able to intercede with God in heaven for the benefit of individuals here on earth. There were two principal kinds of saints: confessors and martyrs. Confessors are those who live a life of asceticism and toil for the Christian faith. They mortified their flesh and by doing so essentially become martyrs. Martyrs die a violent death for the sake of Christ. Documentary evidence on saints comes down to us in the following forms: a written account of a confessor is known as a *vita* or life, while that of a martyr is referred to as a *passio* or passion." Because defined literary conventions were evolving during the Anglo-Saxon period, as this dissertation asserts, both the confessor and martyr profiles in this chapter will be expressed as "life" unless otherwise noted. Aviad Kleinberg places saints in four categories: "martyr," "confessor," ascetic," and "apostle." In "Saints' Stories and Popular Literature," *Flesh Made Word: Saints Stories and the Western Imagination*, trans. by Jane Marie Todd (Harvard University Press: The Belknap Press, 2008), 192.

torture, or exile as a result, yet still they remained steadfast in their confession until the end of their lives. Juliana acts as both confessor and martyr; for she “confesses” publically at length several times throughout the poem as well as dies for her faith.

Unlike Elene’s quest, which exists in the material world, presumably until a time where she too will spend an eternity with God in heaven, Juliana’s story focuses on her death and the redemption of souls. Elene’s mission is complete when she identifies the “true cross” and she returns home alive, keeping four nails (those which secured Christ to the cross) as reward for her adventures; Juliana’s reward is achieved only through her martyrdom and realized in the afterlife. Undoubtedly both saints have much in common and as such have often been the focus of comparison for scholars, who find similarities especially in their chastity and elements of the “*miles Christi*.”²⁹⁴ Yet, Juliana also has certain aspects of her nature in common with Grendel’s mother, a character who is aggressive and described as not completely human: through this lens, the stereotypical female role of saint and martyr takes on new qualities. For instance, Elene’s martial spirit can be detected in her ability to lead and give orders, while Juliana’s might is physically demonstrated when she does not succumb to tremendous physical pain and abuse, and when she literally “grabbed that devil” (*Heo þæt deofol genom*, 288b)²⁹⁵ and put him in chains (*þæt þu mec þus fæste fetrum gebunde*, 434). The coloring of Juliana’s character, as a hands-on physical fighter, more readily aligns her with Grendel’s mother and Judith than with Elene. While a comparison of Juliana with Elene is not a major

²⁹⁴ See Jane Chance, *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (New York: Syracuse UP, 1986), 31–52; B. J. Timmer describes them as “fighting saints,” in *Judith* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), 7.

²⁹⁵ George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds. “Juliana.” *The Exeter Book. The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: a collective edition*. Vol. 3. New York: Columbia University Press, 1936. 113-133. All quotes in Old English for this chapter are from this text unless otherwise noted. All modern English translations of Juliana are those of Aaron K. Hostetter unless otherwise noted. The Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project. “Cynewulf, Juliana.” Last modified April 5, 2017. <https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/juliana/>.

concern of this dissertation, this brief evaluation points out some ways in which Juliana's heroism differs from that of others in the genre.

3 JULIANA AS PEACE-WEAVER

One significant way Juliana's character disrupts the heroic ideal can be understood by examining the Anglo-Saxon literary construct of the "peace-weaver" (*freoþuwebbe*).²⁹⁶ Peace-weaving, as we understand the term, is a conventional function of female characters, namely queens and aristocratic women in Old English poetry. The ritual of marrying a young woman of one influential family to a man of an equally powerful rival clan appears a regular practice, though the term is not commonly used. It only appears three times in the corpus: in reference to Thryth in *Beowulf* ("peace-weaver"; *freoðuwebbe*, 1942a); in reference to Ealhild in *Widsith* ("peace-weaver"; *freoþuwebban*, 6a); and, to describe Elene in Cynewulf's poem ("peace-weaver"; *friðoweþba*, 88a).²⁹⁷ However, a variation of the term is used in *Beowulf* to describe Wealhtheow ("bond of peace to nations"; *friðusibb folca*, 2017a), and because it connotes a similar meaning, it will be included in this discussion.

²⁹⁶ Also see Chapter I, 17.

²⁹⁷ Larry M. Sklutes' study on the function and meaning of the term concludes that "if it [peace-weaver] was a metaphor generally intended to indicate a woman, it was by no means commonly used. Yet since each appearance is in a different book of preserved records of Old English poetry, we may also assume that it was common enough to have been understood readily by audiences of these poems." In "Freoþuwebbe' in Old English Poetry," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 71.4 (1970): 534. He also suggests the meaning of the term may differ in literary and historical context.

In *Beowulf*, scholars have identified Wealhtheow and Hildeburh as quintessential models of the peace-weaver as idealized in the conventional sense.²⁹⁸ Juliana, however, exhibits the essence of the peace-weaver but is neither a queen nor does she perform the described functions of the role in the same manner (i.e., she does not pass out drink or treasure). Juliana's character offers an alternative vision of weaving peace in three distinct ways: by acting as intercessor between the poet and God; by securing a bond between God and humanity; and by weaving a bond between the ecclesiastical and secular worlds.

As a saint, Juliana's character bridges the wide gap between God and man. During the time in which Cynewulf was writing there was a growing disparity between the common people and the clergy; the laity were largely uneducated and accountable for minimal religious faith, while members of the Church upheld the religious ideal.²⁹⁹ This gap was further widened by the illiterate, who were not reliant on the written word for shaping religious consciousness. However, certain ecclesiastical texts were not without effect outside of the monasteries—namely, martyrdoms from early Christianity.³⁰⁰ According to Kleinberg, commoners would obtain basic information about saints from specialists, and sometimes this could lead to a cult for a popular saint; however, since

²⁹⁸ Wealhtheow is Hrothgar's queen and the mother of his two sons. As the poet tells us, she was offered as a wife to king Hrothgar in order to promote peace between two warring tribes, the Helmings and Scyldings. Significant functions of the role are playing hostess at court, which includes passing the mead cup to the *comitatus* in the defined social order, presenting gifts and treasure to retainers, offering words of encouragement and praise as well as wise counsel to the court, and most importantly, bearing children to secure the blood lines between the two warring nations; all these tasks she performs ideally ensuring goodwill between the clans. Hildeburh, however, does not fare as well. Although she is not at fault, war breaks out once again between the Frisians and Jutes. Her Danish husband and son are killed in the battle fighting alongside the Frisians and now, without a home, she is swiftly taken back to Hrothgar's court. Hildeburh is not depicted in the poem as performing the actions of a peace-weaver; rather she represents the unstable position endured by women participating in such practices.

²⁹⁹ See Kleinberg, 188.

³⁰⁰ Kleinberg, 191. See also Thomas Head, *Hagiography and the Cult of the Saints: The Diocese of Orleans, 800–1200* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–5; and Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

peasants often could not read full narratives in Latin, the language of most religious writings in the West, the saint's life was of little importance. Later, however, after tenth-century monastic reform actively supported educating the ruling class as a means of evangelizing Christianity, and with the cult of saints becoming an increasingly important religious activity, the recounting of saints' lives was encouraged and exemplum became a key focus of textual endeavors.³⁰¹ The notion of a heroic age, however, was most certainly still a tendency for poets.

As Christianity teaches, saints intercede with God in heaven for the benefit of individuals here on earth. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part II—The Communion of the Church of Heaven and Earth*, on *The intercession of the saints*, the Vatican states: “Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness. . . . They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus. . . . So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped.”³⁰² Thus, once a body has passed from the earth to God's heavenly kingdom and is sainted, their intercession is eternal. In effect, Cynewulf's poem speaks to the continued practice of the tradition that started in the early fifth century when Christians began a special relationship with “the other world,” the people who had died before them.³⁰³ In his tenth book of the *City of God*, Augustine (354–430 C. E.) defines

³⁰¹ Kleinberg, 188–200.

³⁰² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part I: The Profession of Faith, II. The Communion of the Church of Heaven *The intercession of the saints*. 956.

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p5.htm. (The ellipses in this passage appear in the on-line text.)

³⁰³ Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 60.

the nature of this association, describing saints as intermediaries linking men to God.³⁰⁴ It seems reasonable to suggest that the saint in his/her intermediary estate shares a striking similarity with the peace-weaver of Old English literature: both are channels through which two forces are able to relate. For instance, just as *Wealhtheow* can be recognized as a “bond of peace between nations,” so too can saints, as intercessors, be perceived as weavers of peace between the earthly and the divine. *Juliana*, through her suffering on earth, begins her journey toward sainthood and after death earns her intermediary status, enabling others to call upon her in their hour of need. The creation of *Juliana* is testament to Cynewulf’s personal belief in this tradition. That elements of the heroic ideal are also recognizable in his poem speaks to his propensity for making connections between a heroic ethos and a Christian tradition. By examining the poem’s epilogue, lines 695b–731, it appears clear that Cynewulf sees his heroine as his intercessor, a special type of spiritual peace-weaver.

The epilogue serves as a personal prayer of salvation for the poet; in the first few lines he petitions the holy *Juliana* to exercise her special relationship with God on his behalf (“There is a great need for me for that holy woman to effect me help”; *Is me þearf micel þæt seo halge me helpe gefremme*, 695a–696), and the last word of the poem is “Amen,” perhaps a reflection of the homiletic tradition. Cynewulf discloses his apprehension about own death and the unknown (My soul shall part from my body upon a journey—I myself do not know where”; *Min sceal of lice sawul on siðfæt, nat ic sylfa hwider*, 669b–700) and acknowledges that his wicked actions upon earth can impact his reward in the afterlife; he recalls the pain he caused others and the sins he committed (I remember all that pain, wounded by the sins that I, late and early, have wrought in this

³⁰⁴ Brown, *The Cult*, 60. See also Augustine, *City of God*, 10.1, 3, 7, and 20.

world”; *Sa real gemon, synna wunde, þe ic siþ opþe ær geworhte in worulde*, 709b–711a) and is repentant.

At the most fundamental level, Cynewulf’s poem serves as a public expression of his efforts to make peace with God before his life is over. Exercising his faith, he first prays for Juliana’s intercession and then calls upon readers to invoke her power on his behalf (I pray that every man of humankind who recites this song, earnest and mindful, will remember me by my own name, and pray to the Lord, the Helm of the Heavens, Wielder of Powers, to provide me help, 718b–723a).³⁰⁵ By recounting Juliana’s passion for audiences the poet provides the means by which his fellow man is to fulfill his request, and his runic signature at the end of the poem provides them with the name of the individual for whom they are to pray.

It is unique that the poet directly requests the aid of the saint, his character, on his behalf. That Cynewulf beseeches God’s grace through Juliana demonstrates his confidence in her ability to weave a special kind of peace between himself and the Lord God. When he writes, “I will have need of mercies then, so that the holy woman may intercede with that highest of kings” (*Ðonne arne biþearf, þæt me seo halge wið þone hyhstan cyning gepingige*, 715b–717a), the poet is without doubt summoning Juliana’s real ability to secure this holy relationship for him. In other words, the poet selected a character type to suit his needs and then constructed a version of Juliana that would resonate with Anglo-Saxon audiences, ensuring these needs are met. Thus, Cynewulf gifted her with the capability to advance his personal agenda. Through Juliana, Cynewulf

³⁰⁵ 718a–723b (*Bidde ic monna gehwone gumenacynnes, þe þis gied wræce, þæt he mec neodful bi noman minum gemyne modig, ond meotud bitte þæt me heofona helm helpe gefremme, meahta waldend*).

indicates his attempt to weave together a peace between God and himself, for his poem ultimately is a public confession of his sins and a rededication of faith.

Cynewulf's *Juliana* also secures a bond between God and humanity and weaves a bond of sorts between the ecclesiastical and secular worlds. In the first few lines of *Juliana*, Cynewulf tells us of Maximian (250–310 C. E.) and his “awful thegns” (*þegnas þryðfulle*, 12a) who travelled the earth and “roused strife” (*þræce rærdon*, 10b), creating “heathen idols” (*hofon hæþengiold*, 15a) and “burning the chosen” (*bærndon gecorene*, 16b). This imagery provides audiences with a disturbing picture of Nicomedia as it appears in the poem: a city of unrest, ruled in part by the pagan Eleusius and crowded with unneighborly people often in conflict with one another. When the heroine is first introduced, and she speaks to the “multitude of men,” which implies there must have been many people privy to her troubles; the group would have likely included local authorities, her father, gawkers, and by-standers of all religions and persuasions. After she refuses to marry Eleusius, Africanus angrily delivers her to him the next morning at which point we are told of an “astonished crowd” (*Ðuguð wafade*, 162b) who marvels at Juliana's beauty while listening to her verbal exchange with Eleusius which consisted of his threats and her professions of love for God. It is through these professions that we discern Juliana evangelizing the “True God” (*soðne god*, 47b), which she continues to do throughout her trials. By the end of the poem we find her zealously instructing a crowd of Nicomedians on how to heal their souls before proving her devotion through her martyrdom. Upon her death, the poet tells us a “great majesty among that fellowship” (*þrymme micle hafan oþ þisne dæg mid þeodscipe*, 693b–695a) developed. In this manner, we see Juliana weave a bond between the people of Nicomedia.

For most Christians, the Bible's message centers on the actions of God to restore his relationship with human beings through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus. In a similar fashion, Juliana's death brings the multitudes closer to God. This notion speaks to Wittig's hypothesis that Juliana stands for the "City of God."³⁰⁶ In his reading, Eleusius represents the "City of the Devil"; thus, the heroine and her suitor are figures of the Church and the world, respectively. He considers Juliana a Christ figure as she undergoes her passion in much the same way Jesus did. He writes:

Her father having her flogged and then handed over to Eleusius, who repeats the punishment, resembles Christ undergoing the same at the hand of, first, the members of the Sanhedrin, and then from Pontius Pilate. Just as Christ hung from a cross, Juliana hung from a high tree. Juliana's being cast into prison reflects Christ's burial. The saint's struggle with the devil and her victory, finally, reminds one of Christ's Harrowing of Hell.³⁰⁷

Of course, and rightly so, Wittig cautions readers that Juliana is not equal to Jesus, but the events in the story in which she participates, "make her a type for Christ." Thus, the message can be read: Juliana died, like Christ, so that we too may find a home with God.

Of particular interest is that Juliana's story can be broken down into a tripartite format, or into three episodes: her conflict with the establishment (represented by Eleusius and her father, Africanus), her imprisonment and temptation by Satan, and her martyrdom; like Jesus she undergoes capture, a trial, and death. Three is an important number for Christians, representing the Holy Trinity, as well as the Heavens, three elements in man (body, reason, and spirit), three elements of faith (knowledge, assent, and confidence), three elements of repentance (contrition, confession, and absolution), the three Theological or Christian virtues (faith, hope, and charity), the three Magi, and

³⁰⁶ Wittig, 212.

³⁰⁷ Wittig, 212. The "Harrowing of Hell" is an Old and Middle English phrase for the triumphant descent of Christ into hell (or Hades) between the time of his crucifixion and his resurrection, when, according to Christian belief, he brought salvation to the souls held captive there since the beginning of the world.

three periods before the Law (Adam to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses—the Third Age of the world.) In his epilogue, Cynewulf, too, underscores the importance of “Threeness” (*þrynīs*, 726a) when he writes of the “Father, the Son, and the Spirit of Comfort,” thereby confirming the religious significance of the number among believers.

The reading of Juliana as a Christ figure, or weaver of peace, who dies for mankind so that sins may be forgiven and souls may rise to heaven, carries some weight.³⁰⁸ Here, the poet casts Juliana as a weaver of peace, but instead of maintaining harmony between two warring nations (i.e., the Danes and the Jutes) her presence facilitates a bond between God and humanity. To be a peace-weaver certain criteria must be met as defined above. Juliana, literally and figuratively, performs some of these actions: she is hostess to a public spectacle performing in a saintly manner; she represents a gift from God to every man in the form of an eternal reward; and, most significantly, in her wisdom she advises the Nicomedians on matters of faith and Christian teachings.

If one can read Juliana as a Christ figure, it is also not too far a stretch to envision her as the Church (*Ecclesia*) or performing certain rites within the Church, namely that of bishop or priest. In Chance’s seminal text on the Old English heroine, she aligns Juliana with Judith and Elene, connecting all three with the newly established English Church. She writes, “*Juliana* takes place at the same time as *Elene*, a work with specifically English and national ties that may have prompted the depictions of the two saints not

³⁰⁸ Sklute’s study of the use of the word *freoðuwebbe* and/or *friðusibb* leads him to conclude that the term(s) “does not necessarily reflect a Germanic custom of giving a person in marriage to a hostile tribe in order to secure peace. Rather it is a poetic metaphor referring to the person whose function it seems to be to perform openly the action of making peace by weaving to the best of her art a tapestry of friendship and amnesty. If it reflects anything of a social system of the Anglo-Saxons, it is that of the diplomat.” In “*Freoðuwebbe* in Old English Poetry,” 540.

only as figures of *Ecclesia* but in especial of the English Church, confronting the synagogue and the heathen.”³⁰⁹ Bremmer, too, supposes her as *Ecclesia*, noting “Her constantly confessing Christ, but also her instructing the pagans in the principles of faith (e.g., 638–69), exemplifies the duties of the Church.”³¹⁰ As a confessor Juliana evangelizes God, performing characteristically within the genre, but by “instructing,” and extracting a confession of sins from the devil, she exemplifies the specific clerical role of bishop or priest and extends the role of the typical female martyr.

A Christian bishop or priest, by definition, is an official of the Church who possesses the authority to perform certain rites and administer certain sacraments. Importantly, these roles are typically occupied by men. In part two of the poem, when Juliana is imprisoned, she is confronted by a “false angel” who turns out to be Satan in disguise. She prays for clarity and help with how to deal with such evil. It is then that God’s voice calls out to her:

Take hold of this perverse creature
and hold him fast, until he tells truthfully of his mission,
everything from the start and what his origins are.³¹¹

Obeying, “she grabbed that devil...” (*Heo þæt deofol genom...*, 288b) and took hold of him with her bare hands. The poet then tells us Juliana became “judgment-blessed” (*ferð geblissad, domeadigre*, 287b–288a), which implies a sort of ordination, the process by which in the Roman Christian religion men are consecrated as clergy to oversee and perform a variety of religious rites and ceremonies. Cynewulf’s words suggest that God has sanctified Juliana in such a way that she is able to perform certain sacraments. In the

³⁰⁹ Chance, 36.

³¹⁰ Bremmer, 212. See page 8 and footnote 21 of this chapter.

³¹¹ 284–286, (*Forfoh þone frætgan ond fæste geheald, oþþæt he his siðfæt secge mid ryhte, ealne from orde, hwæt his æþelu syn*).

broadest sense, she has been “ordained” to hear the devil’s confession, his perpetual list of miserable deeds.³¹²

This interpretation extends to Christians, who believe that, while all who follow Jesus’s teachings are priests of a sort, men who are formally ordained hold positions of authority as successors of the twelve apostles and as stewards of the Church, having a higher status and possessing a special grace.³¹³ “The ordination ritual was characterized by the laying of hands on the appointee” (Acts 6:1–7).³¹⁴ This is significant because when Juliana “grabbed” the devil, in effect, she is performing the “laying of hands” and thus is performing the ritual according to Church teachings: a sign that she is justified in her actions and possesses that special grace. The effect of the sacrament of Holy Orders “confers a gift of the Holy Spirit that permits the exercise of a ‘sacred power’ (*sacra potestas*, Cf. *LG* 10) that can come only from Christ himself through his Church.”³¹⁵

Line 456, when Juliana demands, “You must confess more wicked deeds...” (*Pu scealt*

³¹² The sacrament of penance can be historically traced to the New Testament. Most scholars observe three main periods in the evolution of the sacrament: 1) Early Christian penance, which covers the Apostolic era until the six or seventh centuries; 2) Tariff penance, thought to have developed in the Irish monastic context, prevalent from the seventh century until around the thirteenth century; and 3) Individual confessions, which unites the confession of sins with penance, traceable in its various accounts back to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. See Cyrille Vogel, *Le Pêcheur et la pénitence dans l’Eglise ancienne* (Les Editions du Cerf, 1982), 9–10; and John T. McNeill and Helena M. Gamer, *Medieval Handbooks of Penance; a Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales and Selections from Related Documents* (New York: Octagon Books, 1965). For source material on “canonical penance” (public reconciliation, varieties practiced in the fourth through seventh centuries) see sermons of Augustine of Hippo (especially Sermon given during Lent 398 C.E.) and of Caesarius of Arles (references in Makye de Jong, “Transformations of Penance,” *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Frans Theuws and Janet Laughland Nelson (Brill, 2000), 185–224.

³¹³ Peter quotes from the Old Testament where the people of Israel are called “a kingdom of priests” (Exodus 19:6). Isaiah 61:6 states that God’s people will be called “priests of the Lord.” However, the word *hiereus* (“priest”) is not used of church leaders in the New Testament, but the cognate verb *hierourgeo* (“to act as a priest”) is found in Romans 15:16. The words “elder” and “bishop” are most often used in reference to church leaders.

³¹⁴ Holy Orders see: http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Holy_Orders and http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p2s2c3a6.htm. For women and Holy Orders see: <https://udayton.edu/imri/mary/w/women-and-holy-orders.php>.

³¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Part II: The Celebration of the Christian Mystery, Section II. The Seven Sacraments of the Church, Chapter III: *The Sacraments at the Service of Communion*, Article VI: The Sacrament of the Holy Orders. 1538. http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p5.htm.

ondettan yfeldæda ma, 456), demonstrates her effectiveness in the role. This act of hearing Satan's confession is one important way in which Juliana is distinguished from the laity in the poem and serves to further juxtapose her with the false angel; she is in a position of judgment and power over all those around her. Above all, she is in harmony with the Church and its teachings.

Worth noting is that Judith, too, takes hold of the evil Holofernes and delivers justice ("She took that heathen man by the fair fast" (*genam ða þone hæðenan mannan fæste be feaxe sinum*, 98b–99a).³¹⁶ Both women are given the power to dominate men (although the devil is not a human man), elevating them to a distinctive position in the minds of readers. Most female figures of Old English poetry are not afforded this physical capability or status. Furthermore, when Judith is confronted by evil, she prays to God for favor and physical strength ("health and grace"; *geunne me minra gesynta*, 91a) and an anger like no other so that she may hold special advantage over the enemy ("Almighty Lord, bright-minded Glory-Giver, grant me vengeance; let my mind's fury inflame my heart!"; *Gewrec nu, mihtig dryhten, horhtmod tires brytta, þæt me ys þus torne on mode, hate on hreðre miinum*, 92b–94a). Here, we can also draw a parallel with the character of Grendel's mother, who with "ire" seeks to avenge her son's death and take a life for a life; although Judith prayed for ill will, it came naturally for Grendel's dam. While Judith prays for "fury," Juliana prays for a revelation, some insight into the true identity of the angel, and both are granted their requests. They seek, with God's grace, to rise above evil and take control of their own experiences. Juliana's character, however, maintains control and operates within the jurisdiction of Church; while Judith

³¹⁶ For this chapter, all modern English translations of Judith are those of Stephen O. Glosecki, *Old English Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. R. M. Liuzza (Broadview Press, 2014).

beheads Holofernes (justifiably so), Juliana extracts a confession and releases him to the shadows, which allows God to administer any corporal punishment.

Juliana's role of church leader in the poem separates her from other women in the Old English poetic corpus. While there have been other female figures identified as *ecclesia*, like Judith and Elene,³¹⁷ Juliana literally participates in rituals of the Church through the act of hearing confession. To this function I would also add proselytizing, whereby she rhetorically and publically attempts to persuade a mixed crowd of pagans, Christians, and likely those of other religions to "keep vigilance, lest your sworn enemy hinder your way to glory's citadel" (*wearde healden, þy læs eow wiperfeohrend weges forwyrnen to wuldres byrig*, 664–665). She speaks of God's "comfort" and "mercy" (*þær ge frofre agun æt mægna gode*, 658b–659) as the reward for such observance. This preaching to the Nicomedians, immediately before she is beheaded, is more reminiscent of a sermon than a speech as attempts inform people of the benefits for turning to the one Christian God. A homily or sermon is more focused than a speech, which can be defined as a formal address or discourse to an audience. It has a religious or moral subject that is intended for religious edification. As Chance points out, "Her education during her own spiritual contest with the devil has provided her with the means for the Church."³¹⁸

Without fear of death, Juliana states that she desires "to teach" the people how to obtain God's love. Cynewulf writes:

Therefore I, dear people, wish to teach you to secure your house
with law-doing, lest with sudden blasts the winds throw it down.
The strong wall must withstand the storm's showers more firmly,
the sinning purposes. Establish yourself with peaceful love

³¹⁷ See Chance, 31–52.

³¹⁸ Chance, 45. Chance also observes that "The exceptional maiden delivers a homily... instructing the people to "Remember the joy of the warriors and they glory of heaven" (*Gemunad wigena wyn ond wuldres þrym*, 641).

and illuminated belief, establish your foundation, resolute,
upon the living stone. Hold in your hearts the true faith and peace
among you by the desire of your minds and holy mystery.
Then the Almighty Father gives to you all his mercy,
Where you all possess comfort at the power of God,
The most need after your trouble-songs.³¹⁹

This passage is the saint's last speaking part before her death by sword, the blow silencing her voice forever. The poet also silences the pagan Eleusius and his thanes by drowning them at sea, underscoring Christian supremacy and the saint's power, while, through the word of Juliana, reminding readers of the consequences for not holding the "true faith" (*soðe treowe*, 655a). In this passage audiences see a female figure whose heroism is largely borne through her ability to teach.

As a type of clergy or official who delivers sermons and hears confession, Juliana's character moves beyond the traditional role of the virgin martyr. Performing as "priest," the saint weaves a bond between God and the Nicomedians, for ever since Juliana's martyrdom "with the passing of years the praise of God was lifted until this very day, with great majesty among that fellowship,"³²⁰ meaning many of the people present during her death heeded her words and solidarity formed among the masses. As "priest" she also weaves peace between the ecclesiastical and secular worlds. For it is the responsibility of a minister of the Church to bring the flock into the fold; her spectacle serves as a means of bringing people to God and the Church. That Juliana's character is allowed the freedom to participate in the sacraments envisions a space of some authority for women in the Christian church.

³¹⁹ 646–660a. (*Forþon ic, leof weorud, læran wille, æfremmende, þæt ge eower hus gefæstnige, þy læs hit ferblædum windas toweorpan. Weal sceal þy trumra strong wiþstondan storma scurum, leahtra gehygdum. Ge mid lufan sibbe, leohte geleafan, to þam lifgendan stane stiðhydge staþol fæstniad, soðe treowe one sibbe mid eow healdað æt heortan, halge rune þruh modes myne. Donne eow miltse giefeð fæder ælmihtig, þær ge frofre agun æt mæгна gode, mæste þearfe æfter sorgstafum*).

³²⁰ 692b–695a (*Ðær siððan wæs geara gongum godes lof hafen þrymme micle oþ þisne dæg mid þeodscipe*).

4 DISRUPTING THE SAINTS' LIVES TRADITION

Despite what has been argued thus far, there are critics who feel that Cynewulf's *Juliana* is a typical saint's life.³²¹ I disagree. While her story remains faithful to the hagiographic genre, the treatment of Juliana's character largely differs from those of other virgin saints for reasons outlined above as well as those highlighted below in this section. In order to make a comparison, I will provide a brief summary of the lives of three other popular saints (St. Lucy, St. Agatha, and St. Agnes) whose stories were known to the Anglo-Saxons and whose prose accounts were written down by Bede. The story of St. Agnes³²² is especially heart-breaking. She is a young girl (naive and prudent, child-like in years with the mind of an adult; *bilewit and snoter, cild-lic on gearum and eald-lic on mode*, 8–9).³²³ Agnes spurns her would-be lover, the son of Sempronius, and refuses to worship the goddess Vesta. Because she is young she is largely forgiven. However, because of her spirited tongue and adult-like way of expressing herself, she is threatened with the “house of harlots,” but because of the appearance of a bright light, no man can look upon her. Her lover who comes to have his way with her is struck dead, but through Agnes' prayer, he is resurrected. She then suffers the stake but survives the flames. Finally, she is killed by a sword stroke and identified as a witch.

St. Agatha³²⁴ is a young woman living in Sicily when the governor, Quintianus, expresses interest in her. When she refuses his advances, she is turned over to Aphrodisia, a spoiled woman, who is to teach Agatha the trade of prostitution. All of

³²¹ Rosemary Woolf reasons the poem has a “uniformity verging on monotony,” and the only real deviation from the source is the treatment of the character of Eleusius. In *Juliana*, 15 and 19.

³²² Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, Book One, “VII St. Agnes (Jan. 21),” ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: N. Trubner & Company), https://archive.org/stream/aelfriclivesof01aelf/aelfriclivesof01aelf_djvu.txt.

³²³ Ælfric, 170. My translation.

³²⁴ Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, Book One, “VIII St. Agatha (Feb. 5),” ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: N. Trubner & Company), https://archive.org/stream/aelfriclivesof01aelf/aelfriclivesof01aelf_djvu.txt.

Aphrodisia's attempts are in vain, and she must then report her failure to the governor. Quintianus has Agatha brought before him and the two have a "battle of words" which also has no effect on her. He declares that unless she sacrifices to the Roman gods, she will be put to death. Because she refuses, she is tortured, but survives the ordeal and dies a natural death. Quintianus dies soon after.

St. Lucy³²⁵ takes her ailing mother to a church that houses the remains of St. Agatha. While they are praying, St. Agatha comes to Lucy in a vision to tell her that she possesses the gift of grace. Lucy tells her mother what happened and begs her to dispense her inheritance to the poor and vows to never marry. Matters are complicated when the pagan Paschasius takes interest in Lucy and becomes irate when she refuses his advances. He threatens her with bodily harm including beating and loss of virginity at a "house of harlots." Although a great number of oxen and men attempt to take her there, she cannot be moved. After other tortures, she is burned to death.

These three stories and *Juliana* share strong similarities. Most notable is that they convey an image of the ideal Christian woman. Each is portrayed as clean and pure, fiercely protective of her virginity, as well as devoted to the Christian God. The fact that all of these women refuse to wed heathens and worship their gods created complications for the martyrs, but is by no means the main underlying reason each refuses their suitors: remaining pure for Christ shapes the model Christian female. Each of the four virgins would rather die than lose their virginity, especially to a pagan. Juliana's intentions to protect her body are made clear from the beginning of the poem. She is "eagerly intending that her maidenhood would be preserved for the love of Christ, pure from any

³²⁵ Ælfric, *Lives of Saints*, Book One, "IX St. Lucy (Dec. 13)," ed. Walter W. Skeat (London: N. Trubner & Company), https://archive.org/stream/aelfriclivesof01aelf/aelfriclivesof01aelf_djvu.txt.

sin” (*hogde geonre þæt hire mægðhad mana gehwylces fore Cristes lufan clæne geheolde*, 29b–31). The threat of being thrown into a brothel, or being dragged to one, was a form of torture preferred by many persecutors of female virgin saints; Agnes was taken to the house of harlots and Lucy was threatened with violation as well. Chapter V provides an overview of another saint’s life, Eugenia, whose fear of being penetrated is so overwhelming she goes to extreme lengths to protect herself from the unwanted advances of men. Chastity and/or virginity in females was not particular to the hagiographical genre, of course, it was a prevailing theme in Anglo-Saxon literature. But, for Christian men and women, preserving one’s virginity was a way of being closer to God.

Other parallel patterns between the lives of Agatha, Agnes, and Lucy, appear obvious: each suffers the advances of a heathen suitor, they undergo unimaginable tortures because of their refusal to submit, and ultimately they are killed (although Agatha dies a natural death as a result of her physical abuse).³²⁶ The various tortures they undergo are also consistent among the three accounts—beatings, hanging by the hair, burning. Also recognizable in the three stories is a passionate verbal exchange between the saints and their villain(s). It is Juliana’s verbal exchange with Satan that distinguishes her from the other saints. Unlike their stories, which are centered on devotion and chastity, *Juliana* focuses on the good and evil in the world. Cynewulf’s version of *Juliana* depicts a woman with the intention of dying to show her love of Christ, but also to eradicate the evil in the world; not only her persecutors but the devil himself. By adding this dimension to the text, Cynewulf broadens the conventional model of the

³²⁶ Bede recounts St. Agatha’s death: for her last form of torture she is rolled naked over a bed of hot coals and broken tiles and sent back to a dungeon where she prays to God who heals her wounds, but she dies.

virgin saint to create a more powerful figure capable of both a mental and physical clash with evil. In the Old English poem, she is not only the victim who can withstand agonizing verbal and physical abuse; she can inflict it as well.

Juliana's personal battle with Satan, in the central episode of the poem, serves to elevate her character to the status of super hero. Of the 731 total lines in the poem, 316 are dedicated to the "verbal dueling" between the saint and the devil. This is a significant number that speaks to the importance of the episode. Juliana is, in the words of Cynewulf, a remarkable character, unlike any he encountered in his day:

I know as truth that I have never met, before or since,
in worldly realms a woman like you—more bold in your thoughts,
nor more cross-timbered of all womankind!³²⁷

For the devil, who utters these words in the poem, Juliana is the enemy, an indestructible spiritual force he must quell. That he never encountered another woman like her speaks to his anxieties and the futility of his situation. It may also reveal that Cynewulf, too, had never encountered another character or saint with the same vitality, luminosity, and piety as Juliana. Hence, Juliana is not only a conventional retelling of a Latin life of a saint, one meant to impart God's mercy and strengthen audiences' commitment to the faith, or a personal attempt on part of the poet to secure a place for himself in heaven, she is also a spiritual warrior, or *miles Christi*, who combats evil on earth, interceding for those who have the constitution to believe and destroying the evil-doers who do not. Cynewulf writes that there were "five and seventy" people present during one of the tortures where Juliana is thrown into a vat of molten lead. As she is hurled into the blazing muck, it splatters onto the warriors who constructed the chamber, killing them instantly ("There

³²⁷ 547b–551a (*Ic to soþe wat þæt ic ær ne sið ænig ne mette in woruldrice wife þe gelic, þristran geþohtes ne þweorhtimbran mægþa cynnes*).

were five and seventy of the heathen host forburned through the searing sneeze”; *Pær on rime borborn þurh þæs fires fnæst fif ond hundseofontig hæðnes herges*, 587b–589a). As Juliana stands in the flames unharmed, her enemies perish. This action when viewed as a metaphorical battle with evil confirms the saint’s status as a heroine and warrior of Christ.

The *miles Christi* is a Christian allegory based on New Testament military metaphors which stood in for Christian virtues.³²⁸ By the fifth century, the Church allowed Christians to go into battle in order to convert infidels or spread Christ’s teachings. Later, as Chance explains, the “weapons changed to the armament of the virtues in general used by the warriors of Christ.”³²⁹ Typical in the arsenal of a “fighting saint” is the weapon of virginity. Aldhelm sees virgins of Christ as “types of the soul battling vices with the breastplate of virginity and the shield of modesty.”³³⁰ In his *De Virginitate*, Aldhelm outlines the Church’s three categories of chastity: “virginity” (*virginitas*), “chastity” (*castitas*), and “abstinence within marriage” (*iugalitas*); Juliana, of course, represents the virgin. In her prison cell, upon her first meeting the devil, he refers to her as a “blessed virgin” (*eadhreðid mæg*, 257a), recognizing that she is armed and ready for battle. Cynewulf tells us that while Juliana is pure and “does not care for husband love or conjugal ways” (*Heo me on an sagað þæt heo mæglufan minre ne gyme, freondrædenne*, 69b–71a), Satan is a “spirit unclean” (*unclæne gæst*, 418b), and, while she is beautiful and has a “gleam” (*glæm*, 167b) around her, he is of “darkness” (*þystra*, 419b). Audiences understand the depiction of Juliana as unspoiled and gleaming as part of the virtue of virginity, a powerful description against all contrasting language and

³²⁸ Ephesians 6:14–17.

³²⁹ Chance, 34.

³³⁰ Chance, 34–35.

heathen weaponry associated with Satan. This imagery not only serves to distinguish her goodness from the devil's wickedness, but also from many women within her own community as well as readers, affording her special grace.

Juliana's second commanding weapon she uses against the devil is her "shield,"³³¹ which offers protection from the devil's advances ("I have as my hope Heaven-realm's Ward, the Mild Protector, the Wielder of Power, he who shields me...").³³² Made of God's mercy and grace, her "shield" is powerful enough to deflect any physical or spiritual harm the devil intends to inflict upon the holy maid. The devil, too, dons his battle-gear. "Wearing the shape of an angel" (*Hæfde engles hiw, gleaw gymstafa*, 244b–245a), Satan appears in Juliana's jail cell with the intent to weaken her resolve. However, her shield renders his deception ineffective, and she quickly sees through his disguise. Juliana's shield strengthens her character, giving her the clarity to pray for spiritual strength. She beseeches:

Now I wish to ask you, O Shelter of Warriors, Eternal Almighty,
by the noble creation that you, Father of Angels, established at the start,
do not permit me to turn aside from the praise of your blessed gift
as this herald who stands before me bids me with his fear-spell.³³³

At this point in the text Cynewulf shows the vulnerability of Juliana's character. For just mere moments, Juliana was "terrified by that monster."³³⁴ In her fear, she prays that her loyalty, as one of God's "thanes," does not falter. Because God is a "Shelter of Warriors," as we are told here, his protection shields the saint from Satan's startling

³³¹ The "Armor of God" (Ephesians 6:14–17).

³³² 212–214a (*Hæbbe ic me t hyhte heofonrices weard, mildne mundboran, mæгна waldend, se mec gescyldeð*).

³³³ 272–277 (*Nu ic þec, beorna hleo, biddan wille ece ælmihtig, þurh þæt æþele gesceap þe þu, fæder engla, æt fruman settest, þæt þu me ne læte of lofe hweorfan þinre eadgife, swa me þes are bodað frecne færsþel, þe me fore stondeð*).

³³⁴ 267–269 ("Juliana was then, on account of its fearful message to her, terrified by that monster, the terror that spoke I words, the adversary of glory"; *Ða wæs seo fæmne for þam færsþelle egsan geaclad, þe hyre se aglæca, wuldres wiþerbreca, wordum sægde*).

words, enabling her to overcome her fears. With renewed invigoration, she can both physically and mentally handle the devil and begin her interrogation. Capturing the enemy (“She grabbed that devil”; *Heo þæt deofol genom*, 288b), Juliana compels him to reveal his dark sins. Like a desperate criminal, he tells of his own mistreatment and fear, begging for his life all the while searching for her weakness, but she never puts down her shield. The devil states:

If I meet any powerful or mind-proud champions of the Measurer
who against my arrows’ flight will not bend far thence
from the battle but heaves up his board against them,
mind-wise, a holy shield, his ghostly war-dress
who will not betray his God—but hold in his prayers he makes a stand,
fast in a foot-band so I must flee far thence
low-minded, deprived of comfort, in the grip of gleeds,
mourning my care, so that I cannot with craft of strength
go against him with war, but sad I should seek others
lacking in courage, under the bristle of standards,
the more sluggish warrior who I can puff up with my leaven,
and hinder from warfare.³³⁵

Just as the devil revealed for us Juliana’s first weapon of virginity, in this passage he acknowledges her second weapon against him, her “holy shield.” He acknowledges the shield as intimidating and impenetrable, and confesses that when encountered he “must flee” the battle in search of a less challenging fight.

The third and most valuable weapon in Juliana’s arsenal is her rhetoric. Like the other members of the “monastic army,” she uses the “Word of God”³³⁶ to ultimately squelch the devil’s trickery. Just as his words initially “terrified” the saint, her words are

³³⁵ 382–401a (*Gif ic ænigne ellenrofne gemete modigne metodes cempan wið flanþræce, nele feor þonan bugan from beaduwe, ac he bord ongean hefeð hygesnottor, haligne scyld, gæstlic gudreaþ, nele gode swican, ac he beald in gebede bidsteal gifeð fæste on feðan, ic sceal feor þonan heanmod hweorfan, hroþra bidæled, in gleda gripe, gehðu mænan, þæt ic ne meahthe mægnes cræfte guðe wiðgongan, ac ic geomor sceal secan oþerne ellenleasran, under cumbolhagan, cempan sænran, þe ic onbryrdan mæge beorman mine, agælan æt fuþe*).

³³⁶ “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1 (King James Version).

also met with trepidation. The devil is so consumed with dread that he begs for clemency (“I entreat you, my lady Juliana, before the peace of God, to work me no further insult...”; *Ic þec halsige, hlæfdige min, Iuliana, fore godes sibbum, þæt þu furþur me fraceþu ne wyrce...* 539–541), something that he could not convince Juliana to grant him. Furthermore, it is not just the words that carry weight but how powerful and persistent Juliana is in delivering her lines; she possesses the diction and confidence of a hero. Once she has Satan within her grasp, she ceaselessly prods him for information, demanding that he “must speak” (*scealt secgan*, 317–318a, 347b–348a),³³⁷ and he is stricken by her command: “I learn by your speech that I must speak my mind” (*Nu ic þæt gehyre þurh þinne hleoþorcwide, þæt ic nyde sceal nipa gebæded mod meldian*, 461–463a). Against her verbal warfare, the devil admits he is “defenseless” (*orwigne*, 434).

Unlike Lucy who confesses her faith and exchanges verbal arrows with her persecutors until put to death, Cynewulf’s poem shows that Juliana’s words during this exchange have a distinctive impact. As a result of her verbal heroics, one of her enemies (the devil) concedes and retreats, verbally and physically; for he wished he would have never come to her (“lamented his errand”; *siðfæt seofian*, 537a), begs for leniency (“entreat no further disgrace”; *furþur me fraceþu ne wyrce*, 541) and retreats (“seek the shadows in the dark earth”; *þystra neosan in swearta grund*, 554b–555a). Before she dies, Juliana bears witness to evil conceding defeat.

In Lucy, audiences also derive some satisfaction; Maximian dies and Diocletian is driven from the throne, and we find that while she was still speaking, Paschasius, her direct tormentor, was taken in chains to Rome and beheaded. Yet, Lucy herself was

³³⁷ There may be additional occurrences of this phrase that exists within the gap in the text. At least one folio is missing which begins at line 289.

unaware of these events. She had no knowledge of the consequences of her actions. Cynewulf's Juliana—while she does not live to see the demise of Eleusius and his men—the world's archenemy, Satan, surrenders to her. Lucy dies a heroine, of course, but without the awareness of her own heroism. Juliana is a position to realize her own power. In Juliana, female audiences find a new kind of hero and, along with her, are also empowered.

As established, Cynewulf employs both elements of a traditional heroic ethos and new Christian tradition in the poem of *Juliana*; Juliana's heroism brings about a sort of divine justice. By transforming the language of warfare, Cynewulf promotes a new order of values that is inclusive of female participation. In support of the argument of this dissertation—that certain women as they are depicted in Old English poetry transform the traditional heroic ideal—Juliana's role as peace-weaver and cleric serve as prime examples.³³⁸ Her suffering adds interest to the text and her ability to overcome it reveals in her a special power that is more than female or human. But, it is her words that highlight her as a warrior and draw readers into the fight and hold us there. Her fame and legend as a heroine and spiritual warrior are born in words Cynewulf puts to the page. He writes that Juliana is “battle-bold beyond woman-kind” (*wigþrist ofer eall wīfe cyn*, 432).

³³⁸ The female “voice” in Old English poetry is considered in detail in Chapter V. The analysis includes a close examination of Juliana's voice and tone.

CHAPTER V
FEMALE REPRESENTATIONS OF HEROISM
IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Old English poetry derives from sources that are not only Germanic or Christian. Elements of Grendel's mother's character can be traced to Celtic mythology, and Judith is a Hebrew biblical heroine. Thus, these figures were translated into Anglo-Saxon society and shaped to capture the new cultural identity. Within these cultures and their texts, women may operate like their male counterparts physically, but they tend to differ in subtle ways emotionally. The sexes are separated by motivations, methods, and their relationships with other characters, and the symbols, motifs, and tropes central to these qualities also differ. For instance, the females examined here are self-reliant like male heroes, but their resourcefulness stems from something other than brute force. Also like men, they brandish weapons—some conventional, others more unorthodox—and use them in radical ways. Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana are not glory-seekers. They perform publically only because they have been provoked. All of these insights serve as evidence of women's involvement in the heroic ideal.

This chapter examines four major narrative similarities between the characters of Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana, as well as their stories: 1) the “recurrent trope of self-sufficiency,”³³⁹ 2) the “manly” woman, 3) the symbol of the head, and 4) the voice.

³³⁹ A phrase borrowed from John Arnold, “Gender and Sexuality,” *A Companion to the Medieval World*, eds. Carol Lansing and Edward D. English (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 169.

These similarities are not the only discernable connections between the texts but work well as examples of the heroic ethos given their recurrence in Old English poetry. A careful analysis of these elements suggests ways in which Anglo-Saxon poets deconstructed and (re)envisioned literary traditions; and, for the purpose of this dissertation helps us to further delve into the nature of the heroic female figure.

1 THE RECURRENT TROPE OF SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The popular image of the men on whose deeds Germanic heroic poetry was based is a violent and resourceful one, the “epitome of self-sufficient manhood.”³⁴⁰ Beowulf is one example of the self-reliant fierce warrior. Although female, Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana can also be described as self-reliant figures. While each did not initiate the circumstances that ultimately put them in positions of self-preservation and protection, their courageous and proactive responses to their individual predicaments establish their heroism. Each displays intense determination, a fierce mindset, resolve to complete the challenge, and a willingness to die trying. These heroines work alone, relying on what few resources are available to them.

One defining quality shared by these heroines is that they operate independent of any male agent. The story of Judith is about a woman who defeats her enemy (and a rival nation) unassisted. Unlike the biblical version where her community is under siege, our understanding of the situation in the Old English poem begins with the pagan Assyrian leader, Holofernes, lusting after Judith, and her determination to endure the insult until

³⁴⁰ Stephen Grundy, “The Viking’s Mother: Relations between Mothers and their Grown Sons in Icelandic Sagas,” *Medieval Mothering*, eds. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Routledge, 1996), 223. See the *Volsung* and *Niflung* legends, in particular, and the Icelandic manuscript the *Codex Regius* (written down in the thirteenth century).

she can destroy him.³⁴¹ Biblical sources tell us that Judith is a widow. Her husband, Manasseh, “died in the days of the barley harvest” (*qui mortuus est in diebus messis hordiariae*) leaving her a widow shut up in her house for “three years and six months” (*annis tribus et mensibus sex*) (8:2–6).³⁴² From this perspective, readers may conclude she saw it her duty to act in her husband’s stead, as other brave and noble Anglo-Saxon women have been known to do.³⁴³ However, the poem as we have it does not directly label her a widow so readers’ perceptions must rely on their previous engagement with the biblical narrative for this information. Most modern English translations introduce Judith as a “wise maid” or “virgin”³⁴⁴ with no further definitive clarification of social estate. To describe the heroine, the poet uses the Old English terms *mæg* and *weowle*

³⁴¹ The extant Old English poem makes no mention of events prior to Judith’s journey to the Assyrian camp. However, this may be because some leaves are missing at the beginning of the poem.

³⁴² Edgar Swift, ed., *The Vulgate Bible*, vol. 2, part B, Douay-Rheims Translation (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 1699. All English translations from *The Book of Judith* in this chapter are those of Edgar Swift, as well as all Latin quotes unless otherwise noted.

The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament in English, ed., R. H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973).

³⁴³ Most notably is the story of Æthelflæd (c. 870–918 CE), daughter of King Alfred the Great of Wessex, whom he married to Æthelred, Lord of the Mercians, to seal the strategic alliance between surviving English kingdoms after winning the Battle of Edington. Upon Æthelred’s death, she became ruler of Mercia from 911 until her own death. Known as the “Lady of the Mercians,” she was instrumental in the conquest of the Danelaw and, as a consequence, later praised by Anglo-Norman chroniclers.

³⁴⁴ See modern English translations by J. Lesslie Hall (1902), S.A.J. Bradley (1982), R. M. Liuzza (2014), and Aaron K. Hostetter (2016). See also the Old English transcription from by Elliott van Kirk Dobbie (1953), ASPR. All modern English quotes and translations of *Judith* for this chapter are those by Stephen O. Glosecki in Liuzza, *Old English Poetry: An Anthology* (Broadview Press, 2014), 229–242. All Old English quotes in this chapter for Judith are those of Elliott van Kirk Dobbie “Beowulf and Judith.” *The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: a collective edition*. Vol. 4 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936).

more than once, both of which can be translated as “maiden” or “virgin.”³⁴⁵ This language can lead to some confusion. Some scholars, however, feel the Old English text does not encourage us to see Judith as a virgin and that her widowhood is understood.³⁴⁶ Additionally, because we may not have the poem in its entirety, language that definitively labels Judith as a widow may be lost. However, in the existing pages, the poet makes no mention of a former husband, or any relationship with a father, brother, or overlord. The only governance Judith appears to acknowledge or accept is from God. Because God is not human, Judith’s relationship with Him cannot be viewed as a conventional relationship. Likely, readers would not have seen Judith as a reflection of a contemporary female but as a saint or a figure possessing special powers. This character type, performing as something more than human, or as God’s vessel, does not mirror real life and has been portrayed by both woman and men in the poetry. Several examples exist of male heroes serving as God’s vessels. Beowulf works by God’s hand when he defeats Grendel’s mother (“Holy God brought about war-victory”; *halig God geweold*

³⁴⁵The poet uses the word *meowle* or a variation thereof two times in the poem, lines 56b and 261a; and the word *mægð* or a variation thereof eleven times, in lines 35a, 43a, 78a, 125a, 135a, 145a, 165a, 254b, 260a, 324a, and 334a. J. R. Clark Hall’s *Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* translates the strong feminine noun *mægð* as “maiden, virgin, girl, woman, and wife,” and the weak feminine noun *meowle* as “maiden, virgin, or woman.” Judith is also referred to as *wif* (woman), *þeowen* (handmaiden), and *ides* (lady), which has been controversially translated in other ways; however, none of these terms literally mean “widow.” Audrey L. Meaney analyzed the word and its use in Old English. She writes, “It appears to be a word common to Old English and West Germanic, and maybe general Germanic. Old Saxon *idis* and Old High German it are applied to Mary; and most important, *idisi* is the word used for women who sit working spells of binding and losing in the Old High German *First Merseburg Charm*. It would seem that an *ides* was no ordinary woman; and indeed Jakob Grimm believed that the word was applied in earliest times to superhuman beings, midway between goddesses and ordinary women.” Audrey L. Meaney, “The Ides of the Cotton Gnostic Poem,” In *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 158. In Norse mythology, a *dís* (“lady,” plural *dísir*) is a ghost, spirit or deity associated with fate who can be either benevolent or antagonistic towards mortals. While the Old English word *ides* and the Old Norse image of *dís* may not be related, there is no discounting the similar etymology and use of the word with powerful women.

³⁴⁶ See Hugh Magennis, “Gender and Heroism in the Old English *Judith*,” *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts*, ed. Elaine Treharne (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 11.

wigsigor, 1553b–1554a).³⁴⁷ With divine intervention, St. Andreas is able to rescue Matthew from a city of cannibals.³⁴⁸ Therefore, with no male agent present, Judith is a self-imposed female leader.

The poet emphasizes Judith’s wisdom (“wise”; *gleaw, snotere, searoðoncol, gleawhydig, gearoþoncol*), a key quality of leadership, and hints that she may be more intelligent than other heroes; she is described as “ingenious” (*ærest gesohte*, 14). She is also a “fighter” (*Hæfde ða gefohten*, 122a), and physically fit (“hearty and strong”; *eaðost*, 75), as emphasized by her ability to move Holofernes’ unconscious body around the bed and use his sword effectively to cut through his neck bones and ligaments.³⁴⁹ The morning after the beheading, Judith remains “boldly daring” (*ellenþriste*, 133b) as she “steals right through the hostile camp” making her way back to Bethulia (*ut of ðam herige, þæt hie sweotollice geseon mihten þære wlitegan byrig weallas vlican, Bethuliam*, 135b–138a). This trek seems a considerable distance away since the poet writes that the town walls are not clearly visible from where she is. Judith’s physical adroitness serves to align her with other fit male warriors. Yet, while physical strength is expected of an Anglo-Saxon hero, the poet tends to focus more on her mental agility. Her ability to remain “steadfast” (*collenferhðe*, 134b), “clear-minded” (*gleawhydig wif*, 147a), and use “good judgement” (*searoðonocal*, 143) under extreme duress is heavily praised

³⁴⁷ All modern English translations and Old English quotations of *Beowulf* for this chapter are those of R. M. Liuzza, ed., *Beowulf*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2013) unless otherwise stated.

³⁴⁸ *Andreas*, 1206–1208. “Then the Lord of Hosts spoke a word, the Measurer strong of might said to his loyal servant: ‘You must, Andrew, perform a courageous deed!’” Believed to be a translation of a Latin work dated to the fourth century, *Andreas* a 1,722-line Old English anonymous poem, tells the story of St. Andrew the Apostle as he rescues St. Matthew from a race of cannibals. It is the first poem in the Vercelli Book and is followed by Cynewulf’s poem entitled *The Fates of the Apostles*.

³⁴⁹ While the average weight of swords in Anglo-Saxon England and other parts of the world vary greatly based on when and where they were made, and what materials were used, most would have likely been a challenge for the average female to handle, especially those inexperienced. For example, the hilts could be very heavy. See H. R. Ellis Davidson, *The Sword in Anglo-Saxon England: Its Archaeology and Literature* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: The Boydell Press, 1962).

throughout the poem. Hence, it is the combination of Judith's physical and mental capabilities that ultimately conquers the Assyrians. To defeat such overwhelming evil both force and wisdom are required.

As a heroine, Judith is well-armed, albeit unconventionally. Because she is wise and faithful, she prays to God to for the stamina to overtake Holofernes without the assistance of another human being (84–94). God responds in kind without affording her any superhuman qualities or sending warriors. This passage can be compared with Beowulf's request of Hrothgar to let him alone rid Heorot of evil (*þæt ic mot ana minra eorla gedryht, þes hearda heap, Heorot fælsian*, 431-432). In *Judith*, like *Beowulf*, the hero requests to face her challenge independently; however, this solitude is depicted differently for the two heroes. Judith goes to the enemy camp with one other woman, a hand-maid who carries food in a bag for them which later serves as a carryall for the head. In contrast, Beowulf goes to Heorot with a "band of earls and hardy troop" (*minra eorla gedryht, þes hearda heap*, 431b–432a). Judith is truly without armed support. She and her maid possess no weapons or means of bodily protection. Beowulf and his fifteen soldiers (207) sailed to Daneland together and are depicted as sporting war-gear ("covered shields"; *fætte scyldas*, 333b, and "gray coats of mail and grim helmets"; *græge syrcan, ond grimhelmas*, 334). Obviously, these men are trained warriors and never leave his side. They accompany him on his voyage to Heorot and again to Grendel's mother's cave; however, Beowulf performs the heroics. Furthermore, Unferth, an earl in Hrothgar's *comitatus*, supplies Beowulf with an "ancient heirloom" (*ealde lafe*, 1488b) for protection, "a wave-patterned sword" (*wrætlic wægsweord*, 1489a) called Hrunting. Judith, conversely, with no combat gear and only a plan of action, is forced to

seek out an alternative means of destroying Holofernes and his army. Using her beauty as a weapon (“elf-lovely”; *aelfscinu*, 14a) she preys upon Holofernes’ vices. Because Holofernes is attracted to her, Judith is able to enter the enemy camp and hold his attention until she is able to use his own sword to decapitate him. Her heroism therefore is demonstrated by her unconventional use of “women’s weapons.”³⁵⁰ Waiting for Holofernes to pass out so that she has access to his weapon is without doubt resourceful.

In contrast to Judith’s character, Grendel’s mother is depicted as a skilled fighter. But she too performs independently, not working through a male relation.³⁵¹ If she once had a male partner, he is gone (“They knew no father”; *no hie fæder cunnon*, 1355b), and her son is also gone, killed by the hand of Beowulf. While readers have long speculated that she is the last of her clan, and I am inclined to agree, it should be noted that upon Beowulf’s return to Geatland he recounts his adventures for Hygelac. At the beginning of his recitation he boasts:

I avenged them all,
so that none of Grendel’s tribe needs to boast
anywhere on earth of that uproar at dawn,
whoever lives longest of that loathsome kind,
enveloped in foul evil³⁵²

This passage suggests the possibility of an existing Grendel tribe; however, the poet offers no further evidence that its members are still alive or ever existed. Without another Grendel described in the poem, it seems reasonable to conclude that Grendel’s

³⁵⁰ This is a reference to a phrase found in Book XI of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (687–698). It is shouted by Camilla, Volscian maiden turned warrior, as she slays her male opponent on the battlefield. The entire line reads “Well, the day has come when a woman’s weapons prove your daydreams wrong! (*advenit qui vestra dies muliebribus armis verba redargueret. nomen tamen haud leve partum manibus hoc referes, telo cecidisse Camillae*). I translate the phrase *muliebribus armis* as “women’s weapons” and have argued elsewhere that it can be read as a gendered metaphor.

³⁵¹ See Chapter II, pages 19, 20, 24, and 25.

³⁵² 2005a–2007a (*Ic ðæt eall gewræc, swa begylpan ne þearf Grendeles maga ænig ofer eorðan*).

mother is alone, the last of her kind, and can therefore be viewed as an able-bodied, self-sufficient, powerful female.

The landscape and the moors lack clear description, leaving audiences to consider the possibility that the Grendels hold sway over the terrain, as well as perhaps the monsters and serpents who occupy it. The poet writes that the area is home to “sea-creatures” (*sædracan*, 1426a) and provides a vivid description of their fierce protection of the mere.³⁵³ Whether or not Grendel’s mother is chieftain to an army of reptiles or amphibians, she is clearly in charge of her space. The creatures are protecting her lair. We learn this through the battle language present in the passage where Beowulf dives into the mere and “monsters pursue him” (1425–1512a). The poet describes Beowulf as “geared up in his warrior clothing” (*gyrede hine Beowulf eorlgewædum*, 1442b–1443a) with a “shining helmet” (*hwita helm*, 1448a) concerned that a “battle-sword” (*beadomecas*, 1454a) might wound him. This is an image of a warrior ready to fight an army or the leader of a powerful force, not one female, even if the female appears out of the ordinary.

Like Beowulf, Grendel’s mother is physically powerful; after she kills Æschere in the mead hall, she drags the body away (“bore away his corpse”; *hio þæt lic ætbær*, 2127) through the countryside, which would have been no easy feat. The poet describes the war party trailing after her, over “steep stone cliffs, a constricted climb” (*steap stanhliðo, stige nearwe*, 1409) with “narrow paths” (*enge anpaðas*, 1410a) and “towering headlands” (*neowle næssas*, 1411a); this trek would be a challenge for even the most fit of humans. She is also a robust underwater swimmer, and when Beowulf enters her

³⁵³ See lines 1425–1440. In this passage the poet tells of one of the “swimmers” killed by a “Geatish bowman.” He describes the swimmer as being dragged ashore and calls him as a “grisly visitor.” This visual image and language anthropomorphize the sea creatures.

cavern, she hauls him down further and further with her to the bottom, to her lair. She has mighty upper body strength, grabbing the Geat with a “grim grasp” (*grimman grapum*, 1542a) and wrestling him to the ground where she holds him and jabs at him with a knife (“She sat upon her hall-guest and drew her knife”; *Ofsæt þa þone selegyst, ond hyre seaxe geteah*, 1545). This display of aggressive physical skill, pure muscle, and unwavering focus places Grendel’s mother on equal footing with Beowulf as a warrior, at least temporarily.

The episode also reveals her combat experience as she skillfully fights him with her hands and uses weapons with ease. She brings a knife, “broad, bright-edged” (*brad ond brunecg*, 1545b–1546a) to the fight. Later, we learn she has many swords and weapons in her mere. Peculiar to her nature, she is also covered in a protective coating or costume which fulfills the same purpose as armor. Like most suits of armor, it is impenetrable until a weakness is found. Beowulf locates the vulnerable point between the breastplate and helmet and is able to decapitate her. Before she dies, she demonstrates her iron will (in the midst of the fight the poet reveals her thoughts, “She would avenge her boy”; *wolde hire bearn wrecan*, 1546). It is without doubt that Grendel’s mother is self-sufficient and a warrior.

Unlike Judith, Beowulf, and Juliana, Grendel’s mother has no Christian God watching over her nor does she pray or call on any pagan deity for assistance. Associated with her character is a certain nostalgia. Her lair is a battle-hall containing the spoils of war and inheritance and amid the armor rests “a gigantic old sword” (*ealdsweord eotenisc*, 1558a) borne in past battles. Although among the living, she fights to protect herself, her mere, and a fading tradition. Her character reflects a quality of Anglo-Saxon

literature that Sean Lerer refers to as a “deep, cultural consciousness of the Roman past.”³⁵⁴ Her calling and actions are connected to a bygone impulse, not Christianity and its teachings. The implication is that Grendel’s mother is the last of the great pagan women: proud, resourceful, and single-handedly fighting a contest she cannot win.

Unlike Grendel’s dam, Juliana’s character speaks to contemporary Christian sensibilities, but she suffers and dies because of her refusal to marry a pagan. Social customs require a young girl to marry a man or her father’s choosing. Her rejection of Eleusius demonstrates her dissatisfaction with secular conventions and the prevailing pagan beliefs of her time. Juliana’s self-sufficiency and heroism are located in her ability to stand up to the establishment.

While Judith and Grendel’s mother both combat their enemies physically, Juliana is not constructed with any corporal assets. The other two figures battle foreign nations and alien tribes—the Assyrians and the Danes, respectively—but Juliana’s trial lies within her own community. Persecuted by her own people, she is physically unable to fight off her male persecutors. Without an earthly place for her to go and no earthly person to ask for help, Juliana calls upon her greatest resource, God, who bestows upon her a will of iron and the “weapon of words.” As Juliana’s words become more powerful, her tormentors become angrier and more frustrated, and Satan becomes increasingly weak. Though bound and jailed, Juliana eventually deliver the lines that crush her persecutors; both earthly and demonic.³⁵⁵ While Grendel’s mother has no voice, and Judith uses her voice to recruit troops, Juliana uses hers to profess willfully

³⁵⁴ Sean Lerer, “‘On fagne flor’: the postcolonial *Beowulf*, from Heorot to Heaney,” *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages.*, eds. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 78.

³⁵⁵ There is a full discussion of Juliana’s “battle with words” in section four of this chapter.

and to publically humiliate, devastating the heathen supremacy and driving the devil away.

Because Juliana has no concern to save her physical body (as is part of the mission for Judith and Grendel's mother), only her virgin spirit, she makes an exceptionally effective heroine. In dying, she wins the battle. "Inspired in her breast" (*breostum inbryrded*, 539),³⁵⁶ Juliana's self-assurance rescues her soul and acts as example for those who wish to follow her holy path, including the poet. After her death, when she becomes a saint, her heroic status continues to grow.

2 THE "MANLY" WOMAN

Linguistic archetypes of the "manly" woman can be identified throughout literary history in warrior females such as the Amazons of antiquity, whose description in Old English appears in Orosius (I.x.29.14ff).³⁵⁷ Originating in Greek mythology, Amazons have been historically considered the ultimate female warriors; however, they were not necessarily depicted positively. William Blake Tyrrell explains:

The cultural ideal, the adult male warrior, depended upon the imperative that boys become warriors and fathers, and girls become wives and mothers of sons. The genesis of the Amazon myth is the reversal of that imperative: Amazons go to war and refuse to become mothers of sons.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁶ In this chapter, all modern English translations of Cynewulf's *Juliana* are those of Aaron K. Hostetter, The Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry Project, "Cynewulf, Juliana," Last modified April 5, 2017. <https://anglosaxonpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/juliana/>; and all Old English quotations are those of George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, eds., "The Exeter Book," *The Anglo-Saxon poetic records: a collective edition*, Vol. 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), unless otherwise noted.

³⁵⁷ Paulus Orosius (ca. 375–418 CE), student of Augustine of Hippo, was a Chalcedonian priest, historian, and theologian. He wrote three books in his lifetime, the most important of which is considered the *Seven Books of History Against the Pagans* (Latin: *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*), which is a historical narration focusing on the pagan peoples from the earliest time up until Orosius' lifetime. King Alfred the Great (894–899 CE) produced an Old English version of the text.

³⁵⁸ William Blake Tyrrell, *Amazons: A Study in Athenian Mythmaking* (Baltimore and London: The John's Hopkins University Press, 1984), xiii-iv.

For the Greeks, the Amazon myth was used to explain the importance of marriage in Athenian society.³⁵⁹ According to custom, women were betrothed and moved into their husband's household to bear children, ensuring the success of the family. As independent warrior women, the Amazons represented the antithesis of conventional society; they were often vilified for their unorthodox and violent behavior.

Virgil's Camilla and Tacitus' account of the Celtic queen Boudica (ca. 30–61 CE)³⁶⁰ can be viewed as reimagined examples of this literary construct. Virgil tells us that Camilla is “fearless on foot and armed like [a man] with a naked sword.”³⁶¹ In her examination of women warriors in medieval romance, Lorraine Kochanske Stock names Camilla as “a prototype for the literary female warrior.”³⁶² In the early second century, Tacitus wrote of Boudica that she “took the field, like the meanest among them, to seek revenge.”³⁶³ While historically not all characteristics of these warrior women may have been viewed as positive, their figures can be appreciated for presenting audiences with

³⁵⁹ Tyrrell, xiii-iv.

³⁶⁰ Boudica was married to Prasutagus, ruler of the Iceni tribe of East Anglia. As an independent ally of Rome, upon his death he left his kingdom jointly to his daughters and the Roman emperor who ignored his wishes and annexed the kingdom. During a show of force, Boudica is flogged and her daughters are raped. In retaliation, Boudica led the Iceni and other neighboring tribes in a major rebellion united against the Romans. When enemy troops met in London, Boudica is said to have laid waste to the area killing an estimated seventy thousand Romans. She disappears from history shortly thereafter. Somewhat earlier, it is thought that Gildas, in his sixth century *De Excidio et Conquestu Britannia*, may have been alluding to Queen Boudica when he wrote “a treacherous lioness butchered the governors who had been left to give fuller voice and strength to the endeavors of Roman rule.” Gildas, “On the Ruin of Britain,” trans. by J.A. Giles and T. Habington, *Gutenberg Press*, accessed October 23, 2014. <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1949>.

³⁶¹ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 2006): IX.839.

³⁶² See Lorraine Kochanske Stock, “Arms and the (Wo)man in Medieval Romance: The Gendered Arming of Female Warriors in the Roman d’Eneas and Heldris’s Roman de Silence.” *Arthuriana* 5.4 (1995): 56, Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27869148>; and Paula Malpezzi Price, who writes that Camilla is a classic prototype of the women warrior character, in “Women Warriors,” *The Feminist Encyclopedia of Italian Literature*, ed. Rinaldina Russell (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 357–359. Mary Beard provides examples from Roman history where women have been attributed a “man’s nature” because they behaved in contradiction to social norms, in “The Public Voice of Women,” *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (New York and London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 1–45.

³⁶³ Tacitus, *The Annals*, trans. by Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb, *The Internet Classics Archive*, 2009, accessed January, 2018, <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.html>.

alternative ways of seeing women perform and constructing models from which later authors were able to draw.

Katrín Friðriksdóttir describes the warrior woman and Swedish princess who prefers to be called *þornbjörg* (a masculine name), of the thirteenth-century *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (“The Saga of Hrolf Gautreksson”), who is proficient in military combat as well as domestic skills.³⁶⁴ The inspiration for her character has been traced to “early Germanic peoples on the continent as well as to their Nordic relatives whose poetry and mythology presents divine female figures and identifies four images of human women: the warrior, the prophetess/sorceress, the revenger, and the inciter.”³⁶⁵ Notable attributes of these character types—independent, athletic, self-sufficient, and battle-skilled, adjectives traditionally ascribed to male heroes—can indeed be located in the females of Old English poetry examined here. As models of strength and ferocity of the Anglo-Saxon world, Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana, I would argue, are not turned into masculine figures by their authors but afforded certain qualities of a heroic ideal, like Camilla and Boudica, which can mask their femininity but not change their gender. Thus, these characters appear as variations of the trope described above.

Many scholars have viewed Grendel’s mother and Judith in particular as “manly,” or exhibiting the qualities of a male,³⁶⁶ but I argue they are forced to act in ways typically considered masculine; historically, only men who were labeled as heroes in Germanic

³⁶⁴ In the shorter version of the story, she is called Princess *þornbjörg* (Thorbjorg) which is not a masculine name, in Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, “Wisdom and Women’s Counsel in *Hrólfs Saga Gautrekssonar*,” *Hyggin ok Forsjál* (2010): 71–76.

³⁶⁵ Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 3.

³⁶⁶ See Hugh Magennis, “Gender and Heroism in the Old English *Judith*,” *Writing Gender and Genre in Medieval Literature: Approaches to Old and Middle English Texts*, ed. Elaine Treharne (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), 10; Allen J. Frantzen, “When Women Aren’t Enough,” *Speculum* 68.2 (1993): 461; and Alexandra Olsen Hennessey, “Inversion and Political Purpose in the Old English *Judith*,” *English Studies* 63.4 (1982): 289–293. See also Roy Gopa, “A Virgin Acts Manfully: Ælfric’s *Life of St. Eugenia* and the Latin Versions,” *Leeds Studies in English* 23 (1992): 1–27.

legend and this framework applied to depicting female heroics as well. These women, having been acted upon by men, must retaliate in the customary manner to be viewed as heroic; thus, they are not “manly,” but women upholding qualities of a male-defined heroic ethos. Scholars have noted other examples of Germanic and Norse females who have performed in a similar fashion; however, these women tend toward the supernatural in overt ways, primarily as valkyries or goddesses.³⁶⁷ In contrast, Judith and Grendel’s mother, who do exhibit some super-human attributes, are largely described by human terms and as possessing human qualities whereas the valkyries are not. For example, while Judith’s beheading of Holofernes is an action in sharp contrast to the conventional behavior of “real” Anglo-Saxon women, she nonetheless retains her qualities as a human woman. Throughout the text, the poet consistently reminds us of her sex. He tells us she is a *meowle* and a *mæg*; terms used repeatedly used to describe her (two and eleven times, respectively). In addition to this, she is also called *wif* (“woman”) two times and *ides* (“lady”) seven times. Because the poet emphasizes her character as female twenty-two times in the fragmented poem of 350 lines it seems reasonable to conclude that audiences are meant to think of her as a woman.

Grendel’s mother is referred to or described as *ides* twice: as a “monstrous woman” in line 1259 (“*ides aglaecwif*”) and in line 1351 we are told she “had the shape of a woman” (*idese onlicnes*). Patricia A. Belanoff concludes, “Although cognates of *ides* in other Germanic languages suggest that the word originally referred to woman in her sacral aspect or to particularly significant women in society, the word is not always so used in Old English poetry.” Aristocratic and powerful females are frequently given the

³⁶⁷ Additional examples include Valkyries, the *Dis*, and witch-mothers of Norse and Icelandic legends. See also Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda* for a specific list of women identified as battle goddesses and powerful female deities.

label.³⁶⁸ This observation serves to align Grendel's mother with the other *ides*, not the men. Most importantly, the fact that her epithet is that of "mother," and only women can be mothers, makes her unequivocally female. In the poem, she is called *modor* ("mother") seven times. She is also referred to as *wif* ("woman or female person") three times (*mere-wife*; "mere-wife," 1519; "lady troll wife or monstrous woman"; *ides aglaecwif*, 1259; and *wif unhyre*; "horrible woman," 2120). While these adjectives accompanying *wif* are not flattering and may serve to negate her humanity, the use of these terms confirms she is a female. Nowhere does the poet definitively refer to Grendel's mother as a man.³⁶⁹

Certain virgin saints too have been viewed as "manly." Scholars have argued the "manliness" of a handful of literary females based on the comments of patristic and ecclesiastical authors, such as Ælfric, who is noted for writing "If a woman is manly by nature and strong to God's will, she will be counted among the men who sit at the table of God."³⁷⁰ Modern scholarship holds that female saints capture the spirit of man's nature in order to move toward the divine.³⁷¹ While this could be seen as one possible reading of the saint's lives, there are other reasonable interpretations. Although it would be difficult to argue that Juliana exhibits a "man's nature," there are a number of female

³⁶⁸ Patricia A. Belanoff, "Judith: Sacred and Secular Heroine," *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* 32 (1993): 258.

³⁶⁹ Scholars have identified some confusion regarding Beowulf's use of the pronoun *he* in line 1392b in reference to Grendel's mother. Liuzza suggests *he* refers to the Old English *magan* ("kinsman"), which is a masculine noun used in the phrase just prior (1391a).

³⁷⁰ This quotation is referenced in Janet Bately's "The Nature of Old English Prose," *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, eds. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991), 79. And located in Benjamin Thorpe, ed. and trans., *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The First Part, Containing The Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric.* 2 vols (London: Richard and John E. Taylor, 1844).

³⁷¹ See Allen J. Frantzen, "When Women Aren't Enough." *Speculum* 68.2 (1993): 445–471, and 465.

saints that cause controversy in this arena.³⁷² Roy Gopa writes about the gendered traits of the protagonist in both Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon *Life of St. Eugenia* as well as the Latin versions of her story. In the narrative, Eugenia assumes a masculine disguise in an effort to protect her chastity (a not uncommon act in the genre of saints' lives).³⁷³ When the bishop Helenus asks her what her name is, she replies Eugenius (rather than the feminine Eugenia) and although he already knows her true identity, the conversation plays out as follows:

I am called Eugenius. To whom the blessed Helenus said 'Rightly are you called Eugenius, because by doing manfully, you have offered yourself a perfect man in the Lord's contest.'³⁷⁴

In this passage, Helenus recognizes and supports the efforts of Eugenia to keep her identity a secret; since she is literally dressed as a man, and therefore disguised, her would-be suitors and persecutors are likely to be thwarted. In the Latin version, the word *viriliter*³⁷⁵ is employed and is often translated into modern English as "manfully." *Viriliter* in the Latin text, however, is used metaphorically in the sense of "courageously," not implying "manliness."³⁷⁶ The *Book of Judith* also contains the word *viriliter*,³⁷⁷

³⁷² See Marie Delcourt, "Female Saints in Masculine Clothing" in *Hermaphrodite; myths and rites of the bisexual figure in classical antiquity* (London : Studio Books, 1961), 84–102; and P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, eds., *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages* (University of Toronto Press, 2005).

³⁷³ See John Kitchen, *Saints' Lives and the Rhetoric of Gender: Male and Female in Merovingian Hagiography* (Oxford University Press, 1998); Peter Brown, *Body and Society, Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); and Jane Tibbetts Schulenberg, *Forgetful of their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500–1100* (Chicago University Press, 1998).

³⁷⁴ Quotation in Roy Gopa, "A Virgin Acts Manfully: Ælfric's Life of St. Eugenia and the Latin Versions," *Leeds Studies in English* 23 (1992): 3. Gopa's quotations are taken from the text of the Cotton-Corpus version as printed in *Pasionario Hispanico*, edited by A. Babrega Grau, *Monumenta Hispaniae Sacra: Serie Liturgica*, vol. VI, Tom. II (Madrid Barcelona, 1995), 83–98, and the *Passio S. Eugeniae*: Cambridge, Corpus Christi Library, MS 9, 410–26.

³⁷⁵ Whitaker's Words translates the adverb *viriliter* (*viriliter*, *virilius*, *virilissime*): "with masculine/manly vigor," or "manfully/in a manly/virile way." *Vir* (*vir*, *vir*), the noun, is translated as "man/ husband/ hero/person of courage/ honor/nobility."

³⁷⁶ Gopa, 5.

³⁷⁷ The Vulgate *Judith* contains the Latin line "*quia tu fecisti viriliter*."

which in some translated versions gets assigned the word “manfully” (Judith 15. 10–11).³⁷⁸ In the Old English poem, however, Judith is called ‘brave’ and “courageous” several times, but never “manly.” Gopa also observes that in Ecclesiasticus the word *vir* is applied to both males and females who are “strong and discerning.”³⁷⁹ In reference to Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana, the poets do not employ the Old English *werlice*, which is the equivalent of the Latin *viriliter*.

Certainly, saints of both sexes perform daringly bold and spirited feats of heroism. Beyond harm, they are degraded, strung up, beaten and chained, doused in molten lead, mutilated, and burnt to no avail. Among scholars, there is a general feeling that despite the use of this same template for both male and female saints, the descriptions of the saints’ sufferings are inflected by gender concerns.³⁸⁰ Male saints tend to be culturally masculinized while female saints are associated with more feminine qualities. For example, St. Victoria³⁸¹ is a powerful figure, authoritative and commanding, but she bends towards passivity in comparison to her male counterparts.³⁸² Emma Pettit provides a striking example in her observation:

Despite Aldhelm’s use of the same miracle formula for saints of either sex, his choice of lexicon is gender-specific. Most revealing is his different choice of adjectives to describe the tortured male and female saints, for only male saints are associated with the masculine qualities of strength and invincibility. In significant contrast, female saints are described as comparatively weak and defenseless. The men are thus characterized repeatedly as “unconquerable,” “uncompromising,” “triumphant,” and “steadfast.”³⁸³

³⁷⁸ Gopa, 4.

³⁷⁹ Gopa, 5.

³⁸⁰ Emma Pettit, “Holiness and Masculinity in Aldhelm’s Opus Geminatum De Virginitate,” *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages, Religion and Culture in the Middle Ages*, eds. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis, eds., (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 22.

³⁸¹ St. Victoria is mentioned in the *Roman Martyrology* under the date of July 10, in the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* under July 10: *VI idus iulii in Savinis Anatholiae Victoriae*, and in *In Savinis civitate Tribulana Victoriae* under December 19.

³⁸² Pettit, 16.

³⁸³ Pettit, 16.

Aldhelm's contributions to our understanding of saints' lives, the Church, and its ideologies notwithstanding, it appears that Old English poets chose to omit some of the gendered constructs. As testament, Juliana is not treated as weak or defenseless and her resolve is as strong as any of the saints, male or female ("the maid of glory, was resolute and unafraid, mindful of her strength"; *wæs seo wuldres mæg unræd und unforht, eafodā gemyndig*, 600), and she does not behave "manfully." Because Cynewulf himself chooses her, a female saint, to rely upon as his own intercessor for salvation, which is made evident by his personal entreaty found in the last lines of the poem (695–730), we can be confident that some Anglo-Saxons (and at least one male poet) were not so focused on the sex of the saint but rather on Juliana's power and accomplishments, and how sinners could benefit from her story.

In sum, Juliana, Judith, and Grendel's mother are linguistically defined and described by the poets as women. Any interpretation otherwise is implied through female performance of a masculine heroic code, which does not necessarily render them "manly." Instead, they are female heroines representing an expanded cultural role for certain Anglo-Saxon women.

The development of this character—a woman performing as hero—was inevitable; as women joined the Church in reality, so should they be depicted in literature among the faithful alongside Christian men. A woman performing alone, especially a Christian woman without a male agent, was innovative and her success relied upon the careful negotiations of poets.

3 THE SYMBOL OF THE HEAD

A common practice in the ancient world and during the rise of Christianity was sentencing criminals to beheading. Lawbreaking Romans who were citizens were often beheaded for their wrongdoings because their status afforded them a more civilized death than that of a lower class person, where hanging would have been the custom. Yet by the early Middle Ages, this “upper class” execution method was common practice in Western European societies and in the literature.³⁸⁴

From early accounts of the second century B. C. E., the taking of enemy heads was also a common practice of Celtic warriors. H. R. Ellis Davidson quotes the observations of Diodorus Siculus:

They cut off the heads of enemies slain in battle and attach them to the necks of their horses. The blood-stained spoils they hand over to their attendants and carry off as booty, while taking part in a triumphs march and singing a song of victory; and they nail up these first fruits upon their houses, just as do those who lay low wild animals in certain kinds of hunting. They embalm in cedar-oil the heads of the most distinguished enemies and preserve them carefully in a chest.³⁸⁵

Here, Davidson highlights one way the head becomes an iconic symbol of power.

By keeping and displaying the head(s) of one’s enemy, young warriors gain a sense of accomplishment and power, and forge valiant reputations. There also exists tales of severed heads that speak after being separated from the body.³⁸⁶ Heads show up in Irish, Icelandic, Scandinavian, and Germanic traditions, as headstones, carvings, and on sword

³⁸⁴ See Christina F. Cooper-Rompato, “Decapitation, Martyrdom, and Late Medieval Execution Practices,” in *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, Volume 7 of *Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts*, eds. Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey (Brill: 2012), 74–75.

³⁸⁵ Diodorus Siculus, V, 29. Diodorus of Sicily was a Greek historian best known for writing the immense *Universal History* (*Bibliotheca historica*). The paragraph is quoted in H. R. Ellis Davidson, “The Rites of Battle,” *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (Syracuse University Press, 1988), 71. She took borrowed the quote from J. J. Tierney, “The Celtic Ethnography of Posidonius,” *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 60 (1960): 250.

³⁸⁶ See the Old Norse *Ynglinga Saga* first translated into English and published in 1844 by Samuel Laing; and Sturluson’s *Völuspá*. Other accounts can be located in Icelandic folktales, see Jon Árnason’s tale of Thorleif the wizard in Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson, eds., *Íslensk Æfintýri*. Reykjavík, 1852.

hilts.³⁸⁷ It makes sense that Anglo-Saxon poets would have incorporated the symbol into their writing; there were heads displayed in public spaces and various depictions in the British landscape as well as the literatures. We find three severed heads in *Beowulf* (Æschere's, Grendel's mother's, and Grendel's), which confirms the symbol's roots in heroic legend. It is clear that Beowulf's beheading of the Grendels represents power, triumph, and the spoils of war.

In Old English poetry, the head and images of decapitation serve as signs or visual markers and are central to the three poems examined here: Grendel's mother removes the head of Æschere and plants it on a hilltop; Judith cuts off the head of Holofernes and displays it dripping with blood before a crowd; and Juliana's head is cleanly removed by her persecutors, but not until she is ready to part with it. Although the head has long been a traditional sign of glory in battle and a display of heroic performance, when severed and disposed of by women, it becomes a visual indicator of gender and heightens the performance of the female hero.

In the *Vǫlundarkviða* (Völundr's poem), one of the mythological poems found in the Old Norse poetic *Edda*³⁸⁸ (ca. 1300s), decapitation is a consequence of vengeance, as in *Beowulf*. The poem tells of the legendary blacksmith of the gods, Völundr, a figure also celebrated by the Anglo-Saxons but known as Weyland the Smith: the artisan who made Beowulf's mail shirt (450–455). In the Norse poem he is one of the three sons of the king of the Finns, a clan also appearing in *Beowulf*. After nine years, his valkyrie wife leaves him and later he is captured by Níðuðr, a Swedish king who wants his gold.

³⁸⁷ Davidson, 78.

³⁸⁸ The *Poetic Edda* is a modern title for an unnamed collection of Old Norse anonymous poems; not to be confused with the *Edda* (thirteenth century), written by Snorri Sturluson. There are several extant versions which consist mostly of texts taken from the *Codex Regius*.

Völundr is crippled by him and put to work on an island making artifacts. Eventually, he escapes and takes his revenge on the king's family by beheading his two sons, raping and impregnating his daughter, and flying away.³⁸⁹ As a male character representative of Germanic cultural history, Völundr's actions are to be commended for they are forthright and endorse a heroic ethos. Although particularly brutal, as he also makes breast rings out of the sons' teeth, his deeds are culturally considered heroic and just.

Beowulf is also justified in his killing and beheading of Grendel and his mother. While initially he mortally wounds Grendel by ripping off his arm, he later decapitates him on his own turf and drags the head back to Heorot, with the aid of his retinue, to glorify himself and prove the deed is done. He also beheads the monster's mother. Of importance here is that Beowulf is viewed as the hero of the story for brutally killing the Grendels: he rips the arm off of the son, he hangs it over the mead hall door as a trophy, and he leaves the mother's head lying somewhere in the mere. Therefore, the ripping and mutilating of the bodies is not only expected, but glorified, and is made evident here by the reception and treasures Beowulf receives from the Danes upon his completion his tasks; both Hrothgar and Queen Wealhtheow bestow significant wealth and fortune upon him. The queen generously gives him an heirloom "neck-ring" (*beages*, 1216a), a beloved "treasure of the people" (*þeodgestreona*, 1217a). Proud and relieved of his woes, Hrothgar assures Beowulf he is a legend in the making ("your glory is exalted throughout the world"; *Blæd is eræred geond widwegas*, 1703b–1704a). He is also later praised and commended by his own king after he recounting his heroism (although he

³⁸⁹ The modern English translation of the sons' beheading reads: "Early did brother to brother call: 'Swift let us go the rings to see.' They came to the chest, and they craved the keys/ The evil was open when in they looked;/ He smote off their heads and their feet he hid/ Under the sooty straps of the bellows." *Völundarkvitha* (22–24), *Poetic Edda*, 262–263.

never describes the beheadings in detail). For both the Danes and Geats, Beowulf becomes a celebrated legend as well as king to the latter.

Conversely, the act of decapitation by Grendel's mother is not treated as an act of heroism by the poet; rather, she is villainized for the deed. (As we know Grendel's dam is not human and perhaps not subject to human standards, but the poet does "humanize" her in certain ways and, therefore, it seems reasonable to underscore this discrepancy.) Curiously, the poet both sympathizes with her as we see her grieving her dead son, yet she is condemned for modeling the heroic code. Furthermore, the poet does not acknowledge her bravery for going to the Danish enemy camp (as the poets do for Beowulf when he goes to the fens or for Judith when she travels to the Assyrian enemy camp). Hence, Grendel's dam is given some consideration for her role as a mother, but is not acknowledged as a noble Anglo-Saxon warrior although it is clear that certain qualities of the ethos exist within her character.

Anglo-Saxon poets provide examples of how proper women should behave when their kin have been killed. In *Beowulf*, when her son and her brother are killed fighting opposite each other in battle, Hildeburh—instead of attempting to avenge their deaths—weeps ("the lady sang a sad lament"; *ides gnornode, geomrode gyddum*, 1117b–1118a) while the men go off and avenge their loss. In *The Wife's Lament*, we find a woman waiting for her husband's return (whether he is alive or dead is unclear). As she waits, she mourns because she is alone and helpless without the authority to shape her own experience. Again, in *Beowulf*, a village woman is sings a "sorrowful song" (3150) at the funeral of Beowulf. Obviously, weeping and mourning are appropriate reactions for women who have lost loved ones, not seeking revenge. Keith Taylor poses an interesting

question: “If revenge to the Anglo-Saxons was indeed a worthy cause, would it not have been permissible, perhaps even appropriate, for a woman in the absence of a kinsman to avenge the death of her only child?”³⁹⁰ That the poet created Grendel’s mother as an avenger in any sense suggests that in some instances, this behavior may be tolerated. Again, Æthelflead could make a compelling argument for the case. During the Viking conflict, the “Lady of the Mercians” rode north to meet the Danes with a cunning battle plan in mind which proved successful, allowing the Mercians to strengthen their position against the enemy. She did this without the aid of her husband, Æthelred (881–911 C. E.), who died of an illness he had been suffering from for ten years. After his death, she became the sole ruler and continued her battle with against the Vikings. While one must be careful comparing history to fiction, some parallels can be drawn between the historical queen and the character of Grendel’s mother. Ultimately, Æthelflead and Beowulf are exalted for their efforts, and Grendel’s mother remains a monster.

Grendel’s mother is also an outsider and not a friend of the Danes. For her family’s intrepid actions against them, she is depicted as sharing qualities with beasts. The very sight of her is disturbing to Hrothgar and his men (“terror seized them”; *þa hine se broga angeat*, 1291b), and she is labelled and portrayed as “monstrous” (*aglæcwif*, 1259a), “greedy” (*gifre*, 1276a), and an “evil marauder” (*manscaða*, 1339a) who uses her “hostile claws” (*lapan fingrum*, 1505b) and “snatches” (*abreat*, 1298b) like a wild beast. After her raid on Heorot, she becomes less sympathetic. Depicted as an animal in the wilderness, she steals away with her prey, dragging her kill through the inhospitable forest to the fens where over her lair “hangs a grove hoar-frosted, a firm-rooted wood

³⁹⁰ Keith P. Taylor, “Beowulf 1259a: The Inherent Nobility of Grendel’s Mother,” *English Language Notes* 31:3 (1994), 21.

looming over the water” (*ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas, wudu wirtum fæst wæter oferhelmað*, 1364–1365). Like a bear or a wolf, she is hunted down by Hrothgar’s army; the large posse following her “tracks far and wide on the forest paths” (*Lastas wæron æfter walddswapum wide gesyne*, 1402b–1403) until the terrain becomes too rough and a smaller group led by Beowulf continues the chase through the “joyless wood” (*wynleasne wudu*, 1415a) where they find the head of Æschere perched on a sea cliff. This is a gruesome description reminiscent of how animals eat in the wild, leaving the body parts of their mutilated prey as bloody evidence of their kill. The head displayed on the hill shows that she can compete with Beowulf.

Hers is not a civilized land. The poet calls this area “wolf-haunted” (*wulfhleopu*, 1358a), and she is dubbed a “she-wolf” (*brimwylf*, 1506a), a menacing description meant to add another dimension to Grendel’s mother’s character rendering her uncanny and suspect. The Grendels are also categorized as “great march-stalkers” (*micle mearsctapan*, 1348a) which situates them, both literally and figuratively, on the border of civilization. The poet’s language in this passage highlights that the Grendels live outside of society, like animals. In heroic poetry, H. R. Ellis Davidson observes that “the bear and wolf were seen as symbols of valiant warriors, the bear symbolizing the lonely champion and the wolf an outlaw that preys on society, but also a young warrior hiding in the forest waiting to carry out a deed of vengeance.”³⁹¹ The image of the wolf as an outlaw and warrior may help us understand the poetic inspiration for Grendel’s mother’s character. By branding her both monstrous and sympathetic—a wolf in the woods and a grieving mother—audiences are able to consider her actions as both criminal and heroic.

³⁹¹ H. R. Ellis Davidson, “The Rites of Battle,” *Myths and Symbols in Pagan Europe* (Syracuse University Press, 1988), 79.

The predilection for depicting “bad women,” especially as animals, is found throughout early medieval literature and well into the High Middle Ages. Chaucer’s “The Miller’s Tale” provides a later example of the trope. Alisoun is a beautiful young woman, wife, and lover of another man. Although an adulteress, in the end she suffers no corporal punishment, but the poet’s description of her physical body reveals her true “beastly” nature: she has the body of a weasel,³⁹² sings like a barn-swallow, and has the spirit of a colt. Chaucer is not only comparing her to animals, but to animals that are predators. Like Alisoun, Grendel’s dam is portrayed as an animal of prey. She is a danger to proper society and must be contained. The appearance of Æschere’s head on the cliff marks the end of civilization and is a sign of Grendel’s mother’s beast-like nature.

Grendel’s mother also uses her enemy’s head to mark her territory, like a wolf that defends an area in which it hunts from all non-pack members. The head high on the hill sends a signal to the Danes that they are treading on foreign ground and are no longer safe. With the gory display, the “she-wolf” is sending a warning to the Danes to turn around.³⁹³ Yet, being stalked by a band of aggressive and angry warriors, she could have dropped the head, or it could be a last and desperate attempt to intimidate, stall, or distract the troops away from her lair. Thus, the head for Grendel’s mother is not just a

³⁹² Birds of Prey including owls, hawks and eagles, along with foxes and snakes, are the most common predators of the weasel. Weasels are also commonly preyed upon by domestic dogs and cats when they appear in environments populated by humans.

³⁹³ Thijs Porck’s research finds that “Anglo-Saxon charters often contained vernacular boundary clauses which described the areas under discussion. Within these boundary clauses, the term *heafod stoc* (“head stake”) is frequently attesting, suggesting that it was common practice to mark the limits of estate properties with impaled heads.” He finds that “various charters locate such head stakes in the vicinity of a road: e.g., *after foss to þam heafod stoccan* (after the way to the head stakes), The Electronic Sawyer (S 115), <http://www.esawyer.org.uk/charter/115.html>; and in Thijs Porck, “Heads on Sticks: Decapitation and impalement in early medieval England,” The Dutch Anglo-Saxonist (Blog), Leiden University, The Netherlands, March 23, 2018 (7:17p.m.), <https://dutchanglosaxonist.com/2017/04/10/heads-on-sticks/>.

boast of her kill and show of conquest, but a complex symbol of gender-specific concepts: the female need to compete with males for authority; the positioning of females as prey; monster-like behavior; and, in *Judith*, we see the head as a weapon to be feared. Most importantly, while the poet linguistically composes Grendel's dam as a strong leader and mother, the symbol of the head she takes reminds readers that she is other. She does not take the head to her lair and display it as a trophy nor does it motivate in her any special power over her enemies as it did for the Celts. Grendel's mother's beheading of a thane separates her from men in the poem and in folklore.

Because Beowulf takes Grendel's head back to Heorot with him and not Grendel's dam's, it can be concluded that a male's head carries more weight than that of a female. The head does not signify the same constructs when applied to females. Here, the poet dehumanizes Grendel's mother for her performance in the heroic ideal. Perhaps we should ask ourselves: Is this because she is not a Dane or because she is female? Because of this imbalance, it seems reasonable that the symbolism surrounding her character would also be treated in a nontraditional fashion.

The *Judith* poet's treatment of the head, in complete contrast to the *Beowulf* poet's treatment of the symbol, confirms that women can be as powerful as men. After decapitating Holofernes, Judith retrieves his head as a trophy symbolizing a grand triumph over a seemingly indestructible enemy. It not only empowers her but an entire army to fight, regardless of the overwhelming odds. Thus, Holofernes' head, just as heads taken by male heroes, can be viewed in a traditional sense yet, at the same time, audiences discern an expanded role of the symbol. For example, critical to the image of the male hero, Judith also exercises prudence, wisdom, and bravery, remains sober of

mind and strong in her faith, and maintains complete control of her physical self. (For women, this last attribute often emphasizes sexuality.) Those women who could exercise self-control were seen as virtuous, those who could not were viewed as beastly. Because Grendel's mother could not control her impulse to behead Æschere, she is hunted like a beast in the woods. From another perspective, the chase could be read as her taking control and luring the Danes to her lair, like a corrupt female. As a woman who cannot overcome her true nature, Grendel's mother is drawing the men into her mysterious world and one man in particular (Beowulf) into her "clutch" (*inwitfeng*, 1447a). This image provides a good example of how men view female sexuality as dangerous and a deterrent from duty. When she battles Beowulf in her lair, she literally loses control, fighting, falling on the ground, and sitting on Beowulf, and as a consequence loses her head. By contrast, throughout the *Judith* poem, we see the heroine exercising honorable restraint and self-discipline. Although Judith does attempt to lure and preoccupy Holofernes with her sexuality, she remains in control of the situation and receives lavish praise from the Bethulians and the poet.

It is through restraint that Judith's authority is clearly established; while Holofernes figuratively and literally "loses his head," Judith keeps hers. In juxtaposition to Holofernes' uncontrollable drinking, Judith's command of self is highlighted, and she clearly becomes the dominant figure. In her mindfulness, she remembers to pray for God's assistance:

Mankind's Ruler
grant me health and grace; I've never had greater need
for your mercy before. Almighty Lord,
bright-minded glory giver, grant me vengeance;

let my mind's fury inflame my heart?³⁹⁴

With these words Judith summons a miracle. As a woman, she knows it is implausible that she will overpower Holofernes, so she considers her resources and calls upon her faith; she turns her physical and mental self over to God, asking that he make it possible for a woman to overpower a man. And Holofernes is not just any man. In the *Book of Judith*, he is depicted as the battle-hardened appointed general of the powerful King Nebuchadnezzar, who under his charge and with an enormous army lays waste to all of the nations and their gods along the seacoast. This man is muscular, well trained, and takes what he wants. So, when Judith prays for “health,” she is asking for virility, the power and strength to fight a man of great force on equal terms. When she asks for “mind’s fury,” she is asking that she be able to act with the “ferocity” required on a battlefield. Because she is female and human, without military experience, she prays that her body becomes filled with vitality and that the Holy Spirit keeps her focused. Consequently, she transforms into a woman capable of extraordinary feats, like single-handedly cutting the head off of a seasoned male warrior.

Holofernes’ head is not just any head, it is *the* head of all heads. Even unconscious, the wicked man is incapable of losing his licentious nature, his incontinence,³⁹⁵ and because his head is the weapon from which his evil desires emanate, both physically and mentally, Judith must remove it. The episode in *Judith* focusing on the decapitation serves two purposes. First, it shifts the sexual stereotype from female to

³⁹⁴ 90b–94a (*geunne me minra gesyne, þearlmod þeoden gumena. Nahte ic þinre næfre miltse þon maran þearfe. Gewrec nu, mihtig dryhten, horhtmod tires brytta, þæt me ys þus torne on mode, hate on hreðre minum*).

³⁹⁵ Historically, the term “incontinence” is has been used by philosophers to translate the Greek word “akrasia” (ἀκρασία), a lack of moderation or self-control, especially related to sexual desire. Aristotle believed one could be incontinent with money or in temper but especially in terms of bodily pleasure. Its causes could be a lack of will or the inability to think clearly and use sound judgment. See J. A. K. Thompson, trans., *The Ethics of Aristotle* (1976): 235–246.

the male, and second, it enables the heroine to overcome man's sexual aggression. Of great significance is that the poet allows a woman to maintain control over a situation in which she would normally have no power. As such, readers see her as possessing the ability to maintain her virtue. This requires an inordinate sense of self and power. Ready to enact her plan, she stands, literally, towering over Holofernes, threatening him, ready to violate him. The poet writes:

She took that heathen man
by the hair fast then and with her fists tugging
stretched him deftly in deep disgrace,
wielding control of the wicked man³⁹⁶

In this passage, with her bare hands, Judith swiftly and confidently seizes Holofernes and emasculates him. His "deep disgrace" is a result of Judith's ability to "wield control" and overpower him and penetrate his dignity. He is at her mercy, but she shows him none. This is the language used to describe battles of men on the field,³⁹⁷ but here, with a woman leading the conflict, a sexual quality is discernable. I suggest that this is because during wartime rape was often a weapon of choice against women. In this case, the poet enables a woman's use of the same weapon against her enemy.

Across time women have had to experience and contend with a history of aggression. Under the fear of violence and rape women's lives are often fraught with anxiety, especially during wartime.³⁹⁸ It seems reasonable to consider, that the *Judith*

³⁹⁶ 98b–104a (*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*).

³⁹⁷ Compare to the battle-rhetoric of *Maldon* and *Finnesburh*.

³⁹⁸ Margarita Stocker, *Judith the Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 245.

poet used this understanding when constructing his heroine employing the associated rhetoric and imagery in the poem. The poet continues:

She hacked fearsome foe with fateful blade,
carved halfway through his hateful neck,
so that he lay in a drunken swoon with a deadly wound
though as yet unslain, with his soul elsewhere.
So she swung the sword a second time then
the brave lady lashed in earnest,
and that heathen hound's whole head unwound
rolled forth on the floor, leaving the foul carcass
empty behind it.³⁹⁹

With two swings of the sword, the heroine relieves her attacker of his masculinity and identity. The first blow of the sword, which only cuts “halfway,” confirms Judith’s resolve. The second cut severs Holofernes’ “whole head,” which can metaphorically be viewed as his penis (*werlice*)—the symbol associated with male dominance. While the poet never directly states the head correlates to the penis, this rhetoric may have been purposefully left ambiguous to make the event relevant for both men and women; hence, men are able to experience the sexual excitement of the story, while females reap the satisfaction of destroying their attackers.

Once Judith finally kills Holofernes, the poet tells us she has killed a “monster” (*þone atolan*, 75), a “heathen hound” (*þone hæðen hund*, 108), leaving his “foul carcass” (*fula leap*, 110) on the ground. Like Grendel’s mother in the hunt scene, Holofernes is reduced to prey, an uncivilized animal (lusty) that must be kept away from humanity. It is clear, the Old English poet tones down the sexual innuendo that exists in the Latin version of Judith but does not omit it. However, while Judith’s character still

³⁹⁹ 104–112 (*þone feondsceaðan fagum mece, hetepocolne, þæt heo healfne forcearf þone sweoran him, þæt he on swiman læg, druncan ond dolhwund. Næs ða deað þa gyt, ealles orsawle; sloh ða eirbiste udes ekkebrif iðre siðe þone hæðenan hund, þæt heafod wand forð on ða flore. Læg se fula leap gesne beæftan*).

encompasses a certain sensual quality of allure, the sexually corrupt depictions belong to Holofernes and his head.

When Judith severs Holofernes' head, she is metaphorically cutting off his manhood, his "soul." It makes sense that Alexandra Hennessey Olsen reads these lines as an inverted rape. She states, "A brief examination of the lines describing Judith's preparations to kill Holofernes suggests that if the masculine and feminine pronouns were reversed, the same lines could easily describe the rape of a woman by a man."⁴⁰⁰ Hence, the disturbing image complicates gender norms. Instead of being erased, Judith's femininity is enhanced so that she is able to slay her attacker. By shifting the power from male to female, the poet underscores not only the reality of invasion but envisions a heroic ideal that includes women also as aggressors capable of committing violent acts against men. Because Judith's actions are peppered with traditional heroism as well as a spiritual quality, she can be applauded for her appropriate response as the beheader, like Beowulf.

Judith's "ingenious" plan was not only to slay Holofernes. She needed his head to inspire the Bethulians. In the *Book of Judith*, Judith instructs the villagers that the head should "hang on that battlement of our walls" (*suspendite caput hoc super muros nostros*, 14:1–2). Exhibiting a heroic ethos, the heroine uses the head as a symbol of inspiration and proof that God exists. In the Old English poem, Judith does not need to tell the Bethulians to display the head; Judith herself becomes the embodiment of inspired expression. Seeing her at the gates each member of the community is "uplifted" (*mod areted*, 167b). When Judith instructs her handmaiden to display the "trophy," the maid is

⁴⁰⁰ Alexandra Olsen Hennessey, "Inversion and Political Purpose in the Old English Judith," *English Studies* 63.4 (1982): 291.

showcasing Judith and her accomplishments. For the people, Judith is the symbol of hope and inspiration, the head was the inspiration Judith needed to make her way home. In answer to Judith's prayer for the confidence and dexterity to slay Holofernes, God inspires Judith with "hope renewed" (*þa wearð hyre rume on mode*, 97b) so that she is able to act. Judith lives to pass on that hope to the Bethulians so that they might achieve their victory.

Thus, the symbol of the head in relationship to Judith could be viewed by audiences in both traditional and new ways. For the masses, it is a symbol of conquest. Its public display builds fervor and offers the possibility of glory. Judith's private experience with the head provides the inspiration for her own heroism. With it, she assumes the weapon of the enemy and it becomes her source of power and leadership. Judith uses the head to lead an army against an enemy now without a leader. In effect, Judith becomes the leader of the new army of God's people.

Representations of the head in *Juliana* are quite different from depictions in the preceding two poems. The most obvious explanation for this is that her story is martyrdom, and decapitation is one of several standard hagiographical tropes.⁴⁰¹ Beheading is often the preferred execution method of saints, representing the final spiritual release, as removal of the head releases the soul.⁴⁰² In *Beowulf*, the head of Æschere acts as a warning to the enemies of Grendel's mother; it is her attempt at a show of power, a territorial marker, and a reminder to readers that women did not fit neatly

⁴⁰¹ For examples see St. Lucy, St. Cecilia (struck three times with a sword in the neck and left to die), and St. Agnes (stabbed in the throat), along with other stories of virgin martyrs, both men and women, located in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (tenth century). Additional commonly accepted hagiographical sources the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum*, Bede's *Martyrology*, and the ninth-century *Old English Martyrology* which includes works by Bede, Aldhelm, Eddius, Adomnán, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville.

⁴⁰² Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey, Introduction to *Heads Will Roll: Decapitation in the Medieval and Early Modern Imagination*, Volume 7 of *Medieval and Renaissance Authors and Texts*, eds. Larissa Tracy and Jeff Massey (Brill: 2012), 4.

within defined heroic tradition. In *Judith*, Holofernes' head symbolizes a triumphant new beginning representative of changing cultural sensibilities valued by both men and women. In Cynewulf's poem, like in so many other poetic and prose accounts of saints' lives, the head is a common trope that signifies both an ending and a beginning: a sign that the saints' human life has ended and that her spiritual life is just beginning.

Unlike Grendel's mother and Judith, whose heroics are largely determined by their physical potency and effective use of weapons, Juliana has no special physical strength or armaments. Where Grendel's dam and Judith perform the decapitations, Juliana is depicted as a typical weak female in no position to hold corporal sway over her attackers and, ultimately, is the decapitated heroine.

Just as the head is part of the Germanic heroic tradition but its essence is amplified in the hands of the poets of *Beowulf* and *Judith*—the strongest evidence of which is that the female protagonists are the decapitators—so too does Cynewulf employ the symbol in such a way that Juliana's story breaks in some ways with the saints' lives tradition. Scholars have noted the habit of Anglo-Saxon poets reconstructing Christian characters and situating them in terms of heroic society⁴⁰³; the best linguistic examples found in *Juliana* come after her death, when Eleusius and his men escape in fear by way of the "swan road" and drown. The conventional language used in this passage (672–882) is reminiscent of that associated with battle poetry. The head in this context can be read as providing a nostalgic view of the heroic past. Cynewulf provides readers with a clear thematic contrast before and after Juliana's beheading. The first three-fourths of the poem (before her death) read like a familiar Latin hagiography (although it is not formatted as such) and the last several lines (after her death) are consistent with elements

⁴⁰³ Rosemary Woolf, ed., *Juliana* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966), 18.

of the heroic tradition. In essence, her death and subsequent spiritual birth can be viewed as the end of the heroic age and the beginning of a new one. After Eleusius decapitates Juliana, he and his men flee; Cynewulf writes:

Then the malicious Eleusius sought the sea-stream,
upon a ship accompanied by a throng of his harmers—
he bounced across the water's flood for a long while
upon the swan-road. Death seized them all, that band of men
and himself among them before they said to land—
through terrible chastisement. There were thirty
and four of the kindred of warriors deprived of their souls
through the whelm of waves, underlings with their lord,
deprived of comfort, without hope, they sought their hell.⁴⁰⁴

Eleusius and his band of warriors represent all that is sinful as they are governed by Maximian, “an infamous king killing Christian men and felling churches” (*arleas cyning, eahtnysse ahof, swealde cristne men, circan fylde*, 4–5). Cynewulf describes the emperor as “a heathen war-leader” (*hæþen hildfruma*, 7a). These lines, thick with the rhetoric of battle poetry, speak of pagan ways and can be compared with lines 847–852 in *Beowulf*:

The water was welling with blood there—
the terrible swirling waves, all mingled together
with hot gore, heaved with the blood of battle,
concealed that doomed one when, deprived of joys,
he lay down his life in his lair in the fen,
his heathen soul—and hell took him.⁴⁰⁵

In this passage the poet is referring to Grendel who meets his death, like Eleusius, in bloody waters eventually landing in hell. It appears that in Old English poetry one role for those unwilling to embrace Christianity is that of monster-persecutor. Thus, the message is that paganism will not be tolerated in a monotheistic world. Cynewulf

⁴⁰⁴ 671–682 (*Ða hyre sawl wearð to scipe sceohmod sceapena þreat Heliseus ehstream sohte, leolc ofer laguflod longe while on swonrade. Swylt ealle fornom secga hloþe ond hine sylfne mid, ærþon hy to lande geliden hæfdon, þurh þearlic þrea. Ðær XXX wæs ond feowere eac feores onsohte þurh wæges wylm wigena synnes, heane mid hlaford, hroþra bidaled, hyhta lease helle sohton*).

⁴⁰⁵ 847–852 (*Ðær wæs on blode brim weallende, atoll ða geswing eal gemenged, haton heolfre, heorodreore weol; deaðfæge deog; siððan dreama leas in fenfreoðo feorh alegde, hæpene sawle; þær him hel onfeng*).

clarifies that Juliana is unlike like these evil men. He writes that at the moment of her death:

Juliana's soul was led away
from her body to its lengthy joys
by the blow of the sword.⁴⁰⁶

And,

Unlike them, the body of the holy woman was conducted
with praise-songs, by a great many unto its mould-grave⁴⁰⁷

In these lines Cynewulf contrasts the goodness of the saint with the wickedness of the pagans. She is “holy” and Eleusius is “malicious” (*synscapa*, 671b). She is praised by others while the thanes experience “terrible chastisement” (*þearlic þrea*, 678a). In death, Eleusius’ men are “deprived of their souls” (*hropra bidaled hyhta lease*, 681b–682a) while her “soul was led away from her body to its lengthy joys” (*Ða hyre sawl wearð alæded of lice to þam langan gefean*, 669b–670). Cynewulf also juxtaposes Christian ideologies with heroic conventions; Juliana is not like them, neither the pagans nor the heroes of the past—she is of a new tradition.

Decapitation in many cases draws women into the public arena. Anglo-Saxon women’s lives were largely experienced alone or with their families, in a personal space such as the home or a religious setting. The fear of harm to themselves or family (sometimes the extended family of community) was one way women were moved to act publically. For example, after Grendel’s mother’s son is slain she moves from her personal space in the mere to Heorot’s public mead hall to seek revenge. In *Judith*, because Holofernes’ army is going to lay waste to the her village, Judith travels to a lively banquet in the Assyrian camp. Both females also display the heads of their

⁴⁰⁶ 669b–671a (*Ða hyre sawl wearð alæded of lice to þam langan gefean þurh sweordslege*).

⁴⁰⁷ 688b–689 (*Ungelice wæs læded lofsongum lik halire micle mægne to moldgræfe*).

enemies in a public forum, unlike Beowulf, who only displays Grendel's head privately. Like them, Juliana's ordeal transitions from a personal to public space. She is tortured and jailed alone until led to the public square for her execution. It would have been customary that she be taken to a public square for her punishment: execution was a performative act.⁴⁰⁸ Juliana also takes advantage of the public square at the beginning of the poem when she is removed from her home and presented publically before Eleusius and a crowd. Upon her death, Juliana's body is taken by "a great many" (*sidfolc*, 692a) to her final place of rest. With her head removed from her body Juliana is once again assigned to a private space, her tomb.

Another way Cynewulf assigns significance to the symbol of the head is through the concept of "judgment." Juliana is "judgment-blessed" (*ferð geblissad domeadigre*, 288a–287b) by God. The devil also acknowledges her as his "judge" ("I have to suffer and tolerate all things in your judgment"; *Ic sceal þinga gehwylce þolian ond þafian on þinne dom*, 465b–466) as well as her wisdom ("wise in mind"; *ferpe frod*, 553a). Anglo-Saxons understood "law" or "judgment"⁴⁰⁹ as a body of written rules and customs useful in the criminal justice system and preserving the peace.⁴¹⁰ As an image often associated with law and justice, the head is reminiscent of "body politic," a popular metaphor of Western political thought articulated in the fourth century B. C. E. by Plato in his *Republic* and *Laws*. As the most distinctive part of the human body, the head, where reason and wisdom originate, is the ruling principle to which all other parts of the

⁴⁰⁸ For more on public execution in Anglo-Saxon England, see Katherine O'Brian-O'Keefe, "Body and Law in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 27 (1998): 222.

⁴⁰⁹ Old English *æ*, later *lagu* "law"; *dom* "decree, judgment."

⁴¹⁰ See Lisi Oliver, *The Beginnings of English Law* (Toronto, 2002); Benjamin Thorpe, *Ancient Laws and Institutes of England* (1840); H. M. Chadwick, *Studies on Anglo-Saxon Institutions* (1905); Charles E. Tucker, Jr., "Anglo-Saxon Law: Its Development and Impact on the English Legal System" (USAFA Journal of Legal Studies, 1991); Andrew Rabin, "Law and Justice," in *A Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Studies*, eds. Jacqueline Stodnick and Renée R. Trilling (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

anatomy are subject.⁴¹¹ Audiences also believed in the “Godhead” (the Trinity) and God as the eternal judge and overseer of divine law. Tied to the symbol of Juliana’s head is the concept of justice as it is expressed in both human and divine law; Eleusius, whose head is “swollen with rage” (58, 90, and 582) represents human law by exercising poor judgment in passing sentence on the saint. However, God has cast Juliana as the proprietor of truth and justice, which renders her infallible according to Christian teachings. She can be viewed as representing divine law by passing judgement on Satan exiling him to the “dark earth” (*swearthe grund*, 555). Yet, as we know, she still loses her head. Initially, this may leave readers questioning how her torture and death represents any type of justice. But it is the beheading which enables her to reap her ultimate reward in heaven; justice may appear unbalanced on earth but ultimately true justice is served by God.⁴¹²

In addition to Cynewulf’s customary treatment of the head and its functions as it relates to the hagiographical genre, the poet extends its significance to provide audiences with a nostalgic view of the past which serves to venerate the Church’s importance in society. Juliana’s head also functions as the vessel of wisdom and justice, moves her from the private space of women to the public space of man.

⁴¹¹ See Plato, *Plato’s Republic: A Study*, ed. Stanley Rosen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 151; Plato, *The Laws of Plato*, Reprint, ed. and trans. Thomas L. Pangle (University of Chicago Press, 1988), 384; John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, ed. and trans. by Carl J. Nederman, (Cambridge University Press, 1990): Book V, Chapter 1:65; Plutarch’s Letter instructing Trajan; and Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the Body Politic*, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought*, ed. Kate Langdon Forhan (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴¹² Cynewulf offers no specific details concerning the whereabouts of Juliana’s head. All we know is that her body was taken by many townspeople to the city for burial. Whether or not her head went with it remains unclear. Juliana’s Latin *vita* offers more information regarding her entombment, her body, and her ultimate resting place.

4 THE FEMALE VOICE

In the extant Old English poetic corpus there are eleven speaking parts afforded to women: Sarah and Hagar (of *Genesis A* and *B*), Eve (of *Genesis B* and *Christ and Satan*), Wealhtheow, Judith, Juliana, Elene, Hildegyth (*Waldere*), Mary (of *Christ I*, also known as *Advent Lyrics*—she speak in parts IV and VII), the “Wife” (presumed female narrative voice of *The Wife’s Lament*), and the presumed female narrative voice of *Wulf and Eadwacer*. It is generally thought that these characters speak only in relationship to their menfolk or their communities—their husbands (i.e., Hildegyth’s taunting of Waldere), their offspring (i.e, Wealhtheow’s address to the court on behalf of her sons’ inheritance), and their communities (i.e., Elene’s search for the true cross at the request of her son, Constantine, king of the Romans). Of the approximately thirty thousand lines of extant Anglo-Saxon poetry, female speaking parts are relatively few, but as stated early in this dissertation, the voices of these women are significant and striking.⁴¹³

In order to discuss a female voice, it is important to consider the Anglo-Saxon woman in society, especially her role in relationship to men. As previously discussed, women were often portrayed as virgin saints, wives, widows, and mothers in the literature, a reflection of the limitations of a patriarchal society which must be taken into account when examining roles male authors created for them. Frantzen places the female voice in what he terms “the symbolic structure,” whereby artists provide an artistic

⁴¹³ For specific line count and additional details see Arthur Weiss and George Arnold Smithson, *The Old English Christian Epic: A Study in the Plot Technique of The Juliana, The Elene, The Andreas, and The Christ in Comparison with The Beowulf and with the Latin Literature of the Middle Ages*, Vols. 1–2, (University of Iowa Press, 1910), reprint, digitized 2015, 292–303.

expression of reality which encodes the sensibilities of an age.⁴¹⁴ This observation provides one explanation of why women's voices in literature suffer from a combination of cultural ideologies and authorial bias. We see an expression of this repeated in the voices of aristocratic women and queens providing "wise council" at court or when we witness the weeping female grieving the death of her husband. Of particular interest is that certain female literary voices appear unique to the symbolic structure. When treated in new ways, as a "weapon" for example, the female voice has the power to shape the symbolic structure.

The Anglo-Saxon male hero appears in battles with distinctive weapons (e.g., spears, knives, swords, axes, bows and arrows, etc.). Often acquired as gifts or via a great battle victory, they have important symbolic meaning. Unferth, for example, presents Beowulf a "hilted sword named Hrunting" (*wæs þæm hæftmece Hrunting nama*, 1457), "unique among ancient treasures" (*þæt wæs an foran ealdgestreona*, 1458), with which he was to destroy Grendel's mother. Its "edge was iron, etched with poison stripes" (*ecg wæs iren, ateranum fah*, 1460), but it was ineffective. Detailed descriptions and the personification of weaponry underscore its significance in the culture. "With Hrunting," says Beowulf, "I shall win honor and fame, or death will take me" (*ic me mid Hruntinge dom gewyrce, oþðe mec deað nimeð*, 1290b–1491); dying from war wounds on the battlefield is a glorifying act. Possessing and skillfully wielding weapons is critical to hero-making.

Most women are not afforded war gear and sharp instruments. Their weapons, when and if they are needed, tend to be ordinary items used in the heat of the moment for protection. Yet, women could be just as dangerous as men without being physically

⁴¹⁴ Frantzen, *Troilus and Criseyde: The Poem and the Frame*, (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 37.

violent. For example, when women become irate, they can exude great power as they are “emboldened by the strength of emotion,” according to Gwynne Kennedy. She says that “Unruly women and unruly anger jointly threaten male order and reason.”⁴¹⁵ Grendel’s mother “remembered her misery” (*yrmþe gemunde*, 1259b), and laden with sorrow she becomes vengeful; her sadness and anger lead her to perform in horrendous and violent ways. While she speaks no words, her actions are fueled by rage and her intentions are understood loud and clear; Grendel’s mother never says why she appears at Heorot, but everyone immediately understands. It was “obvious” to all she was an avenger (*widdcup werum*, 1256). Judith uses her voice for prayer and to incite war, and Juliana’s voice, central to her story, becomes a weapon of peace. Ward Parks writes:

The Greek and most other heroic traditions seem to me to express male sensibilities for the most part. Thus men dominate the foreground of action, and women become visible in only a few scenes, important though these often are. And yet this very disproportion between the number of lines devoted to them and their central role in the structure of several epic stories signals the centrality of the feminine in the male-dominated heroic imagination.⁴¹⁶

Grendel’s mother, I have argued, is central to the story of *Beowulf*, both literally and figuratively; over the past few decades, her character has been passionately examined with the hope of shedding new light on some of the “problems” she creates for readers, one of the most notable being that she is mute. Although she is assigned no speaking parts, there is a significant number of lines dedicated to her interaction with Beowulf and the Danes,⁴¹⁷ which underscores her significance in the poem.

⁴¹⁵ Gwynne Kennedy, *Just Anger: Representing Women’s Anger in Early Modern England* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 2000), 9.

⁴¹⁶ Ward Parks. *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

⁴¹⁷ See Chapter II, 6. “Jane Chance assigns approximately 500 lines to the episode with Grendel’s mother (1251-1784) and has suggested extending those parameters to 1000 lines (1251-2199).”

Grendel's mother is met with horror and loathing and condemned from the start as a heathen mother of monsters. As punishment she is stripped of her identity, hunted down, and killed. As a pagan, her *wyrd* was to be stricken from humanity. She is introduced as having no voice, no name of her own, no kin, and no husband; she is constructed as a non-entity and invisible in many ways. Yet, I argue that it is her obscurity and silence that enable her immense power. Upon entering Heorot's mead hall, she makes no declaration or verbal threat, nor does she state why she is there, but those inside were filled with *gryre* ("horror"); her dominating, "monstrous" presence is enough to announce why she has come. However, the poet may have thought that audiences would not share the Dane's alarm; after all we have already witnessed the gruesome habits of her son, and she is a female and a mother. How much harm could she do? The poet attempts to allay the "problem" by acknowledging her sex: "The horror was less by as much as a maiden's strength" (*Wæs se gryre læssa efne swa micle, swa bið mægþa cræft*, 1282b–12830). Then he explains his meaning more clearly: "a woman's warfare, is less than an armed man's (*wiggryre wifes be wæpnedmen*, 1284).⁴¹⁸ However, because these lines are so direct, and we know Grendel's mother is to be feared, it seems logical to consider the possibility that the poet is being sarcastic, a way of downplaying her power, employing the element of surprise. However, Danish warriors quickly find that this female differs from social norms. Her presence and actions create a major stir. The men frantically scramble to their feet, raising their broad shields and forgetting their

⁴¹⁸ Scholars agree that these lines are unclear. Liuzza believes the confusion stems from the fact that "Grendel's mother is a much more dangerous opponent for Beowulf" than Grendel, in *Beowulf*, 133, footnote 1. Lines 1282b–1287 have been interpreted in many ways. My analysis here is an attempt to further discussions.

helmets as “terror seized them” (*broga angeat*, 1291b). Even before Grendel’s mother grabs *Æschere* and without uttering a single sound, she was clearly understood.

Grendel’s mother appears at Heorot unarmed, yet she obviously possesses the physical strength to be successful; she grabs a trained warrior and kills him, no man-made weapon necessary. Her body is her weapon. Unlike the average male warrior who is fitted, at minimum, with chain mail, a sword, and a shield, she dons no military equipment or dress. In a similar manner, Grendel carried no weapons with him to Hrothgar’s hall during his rampages. It seems clear that armed combat is not customary for Grendels. Although we do not have a complete physical description of the creatures, the appearance of Grendel’s mother and her son is abnormal by Anglo-Saxon standards. We know that their “alien” (*ellorgæstas*, 1349a) bodies differ from human bodies, for theirs cannot be penetrated by conventional weaponry.⁴¹⁹ Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that Grendel’s mother does not use traditional military equipment. Instead, she relies on her physical skills and natural defenses. Furthermore, if she had come to the hall with a weapon, it too would likely have been nontraditional. Thus, it is Grendel’s mother’s threatening posture that poses a threat to the Danes; her actions speak for her. She “broke into the hall” (*sipðan inne fealh*, 1281b) unexpectedly, “causing a sudden upset” (*þa ðær sona wearð edhwyrft eorlum*, 1280b–1281a). Like a trained warrior, she uses the element of surprise to her advantage.

Grendel’s mother is also an outsider and makes no attempt to introduce herself or state her reason for the intrusion, a crucial element of a heroic encounter. This may have

⁴¹⁹ Some believe that Grendel and his mother sport a sort of protective skin as part of their physical make-up, but it is certain that a spell or “curse” plays a role. (“No sword, not the best iron anywhere in the world could even touch that evil sinner, for he had worked a curse on weapons, every sort of blade”; *þone synscaðan ænig ofer eorþan irenna cyst, guðbilla nan gretan nold; ac he sigewæpnum forsworen hæfde, ecga gewylcre*, 801b–805a).

added to the confusion in the hall. It is customary for the hero to enter a battle of words with the enemy, hurling threats and boasts. To strike fear in one's opponents makes the hero look confident, brave, and commanding. Even the battle-worn Byrhtnoth participates in a verbal exchange with the Viking enemy before the battle at Maldon. Upon first encountering a Viking's herald, Byrhtnoth calls out:

Can you hear, seaman, what we say on our side
Indeed we've something to send you—spears
Deadly dart and durable swords,
These make the war tax you are welcome to collect!

In this passage, Byrhtnoth does not introduce himself, but he does as conventions require by beginning the battle with words. Because Grendel's mother does not participate in a verbal exchange with the Danes when she enters Hrothgar's hall, she is breaking with tradition. Yet, the fact that she shows up to seek revenge suggests that she intends to participate in the heroic code in some customary way. Her ambiguous behavior leaves the Danes confused, unorganized, and afraid.

Augustine's writing reveals that one's identity is manufactured through their actions, not by the physical body.⁴²⁰ This can help shed some light on the distressing effect Grendel's mother had on the Danes. Augustine writes in Book Sixteen of his *De Civitate Dei*:

Yet whoever is born anywhere as a human being, that is, as a rational mortal creature, however strange he may appear to our senses in bodily form or color or motion or utterance, or in any faculty, part of quality of his nature whatsoever, let no true believer have any doubt that such an individual is descended from the one man who was first created.⁴²¹

⁴²⁰ Augustine, Book XVI, *De Civitate Dei*, 42–45

⁴²¹ Augustine, Book XVI, *De Civitate Dei*, 42–45. (*Verum quisquis uspiam nascitur homo, id est animal rationale mortale, quamlibet nostris inusitatem sensibus gerat corporis formam seu colorem sive motum sive sonum sive qualibet vi, qualibet parte, qualibet qualitate naturam, ex illo uno protoplasto originem ducere nullus fidelium dubitaverit*).

Hence, as human beings and “rational creatures” we come in various shapes. However, appearance has little to do with personality. However, regardless of physical appearance, one is expected to observe certain social conventions and behave accordingly. For Augustine, one is only monstrous if one acts as a monster, thus giving some truth to the adage that “actions speak louder than words.” For the past twelve years, every night, the Danes had been subject to the *manscaða* bursting into their hall, tearing their comrades limb from limb, devouring bones and flesh. Therefore, when Grendel’s mother “broke into the hall” at night (*sipðan inne fealh*, 1281b), unannounced, just as her son had done, expectations would have been that she too came to wreak havoc. The Danes, having been preconditioned by earlier incidents, feared her actions not her form, though her appearance does draw some attention. The poet tells us that upon her arrival, she was noticed as a female (“a maiden”; *mægþa*, 1283b). Several lines later, Hrothgar describes her as having “the shape of a woman,” (*idese onlicnes*, 1351a). Thus her body is recognizable as that of a human female but she does not perform as female. Before leaving the hall, she takes her son’s “famous hand covered in gore” (*heo under heolfre genam cuþe folme*, 1302b–1303a) down from the wall. Her actions are in contrast to a woman’s nature, which adds to the element of surprise.

Grendel’s mother’s character is constructed as both good and bad and it is not clear if her muteness supports one vision or the other. It has been suggested that pagan women embody the voice of lust and Christians the voice of morality.⁴²² That the poet erases Grendel’s mother’s voice completely complicates, rather than simplifying, her nature. Does no voice make her more or less pagan? I believe Else Mundal’s work can

⁴²² See Sarah Alison Miller’s review of “Ovid’s hymn to the Virgin Mary in *Medieval Monstrosity and the Female Body*, (Routledge, 2010), 49.

shed some light on this phenomenon. Writing on early Icelandic literary culture, she explores the shift from oral to written literature and its implications for women. She finds that females played active roles in oral literature (Eddic poetry, skaldic poetry, medieval ballads, and *fornaldarsögur*, or mythic-heroic sagas) before becoming marginalized in the male-dominated literate world.⁴²³ In her examinations, she notes more female protagonists, as well as a general positive attitude toward women in oral culture. In contrast, she also observes that “texts more influenced by literate culture (kings’ sagas and family sagas) have fewer women as main characters, less acceptance of independent women, and stories in which women are powerless in their relationships.”⁴²⁴ As we see from these observations, the shift from oral to written literature had a major impact on women and the roles afforded them. This idea can be applied to “the problem” of Grendel’s mother’s voicelessness. Because she acts as a bridge between two worlds—pagan and Christian—it makes sense that her character would embody both literary paradigms: oral and textual. As a construct of oral tradition, like the women in the sagas, she gives a powerful, albeit scary, performance representative of a heroic past where women had more agency. But as a symbol of a rising Christian culture, a literate culture uncomfortable with women in the forefront, she is cast out and condemned. Verbal displays and public performance were men’s social station historically and in the new

⁴²³ Because Else Mundal’s research was released in Norwegian in 1983, I am relying on Zoe Borovsky’s English translation of her findings. See *Kvinner og diktning: Overgangen fra munnleg til skriftleg kultur-ei ulukke for kvinnene?* In *Firandringar i kvinnors villkor under medeltiden*, Ritsafn sagnfræistofnunar, no. 9, ed. Silja Aðalsteinsdóttir and Helgi Þorláksson, 1983, 11–25. Uppsatser framlagda við ett kvinnohís torískt symposium í Skilholt Ísland, 22–25 Júní 1981. Reykjavík: Sagnfrædistofnun Hisk61a Íslands, in Zoe Borovsky, “Never in Public: Women and Performance in Old Norse Literature,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 112.443 (1999): 11.

⁴²⁴ Mundal.

world order.⁴²⁵ Thus, her performance reflects both pagan and Christian culture. Rendering her mute is one way of not definitively committing her to either tradition, which can make her both terrifying and sympathetic for readers given their commitment to a particular ideology.

It is not unusual that a woman's voice is "muted" in Old English literature, as we have observed in the character of Grendel's mother as well as in other women appearing in *Beowulf* who have no speaking parts (Wealhtheow is the only female who actually speaks in the poem which means there are ten that do not). It would have been novel, however, perhaps even entertaining, to witness a female making war-speeches in public, even in the literature. Judith, unlike her male counterparts, whose voices are typically associated with vows and boasting, uses hers for persuasion. There is a unique significance placed on "vows, boasts, and taunts" in medieval literature; a boast is made in the past and a vow is a promise of future deeds.⁴²⁶ This practice, often heard at court, or in the mead hall, helps rally and ready the men for fighting enemy clans. It not only serves to distinguish the hero from the other characters but is a means for conveying information about past deeds and future exploits. It also serves to provide audiences with more details of the hero's accomplishments as well as to generate anticipation for upcoming adventures. Beowulf's speech in lines 2510–2515 provides a good example of this phenomenon. He says:

I have survived
many battles in my youth; I will yet,
an old folk-guardian, seek out a feud
and do a glorious deed, if only that evildoer

⁴²⁵ See Mary Beard, "The Public Voice of Women," *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (New York and London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 1–45.

⁴²⁶ See Michael Murphy, "Vows, Boasts and Taunts, and the Role of Women in Some Medieval Literature," *English Studies* 2 (1985): 105.

will come out to me from his earth-hall.⁴²⁷

This passage provides us with a general view of Beowulf before his arrival at Heorot. His boasts of “many” successful past battles prove he is not a novice warrior and the fact that he is alive to speak of them means he was a successful fighter. He also vows to perform with the same gallantry upon encountering a dragon (the “evildoer”) in the future. Thus, audiences’ expectations are fueled for an exciting fight with a dragon. This puffed-up rhetoric also serves to show Beowulf’s commitment to the *comitatus* and sets a standard of behavior for the group. Most importantly, it confirms Beowulf’s current status as hero. In contrast, Judith maintains the status of leader and heroine without the traditional discourse.⁴²⁸ She does not boast about her plans to infiltrate the enemy camp, nor does she make promises regarding any future plans,⁴²⁹ as one would expect of a conventional heroic figure. Judith does carefully articulate her position, which resonates with the same firm confidence as Beowulf’s boasting, but it in no way serves as self-glorification.

Because Judith’s actions have proven the possibility of victory, her words carry a lot of weight. Upon seeing Judith and the maid return safely to the city and hearing her speak with confidence that her mission was successful, the crowd becomes “humble” (*eaðmedum*, 170a). Obviously, she has done what the townsmen would not or could not

⁴²⁷ 2511b–2515 (*Beowulf* *maðelode*, *beatwordum spræc niehstan siðe*: “*Ic geneoðde fela guða on geogoðe; gyt ic wylle, frod folces weard fæhðe secan, mærdū fremman, gif mec se mansceaða of eorðsele ut geseceð*”).

⁴²⁸ As noted in Chapter III, the Bethulians obviously view her as a sort of leader for they listen to her, obey her commands, and take up arms.

⁴²⁹ See Peter J. Lucas, “‘Judith’ and the Woman Hero,” *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22 (1992): 26. It is important to note that, according to Lucas, that “the tradition of vowing and boasting by warriors is not peculiar to English or to medieval literature.” He provides an example from Book Twenty of the *Iliad* where Aeneas makes threats and vows “over the wine when he promised the princes of Troy to fight Achilles man to man.” The boasts and vows of heroes can also be located in Old French, Old Irish, and Scandinavian heroic legend.

do and, as a result, Judith becomes their leader and hero while they take on the subservient role. As audience members we can include ourselves among the “hordes” that must have been overcome with disbelief and amazement when she returned unharmed, armed with the head of the Assyrian leader, and declared “I took his life with the help of God” (*ic him ealdor oðþrong þurh godes fultum*, 184b–185a). These seven words made her a hero.

Judith represents a new heroic voice, one that omits the conventional boasting and vow-making but maintains the tone of conviction and certainty consistent with the custom. To the people she does not speak of how she came to possess the enemy’s head or elaborate on her experiences while in the enemy camp; the speech is not about her personal heroics, rather it is given to inspire a sense of community and responsibility. Unlike so many Anglo-Saxon male heroes, she does not extol her military prowess in attempt to gain an army of followers. On the contrary, Judith’s goal is to motivate a crowd of tired and hungry people to form an army on their own and fight without her. Her vocal performance is meant to persuade, and her message is “gird for war.”⁴³⁰

The believability for Judith’s capacity to develop a strategic military plan and be successful is made possible by her exceptional command of language as it implies literacy and education. Judith’s rhetoric exemplifies a classical argument style which deviates from the voices of most, if not all, heroes found in Old English literary.

⁴³⁰ In *Waldere*, Hildegyth uses her voice to encourage Waldere to take up arms against the guards who are holding them captive in Attila the Huns’ court. Her speech models heroic conventions but cannot be viewed as primarily persuasive, for she also cajoles and flatters Waldere to get him to act.

By aligning Judith's speech with the Aristotelian argument structure⁴³¹ we may be able to find out why she is so compelling. While it is impossible to know if the poet was familiar with the specific outline of this method, this exercise will demonstrate that the poet used a systematic approach in the construction of Judith's speech to ensure its effectiveness. For practical purposes, I will be looking at lines 151–197. In this passage, Judith begins her oration by telling her audience exactly what they want desire to hear: “to you is glory given and great honor instead of the dire torment you have endured so long” (*þæt eow ys wuldorblæd torhtlic toward ond tir gifeðe þara læðða þe ge lange drugon*, 156–157). These opening words offer hope and immediately capture the full attention of the downtrodden masses who as we are told “all hurried and thronged” (*þrongon ond urnon*, 164b) towards her to continue listening. Her thesis, as stated above, is clear and direct and creates a sense of urgency: “you must make haste now and gird for war” (*þæt ge recene eow fisan to gefeohte*, 187b–188a). Here, she plainly states what she wants them to do and when they are to do it. Her claims to support this request are bolstered by the three classical appeals (*logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*). Her claim, appealing to *logos* (an appeal to logic and a way of persuading by reason) is found in the opening lines of her speech and is visually supported by the bloody head of Holofernes while she

⁴³¹ In its most simplified version, I am referring to classical style of argument, oral and/or written, developed by the Greek philosopher and rhetorician, Aristotle, which uses a series of strategies and appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) to persuade an audience to adopt a particular side of an issue. See Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray, ed., *Brill's Companion to Classical Receptions* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Kathleen E. Welch, *The Contemporary Reception of Classical Rhetoric: Appropriations of Ancient Discourse*, Routledge Communication Series (Routledge, 1990); Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008); Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (Surrey, 2009). Also see Todd Penner and Caroline Vander Stichele, “Rhetorical practice and performance in early Christianity,” 245–260; Peter Mack, “Rediscoveries in classical rhetoric,” 261–277; and John Henderson, “The Runaround: A volume retrospect on ancient rhetorics,” 278–290, in Erik Gunderson's *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

states, “Victory-famed troops, valiant commanders: here you can see the heathen warrior’s head before you. Yes, Holofernes now lies lifeless” (*Her ge magon sweotole, sigerofe hæleð, leoda ræswan, on ðæs laðestan hæðenes heaðorinces heafod starian, Holofernus unlyfigendes*, 177–180). There is no denying the tangible evidence. The head is a clear sign of victory that the war can be won, and its display confirms her words which also lends credibility to her plea. Another claim, appealing to *ethos* (an appeal to ethics and a means of convincing someone of the credibility of the persuader) is made clear through her association with God. She announces in reference to her accomplishments “... God in his might through this hand of mine” (*mihtig dryhten þurh mine hand*, 196b–197) affirming that God works through her and that she and God share a special relationship. Moreover, the crowd recognizes her as a “holy maid” (*seo halige*, 159b), someone exceptional and linked with God. Her credibility is thus indisputable in the eyes of the faithful. Her most powerful appeal to *pathos* (an appeal to emotion and a way of convincing an audience by creating an emotional response), is recognized when she proclaims “Death is allotted to all your foes and honor to you, glory in battle” (*Fynd syndon eowere gedemed to deaðe, ond ge dom agon, tir æt tohtan*, 194b–196a). When delivered to a group of oppressed people, fraught with hopelessness, this is a compelling statement, that your enemies will perish and you will be liberated. This phrase articulates that triumph is guaranteed. That the “city-dwellers” believe this statement to be true is made clear when the poet writes they “knew sudden bliss then once they heard her speak” (*þa wurdon bliðe burhsittende, syðan hi gehyrdon hu seo halige spræc*, 159–160). Emotionally and logically she convinces the crowd to form an army and fight for freedom.

Finally, when approached in terms of an Aristotelian structure, Judith's speech can be viewed as a solidly constructed outline, which may help us understand why audiences found and continue to find this text so engrossing. The poet, in this unique way, made Judith's story relevant for all of us who may feel defeated and in need of solid leadership. The Hebrews' battle is everyone's battle. For Christian Anglo-Saxons, Judith's compelling speech would have likely shifted the focus of the battle scenario from one between men (the traditional heroic battle) to one between good and evil (a Christianized heroic battle), highlighting the religious and moral message of the poem. Some scholars have argued that because the protagonist is a woman, the poem naturally focuses more on the moral messages of the poem instead of the heroics.⁴³² I believe this is what the poet had in mind.

Juliana's voice (more than that of Judith or, obviously, Grendel's mother) is central to the action of the narrative; for without her "verbal battle" with the devil her accomplishments are diminished. It is specifically this intense exchange that positions her as a true heroine. While all martyrs were certainly admirable models of Christianity, the Old English version of Juliana's verbal potency elevates the role.

Most would agree that Cynewulf's poem is the templated story of a "virgin martyr."⁴³³ It consists of an arrest, torture, an intense verbal confrontation between the saint and her male persecutor(s), a final speech, and death.⁴³⁴ As a young Christian virgin whose pagan father tries to force the Christian Juliana into marriage with a pagan nobleman, Cynewulf neither invented her experience nor did he stray far from the

⁴³² See Lucas, 26.

⁴³³ See Chapter IV, 2–3.

⁴³⁴ Aviad Kleinburg, *Made Word: Saints Stories and the Western Imagination*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Harvard University Press: The Belknap Press, 2008), 203. See also Chapter IV of this dissertation, 6–8.

original story, though obvious creative liberties are identifiable.⁴³⁵ The most important creative change, in my opinion, is the expanded number of lines allocated to the devil's longest speech (460–530).⁴³⁶ This change is important because it highlights Juliana's effective use of the power of speech to elicit a confession.

Unlike the devil's liberal speaking parts, Juliana's lines in the poem do not deviate much in length from the original Latin *vita*; however, the impact of her words is astounding and carries more weight. While in the *vita* her commands elicit a response and confession of sins from Belial (the name given to the devil that is omitted in Cynewulf's version), Cynewulf's devil spews at great length and in great detail when directed to do so. This deluge of words attests to the potency of Juliana's voice, especially of her verbal command to "speak" ("You must speak"; *þu scealt furþor gen*, 317a). Juliana commands that the devil "speak" three times (314a, 347a, 417b) in the Old English poem.⁴³⁷ Each time he answers "wordfully" and completely while "seized by fear" (*forht*, 320a). The admission of fear by the devil is also testament to the power of Juliana's authoritative voice and to the forceful quality of tone that the poet attempts to create.

⁴³⁵ See James M. Garnett, "The Latin and the Anglo-Saxon Juliana," *PMLA* 14.3 (1899): 279–298. However, it is worth noting that Michael Lapidge observes that "a manuscript copy of the *Passio S. Iulianae* very similar to, and possibly identical with, the exemplar used by Cynewulf is extant in Paris, Bibliotheque Nationale de France, lat. 10861." Michael Lapidge, "Cynewulf and the *Passio S. Iulianae*," in *Unlocking the Wordhord: Anglo-Saxon Studies in Memory of Edward B. Irving, Jr.*, ed. Mark C. Amodio and Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 147.

⁴³⁶ James M. Garnett also observes that "the speech of the devil is a considerable expansion of the Latin, especially the combats, *beore druncne*—evidently a reminiscence of native customs—and the allusions to Adam and Eve." In "The Latin and the Anglo-Saxon Juliana," *PMLA* 14.3 (1899): 293.

⁴³⁷ Hostetter notes that midway through the poem "at least one folio is missing from the Exeter Book." Directly thereafter the devil is speaking which leads me to consider the possibility that Juliana may have used the word "speak" also on the missing folio(s).

Extra-linguistic cues such as tone of voice support verbal communication. While the term “tone”⁴³⁸ was originally used to discuss music, in modern day as it applies to literature it can be summarized as “the mood of expression or attitude conveyed by the writer.”⁴³⁹ I am applying this modern definition here to help illustrate my assertion that Cynewulf fashioned Juliana with an especially unique and forceful tone of voice which is central to the narrative and speaks to her heroism. Juliana’s use of the verb “to speak” has great influence on the devil. The Anglo-Saxon poet must have detected a stronger tone or a more commanding use of language in his muse than those before him.⁴⁴⁰

While Juliana’s voice induces terror for the devil, his voice only conjures fear in her briefly. When he first appears to her in her jail cell he is disguised as an “angel of God” (*ic eom engel godes*, 261a), and the heroine is “unafraid” (*seo þe forht ne wæs*, 259b). However, her bravery briefly stalls because of his message; that she should forgo her faith to save her life. This frightens her. Thus, it is not the false angel’s tone of voice that scares Juliana but his message to forsake God (“Juliana was then, on account of its fearful message to her, terrified by that monster”; *þa wæs seo fæmne for þam færspelle*

⁴³⁸ According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Online entry: Latin *tonus*, well known in medieval music became the prevalent form. For more detailed reading see the OED entry “tone”
n. Etymology: Partly < Old French *ton* (of voice, 13th cent. in Littré) = Provençal *ton*, Catalan *to*, Spanish *ton*, *tono*, Portuguese *tom*, *tono*, Italian *tuono* < Latin *tonum*, accusative of *tonus*; and partly directly < Latin *tonus* ‘stretching, quality of sound, tone, accent, tone in painting’, in medieval Latin especially as a term of music, < Greek *τόνος* ‘stretching, tension, raising of voice, pitch of voice, accent, musical mode or key, exertion of physical or mental energy’; < strong grade of verbal ablaut series *τεν-*, *τον-*, *τα-*, in *τείνειν* to stretch. In musical senses, much influenced by medieval Latin uses of *tonus*, and in more recent uses, largely influenced by Greek.

⁴³⁹ Lee Odell and Susan M. Katz, *Writing Now: Shaping Words and Images* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2010), 753.

⁴⁴⁰ A similar tone can be detected in the voice of King Hamlet’s ghost nearly a thousand years later in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (ca. 1599–1602 CE). In the play, young Hamlet and two of his comrades, Horatio and Marcellus, sneak out onto the castle grounds at night to meet the ghost of his dead father. After the encounter, Hamlet asks the men to keep the appearance of his father’s ghost a secret. When they do not “swear” to keep the secret emphatically enough to satisfy the demanding Hamlet, the ghost bellows four times: “swear!” The two men are thus so unnerved that they ardently swear without further hesitation. They are compelled to speak just as the devil is uncontrollably obliged to speak to Juliana.

egsan geaclad, þe hyre se aglæca, 267–268). Quickly, her anxiety fades and the devil’s words cease to upset her (“she firmly fastened her spirit, the young and innocent woman, and called out to God”; *Ongan þa fæstlice ferð stapelian geong grondorleas, to Gode cleopian*, 269b–270). Importantly, Juliana appears unafraid of *all* men in the poem. To her father’s threat of beatings she responds “unafraid” (“unafraid she then gave him answer through spiritual thought”; *him seo unforhte ageaf ondsware þurh gæstgehyd*, 147–148b); to Eleusius’ threats of physical harm she responds “unafraid” (“That noble heart unafraid spoke to him”; *him þæt æþele mod unforht oncwæð*, 209); when she first meets the devil she is “unafraid” (“She swiftly asked then, she who was unafraid, pleasing to Christ”; *frægn þa fromlice, seo þe forht ne wæs, Criste gecweme*, 258–259a); and under pressure and more threats of torture by Eleusius she remains “unafraid” (“Juliana, the maid of glory, was resolute and unafraid”; *Wæs seo wuldres mæg anræd ond unforht*, 600b–601a). Her words spoken firmly and without fear stand in stark contrast to the devil’s abysmal admissions. Thus, Cynewulf creates a unique authoritative tone for Juliana which is made even more discernable when measured against that of the devil. Juliana’s tone lends support to her bravery and positions her as an authority figure; thus, it is part of her heroism.

Juliana has more dialogue than almost any other woman in Anglo-Saxon poetry,⁴⁴¹ and her tone is distinctive. Throughout the poem readers are able to perceive Juliana’s rebellious tone—to Eleusius, to her father, to Africanus, and to Satan. From the

⁴⁴¹ The two female protagonists created by Cynewulf, Juliana and Elene, each have more dialogue than all other women appearing in Old English poetry; they are accredited with thirteen specific speaking parts each. However, because the *Juliana* manuscript is missing two leaves, she may have more lines than all others.

onset she speaks defiantly refusing Eleusius' marriage proposal. "Amongst a multitude of men" (*on wera mengu*, 45b), she proclaims:

...you cannot have me
nor can you compel me to be your wedded wife.
Never will you, through your violent spite,
prepare so harsh pain of severe torments
that you should turn me from these words."⁴⁴²

Juliana announces these words in a public speech which gives them weight and helps her build authority from the beginning of the poem. The words "cannot" and "never," which are used in this passage, imply finality, thus confirming her unwavering position and commitment to God and her values. She (re)confirms her position by vowing to her father: "Never will I endure this prince's husband love unless he should cultivate the God of Hosts" (*Næfre ic þæs þeodnes þafian wille mægrædenne, nemne he mægne God*, 108–109), and again, "Never will you persuade me to promise tribute by hypocrisy unto deaf and dumb devil-idols" (*Næfre þu gelærest þæt ic leasingum, dumbum ond deafum deofulgieldum*, 149–150). Five times Juliana uses the word *næfre* in response to her tormentors' requests. Thus, like a true Anglo-Saxon hero, she is resolute, accepting of her fate.

The consistent oscillating dialogue between Juliana and other men, and her ability to speak openly and assertively, communicates to audiences the poet's willingness to consider women's authority within the heroic ideal. The saint's charged words illustrate her courage, and her statements made in public can be likened to the tradition of "heroic flyting."⁴⁴³ Juliana's words become the unconventional weapon with which she

⁴⁴² 53b–57 (*ne meahþu habban mec, ne gepreatian þe to gesingan. Næfre þu þæs swiðlic sar gegearwast þurh hæstne nið heardra wita, þæt þu mec onwende worda þisse*).

⁴⁴³ A type of verbal exchange common to Old English heroic poetry (See Chapter IV, 7). However, Ward Parks excludes Juliana from the phenomenon because there is no "martial resolution," 88.

showcases her power, wisdom, and control. In addition to her refusal to wed, Juliana uses her “weapon” to profess her loyalty to the one “True King” (*Ðæt is soð cyning*, 224), her God, not to Maximian or any earthly man. She places her spiritual values over material treasure when she tells her father, “Eleusius must look with his goods to another woman for bride-love—he will have nothing here” (*He þa brydlufan sceal to oþerre æthestealdum idese secan, nafað he ænige her*, 115–116). The poet uses the voice of Juliana to upset the heroic ideal by replacing old values with new Christian ones.

Juliana’s final speech, her most expansive speaking part in the poem (647–669), best illustrates how women’s articulation of the heroic ethos and vocabulary of Christianity, transforms social customs and literary traditions. The speech takes place outside the city where she is about to be martyred. Before more torture she uses her wise words⁴⁴⁴ to morally instruct a gathering crowd who has come to witness her death. Joseph Wittig likens this speech to “preaching a last sermon” and points out how “this homily urges Christians to apply the lessons of the martyrs to themselves.”⁴⁴⁵ In this scene Juliana publically confirms her commitment to her faith and willingness to die for it, just as she did at the beginning of the poem (44b–57). But the “homily” also bears witness to Juliana’s authority within the Church. Just as her individual imperatives extract a confession from the ultimate sinner, her speech to a flock of sinners teaches atonement (“Hold in your hearts the true faith and peace among you by the desire of your

⁴⁴⁴ Cynewulf ensures readers that Juliana is wise by bestowing upon her the ability to only speak the truth (“I wish to speak a truth to you, so long as I am of the living, I will not tell a lie”; *Ic þe to soðe secgan wille, bi me lifgendre nelle ic lyge fremman*, 130–132a) and by the devil’s own admission (“It is clear to me that you have become in all things unabashed and wise in mind”; *Is on me sweotul þæt þu unscamge æghwæs wurde on ferþe frod*, 552–553).

⁴⁴⁵ Joseph Wittig, “Figural Narrative in Cynewulf’s Juliana,” in *The Cynewulf Reader*, ed. Robert Bjork (New York: Routledge, 2001), 161.

minds and holy mystery. Then the Almighty Father gives to you all his mercy.”)⁴⁴⁶ While the framework of Juliana’s story may be common in Old English literature, her uncharacteristic tone of voice and application of it make her exceptional among other men and women of the genre.

In summary, the narrative similarities shared between the texts in which Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana appear are numerous. Here, I have only examined four which I believe are among the most significant and highlight how the heroic ideal becomes complicated and changes when women share in the tradition.⁴⁴⁷ This is not to say that these qualities are only present in the poems under investigation here, but it is notable that within three different genres—a traditional battle poem (*Beowulf*), a heroic epic (*Judith*, the genre in which the poem is generally placed), and a hagiography (*Juliana*)—where the main characters are females so many parallels can be identified. That Old English poets created imposing, powerful, female figures for audiences to consider speaks to their changing sensibilities regarding women’s roles in Anglo-Saxon culture.

5 CONCLUSION: THE MAIDEN, THE MOTHER, AND THE WIDOW

Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana, as symbols of the grand defeat of agents of evil, stand apart from other women in the poetry, but this does not separate them from their sisters; it makes them advocates for their sex and opens doors for all women in Old English literature no matter how seemingly insignificant the role. Their heroic performances highlight that women exist on the page.

⁴⁴⁶ 652–654 (*sibbe med oew healdað æt heortan, halge rune þurh modes myne. Donne eow miltse giefed fæder ælmihtig*).

⁴⁴⁷ Other possible themes or motifs linking the figures could include: virginity/chastity or sexlessness, rape and penetration, fighting evil, physical strength, endurance, battle rhetoric, conversion, vengeance, suffering, self-sacrifice, marriage, death, social mores, swords, supernatural performance, otherness, persistence, resolution, fortitude, and to these one could add many more.

Female participation in the poetry produces a visible change in the text by removing the action from the battlefield. Grendel's mother's fight with Beowulf takes place in an underwater cave; Judith confronts Holofernes at a banquet and then in his private tent; and, Juliana's ordeal plays out in a jail cell and outside of the city. This geographical expansion from the battlefield is made possible in part by the saints' lives tradition but also by the participation of women in the central action. Anglo-Saxon women did not traditionally accompany men onto the battlefield; therefore, the action takes place in more "female-appropriate" locations. The focus of these poems then becomes more about the outcome of the events and the message of the text, not the sensational descriptions of bloody battles and personal glorification.

This dissertation has shown that males and females perform heroically for different reasons. Female heroism manifests via internal forces; based on provocation and shaped by isolation, women's actions extend to the public forum as a result. Male heroism, by contrast, is a product of public performance and relies on the praise of the *comitatus*, the opinions of kings, and, most importantly, the memory of all. Anglo-Saxon males care greatly about what others think of them. Men publicly fight for king and kingdom, while women fight to protect themselves and family, and if it benefits the community in a spiritual way (i.e., it supports the conversion of Briton), a heroine emerges. These women, then, fit into a heroic ideal; however, it is not the Germanic traditional version.

Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana are afforded dual attributes that breathe depth into their otherwise traditionally defined roles of mother, widow, and saint. Grendel's mother is monstrous and noble, to be both feared and viewed as sympathetic.

Juliana is young and wise. A virgin who had never left her fathers' home, she is profoundly aware of evil in the world, and she sits in judgment. Judith is pious and violent. She is "command-breaking" but commands an army for God. These binaries, I contend, express the multidimensionality of the heroines and serve to deepen the characters' authenticities. It is through this lens that audiences are able to view these figures as both individuals and heroines, which enables a more intimate relationship with their characters.

When viewed individually, Grendel's mother more closely represents a version of reality than Judith and Juliana, although she is portrayed as an unearthly creature. Of the three, her performance is more aligned with human traits, as she demonstrates both the potential for good and evil. Judith and Juliana, showcase a level of piety and faith that is unattainable for most of us. All three female figures act as models of preferred behavior; two rewarded for their good behavior and one condemned for her inappropriate actions. Their importance can be more fully brought out by considering their characters collectively. When viewed together they reveal certain truths about Anglo-Saxon culture.

While we know literature "is an artistic expression of reality," we also know that its nuances can speak to the ethos of culture.⁴⁴⁸ For instance, through the collective evaluation of *Beowulf*, *Judith*, and *Juliana*, we find a shared flourishing heroic ethos as well as a Christian code of ethics. From this we glean that these ideals must have been relatively consistent during the broad expanse of time in which the Anglo-Saxons lived in Briton. The exercise also revealed and confirmed the deep sense of order undergirding Anglo-Saxon life. Most importantly, a vision of the three stages of womanhood

⁴⁴⁸ Albrecht Classen, "The Relationship of Literature to Society," *American Journal of Sociology* 59.5 (1954): 425.

emerged—the maiden, the wife, and the widow—as obviously represented by Juliana as the pure virgin, Judith as the chaste widow, and perhaps not as obvious is Grendel’s mother’s relationship to the faithful wife/mother. Yet, an argument can be made that because she is a mother and in Anglo-Saxon culture most mothers are or once were married, the poet likely envisioned her as having had a male partner at one time. While it can never be proven that she did have a male partner, it cannot be disproven either. Because we are not told that she is a descendent of a race of women or of some female alien race, who can reproduce on their own, and we are told that her son is a descendent of Cain, we can speculate that a male existed in the nuclear family, though he is now gone. Additionally, Grendel’s mother had a cache of treasure and armaments in her “battle hall,” which included a sword with a message of its “origin” (*or*, 1688)⁴⁴⁹ on the hilt. Richard J. Schrader argues within the message is embedded enough information to trace the sword to Grendel’s spiritual ancestors.⁴⁵⁰ That the sword is located in the lair could suggest that Grendel’s father, who would have inherited the sword, had also been there.⁴⁵¹ Therefore, I believe, there is sufficient evidence to place a male partner with Grendel’s mother in her past. Grendel’s mother also demonstrates her fidelity to her son and tribe, by seeking vengeance for his death. Thus, I cast Grendel’s dam as “faithful wife/mother” in the “feminine estates.” This tripartite vision of the estates of womanhood, as represented by three striking literary females, is significant in that it reveals that the age of an Anglo-Saxon female or her social estate has no bearing on her

⁴⁴⁹ Frederick Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. (Lexington, MA: D. C. Heath and Company, 1950).

⁴⁵⁰ Richard J. Schrader, “The Language on the Giant’s Sword Hilt in ‘Beowulf,’” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 94.2 (1993): 144.

⁴⁵¹ Alternative arguments such as Grendel brought the sword to the lair, or Grendel’s mother is the sword’s owner have been considered. I have posited that Grendel’s mother is not related to Grendel and that she is raising the child of another women, as well as numerous other scenarios. However, the argument I put forth appears the most reasonable because it limits the complexity.

ability to model heroic behavior, and speaks to the general feeling regarding women by poets and perhaps society at large.

The exercise of envisioning the three female figures as a unit also elucidated a tripartite view of the human experience: the past (Grendel's mother), present (Judith), and future (Juliana). I have argued that Grendel's mother represents a bygone era and by dying, as a pagan, she rests in the past; Judith, who is alive at the end of the poem, remains in the present to witness the liberation of the Hebrews and realize her heavenly reward after her passing at an undisclosed time; and, Juliana represents a Christian future which includes the possibility of salvation; those who embrace Christ will realize an eternity in God's presence. Grendel's mother, Judith, and Juliana also present a version of the "cycle of life"—birth, life, and death—because we understand Grendel's mother as giving birth to Grendel, Judith as the heroine who is allowed to live by the poet, and Juliana's eminent death is the focus of her narrative. This sweeping portrait of human life can provide a sort of spiritual grounding for audiences. It speaks to the Anglo-Saxon and the Christian sense of order and their relationships to place and space, and illustrates how Anglo-Saxon poets wrestled with some of the same questions we do today.

Also detectible is a tripartite view of the "elements of man"; that is, body, reason, and spirit. Grendel's mother's body is a focus for the poet because he takes the time to tell us she "had the shape of a woman" (*idese onlicnes*, 1351a) and is representative of the material world; Judith exercises reason when she uses *logos* to persuade the Bethulians to "gird for war"; and, Juliana signifies the spiritual plain, attainable only through embracing the one "true God." It is curious that these individual women, when

viewed as a whole, become “whole.” Their individualized natures merging to symbolize one soul, just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit signify one God.

In the three case studies presented in this dissertation I argue three things: Grendel’s mother’s death instills faith (*fides*) in the Christian God, Judith’s accomplishments as leader provides hope (*spes*) for better days, and Juliana’s charitable (*caritas*) nature as a saint creates a bond between God and humanity. Out of this effort, a tripartite view of the three Theological or “Ordinal” virtues (faith, hope, and charity/love) appeared, which was the first of the “groups of three” to materialize. My arguments were not forced: they are based on a careful examination of the primary texts. Because of this realization, I arranged my case studies in this same order to emphasize the interlacing virtues of faith, hope, and charity. This important development invites us to continue our inquiries into the women of Old English poetry who have been shown to reveal underlying truths and the rumblings of an organized, sophisticated, rich culture based on reason and faith.

Females in Old English poetry are remembered for their heroism. The poets’ vision of possibilities for the heroic characterizations of women in the poetry is a reflection of changing ideologies. That they selected to create and interpret the stories of Grendel’s mother, Judith, and Juliana means that for some reason these expressions were important for the “symbolic structure” of the age; scops only sing the praises of people to be honored and/or remembered.⁴⁵² Of the utmost importance is that Anglo-Saxon poets did not inspire these females with independent, individual voices. Theirs is part of the collective voice of a developing nation.

⁴⁵² See Emily V. Thornbury, *Becoming a Poet in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

**Appendix:
Female Characters Appearing in Old English Poetry**

FIGURE	TEXT
Beowulf's mother	<i>Beowulf</i> unnamed but identified as Hrethel the Geat's daughter in lines 374–375
Elan	possibly an incomplete name for Hrothgar's sister
Freawaru	
Grendel's mother	
Hildeburh	
Hygd	
(Mod)Thryth	
Hrothgar's sister	unnamed here but known as <i>Signy</i> in Norse tradition
Wealhtheow	
Weeping woman at Beowulf's funeral	
Yrsi	a character borrowed from Norse tradition that appears in some translations
Apollo's daughter	<i>Boethius – meters</i>
Bride	
Lady Wisdom	
Mary	<i>Christ I</i> Mary is mentioned once in <i>Christ II</i> .
Eve	<i>Christ and Satan</i>
Mary	
Beadohild	<i>Deor</i>
Maethild	
Mary	<i>Dream of the Rood</i>
Elene	<i>Elene and the Finding of the True Cross</i>
African Woman	<i>Exodus</i>
Cain's wife	<i>Genesis A and B</i>
Eve	
Hagar	
Sarah	
Eve	<i>Guthlac B</i>
Guthlac's sister	
Daughter of the prince	<i>The Husband's Message</i>
Mary	<i>Judgment II</i>
Judith	<i>Judith</i>
Juliana	<i>Juliana</i>
Frisian Woman	<i>Maxims I</i>
A woman seeking her lover	<i>Maxims II</i>
Helena	<i>The Menologium</i>
Mary	
Strange women	<i>Precepts</i>
Wife	

<p>Women of the riddles: Woman, 4; Kinswoman, 9, 31, 43; Welch Slave, 12, 52; Sisters, 13; Maiden, 14; Doughty daughter, 25; Ladies, 30a; The speaker, 33; Mother, 40; A flushed woman, 42; A bride, 45; Women kin, 46; Queens, 49; Women caretakers, 50; Standing woman, 54; A lady, 61; A young woman, 74; The solitary woman, 76; Fair-haired queen, 80; The mother, 84</p>	<p><i>Riddles</i> Based on the general commentary, the answer to Riddle 46 is the only riddle in which women appear as part of the answer (Lot's two wives).</p>
Hildegyth	<p><i>Waldere</i> Unnamed in Old English version. She is named in <i>Waltharius</i>.</p>
Ealhild	<p><i>Widseth</i></p>
The speaker	<p><i>The Wife's Lament</i></p>
Women offered to strangers by their tribe	<p><i>Wonders of the East</i></p>
Huntresses and other races of women	<p><i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i></p>

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PUBLICATIONS

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“The Joys of Heresy: Benefits for Women in Medieval Heretical Sects.” In *Reading Heresy: Religion and Dissent in Literature and Art*. Eds. Gregory Erickson and Bernard Schweizer. Boston: DeGruyter, 2017. 83-98.

In Progress

“Grendel’s Mother as a Symbol of Faith in a Changing World View.” *Comitatus* 49 (2018).
Submitted for review February 26, 2018.

Signed Encyclopedia Articles:

Natalie P. Johnson and Kathryn Green. “United Kingdom.” In *Women’s Lives Around the World: A Global Encyclopedia*, Volume 4: Europe. Eds. Susan M. Shaw, General Editor; Nancy Staton Barbour, Patti Duncan, Kryn Freehling-Burton, and Jane Nicols. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2018. 376–388.

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- “Faculty Favorite” Award, Celebration of Teaching and Learning, University of Louisville, 2014-2015
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“The Reincarnation of the Roman Heroine in the Old English *Judith Poem.*” Paper presented at the 51st International Congress on Medieval Studies, The Medieval Institute, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, May 12–15, 2016.

“Inversion and the Heroine in the Old English *Judith Poem.*” Paper Presented at the Forty-First Annual Conference of the Southeastern Medieval Association, Little Rock, AR. October 22–24, 2015.

“Fairy Tales for the Early Modern Christian: the Lord at Work in Giambattista Basile’s *The Young Slave.*” Paper Presented at the 2015 Multidisciplinary Graduate Student Conference in Medieval and Renaissance Studies, The Newberry Library, Chicago, IL. January 22–24, 2015.

“The Joys of Heresy: Benefits for Women in Medieval Heretical Sects.” Paper presented at the International Society for Heresy Studies, New York University, NY. May 30–31, 2014.

“Architects of Atonement: The Master Plan behind Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and Scrovegni’s *Arena Chapel.*” Paper presented at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association Conference, Atlanta, GA. November 8–10, 2013.

“The Cyber Baedeker: A Trip to Literature in Context.” Paper presented at the Fourth Annual University of Louisville Conference in Humanities, Louisville, KY. March 2013.

INSTITUTIONAL SERVICE

Member, Search Committee for the Association of Humanities Academics (AHA), Department of Humanities, University of Louisville, 2013–Present

Volunteer, Exhibition Coordination, “*First Folio! The Book that Gave Us Shakespeare,*” (The Folger Library and the National Endowment for the Humanities in association with the University of Louisville, the Frazier History Museum, and the Louisville Free Public Library), 2016

Volunteer, Translations and the Global Humanities Symposium, University of Louisville, October 16–17, 2014

Faculty Representative for part-time lecturers, Department of English, elected position,
University of Louisville, 2012–2014
Volunteer, Watson Writing Conference, Department of English, University of Louisville, 2011–
2013
Volunteer, Ekstrom Library Research Resources and Usage, University of Louisville, 2011–2012
Volunteer, Ideas-to-Action Initiative, Documentary Video Development and Event Planning,
University of Louisville, 2011

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Volunteer, Student Activities, Trinity High School, Louisville, KY, 2017– Present
Volunteer, Library and Student Activities Holy Trinity School, Louisville, KY, 2008–2017
Event planner, “Aging in Place” National Senior Games, Palo Alto, CA, 2009
Member, L’Alliance Française de New York, NY, 2003–2004
Board Member, Equality Forum, Philadelphia, PA, 2003
Treasurer, L’Alliance Française de Louisville, 1994–1996

CURRENT AFFILIATIONS

Medieval Academy of America
Modern Language Association
Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association
International Society for Heresy Studies
Society of Medieval Feminist Scholarship
International Society of Anglo-Saxonists
Old English Newsletter
Eta Sigma Phi