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## Mixed Pairs: Gender Construction in Anglo-Saxon Art and Poetry

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

MIXED PAIRS:  
GENDER CONSTRUCTION IN ANGLO-SAXON ART AND POETRY  
VOLUME I (CHAPTERS 1 TO 5)

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY  
MARY F. DOCKRAY-MILLER

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 1996

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## ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I argue that, among the great variety of genders at work in the Anglo-Saxon texts under discussion, the maternal provides an initial point from which to depart the hierarchical and limiting opposition of masculine/feminine. That traditional paradigm, as I show in my reading of *The Dream of the Rood* and the Ruthwell Cross Christ, relies on an often unacknowledged violence to keep the feminine position subordinate and passive in the face of dominating masculine aggression. Often, the feminine becomes complicit in the oppositional paradigm, as is the female scribe of the Vercelli Book.

My reading of the gender performances of Adam and Eve in the Junius 11 texts and illustrations, however, reveals a feminine subjectivity that achieves agency and disrupts the tidy paradigm as Eve, described in the text as feminine body and object, leads Adam from the Garden in the illustrations. Another disruption of the binary paradigm comes from the more-masculine Modþryðo and the less-masculine Hroðgar of *Beowulf*; Modþryðo succeeds in fulfilling her sometimes violent desires and in producing the only intact patrilineal genealogy in the poem. Finally, Guthlac of *Guthlac A* and the Guthlac Roll

illustrations defines a masculinity through his holiness and isolation, which are somehow "enough" to make him masculine-heroic without reliance on subsumed violence enacted upon a dominated feminine Other.

When such masculine and feminine performances can break down the very opposition from which they stem, other options for gender performance become apparent as well. I read the maternal as a gender that performs a self-contained subjectivity that needs no specularized Other; because of the maternal bodily link between Mother and Child, that Child can never be Other to the Mother. The maternal performances of the Virgin in *Advent* and on the Ruthwell Cross and of Judith in *Judith* and in biblical illustration are characterized by powerful agency of nurturance and protection, Judith's enacted within a uniquely female community.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PAIRED PERFORMANCE

The title of this dissertation, "Mixed Pairs," seeks to highlight the fluid nature of gender construction in a number of written and visual texts produced in Anglo-Saxon England. Construction of gender is determined by performance that fluctuates continually from culture to culture, from text to text, from subject to subject. The figures in these texts witness a variety of gender performances that cannot be accounted for in a model of oppositional femininity and masculinity. As such, I read another gender category into some of these texts, that of the maternal, which I define as a space open to both male and female figures, a performance that defies oppositional gender construction and forces a re-examination of power in the text. The figures I discuss, one man and one woman in each pair, are not opposed but "mixed," blended in such a way that their gender performances continually inform and undermine one another.

Those figures come from a range of Anglo-Saxon poetic works and visual representations; texts from each of the four major codices of Anglo-Saxon poetry are included. The canonical texts, widely discussed in the critical literature, include *The Dream of the Rood* and the Ruthwell

Cross, in which I examine the figure of Christ as an aggressively dominating heterosexual and masculine figure. Others, including *Guthlac A* and the series of illustrations known as the Guthlac Roll, have suffered critical neglect; I read Guthlac as an example of the celebration of independence and isolation necessary to holy masculinity.

Three of my examples present themselves as pairs through histories of textual relationship. I discuss Christ and Mary in terms of their representations on the Ruthwell Cross as well as of the figures of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood* and Mary in *Advent*. Adam and Eve are both illustrated and narrated in the Junius 11 *Genesis*. From *Beowulf*, the only overtly secular work under discussion, I study the masculine performances of Modþryðo and Hroðgar. My final pair, Guthlac from *Guthlac A* and Judith from *Judith*, are specifically gendered presentations of holy heroism.

Gender, in the way I will use the term throughout this dissertation, is not a "natural" or biological category, though some constructs purport to be so. It is a performance of role, in a text or in contemporary reality. An analysis of gender in a culture like that of Anglo-Saxon England is necessarily mediated through texts, written, visual, archaeological. The texts I will address throughout this dissertation both create and reflect performances of gender; they most frequently present masculinity and

femininity, often stereotyped and idealized, as opposed yet dependent performances. Within these texts, however, the unrealizable desires of culture for stable gender categories become apparent, and the impossibility of fulfilling those desires becomes apparent as well.

In these reflections I am heavily indebted to Judith Butler, whose *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter* clarify the notion of gendered performances that are repeated to the point where they seem natural or inevitable (men work outside the home while women take care of children inside the home). Such biologically-based notions of gender are dependent not upon physiology but on opposition. According to Butler, "The presumption of a binary gender system implicitly retains the belief in a mimetic relation of gender to sex whereby gender mirrors sex or is otherwise restricted by it" (*Trouble* 6).

Yet, Butler says that performance, not biology, determines gender: "There is no gender identity beyond expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Trouble* 25). In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler expands upon this notion of performativity, which, she emphasizes, is not a subjective, conscious "choice" by an already essentialist, humanist "self." Butler stresses that in her first book, by performativity she did not mean that:

...one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice,

donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night. (*Bodies* x)

Rather than the subject deciding its gender, "gender is part of what decides the subject" (*Bodies* x). One cannot precede the other in some sort of linear progression.

Butler rejects the notion that "sex" is prior to "gender" in the way that nature is often construed as prior to culture; she emphasizes that both sex and nature, offered as prior, are actually "offered within language" despite being "retro-actively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access" (*Bodies* 5). Genders are not constructed onto pre-existing sexed bodies; gender construction is not an act that can be deemed "finished" at a certain point (*Bodies* 9). The performativity of gender depends on an understanding of gender construction as an ongoing process (or performance) that is never ultimately complete. Butler advocates an understanding wherein matter (specifically bodily matter) is viewed as "*a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*" (*Bodies* 9, italics Butler's).

*Bodies that Matter* is full of maddening double entendres about "bodies that matter" in the sense of becoming material and of being important topics of inquiry; nevertheless, her assertion that gender performance is an integral part of the materiality of the body underscores the linguistic constructedness of the notions of biology and

physiology. Butler is most interested in examples of "disidentification with those regulatory norms by which sexual difference is materialized" (*Bodies* 4); for her, it is those sites of disidentification that serve to undermine what she calls "the heterosexual imperative" (*Bodies* 2) or "compulsory heterosexuality" (*Trouble* viii) that reigns in contemporary Western culture. As such, norms of gender construction may seem inflexible when they are defined as "the repeated stylization of the body" (*Trouble* 33); yet disidentification, or slippage from those norms, is what reveals their very un-natural constructedness and provides ways to challenge those norms.

One problem with Butler's analysis of gender performance is its ahistoricity, as Clare Lees points out. Lees says:

Although Butler repeatedly gestures toward the importance of history, and historical methodologies, her emphasis on discourse in fact denies history any validity other than as text. (Introduction xviii)

Such ahistoricity, in which language is perceived "as the *only* human system of signification productive of meaning" (ibid, italics Lees'), ignores the bodies upon which oppression has historically been enacted. One facet of the study of history, for Lees, is:

a fuller understanding of the cycles of crises and resolutions that underpin patriarchy, ensure its hegemony, and trace its varied manifestations in different sociocultural formations. (Introduction xix)

Butler's emphasis on language, for Lees, is detrimental to medieval and historical studies simply because it negates historical agency of bodies, "however restricted to language our representation of it is" (Introduction xviii). Butler's discussion of the body in *Bodies that Matter* was not available to Lees when she wrote her critique of Butler; though Butler discusses the materiality of the body there, Lees' caveats remain useful as reminders that Butler's discussion of gender performance is oddly ahistorical; Butler's own examples come from contemporary politics, literature, and film rather than "history" grounded in the past.

Thus it is somewhat self-consciously that I apply Butler's notions of gender performance to Old English texts. Mediated as they are through their own language, these texts not only represent gendered, historical bodies (of Guthlac in his hermitage, for example) but were created and read by gendered, material, bodily subjects (like the scribe of the Vercelli Book). Lees reminds us that discourse analysis, like Butler's analysis of slippage from gender norms, can never fully escape the materiality of the body.

Such slippage in gender performance in Anglo-Saxon texts and the bodies that create the performances is the focus of much of my analysis in this dissertation. Within the texts I have chosen, the categories of masculinity and femininity blend into rather than oppose one another, and

suggest possibilities, for Anglo-Saxon culture and for our culture reading its texts, of gender performances--like that of the maternal, as I will show--that go beyond binary, oppositional construction.

To mix, rather than oppose, genders is to allow for more than two; I hope, throughout this dissertation, to get away from oppositional, limiting definitions into "mixed pairs" that relate to rather than oppose one another. For example, I examine Hroðgar and Modþryðo, a man and woman from *Beowulf*, who enact not an oppositional masculinity and femininity but masculinities of power, in which Modþryðo is ultimately more masculine, more powerful than Hroðgar. Butler's concept of the process of performativity provides a new starting point for examining these very old poetic and visual texts.

As Butler's work shows, one of the most important facets of gender is the relationship between power and the material body. The body is the basis for much traditional gender stereotyping. More than a physiological entity or even a post-linguistic construct, however, the body is the site of power struggles, of the question of which subjectivity controls what each body does and what each body represents. In the introduction to her discussion of *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Karma Lochrie says about the body:

The body, particularly the female body, is itself a construct of science, medicine, theology, literature, education, the clothing industry, advertising, and fitness centers. Except for the



last two industries, the same is true for the Middle Ages. The female body, simply put, has a history, and that history is determined by social and religious values, institutions, and patriarchal power structures. (3)

The male body as well, though not to such a great extent, has been constructed by culture; one focus of much work in medieval studies today is the construction of Christ's body in medieval religious texts.<sup>1</sup>

The body is a source of power struggles in which various forces, people, and institutions assert power by defining standards for and controlling material bodies. The latest round in the series of battles for safe and legal abortion is merely one of the most recent manifestations of this power struggle that has medieval manifestations as well. Allen J. Frantzen discusses power in relation to the contested place of gender theory in current medieval studies when he says:

Gender means, in the first instance, rethinking the absolute categories of male and female, of women and men, of homosexual and heterosexual. This is an exciting prospect for any medievalist, whether feminist or not, simply because it requires a reassessment of the flow of power in and around medieval texts of all kinds. (Enough 452)

The bodies I discuss in this dissertation--bodies of men, women, saints, mothers, heroes, virgins--are all sites of contestation within the text. For instance, I show various

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<sup>1</sup>For instance, Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1993) or Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), especially chapters three and four.

forces striving for control of Adam's body: the desires of God, Adam, the manuscript illustrator, the poet, and the reader. In terms of the Junius 11 illustrations, I argue, Eve's body actually controls Adam's body, revealing that the text's desire for masculine superiority is undermined in the illustrations. Bodies do not determine genders, but in any discussion of gender they provide a necessary focus that is not on physiology but on power and control.

All analysis of power in texts is subjective, not objective in that meaning stems partially from the individual's perspective. My own perspective includes, among others, that of a mother. I began my search for Anglo-Saxon motherhood because I am a mother. The results of that search, however, are of interest to non-maternal readers; to see the maternal as a powerful gender category forces a re-examination of the use of power in these texts. In addition, the recognition of the existence of another gender category, like that of the maternal, puts readers on notice that innumerable genders exist to be performed, and that we need only to seek beyond the binary construction of masculine/feminine in order to mix our pairs, so to speak, and to see new performances in familiar texts.

My work with Anglo-Saxon poetry, manuscripts, and sculpture and with gender theory recognizes that there cannot be simply two genders, masculine and feminine, and that gender, ultimately, is not oppositionally constructed,

even in the most traditional and patriarchal texts. Nancy Chodorow has recently argued for a perception of "many individual masculinities and femininities," especially in clinical psychoanalytic work (521); Chodorow is resisting the theoretical trend towards a definition of gender that is "entirely culturally, linguistically, or politically constructed" (517). Although Chodorow relies, in effect, on the existence of a humanist, essentialist "self," and although her terms are pluralities of masculinity and femininity, her argument for a multiplicity of genders harmonizes with my assertion that there is a multiplicity of genders at work in the Anglo-Saxon texts I discuss.

Chodorow's *Reproduction of Mothering* is a landmark study in the psychology of the mother, but Chodorow does not see the maternal as a separate gender. Instead she subsumes it into the varied category of "femininities."

In contrast, I perceive the maternal to be a gendered category in its own right, a space separate from masculinity and femininity that can be occupied by men and women alike by virtue of the performative nature of gender, as defined by Butler. Butler alludes to the lesbian as a possible "third gender," and her discussion of the lesbian can be fruitfully contrasted with my perception of the maternal. Butler, through the work of Monique Wittig, determines that:

the lesbian appears to be a third gender or, as I shall show, a category that radically problematizes both sex and gender as stable political categories of description. (*Trouble* 113)

Butler does not directly argue that the lesbian is a third gender; she uses it as a category to problematize binary oppositions of gender. While "the lesbian" itself can tend to operate within another binary opposition--that of homosexual/heterosexual--it also destabilizes the opposition masculine/feminine.

The maternal, similarly, breaks down that opposition because the category of the maternal does not presume a one-to-one correspondence of desire between the masculine and feminine or between the lesbian and the lesbian. While I will define the maternal as a gender category more thoroughly below, I would like to suggest here that most notably the figures of the Virgin Mary and Judith perform in the maternal gender in such a way that "radically problematizes" (to use Butler's phrase) the oppositional masculinity and femininity presumed in their texts. I have no wish to replace The Lesbian with The Maternal as The Third Gender; such a gesture would simply reinscribe a masculine-style hierarchy in which, inevitably, the masculine would be the "first" gender and the feminine the "second." I merely wish to propose that the maternal is *another* gender category at work in these texts, and to use this gender construct to undermine radically any notion of binary gender in which even the text itself might be complicit.

My definition of the maternal as a gender category has its roots in psychoanalytic narrative. Psychoanalysis, with its explorations of incest, oedipal development, and primary narcissism, constructs our understanding of gender systems in our culture and in the cultures we study. Psychoanalysis affects and assists our readings of texts from other cultures, like those I discuss in this dissertation, which were created without the vocabulary and categories of psychoanalytic theory. Psychoanalytic narrative tends to describe a construction of gender that presupposes the supremacy of the masculine and the subordination of the feminine; nevertheless, it provides initial material for the creation of a narrative that defines a space for a maternal gender category.

Psychoanalytic narrative, in its usual form, does not allow for other genders in its vision of "normal" sexuality, which tends to be, at least in the landmark works of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, a sexuality of the male child. Female psychosexual development is seen to deviate from "typical" (i.e. male) development, a development which relies on a feminine Other, usually the Mother, to ground and reflect the masculine Subject. Feminist criticism of this male-centered theory has tended to focus on female psychosexual development in its own right, not as a deviant form of male psychosexual development; the subjectivity of

the Mother is often still subsumed by the subjectivity of the (female) child.

Psychoanalytic theory, which has useful categories and methods of analysis, is in many instances still limited by the very binary oppositions that, via Butler, I discussed earlier. Masculine and feminine psychosexual development have been opposed and sorted in a model that accepts opposition as a mode of definition. Psychoanalytic and feminist theorist Jane Gallop has said in a critique of Lacan that, "This problem of dealing with difference without constituting an opposition may just be what feminism is all about (might even be what psychoanalysis is all about)" (93). It is a problem that has not been solved, that perhaps will never be solved, but I have attempted to address it throughout by avoiding and dismantling oppositions that limit analysis to two opposed categories. The maternal can only be defined as a gender if the opposition of masculine/feminine is broken down. Psychoanalytic narrative, despite its usual objectification of the Mother, provides the terms with which I shall define the maternal.

Psychoanalytic theory is notorious for its neglect of the mother and the maternal. It is now a commonplace in feminist psychoanalysis to note that Freud and Lacan, in their initial theories of psychosexual development, assume that the child is male and the mother exists only as object

in the child's world.<sup>2</sup> In these theories, everyone has a mother but no one *is* a mother--a bizarre world view for which feminist psychoanalysts have rightly taken Freud and Lacan to task. For instance, in "The Development of the Libido," Freud says, "Though it is not actually the mother's breast, at least it is the mother. We call the mother the first love-object" (329, emphasis Freud's). Freud seems almost disappointed that the child's first love-object is the mother in her entirety, rather than just her breast; the remainder of his theory of oedipal development deals with the separation of the child, both male and female, from this maternal love-object. Lacan's focus on the male child's relation to the object/mother is similarly apparent when he says:

If the desire of the mother *is* the phallus, then the child wishes to be the phallus so as to satisfy this desire...what he has being worth no more than what he does not have as far as his demand for love is concerned. (83)

In Lacan's narrative of psychosexual development, the child realizes that the mother is not a phallic mother and

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<sup>2</sup>For an example, see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley (New York: Vintage, 1989), 39ff. (repr. from Knopf, 1952). Beauvoir states that Freud "assumes that woman feels she is a mutilated man" and constructs his model accordingly (41). For an overview of more recent feminist response to Freud and Lacan, see Toril Moi's synopses of Kate Millett (27-29) and of Luce Irigaray (129-135) in *Sexual Textual Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1985); Butler on Freud and Irigaray (66-72), *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Janice Doane, *From Klein to Kristeva: Psychoanalytic Feminism and the Search for the Good Enough Mother* (Ann Arbor: U Michigan P, 1992).

separates himself (and the male pronoun there is key) from this castrated mother (defining her as an Other) to enter into the Symbolic, the realm of the Father. Luce Irigaray has criticized both Freud and Lacan for their masculine-centered views, saying that for them "*the feminine occurs only within models and laws devised by male subjects*" (86, emphasis Irigaray's). Irigaray might also have noted that Freud and Lacan, in their male-centered theorizing, have no interest in maternal subjectivity and assume that "the mother" occurs only in subordinate relation to the male subject.

Since what I call the maternal is a performance, it is impossible to define the maternal simply by saying "the maternal is X"; however, the maternal performance is characterized by self-containment, by protection and nurturance, and by a power that stems from the material, maternal body and its relationship to generational continuity. The maternal gender, as I define it throughout my readings of Anglo-Saxon poetry and visual art, performs in such a way that such an Other (against which to define itself) is not necessary to maternal subjectivity. The desire of the maternal is to protect, not to dominate and efface. Maternal *jouissance* (to appropriate a Lacanian term) is realized in a subjectivity that derives pleasure from nurturance of a child who is not Other. While Freud and Lacan postulate that the (masculine) Subject grounds and



defines itself against the feminine, the maternal is a self-contained gender that defines and grounds itself. In doing so, it "radically problematizes" (to return to Butler's term in her description of the lesbian) the notion of binary definition, of defining the Subject against an Other. The child, or the figure in the role of the child, is not an Other because of the materiality of the body; that child has been part of the maternal body and can never be fully Other, even after that definitively teleological process of birth. Although initially this description is based in physiology, I read this relationship to exist metaphorically between the maternal performer and the figure in the role of the child whether the maternal performer is the biological mother or not. Material biological relationship is not necessary for this psychoanalytic relationship to exist; adoptive mothers and "mother figures" (like the czarinas of Russian folk tales) perform in this role as well. The narrative of maternity provides a space for a gender performance that is motivated by desire for protection and nurturance of this not-quite-Other rather than accrual of definitive power to the subject.

I realize that this definition of the maternal, especially when used in examination of "real" mothers in contemporary culture, could be used to augment the reactionary paradigm of mothers who love to suffer and ignore their own needs because they love their children more

than anything else in the world.<sup>3</sup> This is not my intention at all. To say that the maternal is motivated by protection and nurturance is not to say that subjectivity is erased; indeed, it is just such protective and nurturing agency that allows maternal subjectivity to define itself without an oppositional Other. The maternal accrues power to itself-- not a phallic, masculine power but a maternal power based in the *jouissance* of a strong relation to the child--as it performs its gender. Maternal desire is not self- or Other-directed (as desire is in the Lacanian narrative) but directed towards the satisfaction of itself through the happiness of the child. Through desire to protect and nurture the child, the figure enacting a powerful maternal performance satisfies its own desires almost inadvertently. Such a power of the maternal upsets masculine hierarchy and threatens the very definition of power as that which is used to dominate others. Both the Virgin Mary and Judith perform within the maternal gender when they form relationships with child-figures and nurture and protect them in such a way that their own power is augmented.

The maternal figure is powerful but not a "phallic mother" in that "phallic mother" is a term used by Lacanians

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<sup>3</sup>For a salient analysis of how psychoanalytic theory has been used to keep mothers politically powerless and voiceless, see Doane on Winnicott, 19-29; for Doane, Winnicott's "description of mothering..requires the redefinition of such issues as freedom, autonomy, and desire" in such a way that mothers become "socially and economically dependent upon men, whose power is enhanced by this dependency" (25-26).

to describe the child's *perception* of the mother's power, not any actual power that she has. Once the child realizes that his mother is actually castrated, his initiation into the realm of the symbolic is begun. As well, the term "phallic mother" connotes a masculine sort of power, the power of having the phallus and all it symbolizes in Lacanian narrative. Instead, maternal power, as I view it, is based in desire and intergenerational sexuality rather than in domination of an Other and control of the symbolic. The power of the maternal is directed toward the preservation and nurturance of the child and as such provides its own sort of eternity through generational continuation of the maternal subject's material body, constructed, as Butler says, through an ongoing process of performance.

Thus, the maternal is not merely a subset of the feminine, as others (like Chodorow) have seen it. As I noted above, it is a space open to both men and women. While biological mothers (like the Virgin Mary) seem to be the first focus of investigation into the maternal gender, maternal figures need not be biological mothers (as Judith is not), or even women at all. While I have found no maternal men in these Anglo-Saxon texts, a maternal Christ is the focus of much scholarship based in the later Middle

Ages, most notably Caroline Walker Bynum's *Jesus as Mother*.<sup>4</sup>

Maternal performance, as such, is inherently threatening to patriarchal norms and power structures. One such structure is that of *homosociality*, a term I will be using throughout my text in the way it is defined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In her terms, a homosocial nexus uses women in exchanges and relations between men to the men's mutual benefit. A homosocial structure also defines women as commodities, thus negating or neutralizing any feminine or maternal power that might otherwise be available to women. Simply because it makes clear the disempowerment of women, including (especially?) mothers, in patriarchy, I have found the rubric of homosociality to be a useful way to examine masculinity throughout this dissertation. Sedgwick says:

"Homosocial" is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual.' In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality. (1)

In addition, Sedgwick sees distinctly homoerotic aspects in homosocial relationships. She analyzes what she terms "triangles" comprised of two men and a woman in a variety of

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<sup>4</sup>Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: U California P, 1982).

literary works (mostly eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels) in which the woman, ostensibly the erotic focus of both men, becomes a heterosexual "cover" for the eroticism in the homosocial relation between the men. For Sedgwick, the line demarcating the homosocial and the homosexual is not as sharply drawn as many men might like; her amusing example is that of Ronald Reagan and Jesse Helms, "men promoting men's interests," whose male-male bond is in some way "congruent with the bond of a loving gay male couple" (3).

Sedgwick refers to Gayle Rubin's essay, "The Traffic in Women," which does not use the term "homosocial" but discusses such relations and exchanges between men as well, from an anthropological rather than literary perspective. Drawing on Claude Lévi Strauss' *Elementary Structures of Kinship*, Rubin discusses how description of the societal structure of women exchanged between men has been used to legitimize rather than to criticize the oppression of women in modern culture. Rubin's focus is not male-male eroticism, like Sedgwick's, but male exchange of women that enables male economic, political, and sexual dominance of women. Rubin says:

If it is women who are being transacted, then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, the woman being a conduit of a relationship rather than a partner to it...If the women are gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers its quasi-mystical power of societal linkage. The relations of such a system

are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges--social organization. (174)

Rubin expands her analysis to psychoanalysis and includes Freudian and Lacanian terminology to show that the exchange of women also enables the possession of the phallus (representative of social and linguistic power) by men. She says: "In the cycle of exchange manifested by the Oedipal complex, the phallus passes through the medium of women from one man to another" (192). In Rubin's terms, the exchange of women not only confers status upon men but anthropologically and psychoanalytically enables the perpetuation of patriarchal culture.

Luce Irigaray also cites Lévi-Strauss in her essay "Women on the Market," which, like Rubin's, argues that women act as commodities in relations between men. For Irigaray:

there is no such thing as a commodity, either, so long as there are not *at least two men* to make an exchange. In order for a product--a woman?--to have value, two men, at least, have to invest (in) her. (Market 181)

Irigaray's essay sees women as products in a psychoanalytic and linguistic rather than monetary economy; she argues that within this exchange system women function to "assure the possibility of the use and circulation of the symbolic without being recipients of it" (Market 189). Like Sedgwick, Irigaray emphasizes the homoeroticism implicit in

this exchange; Irigaray calls this system "a ho(m)mo-sexual monopoly" and "the reign of ho(m)mo-sexuality" (Market 171). Her wordplay points up the male-male eroticism in this ostensibly heterosexual system of exchange.

Throughout this dissertation, "the homosocial" will refer to a system of exchange of women between men in which the men accrue economic and political status and in some way satisfy sublimated homoerotic desire. In this system, not only are all women perceived to be objects valued by the possibility of their exchange, but mothers especially are disempowered through a definition of motherhood that emphasizes biological reproduction of men (exchangers) and women (commodities that can be exchanged). That system reinscribes an interpretation of motherhood as a state of oppression in which female biology is put to the uses of patriarchy. I read maternity, both literal and metaphorical, in a much more optimistic manner, so that the maternal performance enacts agency and power. As such, a clash is inevitable between the homosocial and what I term the maternal; that clash will become most apparent in my reading of the way the Virgin's maternal performance on the Ruthwell Cross undermines the patriarchal power structures of Christianity as depicted by Christ on the same cross.

Throughout this dissertation, I have been conscious of working within a tradition of Anglo-Saxon studies that is in a state of upheaval as post-structural critical theory meets

traditional practice, somewhat later than it has in other specialties within English studies.<sup>5</sup> I have found that traditional/post-structural, like other oppositions, is one that needs to be dissolved. A reader of these texts cannot have one and not the other. In each chapter, I have used "traditional" techniques that focus on manuscript context of the poetry, vocabulary study of important words (with its sometimes laborious counting of forms and usages), and examination of sources of the texts in question. My translations of poetry tend toward the ungainly and literal rather than the poetic because in all instances I am focused on the grammatical and literal issues of the text.

None of these techniques is an end in itself, however; in each chapter, different theories and rubrics of gender construction, from Freud's essay "Female Sexuality" to Carol Clover's idea of a "masculine continuum" in early Scandinavian society, inform the textual analysis. Each chapter contains a critical genealogy of the text, written or visual, under discussion. Each of these genealogies tries to summarize the critical history of the text, not just for content but for theoretical methodology: how has each text been used to satisfy the varied desires of its critics? While my focus is gender construction, each of the

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<sup>5</sup>For an overview of the place of post-structuralist theory in Anglo-Saxon studies, see John P. Hermann, "Why Anglo-Saxonists Can't Read: Or, Who Took the Mead out of Medieval Studies?" *Exemplaria* 7 (1995): 9-26.



texts I discuss has been approached from a number of theoretical viewpoints, not all of them consciously elucidated. Some texts, like *Guthlac A*, have never been approached through a gender-theoretical rubric; others, like *Judith*, have been a focus of gender or feminist critics for the past ten years or more.

The current state of gender theory in Anglo-Saxon and other Medieval studies is a subject for debate; in the 1993 *Speculum* issue *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, opinions ranged from a view of hostile tolerance of gender and feminist theory to its near supremacy.<sup>6</sup> Publication of essay collections like *Speaking Two Languages, Medieval Masculinities* and *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections* show that gender theory is being practiced and published in Anglo-Saxon Studies (each of these collections contains gender-oriented essays on Anglo-Saxon literature).<sup>7</sup> In addition, journals like *Exemplaria* routinely include gender-based articles in

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<sup>6</sup>For the former viewpoint, Judith Bennett says, "today feminist scholarship on the Middle Ages flourishes but only within a largely indifferent and sometimes hostile community of medievalists" (315); for the latter, Frantzen says, "feminist studies, if not the norm, are now so regular that they have redefined the norm" (445). Both quotations from *Speculum* 68 (1993), a special issue edited by Nancy Partner; reprinted as *Studying Medieval Women*, ed. Nancy Partner (Cambridge: Medieval Academy of America, 1993).

<sup>7</sup>*Speaking Two Languages*, ed. Frantzen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991); *Medieval Masculinities*, ed. Clare Lees (Minneapolis: U Minnesota P, 1994); *Class and Gender in Early English Literature: Intersections*, eds. Britton Harwood and Gillian Overing (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994).

each issue; there are also a number of other recently published essay collections which practice gender theory in Medieval Studies but do not directly address Anglo-Saxon literature.<sup>8</sup>

This recent work has served to make gender theory legitimate though not supreme in Anglo-Saxon studies. Resistant readings of canonical texts, like that of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* by Clare Lees and Gillian Overing in "Birthing Bishops and Fathering Poets: Bede, Hild, and the Relations of Cultural Production,"<sup>9</sup> show that gender and power structures permeate texts, even texts in which those structures are veiled or occluded. Gender theory provides a way to expose assumptions (like Bede's) of the masculine as normative or universal; it affords examination not only into women, women's lives, and femininity, but into men, masculinity, and other genders as well.

As such, I see this dissertation as an exercise into two different, but not opposed, traditions, one quite old, the other very new. While the idea of gender theory as a "new tradition" may seem oxymoronic, I think the phrase accurately conveys my expectation that gender theory will eventually have in Anglo-Saxon studies the academic status now accorded to manuscript description and source study. It

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<sup>8</sup>An example is *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, eds. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: U Pennsylvania P, 1993).

<sup>9</sup>*Exemplaria* 6 (1994): 35-66.

is within the interactions of these two traditions that I see the maternal working as a third gender that is powerful and protective, subjective but not self-absorbed, bodily but not bounded by physiology. My "mixed pairs" of Christ and Mary, Adam and Eve, Hropgar and Modþryðo, and Guthlac and Judith reveal ultimately that they are pairs not of opposed masculine and feminine figures but pairs of multiplicities of genders that are constructed by performance within the various texts.

Part of my inquiry in each chapter focuses on the ways that individual words or sets of words function to construct figures' gender in the different written texts. For instance, using the *Microfiche Concordance to Old English*,<sup>10</sup> I show that the words used in the Junius 11 *Genesis* to describe Eve's beauty are unique, in their superlative form, to Eve. The uniqueness of these adjectives points to Eve's unique status as an example of constructed femininity that is supposed to, but ultimately does not, act as Other to Adam's masculine subjectivity.

An inquiry into visual representations of the figures under discussion provides another medium for exploration of gender in all chapters except that devoted to *Beowulf*. Through the composition and technique of the visual artifact, the gender of certain figures seems to be

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<sup>10</sup>Throughout I will cite the Concordance by page number within fiche number within a letter: "G018, 44" refers to page 44 on the eighteenth fiche of "G."

"performed" literally in narrative sequence in a series of sculptures or of manuscript illustrations. For example, the composition of the sculptural panels on the Ruthwell Cross that portray the Virgin shows her as enacting a powerful maternity rather than a more traditional or stereotypically expected submissive femininity.

I do not presume to an exhaustive survey or use of the multitudes of feminist and gender theories that are currently being produced and discussed in the scholarly community. Instead, distinct theories or rubrics have presented themselves as fruitful means for examining the poems or visual representations so that each chapter engages a specific theoretical text as well as the literary or visual text at hand. These theoretical interactions have led me to what I hope are new perceptions of these Anglo-Saxon texts. For instance, in chapter two, following Celia Sisam, I suggest that the scribe of the Vercelli Book was probably female; in chapter five I argue that the poem we know today as "*Genesis B*" is an editorial construct, never intended to be viewed as a text separate from the "*Genesis A*" that surrounds it.<sup>11</sup> In addition, I argue that Judith, rather than acting as a figure of chastity or a female Germanic hero, performs within what I call the maternal

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<sup>11</sup>I place quotations around these titles because, as I argue in chapter five, they are editorial constructs that ignore the manuscript context of one long poem suitably called *Genesis*.

gender in an ultimately subversive female community that she creates with her maid.

My first pair of Christ and Mary sets up a paradigmatic pair that provides a gendered background for the other three pairs. Christ and Mary were the ultimate masculine and feminine figures of the Middle Ages, especially within religious life. In a way, figures of Christ define the word "masculine" rather than the other way around; figures of Mary provide definitions of femininity that other women can imitate (though, as Marina Warner and others have noted, other women can never achieve the sort of feminine perfection defined by the Virgin). The paradigms these figures present, in various manifestations, permeate the entire culture (as, to some extent, they still do today).

I relate specific manifestations of Christ and Mary in two written texts, *The Dream of the Rood* and *Advent* respectively, and in one series of visual texts, the Ruthwell Cross sculptures. A comparison of the figures' gender constructions in the two written texts is not that of a "textual" pair, like that of Adam and Eve, who appear in the same text and can hardly be described individually. Mary figures in *Dream*, and the infant Christ does appear in *Advent*; the necessity of the relationship between the two figures is somehow assumed if not elaborated in the two texts. Reading the figures across the two texts provides a fuller, if cross-textual, pair for analysis. A comparison of

the two illuminates oppositional gender construction at work that spans the two texts, separately building upon the shared doctrinal orthodoxy of dominant male and subordinate female in opposition. Reading the genders of the figures in the two texts against each other, and against the portrayals of the figures on the Ruthwell Cross (which is textually as well as iconographically related to *The Dream of the Rood*), reveals the effort needed by the universalized masculine to dominate, and the various subversions of the feminine and performances of the maternal that neutralize that effort. I begin with Christ, the dominant masculine figure in all medieval art; his maternal mother, however, is never very far away.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE DOMINANT, HETEROSEXUAL MASCULINITY OF THE *DREAM* CHRIST

The Ruthwell Cross and *The Dream of the Rood* both construct a masculinity for Christ that is majestic, martial, and specifically heterosexual and that relies on a fragile opposition with a femininity defined as dominated Other. As heterosexual, Christ dominates other figures within and without the text. His particularly constructed masculinity, explored rather than merely assumed both on the cross and in the written poem, adds a new dimension of gendered heterosexuality to our understanding of these texts, both of which may have been created for a specifically female audience.

In the pages that follow, I will argue that Christ's masculinity is affirmed against the figure of the feminized cross in *The Dream of the Rood*, which acts as a dominated Other. That position of Other is also assumed by the scribe--also the initial reader--of the Vercelli Book, who not only assumed a feminine position but might have been female as well. The feminized figures on the Ruthwell Cross, both male and female, also act as dominated Others for Christ's masculinity. In this chapter I will discuss

the gender construction of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*; in chapter three, that of the Virgin in *Advent*; in chapter four, that of both figures on the Ruthwell Cross. Christ and Mary form a "mixed pair" that presents, in these texts, both an example of binarily constructed masculinity and femininity and an example of a maternal performance that destabilizes that binary. In my discussion of Christ, I rely on Arthur Brittan's investigation into the construction of masculinity as I examine Christ's gender performance in this canonical poem.

In *The Dream of the Rood*, the speaker tells of his *swefna cyst*, best of dreams, in which he sees the cross of the crucifixion, alternately bejeweled and bloody, in the sky. The cross then speaks, giving its own first person account of the Passion of Christ, and encouraging the dreamer to spread the message of the cross to his contemporaries. The poem ends as the dreamer resolves to follow the cross's instructions, though he longs for the peace and joy of heaven. The poem is probably the most frequently read Old English text, after *Beowulf*, but the gender paradigms within it have gone largely unremarked, despite the mountain of criticism produced about the poem.

An examination of masculinity is a relatively new idea in gender theory, undertaken most recently in medieval



studies in the *Medieval Masculinities* essay collection.<sup>12</sup> Until the advent of feminist theory and its examination of women, the term "mankind" defined a universalized and assumed, somehow genderless humanity that was actually based on male or masculine paradigms.<sup>13</sup> Those paradigms then seemed "natural" to the point where they were taken for granted. This naturalization of masculinity as humanity is discussed in Arthur Brittan's *Masculinity and Power*, wherein he notes that in the social sciences the term "human nature" actually refers to middle class white male nature (147-148). For Brittan, "masculinism" is "the ideology that justifies and naturalizes male domination" (4) and it depends on a falsely constructed dichotomy of man/woman or masculine/feminine. Brittan asserts that "we find it almost impossible to think of gender and sexuality except in terms of a dichotomy" (14). This opposition is now widely rejected as a false construct. However, it is just such an opposition, readily accepted and unexamined, that bulwarks a masculinism of domination and aggression. Brittan discusses the necessity of hierarchy, domination, and competitiveness

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<sup>12</sup>Thelma Fenster's preface and Clare Lees' introduction to this volume both address the issue of studying men as a part of the goal of gender theory.

<sup>13</sup>For a recent discussion of this much-noted phenomenon, see Luce Irigaray, *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian Gill (New York: Columbia UP, 1993); Irigaray asks if it is possible to "speak in a *universal* and *neuter* way? Does neutrality exist? Where? How?" (170, italics hers) and notes that "this neuter does not solve the problem of the hierarchy observed by the male and female genders" (174).

in this definition of masculinity (which, I should note, he does not endorse); all these concepts require a femininity that exists in binary opposition to this masculinity (106). When this opposition is broken down, masculinism breaks down as well. Without a subordinate, dominated, oppositional femininity, masculinity cannot be defined as "naturally" superior and dominating.

This sort of binary construction is at work in the masculinity of Christ in *The Dream of Rood*, however, which posits an oppositional masculinity and femininity upon which Christ's gender construction depends. The concomitant fragility of that construction, which is based on a seemingly natural opposition, underscores the fragility of dominant masculinity and ultimately, I will argue, the fragility of patriarchal Christianity.

It is a commonplace in criticism of *The Dream of the Rood* to note that Christ is presented as an Anglo-Saxon warrior lord, who is served by his thanes, especially the cross, and who rewards them at a feast of glory in heaven. Critics note that Christ is described as *freaan mancynnes*<sup>14</sup> (the lord of mankind, 1.33), *geong hæleð* (young hero, 1.39), and *ricne cyning* (the powerful king, 1.44), just three examples of many that show Christ as a lord in the heroic

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<sup>14</sup>Text of *The Dream of the Rood* from G.P. Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records* vol. II (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932). Translations are my own; further line citations in my text.

sense seen in *Beowulf* and in historical documents such as the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*: one to whom honor and loyalty to death are due. The cross, the dreamer, and ultimately the dreamer's readers (the audience) form the comitatus of this lord, the group of followers who trust, obey, and believe in Christ.

In 1958, Robert Diamond and Rosemary Woolf both commented on these heroic motifs in the poem. After a meticulous listing of the heroic oral-formulaic phrases used in the poem, Diamond stated that the heroic motif "does a kind of violence to the spirit and doctrines of Christianity" (4) and that the poem "preserves the old clichés and formulas of heroic poetry but applies them to Christian subjects" (7). Somewhat more amenable to Christ's heroism in the poem, Woolf argued that the warrior-Christ trope is not specifically Anglo-Saxon but more broadly early Christian (144-5). For Woolf, the warrior Christ is an integral part of the orthodox Christianity of the poem: "The young hero's advance, and ascent of the cross, is thus at once painless and heroic, and is therefore a most admirable symbol of the divine nature of Christ. . . ." (147).

Subsequent critics have approached the heroism of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood* with varying degrees of enthusiasm, depending on the critic's view of an opposition that, for lack of better terms, I will simply call sacred

and secular,<sup>15</sup> although no critic specifically denies that the poem is overtly religious (sacred) or that Christ is presented as a heroic warrior (secular). Christ's masculinity, in my view, precludes an opposition that separates bodily sexuality and action from spiritual belief and contemplation.

Those critics who lean toward a secular interpretation include Carol Wolf, who states that the structure of the poem reinforces a "presentation of Christ as hero and the crucifixion as heroic encounter" (206). Michael Swanton likewise describes the crucifixion as "preeminently an act of dominant free will by a prince confident of victory" (*Dream* 71). O.D. Macrae-Gibson argues that "the Christ-figure appears as an active hero eagerly approaching for battle" (668).<sup>16</sup>

Critics who follow Woolf argue that the warrior-Christ motif is not specifically Anglo-Saxon but more generally

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<sup>15</sup>Such a critical genealogy that sorts critics into artificially constructed but necessary categories is indebted to Gillian Overing's similar work on the critical genealogy of Eve of *Genesis B* in "On Reading Eve: Genesis B and the Reader's Desire," *Speaking Two Languages*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991), 35-65. Overing discovered, however, as she tried to divide critics into those who blame Eve and those who don't, that her categories kept breaking down. Though my categories are prone to such breakdown as well, I will keep them for ease of reference. For a more thorough discussion of Overing's work on Eve, see chapter five.

<sup>16</sup>Others who have positively invoked a more secular approach towards the heroism of Christ in their work on the poem include Cherniss, Klinck, Kirby, Lee, Leiter, and del Mastro.

early Christian and that Christ should not be perceived as an Anglo-Saxon hero like Beowulf or Bryhtnoth. John Fleming claims that there is "no need to turn to pagan Germania" to explain the image of heaven as feast hall at the end of the poem (48). Themes of exile and community and militant faith are part of the culture of Benedictine monasticism that, Fleming argues, produced the poem. For Fleming, the poem is "presenting a figurative statement of the main principles of early Benedictine asceticism and a typically monastic view of salvation" (43-4) rather than accomodating Christian myth to pre-Christian poetic form. "The regal and heroic attitude of Christ is perhaps the least convincing of the proposed teutonic elements within the poem" (49). While no other critic I have discovered categorically denies elements of Anglo-Saxon heroism in the poem's diction, many others subsume these elements in a specifically sacred reading of the poem.<sup>17</sup>

All of these critics, whether their focus is more secular or sacred, assume rather than explore the masculinity inherent in the idea of heroism, whether that heroism is of an Anglo-Saxon warrior or an eremitic monk. Fleming, for example, links Christianity and heroic masculinity when he compares the image of heaven as feast-hall to Alcuin's "forceful, masculine vision of heaven"

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<sup>17</sup>Such critics include Robert Burlin, David Howlett, and, to some extent, Eamon O'Carragain.

(48), although he does not elaborate on his choice of adjectives. The *Dream* feast-hall scene does indeed seem like something out of *Beowulf* or the fantasies of the narrator of "The Wanderer." The dreamer tells us he wishes the cross would take him:

þær is blis mycel  
 dream on heofonum, þær is dryhtnes folc  
 geseted to symle, þær is singal blis,  
 ond me þonne asette þær ic syþþan mot  
 wunian on wuldre, well mid þam halgum  
 dreames brucan (ll.139b-144a)

(where there is great bliss, joy in the heavens, where the folk of God are seated at a feast, where there is everlasting bliss, and [the cross would] set me then where I afterwards may dwell in glory, may partake well of joys with the holy ones.)

This feast, longed for by an exile, is much like that of the feast longed for by the narrator of "The Wanderer," which Helen Bennett describes as the masculine ritual of "the warmth and community of the mead-hall shared with kinsmen and their treasure-giving lord" (44-45). In this sort of economy, according to Bennett, women are excluded because the feast is part of the masculine culture of war. "A society based on an economy of war is a society of men, a society in which masculinity itself becomes the only class" (43). The dreamer in *The Dream of the Rood* longs for a social situation from which women are, by definition, excluded.

Fleming's reading of this scene as an expression of joy in specifically masculine monastic community accords with Bennett's analysis of the masculinism of the scene from "The

Wanderer" although Fleming wishes to disassociate monasticism from heroic paradigms. The endurance and stamina needed by the warrior for war and by the monk for the ascetic life are defined as masculine and are practiced by males, not only in Fleming's unexplained choice of adjectives but also in the descriptions and interpretations of Christ's heroism by countless other critics.<sup>18</sup>

As such, Christ's masculinity as warrior or as ascetic has been largely unexplored. I would like to propose that the masculinity of Christ in the poem is defined primarily in the description of Christ's interaction with the talking cross. Christ is majestic, martial, and dominatingly heterosexual, and all of those attributes become apparent in the cross's description of him. An examination of this gender construction reveals both the fragility and the aggression inherent in the patriarchal Christianity that the poem ostensibly celebrates.

The reader of *The Dream of the Rood* sees Christ through doubled narrative lenses: the dreamer tells the reader what the cross told the dreamer. Only the cross reports a direct connection with Christ. While the dreamer longs for a union

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<sup>18</sup>Such masculinization of asceticism and holiness has recently been analyzed by gender theorists in relation to saints' lives, wherein female saints are seen to perfect themselves by acting and/or dressing like men; the more "masculine" the female saint's thoughts and actions, the "holier" she becomes. See Frantzen's reading of the *Lives* of Agatha and Eugenia, wherein "for a man to be holy is to act like a man; for a woman to be holy is also to act like a man" (Enough 466-7).

with Christ in heaven, only the cross actually achieves any sort of union with Christ. That union underscores Christ's masculine traits.

The first of those traits, his majesty, is not in critical dispute. Christ's majesty comes from the awe inspired by the mystery in the paradox of Christ's everlasting life through death. Christ is called *æلميhtig/strang ond stipmod* (almighty, strong and resolute, 11.39-40), *heofona hlaford* (the lord of heavens, 1.45), *wealdende* (ruler, 1.53), and *cyning* (king, 11.44, 56). Variations of these phrases recur throughout the cross's speech, which shows Christ's majesty, described with both more secular and more sacred terms, to be an integral part of his persona. Critics follow the poem's lead. For example, Bernard Huppé says that the poem meditates on "the antithesis between the literal reality of the death of Christ and the spiritual reality of his deathlessness" (97) and that "the suffering in the passion is a cause for triumph, and the awe of the dreamer reflects the attitude proper to one who glimpses in the Cross the promise of redemption" (101). Alvin Lee refers to "the ancient paradox of life by means of death" (191). Michael Swanton says that "With the agony transferred to the cross, Christ can sensibly be seen to rule from the gallows" (*Dream* 71).

Christ's majesty is complemented by his martial heroism. Indeed, the diction describing these two



characteristics overlaps. Christ is not only lord and almighty king, but also a *geong hæleþ* (young hero, 1.39), a *beorn* (warrior, 1.42), who leads a *weorode* (troop, 1.152). He has *elne mycle* (great strength or courage, 1.34), and he is *modig* (brave, 1.42) and *mihtig ond spedig* (mighty and successful, 1.151). His battle is with the forces of evil; his comrades are angels, saints, the cross, and the aspiring dreamer.

Christ's relationship with the Cross renders his majesty and martial heroism specifically masculine. The Cross is often interpreted as a reluctant follower of Christ, obedient to his lord but distraught as he watches his lord die and dares not try to help him. As a *comes*, the cross seems to violate the thane's oath to protect his lord and follow him to death, a duty best exemplified in *The Battle of Maldon*. Instead, the cross tells the dreamer four times that the cross did not dare to stop the crucifixion (ll.35, 42, 45, and 47).

Thus, the speaking cross is the dreamer's and reader's main source of information about Christ. Margaret Schlauch was the first to identify this speaking cross with the classical trope of *proposopoeia*, the speaking object, at work in poem. Michael Cherniss sees the speaking cross as a type of hero's weapon like the talking weapons of the riddles; like a sword, the cross is rewarded for its thane-like service to its lord with adornment of treasure. John

Tanke's post-structuralist reading stresses the speaking cross as the focus of the dreamer's and reader's identification: the cross offers "the dreamer the only effective subject position from which to identify with Christ: as one who undergoes the crucifixion not as Christ did *but as Christ commanded*" (24, italics Tanke's).

Schlauch and Cherniss do not discuss the gendering of this speaking object or, of course, its power to create a subject position (as Tanke does). The objects that Cherniss compares to the speaking cross--sword, spears--are distinctly phallic and masculine. A reading of the cross as a *comes* or *thane* of the Lord-Christ necessitates a masculine gendering of the cross, although such gendering is not discussed in the related literature. Only Tanke analyzes the cross in terms that seem traditionally feminine--that is, as passive, voiceless, and victimized (120-121).<sup>19</sup> But Tanke does not develop his intriguing comment on the ideology implicit in a perception of the cross as gendered:

The ideological analogy between the divine Christ and the heroic male warrior is supported by an equally ideological association between the human Christ and the passive female victim. Both arguments seek to naturalize the symbolic construction of sexual difference. (132)

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<sup>19</sup>Tanke sees the cross as voiceless in the "time" of the crucifixion, when the cross dared not speak. It is only in the "time" of the dream that the cross acquires a voice.

Although Tanke's focus is not gender, his analysis reveals the gendering implicit in a variety of readings of the supposedly masculine or even gender-neutral cross.

Traditional readings of thethane-lord relationship between the cross and Christ emphasize Christ's masculinity in the context of what we would now see as a homosocial bond, a bond between men that uses an exchange of objects, often women, to hold together the status quo of any society dominated by men (as I discussed in chapter one above). Whether Christ is interpreted as a majestic, heroic Anglo-Saxon lord served by his thane or as a majestic, heroic heavenly king served by an appropriately Christian servant, the bond is still one that defines Christ as the dominant male in a relationship between males. This homosocial bond is made most apparent in Kenneth Florey's analysis of the poem, wherein he continually refers to the cross as "he" rather than "it," emphasizing the cross as a masculine-gendered "character" in the drama of the poem.

But the masculinity in this homosocial bond is undermined in a close reading of the union at the crucifixion between Christ and the cross, however. If that meeting is construed as one between a lord and a retainer, the gender of the cross is masculine. But the vocabulary and imagery suggest a heterosexual rather than a homosocial relationship between the two characters of a masculine Christ and feminine cross. Although several critics have

referred to the feminine gendering of the cross, none but Tanke has considered how the gendering of the cross as feminine during the crucifixion scene serves to highlight a heterosexual masculinity of Christ.

Faith Patten was the first critic to note the feminization of the cross in *The Dream of the Rood*. Her argument examines the "sexual imagery" of lines 39-42, in which Christ strips before mounting and embracing the cross (397), and emphasizes three words: *ongyrede*, *bifode*, and *ymbclypte*. But Patten does not elaborate on why or how these words convey "sexual imagery." Patten identifies the feminized cross with the feminized figure of the church: "the cross is imaged as the bride of Christ, or the Church, which, allegorically, is born from the union of Christ and the cross" (397). She argues further that the parallels between Mary and the Cross (ll.90-94) and between Christ and Adam (ll.98-102) are similar in meaning and opposite in gender: just as Mary's bearing of Christ prefigured the cross's bearing of Christ, so Adam's death and downfall prefigured Christ's death and resurrection (398). As Adam and Christ are masculine, Mary and the cross are feminine; within Patten's analysis of the structure of the poem, the cross "seems to be female" (396).

O'Carragain similarly points out that the annunciation and the crucifixion were both thought to have occurred on March 25th (Collector 95), making a stronger case for the

parallel between Mary and the cross both bearing Christ, though O'Carragain does not discuss the gender implicit in that parallel. Like Patten, John Canuteson also sees the cross as a bride of Christ: "A kind of marriage consummation takes place on the cross" (296). Canuteson refers to the cross as "she" throughout his article, and notes that the diction describing Christ as he approaches the cross for the consummation encompasses "all the things a woman would see and appreciate" (296).

The identification of the speaking cross in the lines that refer to the Virgin Mary reinforces the feminine position of the cross in the crucifixion scene. I quote the lines in full:

Hwæt, me þa geweorðode wuldres ealdor  
 ofer holtwudu, heofonrices weard.  
 Swylce swa he his modor eac, Marian sylfe,  
 ælmihtig god for ealle menn  
 geweorðode ofer eall wifa cynn. (11.90-94)

(Lo, then the prince of the world honored me over forest-wood, the guardian of heaven's kingdom, just as he, almighty God, also honored over all the kind of women his mother, Mary herself, for all men .)

The cross makes the comparison between itself and the Virgin, providing not only a simile of honor but one of gender role as well. Although the cross undergoes the crucifixion with Christ, it is with the mother of Christ rather than with Christ himself that it identifies itself. Patten and O'Carragain examine the parallel between the cross and Mary only in so far as it relates to Christ (both bore him); they do not remark that the parallel places the

cross in a feminine position, one of honor but also of suffering, passivity, and endurance in opposition to Christ's heroic masculinity. The diction of the cross as it describes its union with Christ during the crucifixion shows the feminization of the cross that is finally made explicit when it compares itself to the Virgin rather to Christ.

That diction forms the crux of my argument about the heterosexual nature of the masculinity of Christ and the feminized cross, for I agree with Canuteson and Patten that the cross is specifically feminized in the key lines where the physical contact is initiated between the cross and Christ (ll.39-43). Woolf notes that the approach of Christ to Calvary, where the cross is waiting for him, is "the poet's own variation" (146) of the traditional biblical story, wherein Christ carries the cross up the hill. This "variation" makes Christ appear heroic rather than haggard; it also invokes an archetypal scene of a lover coming to his beloved.

The vocabulary provides the specifically textual evidence that this crucifixion is also a form of heterosexual consummation. Swanton argues that Patten's conclusions about the sexuality implicit in this scene are "unwarranted" (*Dream* 113). However, an analysis of key verbs in the passage shows that although most of the diction was found in traditional, orthodox, religious uses, it also had sexual connotations. The sexual associations of these

words--*ongyrede*, *gestigan* (which occurs in two forms in the passage), *ymbclypte*, and *bifode* (which also occurs in two forms)--are much less frequent in the extant literature than the orthodox religious usage. However, the mere evidence of the existence of such sexual connotation shows that these words confirm both the orthodox faith of the poem and the heterosexual relationship of the feminized cross with Christ, its overtly masculine bridegroom. I quote the passage in full:

Geseah ic þa frean mancynnes  
 efstan elne mycle þæt he me wolde on *gestigan*.  
 þær ic þa ne dorste ofer dryhtnes word  
 bugan oððe berstan, þa ic *bifian* geseah  
 eorðan sceatas. Ealle ic mihte  
 feondas gefyllan, hwæðre ic fæste stod.  
*Ongyrede* hine þa geong hæleð, þæt wæs god ælmihtig,  
 strang ond stiðmod. *Gestah* he on gealgan heanne,  
 modig on manigra gesyhðe, þa he wolde mancyn lysan.  
*Bifode* ic þa me se beorn *ymbclypte*. (11.33a-42a)

(I saw then the lord of mankind hasten with great strength so that he would climb on me. There then I did not dare to bend or break against the lord's word, when I saw the corners of the earth shake. I could strike down all the fiends; however, I stood fast. The young hero then stripped him(self), that was god almighty, strong and resolute. He climbed onto the high gallows, brave in many visions, then he would redeem mankind. I trembled when the warrior embraced me.)

The first of the words I have chosen, *gestigan*, appears in two forms in the passage: *gestigan* 1.34 and *gestah* 1.40. It means "to move, go, reach: go up, spring up, ascend, rise, mount, scale . . . go down, descend" (Hall, 321). It is typical of the words I have chosen in that its most frequent usage is traditionally religious while it also has sexual connotations. According to The Microfiche

Concordance to Old English, the most common usage (29 times in various forms) refers to an ascent to heaven by Christ or another holy figure (MCOE G031 and G032). Six times the word refers to boarding a ship; seven times to Christ's ascension of the cross (including the two "Dream" references); and nine times to ascending a hill or reaching a geographic place. However, five times the verb refers to ascending a bed, and three of those are explicitly sexual. All come from the story of Abraham in *Genesis*.

The first example of these occurs when Sara tells Abraham to have sex with Hagar since Sara has been unable to produce an heir:

Her is fæmne,        freolecu mæg,  
 ides egyptisc,     an on gewealde.  
 Hat þe þa recene     reste gestigan  
 and afanda hwæper    frea wille  
 ænigne þe            yrfewearda  
 on woruld lætan     þurh þæt wif cuman (11.2228-  
 2233)<sup>20</sup>

(Here is a woman, a noble maiden, an Egyptian lady, one in your power. Order her then instantly to ascend to the bed. Find out whether the lord wishes to let for you any heir into the world to come through that woman.)

Abraham is ascending to the bed for sexual intercourse and procreation. Fifteen lines later, the verb is used again to refer to the same situation: *Agar ðe idese laste / beddreste gestah* (Hagar the noblewoman by duty to the bed ascended, 2249-50a). Finally, Sara is brought from the bed of the heathen Abimelech and given back to Abraham: *þæt me Sarra*

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<sup>20</sup>Text of *Genesis* from Doane, A.N., ed, *Genesis A* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1978). Line citations in my text.



*bryde laste beddreste gestah* (So that for me Sara by bridal duty to the bed ascended, 2715b-2716b). Although Abimelech had taken her from Abraham in innocence, thinking she was Abraham's sister, God had made Abimelech's other women barren in retaliation for Abimelech's taking the wife of a prophet. Since Abimelech did not have intercourse with Sara, the other women become fertile again after she is returned to Abraham (Genesis 20). These examples show that *gestigan* was used in situations where sex, sexuality, and sexual rights were at issue. These beds also bring to mind the beds in the beginning of *The Dream of the Rood*, where men sleep (*syðþan reordberend reste wunedon* 1.4) and the dreamer dreams. According to Fleming, the ascetic monks with whom he associates *The Dream of the Rood* prayed prostrate on the floor, arms outstretched in the shape of the cross (65-66), so that the "bed" of the monk may be construed as an imagined cross, just as Christ's "bed" in *The Dream of the Rood* could be viewed as a bed within the other contexts of *gestigan*. "Ascent to the bed"--or ascent to the cross, in the case of *Dream*--involved issues of fertility, of legitimacy, and of sexual control over the body.

These three examples may seem insignificant when compared with the sheer numbers of uses of the verb that are much more conventionally religious (29 ascensions to heaven). The uses that I am terming "sexual" rather than

"religious" actually come from a most orthodox religious text, an Old English version of the Book of Genesis. These sexual references in this orthodox text show the acceptability of the sexual meaning of *gestigan* in *The Dream of the Rood*. The sense of a conventional ascent to heaven or a non-sexualized ascent of the cross is still a much more widely acceptable interpretation of the word in "The Dream of the Rood," I realize. However, I am not arguing that a more specifically sexual meaning should replace our understanding of the religious significance of the word. I only wish to point out that the word had sexual as well as religious connotations; that examples of religious meanings are predominant does not mean that these meanings excluded sexual connotations.

The Old English *Genesis* provides a sexual connotation for another of the key verbs from the "Dream" passage, *bifian* (to tremble). Like *gestigan*, this word occurs in two forms in the passage (11.36 and 42), first in a traditional religious sense and then in a more sexual sense. The cross tells the dreamer that *ic bifian geseah / eorþan sceatas* (I saw the corners of the earth tremble) and then says *Bifode ic þa me se beorn ymbclypte* (I trembled when the warrior embraced me). The first usage is highly conventional; there are 25 uses of forms of *bifian* that refer to the earth trembling at the crucifixion, ascension, or on Judgment day (MCOE B012 15-22). A typical use of this word is from

Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, *eal bifode on cristes æriste* (All trembled at the resurrection of Christ I.15 228.12); the first usage in *Dream* falls into this category.

There are 21 more general references to humans or humanity trembling in the face of God or moral truth, 17 in the psalms and 11 from homilies; these statistics include multiple manuscript copies of one text. The only overtly sexual usage of *bifian* in the extant corpus is also in Genesis. As Lot is overcome by the northern kings (Abraham will avenge his defeat and recover his women and treasure), the poet tells us that

	sceolde forht monig
blachleor ides	bifiende gan
on fremdes fæðm.	Feollon wergend
bryda and beaga,	bennum seoce. (11.1969-1972)

(many terrified pale-cheeked ladies must go trembling into an enemy's embrace. The defenders of brides and rings fell sick with wounds.)

Gender issues abound in these lines; the women are equated with treasure, with property, and the men are defined merely as defenders of that property. Within the terms of my argument, these lines illustrate a sexual connotation for *bifian*, for the women of Sodom tremble with fear as they enter into forced sexual relationships with their conquerers. The parallel with the situation of the cross in *Dream* shows a common context for both usages and suggests an unwillingness on the part of the cross as well of the Sodomite women. The feminized cross of *Dream* finds itself

in a situation strikingly similar to that of the Sodomite women as they face rape.

The next important verb, *ymbclypte*, might seem to a modern sensibility to need no explanation of a sexual usage; after all, the foremost connotations of "to embrace" in modern English are romantic and sexual. Again the extant corpus provides many more examples of religious rather than sexual usage, however; the most common context for *ymbclyppan* is *rapas synfulra ymbclyppynde wæron me* (ropes of sins were embracing me), repeated nine times in variants throughout psalm texts; other common uses include the embrace of Zion, peace, and death (MCOE Y002 282-284).

Metaphorical usages of "embrace" occur 24 times, along with seven occurrences in Latin-Old English glossaries (produced during the Anglo-Saxon period). Only two usages in narrative text are concrete rather than metaphorical, showing an embrace between two people or people and concrete objects: Christ embracing the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood* and Arcestrate embracing Apollonius in *Apollonius of Tyre*. In that late tenth century prose work, at the moment of recognition between the separated wife and husband, *Arcestrate, soðlice his wif, up aras and hine ymbclypte* (Arcestrate, truly his wife, rose up and embraced him, 49.1). At this emotional and sexually charged moment the Old English narrator has chosen a word rarely used for

persons, the same word that describes Christ's embrace of the cross in "The Dream of the Rood."

The final word at issue is *ongyrede*, which occurs only once in the poetic corpus, in *The Dream of the Rood*. It is used in prose, in various forms, only seven times (MCOE 0007 14-15). Christ's naked body is the focus of three of the other seven uses of the verb *ongyrdan* in the Old English corpus which also refer to the disrobing of Christ, but these follow the conventional story line of the Roman soldiers stripping Christ (and then playing dice for his clothes)(MCOE 0007 14). The two usages in Bede refer to Oswin's removal of his sword in his humility before the bishop (III.12.196.26) and to the monk Owen who strips himself of the things of this world (IV.3.264.3). The two remaining usages of the word refer, like *ongyrede* in "The Dream of the Rood," to naked holy bodies, and the sexual tensions surrounding those bodies. I will examine this evidence in detail.

The first of these occurs in the Life of Mary of Egypt, when the abbot Zosimus gives the saint his cloak to cover her nakedness. In this instance, the naked body becomes covered, and the "stripping" is actually the removal of Zosimus' outer cloak so that Mary can cover herself:

He þa fæstlice swa dyde swa heo bebead hine þam  
 scycelse ongyrede þe he mid bewæfed wæs on bæclincg  
 gewend hire to wearp

(Then he confidently did as she had prayed him, ungirded the mantle with which he was clothed, and, turning his back, threw it to her.)<sup>21</sup>

The female is naked here, and while Zosimus has already seen Mary's naked body (it is earlier described as *sweartes . . . for þære sunnan hæto*, or darkened by the sun's heat), it must be covered up before they can have a proper face-to-face conversation. The writer of the *Life* (not Ælfric) is emphatic that this covering must happen: *gegyrede hire be þam dæle þe heo mæst mihte and mæst need wæs to beheligenne* (she girded herself about the part that she most required to do, and [which there] was most need to conceal). The sexual temptation of the naked body, even an old body cooked by the sun, must be hidden. The sexual tension of the situation demands that Zosimus *ongyrede* and Mary of Egypt subsequently *gegyrede*.

A more obviously sexual use of the word comes in the Old English martyrology story of St. Eufemia, whose brief life, recorded on September 16, is that of a typical virgin martyr. She is pressed to renounce Christianity by an evil government official and tortured, then killed when she refuses. The torture is unsuccessful due to heavenly intervention. The second of Eufemia's torturers (who have been ordered to throw her into an oven) strips her: *þa ongyrede oðer þegn þa fæmnan* (then the other thane stripped

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<sup>21</sup>Text and translation from Walter Skeat, ed, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*, vol.2, EETS 94 (London: Oxford UP, 1890, repr. 1966), 15.

the maiden).<sup>22</sup> He cannot actually put her in the oven, since he has a vision of angel-like men who scatter the fire, but he does manage to take her clothes off. As in the use of the word in the narrative of Mary of Egypt, there is an implicit sexual tension between the two figures, the naked woman and the clothed man. The virgin martyr is a sexualized figure, naked and seemingly defenseless before men who have a thwarted and explicit sexual interest in her.<sup>23</sup>

Christ's naked body is different from these two bodies: his is male, Mary's and Eufemia's are female, and he strips voluntarily. These examples show that *ongyrede* was used in linguistic situations that were full of sexual tensions of gender, power, and naked bodies. As Christ strips himself in his ascent to the cross, he too is entering a linguistic situation charged with sexuality: the heterosexuality of a masculine lover coming to his feminized beloved.

Editors and critics shun the sexual implications of Christ's nudity. While Dickins and Ross translate *ongyrwan* as the ungainly "take one's clothes off" (47), most other dictionaries and glossaries prefer "strip." Alvin Lee notes

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<sup>22</sup>Text and translation from George Herzfeld, ed., *An Old English Martyrology*, EETS 116 (London: Oxford UP, 1900, repr.1973), 173.

<sup>23</sup>For a discussion of the sexuality of virgin martyrs' *Lives*, see Gayle Margherita, "Desiring Narrative: Ideology and the Semiotics of the Gaze in the Middle English *Juliana*," *Exemplaria* 2 (1990): 355-374.

the irony that Christ takes off his clothes before his "battle," while the more conventional warrior puts on his armor (178). Louis Leiter calls the disrobing a "dramatic transformation from a lower to a higher spiritual level" (104) in that Christ is preparing himself for the climax of his life on earth. Swanton states that Christ, "victorious and single-minded . . . strips himself for battle and a kingly victory" (*Dream* 40). Swanton elaborates on Woolf, who argues that "Christ's stripping of Himself, then, is voluntary and heroic, and so also therefore is His nudity" (147).

Nudity serves to sexualize this otherwise religious scene. The sexual connotations of these words, *gestigan*, *bifian*, *ymbclypte*, and *ongyrede* raise the issue of Christ's masculinism, which I see as a naturalized male dominance of an artificially opposed feminine in the cross. Christ mounts the feminized cross when he is naked, enacting literally the motif of the bride of Christ that is a commonplace in medieval Christology.

All of the verbs I have discussed in this section point to diction chosen for its competing connotations of orthodox belief and of sexuality. The cross trembles as Christ strips, mounts, and embraces. All of these words point to a construction of a gendered relationship between Christ and the cross that emphasizes explicit, rather than assumed and unremarked, heterosexuality as a key component of Christ's



masculinity along with his majesty and his heroism. The cross is the feminized figure, trembling and waiting, not daring to move, as the masculine Christ performs his heroic--and seemingly sexual--act.

That masculine performance necessitates an oppositional feminine Other against which Christ's masculinity is defined. That feminine is passive and subordinate, identifying with the Virgin rather than with Christ the hero. As Tanke describes, the cross is the victim in the *Dream* crucifixion narrative (121). Tanke exposes the violence needed for this construction of the cross: the cross is "either the subject of a passive voice sentence or the object of a verb" (120). Tanke catalogues those verbs in a list which is also a catalogue of violence enacted upon the cross:

[The cross is] hewn down, steered away, seized, worked, commanded, borne, set up, fastened, mounted, embraced, driven through with nails, mocked, spattered with blood, disturbed, abandoned, wounded, felled, buried, discovered, and adorned. (120)

Tanke emphasizes the difference between the "traumatized and ignorant victim" that the cross claims to have been during the previous action of the crucifixion and the "authoritative and knowing subject" of the poem's speaker of that narrative in the poem, which becomes a sermon (135-36). While the word "rape" appears only in a footnote in Tanke's analysis (121,n.9), he fully demonstrates, in my view, the violence implicit in the binary gender paradigm that the

poem both sets up and depends upon. As the feminine Other to Christ as masculine subject, the cross is violated and is acquiescent in that violation. A reading of the cross as expressly feminized (rather than quasi-neuter) and of Christ as expressly masculine (rather than quasi-universal and somehow genderless) reveals the violence necessitated by the existence of that binary paradigm. That binarism is not natural but rather is naturalized, its character constructed and violent.

Acknowledgement of such a violent binarism provides a way of reading the rest of the poem in which the dreamer becomes a voyeur who engages in a homosocial relationship with Christ that is mediated by the feminized cross. The dreamer has had the *swefna cyst*, the best of dreams, in that he scopophilically watches the cross, both bejeweled and blood-stained, and derives pleasure (spiritual and otherwise) from looking and listening to its erotically charged narrative. The dreamer becomes a privileged masculine figure in this triangle of Christ-cross-dreamer, and the vision of the homosocial feast in heaven at the end of the poem (discussed above), where there is masculine community and exchange, provides the incentive for the dreamer to stay on earth for a time and relate the message of the Cross. To read this relationship in the terms of Sedgwick's homosocial paradigm reveals the benefit that accrues to the masculine figures in the triangle: Christ's

position as dominant masculine figure is affirmed and the dreamer accrues status in the masculine afterlife as a follower of Christ while receiving the pleasure of an onlooker during the narrative of Christ's sexualized action.

This masculine heaven that Christ already occupies and toward which the dreamer longs is paradigmatic of the exclusionary, binary, and violent system upon which this construction of patriarchal Christianity depends. For Christ to be dominant, there must be a figure for him to dominate. For heaven to be attractively exclusive, figures (of women, in this case) must be excluded. Christ's glory in the crucifixion narrative and throughout the poem is dependent on the violence inflicted, in this poem, on the cross rather than on the body of Christ and the binary construction set up by that violence. The sexuality of this figure of Christ aggressively takes control of the narrational situation, and the feminized Other, the cross, *must* submit for that narrative to be effective for the dreamer.

The Anglo-Saxon reading audience of this violent, homosocial, and powerful poem has been presumed to be male. A male scribe, reader, or listener of *The Dream of the Rood* would most likely identify with the position of the dreamer, relating to Christ through the feminized cross and hoping for the reward of the masculine heaven. Only through a specific identification with the cross and its position,

however, can the reader enter into a direct connection with Christ. Such a connection, the goal of much ascetic practice, would have necessitated an identification of the reader with the cross rather than with the dreamer. Such identification places the reader in the feminine position with the cross as that reader strives to forge a link to Christ. I would like to suggest that the masculinity of Christ constructed in *The Dream of the Rood* suggests a female scribe and reader. Relying heavily on Stephanie Hollis' *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, I would also like to suggest that such a female scribe would have been participating in a religious culture that defined feminine and masculine Christian faith in an oppositional way, thus encouraging the female scribe to enact a femininity that complies with Christ's active masculinity: heterosexual, passive, and subordinate. The masculinity of the *Dream* Christ requires such a complicit femininity to exist.

While we have no way of knowing how widely known *The Dream of the Rood* was, or how many copies of it may have existed at various times, we do know that it is now part of The Vercelli Book, a late-tenth century book that was probably made for personal meditation and devotion. Much work has been done on the book as a whole (description of the manuscript, analysis of its language forms and attention

to both the poetry and the prose),<sup>24</sup> but all of the book's modern readers have assumed its scribe was a man. Donald Scragg and Celia Sisam agree that the Book was made in south-east England in the late tenth century. Sisam states, "It is likely, then, that all the texts in the Vercelli Book came to the scribe from south-eastern sources, and that therefore he himself worked in or near the south-eastern region" (35). Scragg argues, "The conclusion that the Vercelli Book is a Kentish compilation seems inescapable" (Compilation 207).

Also at issue is the level of the scribe's engagement with the text. Sisam calls attention to the "skillfully executed" erasures throughout the manuscript (29), while Paul Szarmach argues that the scribe "is not an active scribe . . . is by and large a mechanical copyist who has followed his exemplar" (184) and "is a mechanical scribe, uninterested in altering the text he receives, who contributes only errors of the eye to the text he copies" (185). Few scholars focus on the book as a whole or examine how the scribe's choice of and organization of texts might also point to his or her level of engagement with the text. The only scholar I have discovered who does examine the Vercelli Book as a book, rather than as a series of separate entries, is Eamon O'Carragain, who notes that modern

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<sup>24</sup>Eleven of the 23 homilies exist in other manuscripts (sometimes in variant form); all six of the poems are unique to the *Vercelli Book*.

scholars tend to isolate individual texts from their manuscript contexts because of "the unfortunate custom of considering Old English poetic manuscripts, not in their own right as compilations, but as vehicles merely of the texts they contain" (79). Other texts in the manuscript have not been seen to inform the meaning of the poem. O'Carragain concentrates on the links between *Soul and Body*, *Homiletic Fragment I* and *The Dream of the Rood*, three poems that appear in that order in The Vercelli Book (folios 101v-106r). He also insists, I think rightly, on the whole book as a personal compilation that focused meditation on asceticism and the Last Judgment, two concepts that (O'Carragain argues) were interrelated for the scribe.

O'Carragain states that The Vercelli Book is "one man's book," which was "made for personal use, and gathered together over a pretty extended period of time from whatever vernacular material came to hand which fitted in with the collector's interests" (Collector 65). He cites the seemingly haphazard order of the collected texts to show the personal nature of the collection, arguing that the lack of organization meant that only the book's scribe would be able to find a text with ease (Collector 66). By listing the contents of each homily, O'Carragian shows that there is a balance between references to the Last Judgment and to more general ascetic practice. The overarching focus of the book's texts is one of properly practiced asceticism in this

world, which leads to a favorable judgment on the Last Day (Collector 69-70). O'Carragain sees the whole book as a compilation intended as a "stimulus to prayer and repentance" for its scribe (Collector 99).

O'Carragain's analysis rests on the usual assumption that the scribe is a man, specifically a monk (Collector 67). Every discussion of the Vercelli scribe I have located assumes the scribe is a man. Scragg, Szarmach, and Lewis Nicholson (editor of translations of the Vercelli Homilies) all use the masculine pronoun in their discussions of the scribe's propensities, strengths, weaknesses, and beliefs. Since the Vercelli Book is considered to be a book of personal devotion, used by the person who made it, the book's scribe and its first reader are the same person. As such, the gender of the scribe can inform our perceptions of the gender of the book's immediate intended reading audience as well. A male reader, as I suggested above, would more likely identify with the masculine, voyeuristic dreamer. The heterosexuality of the relationship between Christ and the Cross in *The Dream of the Rood*, however, suggests a female scribe and initial reader; the reader of the poem would identify much more strongly with the feminized position of the cross if that reader were female.

Extreme though my suggestion seems to be--we do not ordinarily think of female scribes, or of the gender of scribes at all--I note that a female scribe has actually

been obliquely suggested in a footnote by Sisam. Sisam follows the conventional masculine pronoun and assumption in the rest of her text. In her description of the manuscript, she states:

The manuscript was copied at the end of the tenth century by a single scribe; he seems to have been a lone worker, who built up a private collection of devotional reading in Anglo-Saxon . . . He had no understanding of Latin. His script is elegant, individual, old-fashioned . . . this is not the product of a great monastery, with a flourishing scriptorium, trained scribes, and a large library: rather we should look to some small house, perhaps a nunnery [here Sisam includes a footnote], where an English book was needed for private reading. (44)

Sisam adheres to the convention that assumes scribes of major books (and since we have only four manuscripts that contain substantial amounts of Anglo-Saxon poetry, they are all presumed to be major) were men. That assumption contains the implicit equation of masculinity with creation and transmission of canonical texts. Yet in a footnote after the word "nunnery" in the section quoted above, Sisam suggests something quite different, something that neither she nor anyone else brings up again:

No piece in the Vercelli Book appears to have been composed for those in religious orders, rather than for the laity. Homily VII must have been intended . . . for a mixed lay audience . . . English sermons for the laity and religious poetry may have been the only available reading matter for nuns at this period. A place such as Barking Abbey, restored by King Edgar after its destruction by the Vikings in 869, would have needed new books in the late tenth century. (44,n.2)

Sisam almost makes the radical statement that the scribe and initial reader of the Vercelli Book could have been a woman,



but she refrains from stating that directly. In addition to her suggestion of Barking Abbey (famous as the home of the recipients of Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*), the nunneries of Thanet, Sheppey, and Newington all could have been the home of the scribe of the Vercelli Book.

All three of these nunneries were in Kent (Scragg places the scribe in Kent) while Barking was in Essex (Sisam places the scribe more generally in the southeast). Minster in Thanet existed as a nunnery from the seventh century to 1011, and endured two Viking destructions (Knowles 71). The last abbess, Leofruna, was captured by the Danes in Canterbury in 1011, and the house and its lands were subsequently absorbed by Canterbury St. Augustine's (Rollason 53, 66-67). Sheppey, also known as Minster St. Sexburga, was founded in 670 and deserted before the Norman conquest, but no sure date is known (Knowles 215). Newington, foundation date unknown, housed a small number of nuns who eventually took over the abandoned Minster St. Sexburga during the reign of William the Conqueror (Knowles 215).<sup>25</sup> Each of these houses could have been inhabited by

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<sup>25</sup>I would like to mention here the difficulty I had in finding the names of nunneries in Kent in the Anglo-Saxon period. Many of the double monasteries are listed in Knowles and Hadcock's *Medieval Religious Houses* as Benedictine Monasteries (i.e. men-only houses), with their dual nature noted only in footnotes (Whitby, for example). In addition, a house that was male at the dissolution is listed as a house for men even though women may have lived there at one time. As such, Minster in Thanet is listed as a monastery, though it was "founded" as a house exclusively for men only in 1027 after a previous life as a nunnery, which is mentioned only in a note.

a woman who was interested in the relationship between asceticism and the Last Judgment, who did not know Latin, and who did not have access to a great library with varied exemplars--in short, by the scribe of the Vercelli Book.

Most of the information available about women scribes comes from the eighth rather than the tenth century. The wealthy double monasteries of eighth-century England produced books in such quantities that copies of important biblical and patristic texts were sent to the continent to assist the Anglo-Saxon missionaries in Frisia and Germany. Specific information from the "Boniface Correspondence," letters exchanged between Boniface and those in holy orders back in England, makes clear that some of these books were copied by female scribes (Fell 112-115). Women copied, owned, and controlled access to books in the eighth century. Bernhard Bischoff writes:

Even the inmates of English nunneries were versed in writing and were active too as scribes. The oldest English ex-libris 'Cuthsuithae boec thaere abbatissan' is probably her autograph from the period around 700. (199-200)

In the tenth century, however, general decline in learning and literacy, the Viking raids, and a specific decline in the status of women (discussed below) limit the availability of evidence about female scribes. In her discussion of religious women of the tenth century Benedictine Revival, Fell says:

The double houses have vanished, and the new communities are either monasteries or nunneries. . .

It is clear that the nunneries were supported by grants from queens and other powerful women but it is by no means clear that they ever became the centres of culture and learning that their forerunners had been. (127)

The tenth century nunneries, in one of which the scribe of the Vercelli Book may have lived, were no match for their eighth century forebears in book production and general literacy. This portrait of learning at tenth century nunneries coheres with the portrait of a female scribe of the Vercelli Book who was not skilled at copying and who knew little or no Latin. Although I postulate that the gender construction and identification patterns of *The Dream of the Rood* suggest a female scribe, there is no direct evidence for such a scribe's existence. However, there is no direct evidence that negates the possibility of such a scribe's existence either.

It could be argued that the gender of the scribe of The Vercelli Book is irrelevant, that the texts were not composed by the scribe and as such do not add to our meager knowledge of women's writing during the Anglo-Saxon period. It could also be argued that the gender is irrelevant since asceticism and the Last Judgment could be viewed as gender-neutral concepts, that the Vercelli texts preserve a vision of Christian belief in which gender does not matter. If this is so, I ask, why is the scribe always "he," and why did Sisam not pursue her speculation? Although I am looking only at *The Dream of the Rood*, and neglecting O'Carragain's

caveat about the manuscript context of the poem, I wish to argue that *Dream* serves in microcosm to define a femininity for the scribe and the reader that is constructed in opposition to Christ's majestic, heroic, heterosexual masculinity. As Brittan has pointed out, such a dominant masculinity, dependent wholly on opposition, *requires* the presence of a dominated feminine Other. The poem encourages its scribe and reader to be passive and subordinate, a stance quite in accord with Hollis' depiction of the position of women in the Anglo-Saxon church at the end of the tenth century, the time when The Vercelli Book was compiled.

Hollis argues that during the Anglo-Saxon period the position of women in the church gradually deteriorated from a form of equality where men and women were both seen as soldiers of Christ to a form of hierarchy wherein a male ecclesiastical privilege defined woman as Other: the female soldier of Christ became the subordinate Bride of the Lamb (40-41). While Anglo-Saxon germanic culture "was more inclined to foreground the likeness of women to men," the influx of Roman Christianity brought "the alterization of women" and attendant reduction of women's status (10). Hollis parallels the gradual decline of the double monastery with the decline in women's status; as women were increasingly defined as inferior beings who needed strict direction, abbesses engaging in lay ministry and

administering houses of men and women became more problematic in the view of the established church (13-14 and elsewhere). Hollis is a resistant reader of Theodore, Aldhelm, Bede, and others as she examines "the construction of women as essentially 'other' and inferior beings" (11).

I see complicity with such a construction of binary alterity at work here in the act of inclusion by a possibly female scribe of *The Dream of the Rood* in her book of personal meditations. The vocabulary of the poem constructs an "appealing" masculinity of Christ in that he is heroic, powerful, and heterosexually desiring. Canuteson's remark about the cross' narrative highlighting "all the things a woman would see and appreciate" (296) assumes a femininity that would find these qualities attractive, a femininity much like that which Hollis describes. Such a femininity would acquiesce to a construction of itself as a feminine alterity to the active, heroic, and majestic masculine. That masculinity entails a femininity that is passive, quotidian, and unassuming. Hence I see the cross as a feminized Other to an aggressive, heterosexualized Christ, perhaps as the bride of the lamb (as opposed to the more androgynous soldier of Christ) who copied the poem into her devotional book saw herself. An intersection of Hollis' vision of the church and my reading of Christ's masculinity points to a scribe who would more likely be a woman than a man, and I will refer to that scribe from now on as "she."

she does not provide the modern feminist with some sort of subversive heroine; rather, she enacts a femininity that acquiesces to and is complicit with the binary paradigm that constructs her to be dominated and inferior.

In this analysis I have attempted to argue for rather to assume the masculinity of Christ, and to interrogate what it means for Christ to be presented as aggressively heterosexual, rather than in some quasi-neutral, universalized masculinity. The resulting evaluation of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood* as specifically dominating, relying on a dominated feminine Other for definition, reveals the oppositional nature of that definition. An examination of this rubric exposes the violence necessitated by this construction, the complicity of the feminine figures (the cross, the scribe) within the construction, and the voyeuristic nature of the dreamer and other masculine figures participating in a homosocial relationship with Christ. The Christianity celebrated in this poem is actually a Christianity that serves patriarchy, a spiritual justification for the violence and oppression inherent in masculine/feminine opposition needed for naturalized domination of society by males.

However, that opposition is precarious because of its very reliance upon the feminine Other, the complicity of which cannot always be relied upon or even enforced. The mixed pair of Christ and Mary underscores the need for this

feminine complicity in Christ's masculinism (to return to Brittan's term). Mary figures in *The Dream of the Rood* as a point of feminine identification for the cross. Her use in the construction of such femininity reveals the fragility of that oppositional masculinity and the patriarchy it supports. The scribe of the Vercelli Book and the Cross of *The Dream of the Rood* acquiesce to the role of feminine Other to Christ's martial, heterosexual masculinity. In contrast, the figure of the Virgin Mary of the Exeter Book *Advent* disrupts that opposition and provides a glimpse of the maternal gender at work in a text that initially seems to rely on masculine/feminine opposition to define subjectivity. Her deviance from the acquiescent femininity enacted by *The Dream of the Rood* cross mixes the pair and shows how her own gender performance and that of her son inform one another.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE MATERNAL GENDER OF THE ADVENT VIRGIN MARY

Christ's presentation in *The Dream of the Rood* reinscribes his dominant masculinity with heroic heterosexuality, opposed to the subordinate, passive femininity of the cross and those I have chosen to see as other feminized readers, including the Vercelli scribe. In complementary fashion, Anglo-Saxon representations of his mother, the Virgin Mary, tend to present a femininity that seems similarly passive and objectified. In the *Advent* lyrics of the Exeter Book, however, that ideal femininity does occasionally reveal its precarious underpinnings in metaphor and in its need to dephallicize the Mother. As such, Mary of *Advent* and Christ of *The Dream of the Rood* enact a "mixed pair" that both demonstrates and unsettles an oppositional masculine/feminine paradigm. The reference to Mary in *Dream* enables a reading of the cross's identification with a feminine figure; such passive objectification has been read into the figure of Mary in *Advent* as well.

However, in this poetic text and in the Ruthwell Cross sculptures (discussed in chapter four), Mary's performance is maternal rather than traditionally feminine, and she acts



as a powerful subject rather than an object against which the masculine can define itself. She thus upsets the oppositional paradigm upon which such masculinity as the *Dream Christ's* depends.

The poem I refer to as *Advent* has a complicated editorial history because of its placement as the first poem in the Exeter Book. The editorial and critical strands of the poem are necessarily entwined, for editors have determined the text to a staggering degree. The poem has been variously titled, dated, divided, and assigned authorship. Its editors necessarily become critics as they present and introduce the poem that they wish to be read. There is manuscript evidence to argue that the poem which Krapp and Dobbie refer to as *Christ* can be construed as one long poem on Christ's advent, resurrection, and second coming. Manuscript evidence can also be interpreted to show three separate poems or three related yet individual poems (Krapp and Dobbie adopt this latter, moderate stance). The beginning of *Advent* is lost (the initial folio or folios of the Exeter book are lost); there are five fitt divisions within its text. There are space breaks and capitalization conventions at lines 439 and 866 of what could be called *Christ*; Krapp and Dobbie call these "all the usual marks of a major division of the manuscript" (xxv). Interpretations of these breaks have led to presentations of one long, three related, or three separate poems. Krapp and Dobbie refer to

*Christ* as one poem with "three distinct structural units" (xxvi) that demonstrate "not a connective narrative or exposition, but rather a general similarity of theme and treatment" (xxvii).<sup>26</sup>

In 1900, its first modern editor,<sup>27</sup> A.S. Cook, presented *Christ* as a long poem in three parts, all written by Cynewulf. The title of his edition, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, attests to his desire to present the poetry as one long, unified text by a known (and canonical) author. His lineation is continuous throughout his subtitled three sections (Part I - The Advent, Part II - The Ascension, Part III - Doomsday). More recently, Jackson Campbell (1959) and Robert Burlin (1968) have followed manuscript evidence that demarcates *Advent* as a separate (but related) poem. They titled their respective editions *The Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book* and *The Old English Advent*, disassociating this poem from the two that follow it in the Exeter Book. Only one, *Christ II*, was actually written by Cynewulf.

Campbell and Burlin also divide the poem into twelve sections, each corresponding to the antiphonal source for that section. Each lyric begins with *Eala*, the Old English equivalent of the "O" that begins each of the antiphons sung

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<sup>26</sup>Krapp and Dobbie divide *Christ* into *Christ I* (ll.1-439), *Christ II* (ll.440-866), and *Christ III* (ll.8667-1664).

<sup>27</sup>*Christ I* was edited as part of complete editions of the Exeter Book by Thorpe, Grein, and Wuelker in the 19th century; Sir Isreal Gollancz's 1892 edition became part of the EETS *Exeter Book Part I*.

during the advent season.<sup>28</sup> Burlin follows Cook's lineation; Campbell lineates each section individually, in accordance with his assertion that "the order of the poems is unimportant" (11) and that the poems (other editors would disagree with that plural) "afford great aesthetic pleasure...with no pretensions above those of a group of individual lyrics" (10). I will follow Cook's lineation for manuscript reasons. The manuscript does not divide the "twelve poems" as such but provides five fitt divisions that are not as elaborate and distinctive as the line breaks at 1.440 and 1.866.<sup>29</sup> I have found it convenient, however, to refer to the individual "lyrics" or sections as they correspond to their antiphonal sources. In the wake of Campbell's and Burlin's work, critics have also referred to *Christ I* as *The Advent Lyrics* or simply *Advent*. I will follow Greenfield and Calder and refer to the poem as *Advent*.

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<sup>28</sup>For discussions of the antiphonal sources, see Cook, xxxv -xliii and Campbell, 6-34; also Dom Edward Burgart, *The Dependence of Part I of Cynewulf's Christ upon the Antiphony* (Washington: Catholic University, 1921); Thomas Hill, "A Liturgical Source for Christ I 164-213," *Medium Ævum* 46 (1977): 12-15; Simon Tugwell, "Advent Lyrics 348-77 (Lyric no. 10)" *Medium Ævum* 39 (1970): 34.

<sup>29</sup>These divisions are not numerical, as they are in the *Beowulf* or the Junius 11 manuscripts; rather, the word "Eala" at lines 71, 164, 275, and 378 is written with a large capital "E" and a small capital "A" before resuming the usual script. The first division is not marked as such since the beginning of the manuscript is damaged. Divisions are marked on folios 9a, 10a, 11b, and 13a of the Chambers facsimile.

The narrative action of *Advent*, if it can be so termed, is one of praise of Christ that focuses on his birth and its relation to Christ's mercy for humanity. A brief summation of the contents of the lyrics reveals a movement through Mary's pregnancy and the birth of Christ, although the praiseworthiness of Christ is the main subject of each:

- 11.1-17: a plea for Christ to restore the crumbling temple of humanity
- 11.18-49: a plea for Christ to release us from the prison of life
- 11.50-70: praise of Jerusalem as the city of Christ
- 11.71-103: a dialogue between the Virgin and a son of Jerusalem about the mystery of her pregnancy
- 11.104-129: praise of Christ as the morning star
- 11.130-163: praise of Christ as King of Heaven
- 11.164-213: a dialogue between Joseph and Mary about the legitimacy of her pregnancy
- 11.214-274: a plea for Christ's mercy
- 11.275-347: praise of Mary as Virgin Mother of Christ
- 11.348-377: a plea for Christ's love and mercy
- 11.378-415: praise for the Trinity
- 11.416-439: praise of the virgin birth of Christ

I will be focussing on the fourth, seventh, and ninth of these divisions, as those are the sections that treat Mary most thoroughly. As I analyze Mary's gender performance in these sections, I hope to show how her oppositional or traditional femininity, defined against Christ's (and others') masculinity, is undermined by her maternal performance that forces an interrogation of the Christianity which depends upon Mary's maternal body for its most central myth. In doing so, I will read Julia Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater" against the poem and then focus on two words, *gebetscipe* and *gemæscipe*, which elucidate the destabilizing nature of Mary's maternal performance.

The view of Mary's traditional femininity in *Advent*--a passivity shaped by its relation to men--has been most thoroughly treated by Jane Chance. In *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature*, Chance argues that the Virgin Mary of *Advent* presents an ideal Anglo-Saxon femininity that contrasts with the antitype presented by Eve.<sup>30</sup> Chance states, "the primary conventional secular role of Anglo-Saxon woman demanded her passivity and peace-making talent, an ideal perfectly fulfilled in the social and religious archetype of the Virgin Mary" (xiv); Mary "ideally fulfills all of the roles normally available to women: young girl, virgin, bride, and mother" (xv). Throughout, words that refer to Mary show her in this variety of roles: *fæmne*, *mægð*, and *meder*. Chance sees Mary presented in a variety of ways, so that all women could identify with her in one or another of her roles:

The progression of roles seems to begin with the most human and natural, in the image of the young girl in poem two, and end with the most divine, abstract, and allegorical, in the typology of Ecclesia in poem nine. (17)

Mary is virgin and mother; she is defined by her relationships to masculine figures: Joseph, Christ, and God. Chance sees Mary as peaceweaver in her role as intercessor between God and humanity (28), fulfilling another traditional role for Anglo-Saxon women. For Chance, Mary's

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<sup>30</sup>See chapter five below for a discussion of Chance's arguments about Eve.

ideal femininity stems from her absolute success in a variety of roles, all of which entail that she subordinate herself to the desires of a masculine figure: the angel of annunciation, her son, her earthly husband, or a petitioning humanity.

Chance's interpretation idealizes Mary as an archetype aspired to but never realized elsewhere in Old English literature. Chance builds upon a critical tradition that has consistently viewed Mary as a figure that must be metaphorized and disembodied. That tradition has done so unconsciously, removing the material female body from the text by interpreting it as a metaphor and discussing the Virgin, whose very epithet refers to her body, in terms that subordinate her to masculine desire and that relegate her existence to her relationships with masculine figures.

Stanley Greenfield and Daniel Calder stress the paradox inherent in the presentation of Mary in *Advent*; they see her as "paradoxically most humanized" when she is "no longer the earthly lady but the Queen of Heaven, the Bride of Christ" (187). Simultaneously glorified into symbol and humanized by her maternity, Mary is one instance, for Greenfield and Calder, that shows *Advent* as "a beautiful confluence of Christian doctrine and configuration with Old English poetic techniques" (188).

Mary Clayton alludes to such paradox when she discusses the growth of the cults of the Virgin in Anglo-Saxon

England. Clayton argues that Mary's cult developed in two separate waves, the first in eighth century Mercia, the second in tenth and eleventh century Winchester; in these cults, Mary was, to some extent, the "focus of devotion" (269). She was worshiped for her own powers of intercession and mercy as well as for her maternal relationship to Christ. Clayton contrasts the content of devotion in these cults with extant poetic works, however, wherein "Mary's role is entirely subordinated to her son's" (209). Clayton stresses that the cult of Mary necessarily stems from her role as the mother of Christ; however, an interpretation of Mary simply as *dei genetrix* seems to belong to places and times where the cult of Mary was not as strong. In *Advent*, according to Clayton, Mary "is viewed largely in Christological terms" (202).

Editors and critics have tended to view the Virgin Mary in such traditional doctrinal terms, as the *dei genetrix* whose importance stems wholly from her relationship, both literal and metaphorical, with Christ. As Barbara Raw summarizes:

The major theme of the poem is Christ's divine and human natures. To put it differently, it is not a poem about the birth of Christ but about the entry into historical time of the God who exists outside time with no beginning or end. (233)

In Raw's and others' vision of the poem, Mary is the vehicle for that entry; her body ushers Christ into the world. Thus Mary has been interpreted as an allegory that depends upon

her relationship to Christ as human mother. That female body, however, disappears in insistent metaphorical presentations in and interpretations of the poem.

Campbell expresses this critical distaste for Mary's female body most overtly. He terms the Nativity tableau--*nu we on þæt bearn foran breostum stariað* (now we look on that child at the breast, l.340)<sup>31</sup>--"the only spot in these twelve Christmas poems where the intimate and slightly sentimental image of the mother and child is insisted upon" (29). The literal physiology of motherhood, the baby nursing at his mother's breast, is negative in Campbell's terms; it is intimate and insistent. Campbell seems thankful that such an infelicity occurs only once in the poem.

Burlin discusses the disembodied and metaphorized figure of Mary to an even greater extent than most other critics. The subtitle of his edition is "A Typological Commentary." He notes that patristic and theological types and symbols of Mary are often things rather than people: the Tree of Jesse, the enclosed garden. In contrast, prefigurations and types of Christ are much more frequently people than things: Isaac, Adam, Joshua. Mary's metaphorical equivalents are objects without bodies, just as

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<sup>31</sup>Text throughout is from G.P. Krapp and E. Dobbie, eds., *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, vol. III: The Exeter Book* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936). Translations are my own.



Mary, in much of the poem, is constructed as an object without a body. The two main metaphorical objects that replace her are the temple and the gate; at the same time, the poem repeatedly refers to the Christian traditions that have allegorized her as Queen of Heaven, Mother Church, and Bride of Christ.

Burlin focuses much of his discussion on the metaphor of the locked gates for Mary's virginity (ll.304-325) in the ninth lyric, "a concentrated evocation of the figurative center of the vision, the heavily bolted and chained doors" (147). Figures for Mary include *æpelic ingong* (the noble gate, l.308a), *gebunden / deoran since duru ormæte* (the huge door bound with precious treasure, ll.308b-309b), *ðas gyldnan gatu* (this golden gate, l.318a), and *pæt wealldor* (that wall-door, 328a). Only God can pass through these locked gates, and their integrity is not tarnished by his passing; they are a figure for Mary's eternal virginity prepartum, in partu, and postpartum. The importance of her virginity, her bodily intactness, to Christian doctrine cannot be overstated; as Marina Warner says:

Her unbroken virginity suspended the law of nature, and thus manifested the presence of the divine, but her full parturition of Christ served to prove his manhood. The virgin birth was the key to orthodox Christology. (64)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>For historical background of the theological controversy of Mary's perpetual virginity, see Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex* (New York: Knopf, 1976, repr. Vintage, 1983), pp.64-67.

Thus, Mary's maternal body provides the evidence for Christ's dual nature as human and divine. That body is allegorized and described in metaphor, but its necessity as *body* to the myth cannot be denied.

Throughout this metaphoric sequence of the ninth section of *Advent*, Mary, who is invoked as addressee at its beginning, is an object acted upon by God and Christ. When she does display some agency, she is an acquiescent actor in this male-dominated narrative. As such, she performs a traditional, oppositional femininity much like that of the acquiescent cross in *The Dream of the Rood* (which, notably, compares itself to her). She is the object of the angel's orders in lines 297b-300b, wherein the angel tells her

	þæt þu sunu dryhtnes
þurh clæne gebyrd	cennan sceolde
monnum to miltse,	ond þe, Maria forð
efne unwemme	a gehealdan

(that you the son of the Lord through clean birth must bear as a grace for men, and [that you must], Mary, thenceforth keep yourself ever from uncleanness, ll.299b-300b).

After Mary receives the annunciation, the lyric turns to the annunciation's fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (ll.301-327), in which the gates are described as a prefiguration of Mary's virginity. These lines describe a specifically masculine (Isaiah is called *woðbora*, wise man, l.302) vision of female bodily sexuality, in which ensuring female bodily purity is as simple and controllable as

locking the gates. God the Father controls access to them and none but he will pass through:

. . . ðas gyldnan gatu giet sume sipe  
 god sylf wile gæstes mægne  
 gefælsian, fæder ælmihtig,  
 ond þurh þa fæstan locu foldan neosan,  
 ond hio þonne æfter him ece stondað  
 simle singales swa beclýsed  
 þæt nænig oper, nymðe nergend god,  
 hy æfre ma eft onluceð (318-325).

(. . . the golden gate yet in some time God himself in the spirit's power will pass through, the father almighty and through the bound locks visit the earth, and they then after him eternally stand, always forever so fastened so that none other but the savior God may ever again unlock them.)

The gates are passed through, locked, and unlocked; they never open or close of their own volition. Christ locks Mary's body after his passing through with a *liopucægen* (body-key, 1.334a) in a figure vaguely reminiscent of the locking of a harem to ensure the sexual control of its inmates.

Even Mary's existence is spoken by others; in the beginning of the sequence, she is named and spoken by speech-bearers (*þec mid ryhte ealle reordberen / hatað ond secgað*, you with righteousness all the speechbearers name and bespeak, 11.278a-279a). Many sentences that contain "you" (Mary) as a subject have a form of the verb to be as a main verb (*þu sie*, you may be, 1.284a). The only part of the ninth division in which Mary is grammatically an active subject occurs at lines 287-290a:

Forþon þu þæt ana ealra monna  
 gepohtest þrymlice, pristhycgende,

þæt þu þinne mægðhad meotude brohtes,  
sealdes butan synnum

(Therefore you alone of all humanity splendidly strong  
in mind determined that you would bring your maidenhood  
to God, would give [your maidenhood] without sin,  
ll.287-290a)

These lines may be a reference to Mary's apocryphal  
childhood vow of herself and her virginity to the temple in  
Jerusalem. In them, Mary is acting to serve God in  
accordance with God's will. It could be argued that Mary is  
actively submitting to God's will (thus assigning some sort  
of agency to her). The vocabulary of these lines is  
reminiscent of heroic diction--*þrymlice*, *þrithycgende*--  
imparting a degree of courage and valor to Mary's  
submission. It is, nevertheless, a submission of a feminine  
figure to a masculine deity, and thus it reinscribes the  
masculine/feminine binary like that constructed by the  
masculine performance of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*.  
In the remainder of the diction of this section, the  
grammatical structure emphasizes her passivity and  
objectification, actions performed upon her by others.

Such grammatical structure of active and passive  
construction sets up a binary within language from which it  
is difficult to escape. Grammatically, Mary is almost  
always an object or passive subject. She is on the  
receiving end of orders and imperatives: *þæt þu sunu  
dryhtnes / þurh clæne gebyrd cennan sceolde* (that you the  
son of the Lord through clean birth must bear, ll.297b-

298b), *Iowa us* (show us, 1.335a) and *Gepinga us* (intercede for us, 1.342a). These verbs are imperatives, not hortatory subjunctives;<sup>33</sup> they order rather than plead. She is celebrated throughout as an allegorized and serving feminine figure, controlled by the will of a masculine, patriarchal God.

In this sequence, Mary's is not a material maternal body, though all of Christological doctrine depends upon that body. Her body is reduced to what could be perceived as a grotesque allegory of a giant, locked vagina: the gate through which only God can pass (God the father as she conceives, God the son as she gives birth). The image of the gate centers attention on Mary's bodily intactness; the explicit physical nature of that intactness, and its focus on the physiology of female genitalia, no matter how metaphorized, must be acknowledged. In this sequence, the metaphor of the gate glosses over the physical nature of Mary's crucially important virginity to the extent that it becomes a thing she can bring to God, like a present in a box, rather than a material bodily attribute. In *Advent*, through objectification and allegorization, Mary's maternal body disappears in a typological reading and indeed in the very structure of the poetic language itself.

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<sup>33</sup>Class two weak verbs have -a endings in the imperative singular, -ie endings in the subjunctive (Cassidy and Ringler 62).

That bodily physiology is made most apparent in the nativity tableau that troubled Campbell with its intimate sentimentality. Burlin terms that scene "simple and undramatic" as he subsumes the literalness of the mother and child vision (what he terms the "historical theme" throughout his text) into his typological analysis, wherein "the earthly image of the Advent as a historical event is caught up and absorbed in the eternity of spiritual reality" (149).

A similarly metaphorical reading comes from Earl Anderson, who refers to Mary as *eiron*, a "self-deprecating or unobtrusively treated character in fiction, usually an agent of the happy ending in comedy and of the catastrophe in tragedy" (230). As such, Mary becomes a "didactic authority" rather than a person (239). Ward Parks distinctly rejects readings of Mary that focus on drama or character; for Parks, Mary's objectification is an integral part of the poem:

Mary's most important characteristic consists not in her common humanity but in the degree to which she surpasses all other women; the poem depicts her less as a human personality than as an object of veneration. (75)

Parks may have been responding directly to Ann Klinck, who argues that Mary represents a female point of view that focuses on relationships and feelings, especially in what Klinck, following Campbell, terms "Lyric VII" (11.164-213). For Klinck, Mary fulfills "the role of the submissive, but

psychologically dominant, wife" (Characterization 598). Klinck contends that poetry that takes women as its subject, rather than the more traditional "battle, voyage, exile" poetry that focuses on men, must address feelings and emotions as it explores relationships between the sexes. For Klinck, "Female characters become the vehicle for a more searching and more realistic portrayal of human thoughts and feelings" (Characterization 606). Klinck presents herself as a critic who knows what a "realistic" character portrayal entails in Old English poetry--a highly suspect position. While Klinck does make an effort to view Mary as an independent agent rather than an allegorized possession of God, she deals only with the lines traditionally termed the "passus" of *Advent* (the seventh section),<sup>34</sup> ignoring the rest of the poem, most notably the ninth lyric, and the implications of its other presentations of Mary.

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<sup>34</sup>These lines are almost entirely in dialogue, and since the manuscript does not provide speech designations, speech assignment has formed the focus of critical debate. Treatments of these lines include Earl Anderson, "The Speech Boundaries in Advent Lyric VII," *Neophilologus* 63 (1979): 611-18; John Foley, "Christ 164-213: A Structural Approach to the Speech Boundaries in Advent Lyric Seven," *Neophilologus* 59 (1975): 114-18; Judith Garde, "Christ I (164-195a): The Mary-Joseph Dialogue in Medieval Christian Perspective," *Neophilologus* 74 (1990): 122-130; C.G. Harlow, "The Old English Advent VII and the Doubting of Mary Tradition," *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985): 101-117; Thomas Hill, "A Liturgical Source for Christ I 164-213," *Medium Ævum* 46 (1977): 12-15; Neil Isaacs, "Who Says What in Advent Lyric VII?" *Papers on Language and Literature* 2 (1966): 162-66; Cook (96-98), Campbell (22-25), and Burlin (116-125) also provide overviews.

Indeed, Klinck ignores many of the grammatical structures of the seventh section, similar to those in the gate-metaphor section, that make Mary an object even within her own active speech. By Mary's own admission, she is passively made a temple (*Nu ic his tempel eam / gefremed*, now I his temple am made, ll.206b-207a), and she *must* bear life's glory (*sceolde ic lifes prym / geberan*, must I life's glory bear, ll.204b-205a). Even as she speaks these lines, she makes apparent her own grammatical position as passive subject.

At the end of this section, Mary does begin to show some agency that figures a form of maternal disruption. Relying on her bodily relationship to Christ to provide authority, she disrupts the paradigm of traditional feminine passivity at the end of her final speech as she instructs and even commands Joseph. The boundaries of that final speech are not in any doubt (as the rest of the speech boundaries in the lyric are); the structure of the poem makes clear that it is Mary speaking: *þa seo fæmne onwrah / ryhtgeryno, ond þus reordade* (then the virgin revealed the right-mystery, and thus spoke, ll.195b-196).

This final speech begins with much the same sort of grammar and content that present Mary as a feminine object working a masculine will in section nine (discussed above). She relies on the authority of Gabriel when she says:

ac me eaden wearð  
geongre in gearдум,      þæt me Gabrihel,



neofones heagengel, hælo gebodade

(But to me became granted [when I was] younger in years,  
that which to me Gabriel, heaven's high angel, with  
holiness announced, ll.200b-202)

By the end of this lyric, however, Mary is commanding Joseph, using imperatives like those the petitioners direct to her at the end of section nine. To assume such a position of authority, she relies on her maternity:

Saga ecne þonc  
mærum meotodes sunu þæt ic his modor gewearþ,  
fæmne forð sepeah, ond þu fæder cweden  
woruldcund bi wene

(Say eternal thanks to the great God's son that I his mother became, a virgin forth nevertheless, and you [will be] called [his] father by the opinion of earthly ones, ll.209b-212a)

While her maternity was metaphorized in the lines that evoked a traditional passivity for Mary, that same maternity provides Mary with authority in the seventh section. This authority exists in a state of tension with the passive construction of the Virgin, the process of objectification that started when Christ chose Mary as his mother at l.36, *mægð manes leas, þe he him to meder gecease*, reversing the usual biological process of the adult deciding to have the child. I will return to section seven in my discussion of *gemæcscipe*, a word laden with associations of the problematics of maternity; it is in this seventh section "passus" that the tensions within the poem between traditional femininity and maternal power are most apparent.

This critical genealogy and analysis of sections nine and seven has shown that within the poem and within the critical literature about *Advent*, Mary is defined almost solely by her relationship to Christ, a relationship that depends entirely upon Mary's female, maternal body. I wish to focus now on that material body and resist the allegorization that has been textually performed upon it. Mary's maternity, epitomized in the nativity tableau in *Advent*, is based wholly in her body, which becomes disembodied and disappears. Her epithet, "virgin," refers to her body, though once her intactness has been established, her virginity becomes a metaphor for purity rather than a physical description. The wholeness of the female body and the symbols that can be created from that wholeness tend to eclipse the actual body. Karma Lochrie has discussed such sealed bodies in her work on medieval mysticism; while Lochrie is discussing late medieval female mystics and their *imitatio cristi*, her analysis could also point to an imitation of the Virgin Mary, especially in the way Mary is described in *Advent*. Lochrie addresses female virginity in general when she states:

It is no coincidence that chastity is defined for woman as a physical and spiritual *integritas*, or intactness. The religious life for women consists primarily in adopting boundaries and maintaining an unbroken body (24).

The holiness of the women mystics Lochrie discusses depends on their intactness, just as the Virgin Mary's does. As

Lochrie puts it, "When virgins are then instructed not to break that which seals them together with God and with themselves, they are being called to enclosure at many levels" (25). Intactness, virginity, becomes a guiding metaphor for the lives of these women to such an extent that seclusion and isolation become part of a virginity that becomes disassociated from its primary, bodily meaning. The boundaries of spiritual enclosure echo the boundaries of the unbroken female body; the sealed, virgin woman is sealed off from society to maintain her purity. Part of such enclosure, as manifested in *Advent*, is grammatical objectification and metaphorization of the female body that bore Christ and that still remained intact, sealed.

*Advent* constructs Mary's femininity as that of an intact body which can be metaphorized, especially as a locked gate, and then made to disappear. Even so, her own speech about her maternity empowers her to the point where she can issue commands to her husband. The psychoanalytic analysis which follows will show that the tendency towards the construction and disappearance of the female body in *Advent* accords with the masculine-centered focus on the necessarily male child in psychoanalytic theory. That theory constructs and then neutralizes an all-powerful "phallic" mother, refusing to address a maternal agency that is not grounded in masculine hierarchy. In her speech, her action, and in the vocabulary used to describe her, Mary of

*Advent* enacts a maternal subjectivity that is not phallic, and she refuses to disappear. Such psychoanalytic perspective can provide insight into the disruptions of the Christian myth of virgin maternity by Mary in *Advent*.

As I discussed in chapter one, Freud's and Lacan's descriptions of the male child objectify the mother in that they see her only through the view of the male subject. Such a mechanism is at work in *Advent*, which seeks to contain--in both senses, to hold and to restrain--the Virgin Mary so that she can produce her son and lose her self. While a focus on Christ to the exclusion of other figures is a mainstay of Christian doctrine, in *Advent* that focus comes at the price of disembodiment and objectification of the feminine, a process that can never be fully complete.

To examine the myth of virgin maternity as presented in *Advent* from the viewpoint of the mother, practical and theoretical questions need to be asked, though they may not be answered. On the practical side: What did the labor of birthing God feel like? While theologians have argued that it did not hurt, does that mean that Mary felt pleasure? Or did she feel nothing? Warner quotes St. Bonaventure, who wrote "Then the Son of the eternal God came out of the womb of the mother without a murmur or lesion, in a moment..." (45). Peter Brown notes that the birth of Christ was characterized by "the suppression...of the violence of

normal childbirth" (444). Brown also summarizes the views of Ambrose and Augustine:

For Ambrose, the virginity of Mary had consisted primarily in the fact that her body had not been entered by a male penis, and that her womb had received no alien seed: it was, for him, a potent image of a sacred boundary, unbreached by intrusion from the outside world. For Augustine, Mary's conception of Christ stood rather for an act of undivided obedience. (407)

Either a description of what the birth was *not* (painful and usual) or a metaphorization of the birth (image of a sacred boundary, act of obedience), none of these descriptions of the birth is from the Mother's point of view. To say that an experience is not painful still leaves a wide range of emotion, feeling, and sensation, a range which is not explored, I would argue, because it would entail a focus on the mother rather than on the child during the process of birth. A focus on the mother leads to other questions: Once Christ was born, did Mary enjoy taking care of him? did she become frustrated if he woke up a lot in the middle of the night?

Theoretically, Mary at the Nativity could be construed as a phallic mother (to use Lacan's term) in the developmental narrative of Christ. Lacan says, "at a more primordial level, the mother is for both sexes considered as provided with a phallus, that is, as a phallic mother" (76). The power of the phallic mother is imaginary, not actual, however; within the Lacanian schema, the Virgin would lose the appearance of power once her child realizes she is

castrated. As well, use of the term "phallic" merely serves to reinscribe masculine hierarchy and categories of power. The phallus, in Lacan's terms, is a symbol of power; for Lacan, the Phallus is the signifier that has the power to determine the relationship between itself and the signified. Here again Lacan views the mother-child relationship from the viewpoint of the child, but it is Mary, after all, who has borne the Word, and who will care for him in infancy.

Rather than "phallic," I prefer the term "maternal" as defined in chapter one: maternal power is based in nurturance rather than domination, love rather than fear, but maternal power is no less strong because of its origins. Nurturance is a frequent *topos* in discussions of the Virgin, but it is discussed only from the viewpoint of the recipient. How much power does Mary have? Not only does she have the power to speak to Joseph in imperatives, but the maternal mother also has the power to give or to withhold pleasure and comfort to the child who cannot be wholly other to her because of the bodily connection between them.<sup>35</sup> She decides whether the child is fed, warm, clean, embraced.

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<sup>35</sup>The term "maternal mother" may seem redundant, but there are a number of mothers in Old English poetry who do not perform in the maternal gender. I discuss the *Genesis* Eve and *Modþryðo* of *Beowulf* in chapters five and six, respectively; both of these female characters are mothers but not maternal; my discussion of Judith in chapter eight shows that Judith is a maternal woman though not a biological mother.

The patristic fathers never addressed what it may have felt like for Mary to have that kind of power, a specifically maternal power, over the infant, human God. The power implicit in the maternal gender is the power of the nurturer; caring or nurturance is not *taken* by the child but *given* by the mother, to whom the power of the magnanimous giver accrues. The child is the one in need. No wonder *Advent* shies away from a focus on Mary as woman/mother, focusing instead on Christ while disembodiment and metaphorizing Mary in the process.

The power and joy inherent in motherhood have been shrouded, in *Advent* and in psychoanalytic theory, by a focus on the child. The subjectivity of the mother, virgin or not, is subsumed in the subjectivity of the child as the mother becomes Other in the process of psychosexual development. In "Stabat Mater," an essay that discusses Mary at the end of Christ's life rather than at the beginning of it, Julia Kristeva states that such a construction of motherhood is a narcissistic fantasy:

it involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the *relationship* that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized--an idealization of primary narcissism. (161)

Kristeva makes plain the difficulty of theorizing the mother without indulging in narcissism and shifting the focus back to the child, a process she calls the "primary narcissism." The joy of the maternal mother, who knows she is the most important part of her child's life, who defines her child

through herself and not the other way around, is difficult to theorize and is also an inappropriate topic for a religious poem that ultimately wishes to praise Christ. To acknowledge the Virgin Mary of *Advent* as maternal mother would be to subordinate the power of Christ to the power of Mary, upsetting the hierarchy of Christianity.

However, a focus on the Mother necessarily reveals such joyful and powerful subjectivity that she draws from her role. Kristeva describes this culturally inappropriate *jouissance* of maternity in her columns of *écriture féminine* that run alongside the analytical text. On the right side of the page, Kristeva invokes a contemporary politics that must include mothers and maternity:

one needs to listen, more carefully than ever, to what mothers are saying today, through their economic difficulties and, beyond the guilt that a too existentialist feminism handed down, through their discomforts, insomnias, joys, angers, desires, pains, and pleasures. (179)

On the left side, she meditates on her reality as mother:

motherhood destines us to a demented *jouissance* that is answered, by chance, by the nursling's laughter in the sunny waters of the ocean. What connection is there between it and myself? No connection, except for that overflowing laughter where one senses the collapse of some ringing, subtle, fluid identity or other, softly buoyed by the waves. (179-80)

Images of water and fluidity ("the community of women is a community of dolphins," 181) make clear Kristeva's version of this maternal subjectivity: the identities of mother and the child flow back and forth in a world of laughter, joy,



and community. That world includes pain and fear but it is founded on the unshakeable knowledge--shared by the Virgin Mary--that "she is destined to that eternity (of the spirit or of the species) of which every mother is unconsciously aware" (172). Biological maternity, in its way, is a threat to Christianity in that it guarantees its own kind of eternity: What woman needs Christ as eternal savior if she can just have a baby? The child, through its bodily connection with the mother, provides a continuation of life similar to that of the promise of heaven. Part of the subversiveness of the maternal gender stems from this self-sufficiency of the quasi-immortality of procreation.

This brief theoretical examination of motherhood from the mother's point of view has shown, I hope, that actual, un-metaphorized motherhood is practically and theoretically threatening to any patriarchal world view. Although Mary is celebrated in Christian ideology for her nurturance and love, the focus is traditionally on the recipients of that nurturance and love (petitioners, the Christ child) rather than on the power Mary exercises as she provides them. The power of the Virgin Mary over the infant Christ has the potential to undermine the Christian hierarchy; the promise of eternity in maternity undermines the need for a Christian afterlife. A consistent focus on the (male) child in the mother-child relationship defines the mother as object, as Other, and attempts to neutralize the maternal mother.

*Advent* performs this construction through metaphor and syntax in sections nine and seven, as I have shown above. To permit Mary to act as maternal mother would undermine the supremacy of Christ. However, the figure of Mary does just that, expressing her authority in section seven even as she is simultaneously objectified by the grammar and metaphor of the section.

Thus, the power relations of maternity cannot be fully suppressed. The Virgin of *Advent* does manage to speak with authority and disrupt the hierarchy of Christianity through her bodily relationship to Christ, despite the text's best efforts to the contrary. Mary exposes that which her interpreters have tried to veil: that Christianity, the constructed religion of patriarchy, depends upon the maternal body. It cannot exist without it. As such, the maternal body, unmetaphorized, unobjectified, threatens to overtake the figure of the Christ child as the focus of veneration. One way to enter this analysis of the subversive function of Mary's body in the poem is through vocabulary; though there are a variety of interesting words that refer to Mary throughout *Advent*, I have chosen two that especially disrupt the careful construction of Mary's femininity as metaphorized, disembodied, virgin maternity: *gebedscipe*, spoken by the son of Jerusalem in section four, and *gemæcscipe*, spoken by Mary in section seven. Lexical analyses of both words show that Mary's body and control

over that body are still very much at issue throughout the poem.

*Gebedscipe* is translated variously as "cohabitation, wedlock" (Hall 37), "carnal intercourse" (Cook 248), "sexual intercourse" (Campbell 119), and "intercourse" (Burlin 91). Literally, however, it means "bedded-ness," the state of having been bedded.<sup>36</sup> The word is spoken by the son of Jerusalem when he queries Mary about the virgin birth (the speaker becomes clear only 25 lines later, when Mary names *sunu Solimiae somod his dohtor* in her reply):

Eala wifa wynn geond wuldres þrym,  
 fæmne freolicast ofer ealne foldan sceat  
 þæs þe æfre sundbuend secgan hyrdon,  
 arece us þæt geryne þæt þe of roderum cwom,  
 hu þu eacnunge æfre onfenge  
 bearnes þurh gebyrde, ond þone gebedscipe  
 æfter monwisan mod ne cuðes (71-77)

(O joy of women through splendor's glory, virgin noblest over all the earth's surface, of which ever sea-dwellers tell to hear, explain to us that mystery that came from the heavens, how you the increase ever received through the birth of a child, and you did not know that bedded-ness in the man-known way)

*Gebedscipe* occurs only in poetry, never in prose, and it occurs only four times in the poetic corpus: once in *Advent* and three times in *Genesis* (MCOE G005). In all four uses, the word is used in connection with questions of the legitimacy of children, with patrimony, and with the mother's body as a means of transmission of property. In *Advent*, the question is somewhat rhetorical, as Mary is

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<sup>36</sup>"Bed-ness" or *bedscipe* does not exist in Old English (MCOE B004), nor does "mate-ness" or *mæcscipe* (MCOE M006).

already praised; the "doubting" of the son and daughter of Jerusalem is merely the vehicle for Mary to assert her purity and her nullification of Eve's guilt (*is Euan scyld eal forpynded*, 1.97). However, a virgin birth (one without *gebedscipe*) is something the questioners have never heard of (11.78-82), and while the tone is worshipful, they want to know the truth. There is no hint that they are suspicious of foul play, but they want the situation made clear. Mary responds that men can never understand God's mysteries -- *Forþan þæt monnum nis / cuð geryne*--but she assures them that now "Joy is received" (*Hyht is onfangen*, 1.99) so that all is in order. The unease about *gebedscipe* and its place in virgin birth has been alleviated; the question about the place of her body in this patriarchal schema has been answered by reassurance that her body did work in accord with the (masculine) will of God.

*Gebedscipe* seems to be used in instances where initially there is anxiety that things are not in order, then assurance that they are. The other three uses of the word also occur in incidents that threaten patriarchy, especially in reference to paternity and patrimony; they all occur in the Junius 11 *Genesis*.<sup>37</sup> The first usage occurs

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<sup>37</sup>*Gebedscipe* occurs at 11.2216 and 2467; *gebedscire* is the manuscript reading at 1.1146 but the sentence structure and meaning is so similar to that of 11.2216 and 2467 that *gebedscire* has consistently been emended to *gebedscipe*. Unemended, *gebedscire* would be an unwieldy hapax legomenon meaning "sexual intercourse."

in the elaboration of the lineage of Seth, Adam and Eve's good child who replaces the dead Abel. After the birth of Enos to Seth, the text reads:

him æfter heold þa he of worulde gewat  
 enos yrfe siððan eorðe swealh  
 sædberendes sethes lice.  
 he wæs leof gode and lifde her  
 wintra hundnigontig ær he be wife her  
 purh gebedscipe bearn astrynde (1143-1148)<sup>38</sup>

(For him afterwards Enos held the property when he [Seth] departed from the world, after the earth swallowed the body of Seth. He [Enos] was beloved by God and lived here [on earth] 190 winters before he by his wife here through bedded-ness begat children.)

The additions to the Vulgate are especially relevant to my argument about female bodies and patrilineal anxiety. In the Vulgate, names of sons and names of fathers are interspersed with various units of time: Seth lived 105 years and then begat Enos (Genesis 5:6). There is no mention of women, female bodies, male bodies, or property. In this Anglo-Saxon version, the lineage exists specifically for the transmission of property: Enos held the yrfe after his father's body was put in the ground. The association of bodies and property is readily apparent. Enos' wife's body makes an appearance as well, an acknowledgement that property cannot be transmitted to children without the bodies of women. Interestingly enough, however, the necessity of the woman's body is subsumed in the sentence

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<sup>38</sup>Text of *Genesis* from A.N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978). Translations are my own.

structure: Enos himself is the subject of the verb *astrynde*, necessitating a translation of "begat" rather than "bore." His wife and her bodily ability are merely objects of prepositions (*be wife, þurh gebedscipe*). In this passage of *Genesis*, *gebedscipe* assures that property is transmitted correctly and that the female body remains a tool of male desire and action.

Similarly, the next usage of *gebedscipe* shows the anxiety of a woman who has not been able to produce children. In the narrative of Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar, the text reads:

þa wæs sarran sar on mode  
 þæt him abrahame ænig ne wearð  
 þurh gebedscipe bearn gemæne  
 freolic to frofre (2216-2219a)

(then was Sarah sorrowful in spirit, that for him as a comfort to Abraham no noble children existed in common through beddedness).

The anxiety of lineage is at issue here. Sarah has failed in that she has been unable to produce an heir to whom Abraham's property would be willed. She is initially eager for Hagar to conceive a child for Abraham, but after Sarah bears Isaac, she convinces Abraham to cast out Hagar and Ishmael. After *gebedscipe* produces the needed legitimate son, Sarah's anxiety is not that Abraham will lack an heir but that the heir produced from her body will not receive his patrimony.

The last usage of *gebedscipe* also presages anxiety; this time, the issue is not only the purity of the women

involved (as in *Advent*) but also the righteousness of the "natural" sexual order. As the Sodomites threaten Lot's two angelic visitors with homosexual rape, he offers them instead his two virgin daughters as more fitting sexual partners:

Her syndon inne unwemme twa  
 dohtor mine. doð swa ic eow bidde  
 --ne can þara idesa owðer gieta  
 þurh gebedscipe beorna neawest --  
 and geswicað þære synne. ic eow sylle þa  
 ær ge sceonde wið gesceapu fremmen,  
 ungifre yfel ylða bearnum (2466-2472)

(Here are within my two unblemished daughters. Do as I bid you--neither of these noble girls yet knows companionship of men through beddedness--and give up this sin. I give [them] to you then, before you perform in shame with nature a harmful evil to sons of men).

It might seem at first that the issue here is male bodies and homosexuality (defined as *synne* and *yfel*), but the daughters' female bodies are offered as the tool to correct the "unnatural" Sodomites.<sup>39</sup> In Lot's view, evil to "sons of men" is more important than any evil which rape may pose to his daughters. Sexual intercourse between men produces no children, no heirs for property. The daughters are appealing in their virginity; they are *unwemme* just as the Virgin Mary is in *Advent* (1.300). Even as rape victims, in *gebedscipe* they are heterosexual and can produce children. Lot's anxiety concerns the "nature" (*gesceapu*) that the

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<sup>39</sup>The bodies of these daughters are also at issue later in the biblical narrative, when they commit incest with their father in order to continue his line. See chapter six below for a discussion of that section of the narrative.

sodomites violate; the offered violation of his daughters is, for him, inconsequential in comparison with the threat to patriarchy and patrimony that the sodomites represent.<sup>40</sup>

While *gebedscipe* is used in situations in which women's bodies seem to question yet ultimately uphold a masculinist order, *gemæcscipe* and other forms of *gemæc-* are used when describing women who do not fit into such a "natural" patriarchal order. Forms of *gemæc-*<sup>41</sup> occur 74 times in the Old English corpus. All relate to some sort of joining, usually spousal; the union is usually a physical one but can be more spiritual as well. The most frequent usage is in reference to a woman; 46 occurrences refer specifically to a wife as the spouse of a husband, as in the frequent use of *gemæccan* in *Apollonius of Tyre*, wherein Arcestrate is repeatedly referred to as a spouse, to *gemæccan*, for Apollonius. Six usages occur in contemporary Latin-Old English glossaries to gloss some form of *conjunx*, marriage or joining. One glossary usage glosses *frater*, which suggests that there is an element of companionship in this word that does not exist in *gebedscipe*.

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<sup>40</sup>This interpretation of the sexuality of the daughters of Lot as a quasi-legitimate means to continuation of the species is touched upon in Catherine Cox's essay, "The Subversive Erotics of Chaucer's Summoner," *Exemplaria* 7 (1995), 167 and n.43 as well as in Allen Frantzen's essay on *Cleanness* forthcoming in *PMLA* 111 (1996).

<sup>41</sup>*gemaeccan, gemaecga, gemæc, gemæcca, gemæccan, gemæccan, gemæccen, gemæccen, gemæccena, gemæccum, gemæce, gemæclic, gemæclicum, gemæcne, and gemæcscipe* in MCOE G021



This suggestion is borne out by six usages that are not specifically sexual or even spousal, such as the reference to Satan who *mid his gemæccen besænct*, plunged down with his companions.<sup>42</sup> In one instance, *gemæccan* denotes the conceptual joining of sorrow and evil: *swa mycles sares ne yfeles gemæccan*.<sup>43</sup> Ten times the word refers to spouses generally, without regard to gender.

Only five times is *gemæc-* used to refer specifically to a husband as a spouse; in all five of these instances, the women attached (or not) to these spouses threaten to disrupt the patriarchal system based on transmission of property through the mother's body. *Gemæc-*, when it refers to a husband, makes clear the uneasy relationship between patriarchal structure and the maternal body. The first of these examples comes from *Advent*, in Mary's final speech of the "passus." In response to Joseph's doubts and demands, Mary says:

Soð ic secge þurh sunu meotudes,  
 gasta geocend, þæt ic gen ne conn  
 þurh gemæcscipe monnes ower,  
 ænges on eorðan, ac me eaden wearð,  
 geongre in gearðum, þæt me Gabrihel,  
 heofones heagengel, hælo gebodade (197-202)

(I say truth through the Son of God, Saviour of Souls,  
 that I do not yet know ever through mated-ness of any

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<sup>42</sup>Rubie D-N Warner, ed., "Concerning the Coming of the Anti Christ," *Early English Homilies from the 12thc. MS Vesp.D.XIV*, EETS 152 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, and Co., 1917), 67.

<sup>43</sup>Donald Scragg, ed., "Homily XXII," *The Verceli Homilies*, EETS no.300 (London: Oxford University Press, 1992), 368.

man on earth, but to me granted became, [when I was] younger in years, that which to me Gabriel, heaven's high-angel, announced with holiness).

*Gemæcscipe* has been translated "cohabitation" (Hall 224); "cohabitation, wedlock" (Cook 251); "coupling, cohabitation" (Campbell 120); and "husband" (Burlin 115). Literally, it means "mated-ness" with the implications of physical mating of bodies as well as of the more spiritual mating of souls or companions. The disruption of her pregnancy on her impending earthly marriage is apparent enough; Joseph worries that either she will be stoned as an adultress or he will be shunned as a man forsworn (ll.190-195a). Without the masculine authority of God, Christ, and Gabriel, Mary could be talked about as an adultress, one who disrupts patriarchy since her husband cannot guarantee the paternity of his child. As I discussed above, Mary assures Joseph and even commands him to understand that her situation is unique and that he will accrue glory as well; rather than cuckold, Joseph will be called the earthly father of God's son (ll.210-212a). Joseph acquiesces to God's sexual rights over his fiancée, but only after making apparent the disruption that any adultery would cause.

A similar situation occurs in the "Nativity of Mary the Virgin" contained in Oxford, Bodleian MS Hatton 114. The immaculate conception of Mary by Anne became doctrine only in 1854 (Warner 238); originally, the miraculousness of Mary's conception was more simply that, like Elizabeth, Anne

conceived in her old age. An angel appears first to Anne and then to her husband Joachim (he is away from home on a journey) to tell them that they will conceive a child. Warner states that, "In iconography, the electric impulse of life miraculously passed between Joachim and Anna when they ran to meet each other after the angel's news" (239). The Old English Saints' life uses *gemæccan* just before this moment:

Heo þa Anna wæs æt hyre gebede, þa ætywde hyre drihtnes encgel and hyre gecigde þone hamsið hyre gemæccan<sup>44</sup>

(Then she, Anne, was at their bidding, when the angel of the lord showed [himself] to her and summoned the home-journey of her spouse for her).

Anne is not only relieved of the same anxiety that plagued Sarah; like her daughter after her, she also has divine assurance of the moral righteousness of her miraculous pregnancy. Both Mary in *Advent* and Anne in the *Life* need the imprimatur of the deity on their pregnancies; both women, without that imprimatur, would disrupt the conventions of their society, which does not usually accept pregnant old women or pregnant virgins.

Similar situations arise in other uses of forms of *gemæc-* that refer to male spouses. In the *Penitential of Pseudo-Egbert*, the word occurs in the knotty problem of a woman who consecutively marries two brothers: *Gif hwylc wif*

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<sup>44</sup>Bruno Assmann, ed., *Angelsaechsiche Homilien und Heiligenlebeb* (Kassle: George Wigand, 1889), 125.

twegen gebroðro nymð hire to gemæccan todo man hi; & beon hi in dædbote þa hwile ðe hi lybban swa hira scrift him tæce<sup>45</sup> (If a certain woman takes two brothers to herself as spouses, one after the other, they [the woman and the second brother] must be separated and live in penance for the rest of their lives as their confessor teaches them). While the punishment applies to both parties, it is the woman who acts as the subject of the sentence; the penitential does not address a brother who marries his brother's widow but a woman who takes two brothers as husbands. She has caused the sin, the disruption.

Such disruption is avoided by the virtuous widow Galla, who is cited in the fourth Dialogue of Gregory the Great:

þa forþon sona swa hire gemæcca wæs forðfered, heo wearp hire fram þm woruldlican hade & brohte hi sylfe to mynstre & sealde to þeowdome þæs ælmihtigan Godes to þære cyrcan þæs eadigan apostolas sancte Petres.<sup>46</sup>

(Then therefore as soon as her spouse was dead, she cast off herself from the earthly state and she brought herself to the minster and gave [herself] to the divine service of the almighty God, to the church of the blessed apostle St. Peter).

The widow is potentially subversive, since she controls the property of her former husband and he is no longer alive to monitor her sexuality and procreativity. Gender problems

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<sup>45</sup>Penitential quotations from Josef Raith, ed., *Die Altenglische Version des Halitgar'schen Bussbuches* (Hamburg, Verlag von Henri Grand, 1933), book two, chapter 11, p.22.

<sup>46</sup>All Dialogue quotations from Hans Hecht, ed., *Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen* (Leipzig: Georg Wigand, 1900), 279.

abound in this vignette: Galla's doctors warn her that she will grow a beard, *þæt hire þonne wolden beardas weaxen*, a definitive sign of masculinity, if she does not marry again (and return her former husband's property to secular circulation). She does grow the beard, but is not disturbed by it. In addition, her reward for her piety is the specifically female disease of breast cancer,<sup>47</sup> *heo wearð þa gestanden on þa breost mid cancre þære wunde*, and a vision of St. Peter at her death. Galla, with her beard, her money, and her breast cancer, defies innumerable female stereotypes. Gregory definitively approves of her life of piety in which the church controls her worldly goods. The double meaning of *eadigan* hints at the financial issues of this passage: it can be translated "blessed" but also "wealthy" (Hall 92).

The use of *gemæc-* in *The Wife's Lament* (like *Advent*, found in *The Exeter Book*) is the last of the five occurrences that refer to specifically to husbands, and it is the most appropriate to this argument about the disruption of patriarchy by women without proper husbands. While the situation of the narrator has formed the locus of much of the critical discussion of the poem, all critics agree that the speaker is isolated from her lover/husband; this exile from love and kin has occurred through the machinations of

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<sup>47</sup>"Breast cancer" seems a thoroughly modern term, but the Old English, literally translated, says that Galla was wounded "in the breast with cancer."

another man who, depending on the readings of various cruces throughout the text, may be another husband or lover of the narrator. Her disruption comes from the ambiguity of her situation and from her resentment at that situation. She is neither wife nor maiden, mother nor nun: those appropriate feminine roles of the Virgin Mary that Jane Chance delineates do not apply here. The narrator of *The Wife's Lament* disrupts by not fitting into Anglo-Saxon society; she loves her lost husband/lord but is not with him, supporting his causes and bearing his children. She says:

forþon is min hyge geomor  
 ða ic me ful gemæcne monnan funde  
 heardsælige hygegeomorne  
 mod miþendne morþor hychendne  
 bliþe gebæro ful oft wit beotedan  
 þæt unc ne gedælde nemne deað ana  
 owiht elles (17b-23a)<sup>48</sup>

(And so my heart is sad, since I found the man who was my true mate to be unhappy, sorrowful of heart, concealing his purpose, meditating crime. Blithe in demeanor we two had very often vowed that nothing else should part us but death alone).

Her longing for her true mate, her poetic lament, her rejection of the fate of exile that men have ordered, her curse of her enemy at the end of her speech, all point to a female narrator who insists on questioning the mores of her society and her place in it.<sup>49</sup> Though no children are

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<sup>48</sup>Text and translation from W.S. Mackie, ed, *The Exeter Book Part II: Poems IX-XXXII*, EETS 194 (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 152-155.

<sup>49</sup>Feminist readings of *The Wife's Lament* include Patricia Belanoff, "Women's Songs, Women's Language: Wulf and Eadwacer and The Wife's Lament," *New Readings on Women in Old English*

mentioned in the poem, any she has produced or will produce will be of unclear paternity and unclear allegiance. The narrator of *The Wife's Lament* represents a maternal threat to patriarchy in that she refuses to acquiesce to her situation and thus enacts the possibility of the production of children with unclear paternity.

Such maternal disruption of society occurs in uses of forms of both these words, *gebescipe* and *gemæcscipe*. Women and their maternal bodies, their bedded-ness and their mated-ness, are integral to the patriarchal society that tries to metaphorize those bodies. Children are produced by those bodies in unseemly, bloody labor, and then fed from those bodies. Those children then inherit the patriarchal society of their fathers. As mothers speak and act, their bodies come into conflict with the patriarchy that simultaneously needs them and wants them to disappear.

Yet, as Mary shows in *Advent*, the maternal cannot be wholly subsumed by oppositional gender construction. Even the vocabulary that tries to reduce her to metaphor reveals the clinging associations to bodiliness of the birth supposedly characterized by a disembodied virginity. In the lyrics, she is metaphorized and passive but she also

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*Literature*, ed. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 193-203; Jane Chance, "The Errant Woman as Scop in Wulf and Eadwacer and The Wife's Lament," *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986), 81-94; Barrie Ruth Straus, "Women's Words as Weapons," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 23 (1981): 268-285.

commands and speaks. Lexical connections with other situations of unclear paternity reveal the power inherent in the body of the mother and its ability to produce and nurture children. Mary as maternal power undermines the poem's Christianity which she is initially constructed to support as passive object, for she reveals at the Nativity, through her body and her nurturance, that the infant Christ is powerless and dependent upon her maternal power. In addition, her maternity enacts its own kind of eternity, one unrelated to the eternal salvation promised by her son; the bodily continuity from mother to child provides a link to life after death that circumvents all doctrine of sin and redemption within the institutional, patriarchal church that seeks and fails to veil the maternal power of Mary in *Advent*. Even more strikingly, the figure of Mary on the Ruthwell Cross enacts the maternal gender in such a way that undermines the dominant, oppositional masculinity of her son in the same sculpture series.



## CHAPTER 4

### THE MASCULINE AND THE MATERNAL ON THE RUTHWELL CROSS

The mixed pair of Christ and Mary, with all its concomitant tensions and complements, meets as well in the sculptural program of the Ruthwell Cross. There is no direct textual connection between *Advent* and the cross, but both present Anglo-Saxon versions of Marian iconography that elucidate a maternal gender performance. There is a textual relationship between the cross and *The Dream of the Rood*; parts and variations of the speech of the cross from that text are carved onto the sides of the monumental cross. The three texts--*Dream*, *Advent*, and the Ruthwell cross--are linked through textuality, iconography, and gender performances of Christ and Mary.

The disruption of the maternal, especially the maternal body, apparent in *Advent* is even more pronounced in the portrayals of the gendered figures of Christ and Mary on the Ruthwell Cross. The masculinity of the Ruthwell Christ in the figural sculpture as well as in the runic inscription, like the masculinity of the *Dream* Christ, depends on dominance of a feminized Other. As in the Vercelli *Dream*, the Ruthwell Cross Christ is majestic and heroic--and he

also has a much larger cast of supporting characters, both male and female, against which his active, dominant masculinity is highlighted and on which it depends. The Ruthwell Mary performs within the maternal gender on the Cross, breaking down that masculine/feminine opposition and calling into question the very worship of the dominant God that the Cross ostensibly celebrates.

The crucifixion poem copied by the Vercelli scribe into her devotional book exists in a much older form, carved in runes among inhabited vine scrolls on the narrow east and west sides of a late seventh/early eighth century monumental cross in Ruthwell Church in Dumfriesshire near the Scots-English border.<sup>50</sup> The east and west inscriptions are of a poem related to lines 39-64 of *The Dream of the Rood*. While earlier scholars simply referred to the inscription as an early version of *The Dream of the Rood*, David Howlett has recently suggested that the Ruthwell and Vercelli texts have similar but distinct sources (Inscription 85).

The Ruthwell Cross Crucifixion Poem, as it is now usually called, consists of 24 half-lines in Howlett's transliteration from runic script to Old English. He divides the poem into four sections corresponding to the

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<sup>50</sup>The dating of the Ruthwell Cross has been a matter of some controversy. Douglas MacLean summarizes the arguments, based on style, epigraphical elements, and history, which have placed the cross's creation anywhere from the mid-seventh to even the tenth centuries. MacLean dates the cross to the second quarter of the eighth century (70).

north and south borders of the east and west sides. I quote his translation in full:

[North border, east side] God Almighty stripped Himself. When he wished to ascend on to the gallows, brave before all men, I dared not bow down, but had to stand fast.

[South border, east side] I raised up a powerful King. I dared not tilt the Lord of Heaven. Men mocked us both together. I was drenched with blood issued from the Man's side after He sent forth His spirit.

[South border, west side] Christ was on the Cross. But hastening nobles came together there from afar. I beheld it all. Sorely was I with sorrows afflicted. I bent to the men, to their hands.

[North border, west side] Wounded with arrows they laid Him down weary in limb. They stood for Him at the head of His corpse. They beheld there Heaven's Lord. And he rested Himself there for a time.  
(Inscriptions 88)

The inscription contains early forms of two of the words I discussed earlier: *ondgeredæ* and *gistiga*, both on the north border of the east side.<sup>51</sup> Christ is referred to as lord and as king in the poem, showing that his heroic majesty is similar to that of the longer Vercelli text. The runes contain only words spoken by the cross, as if the cross on which they are carved is the actual speaker of the poem: the Ruthwell Cross "speaks" as if it were the true cross. This speaking cross has borne the body of its lord, and the sculpted panels depict that lord in his greatness. The Ruthwell Cross serves Christ as a vehicle for his

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<sup>51</sup>For a complete runic text of the Ruthwell Crucifixion poem, see Howlett, Inscription 83; for the Old English transliteration, *ibid* 88.

glorification, indicating that this sculpture as well the prosopoeiac figure of the Vercelli poem enacts a feminized role that serves to glorify the masculine and majestic God.

The sculptural program carved on this "speaking" cross glorifies Christ as well. There is continuing speculation about the content of the lost panels from the transept of the cross, but most of the extant panels on the shaft have been securely identified. On the south side of the cross, in ascending order, are carved the crucifixion, the annunciation, Christ healing the blind man, Mary Magdalene washing the feet of Christ, and Martha and Mary. The north side depicts, in ascending order, the flight into Egypt, Paul and Anthony, Christ in majesty with beasts, and John the Baptist.<sup>52</sup> Scholars usually read the unifying theme of the sculptural program as one of asceticism, penitence, and contemplation.

Christ appears on the Ruthwell Cross four times, and in each depiction he is presented as a powerful masculine figure that dominates the other figures in the panel. As such, his gender performance conforms to the paradigm of masculinism developed by Brittan which I discussed in relation to *Dream*: it depends on dominance, hierarchy, and competition to express a masculinity that relies on the

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<sup>52</sup>Meyvaert has recently argued that this panel is actually an "apocalypse vision" rather than a depiction of John the Baptist (112); see George Henderson, "The John the Baptist Panel on the Ruthwell Cross" *Gesta* 24 (1985) 3-12, for a refutation of Meyvaert's argument.

fragile opposition of masculine/feminine. I will discuss the Ruthwell Cross Christ panels in ascending order, beginning with the crucifixion panel at the bottom of the Ruthwell Cross's south side.<sup>53</sup> Rosemary Cramp has suggested that Christ at the crucifixion was considered to be a "secondary figure" since the theology of the time "stress[ed] the apocalyptic significance of Christ in majesty rather than Christ suffering" (Symbols 128). Lawrence Stone has argued somewhat more stringently that the Crucifixion was placed at the bottom rather than in a more prominent position because "the Crucifixion is a bewildering example of shame and degradation" for the culture that produced the cross, "a primitive people brought up on traditions where might and worldly success are the main criteria of morality" (11). More recently, Paul Meyvaert has argued that the placement of the Crucifixion panel enabled the congregation at Ruthwell Church to pray at the foot of the cross, next to a "close and accessible" crucifixion scene (107).

That crucifixion scene portrays a heroic Christ, not a man of sorrows (a very rare depiction in early art), however, and as such would not have needed to be "hidden" from viewers who may have been repelled by helpless suffering. The crucifixion scene is almost impossible to

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<sup>53</sup>The panels I examine in this chapter are reproduced in the figures appendix in order of discussion after reproductions of the north and south sides of the Cross in their entirety.

photograph clearly today (the Cross has been re-erected in a well dug in Ruthwell Church; the crucifixion panel is actually *in* the well, impeding good photographs of it).<sup>54</sup> In addition, the panel was severely damaged by the Cross's long sojourn outdoors, both in pieces after it was broken down by Presbyterian iconoclasts in 1642 and in its subsequent reassemblage in the garden of the rector's house from 1802 to 1887, when it was moved back into the church.

Despite these difficulties, we can still see outlines of the figure of Christ on the cross, the sun and the moon above the cross, and dim shapes on either side, presumably two of the traditional mourners at the foot of the cross, St. John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene, or the Virgin Mary. Michael Swanton describes the three-foot high Ruthwell crucifixion Christ as an "upright and vigorous Christ, bearded but naked save for a loin-cloth, [who] extends over the entire area, reaching to the four sides of the panel" (*Dream* 19). Similarly, Howlett states that "Christ stands rather than hangs on the Cross, bearded and wearing only a loin cloth" (*Inscriptions* 72). The Ruthwell panels follow the convention of size in medieval art: the most important part of a composition is the biggest in scale (hence the figures looking out of a castle window might be larger than

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<sup>54</sup>For a narrative about the history of the cross in physical space and in scholarly analysis, see Brendan Cassidy, "The Later Life of the Ruthwell Cross: From the Seventeenth Century to the Present" in *The Ruthwell Cross*, Brendan Cassidy, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 3-34.

the castle). The large crucifixion Christ is heroic and masculine, with his beard and his near-nakedness, standing in triumph rather than slumping in defeat. He fills the whole panel, commanding the space with his presence. As in other Ruthwell Christ panels, other figures look up at him; despite the panel's placement at the bottom of the cross, Christ is elevated by virtue of the panel's composition. He is in majesty, not in pain, in this crucifixion.

The next representation of Christ, the south side panel of Christ healing the blind man (the Annunciation is between the Crucifixion and this panel), has not elicited much comment. Most critics cite it as a traditional allegorical depiction of Christ healing humanity through his coming; people who do not follow the teachings of Christ are "blind" until he enlightens them.<sup>55</sup> In this panel as in the other, however, Christ is the dominant figure, in control of the other figure in the panel. Christ is taller than the blind man; his halo adds to his advantage in stature. His gaze is slightly downward; his shoulders and hands are above those of the blind man. Despite the wearing of the sculpture, we can still see that the figure of Christ was carved in much higher relief from the ground of the panel, and as such took up more space and was more well developed than the figure of the blind man. He dominates the panel and the blind man by virtue of size and stance. Christ, of course, should be the

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<sup>55</sup>Meyvaert 110 is a good example of this type of reading.

dominant figure in this panel as in the others, but he is not simply dominant; he is dominating as well. This is a Christ who heals, but who requires the submission of those who are healed.

Directly above Christ healing the blind man is the main panel of the south side, Christ with Mary Magdalene. While this panel is commonly interpreted as a figure of contemplation or of repentance, it also reinforces the power of Christ. Mary Magdalene, all hand and hair, washes the feet of a frontal Christ. Her gaze is directed towards his feet, and (though it is hard to tell for sure) her face seems to be turned slightly away from the viewer, so that less than half of it would have been visible. Her hand is larger than her face (a detail Stone uses to point to a lack of Mediterranean exemplars for this panel [12]), a size discrepancy that focuses the viewer's eye on her action rather than on her and draws the eye upward from her hand, holding the curve of her hair, to the figure of Christ.

This figure is almost identical to the figure in the same pose on the Cuthbert coffin (Cramp 10, Saxl 19). Christ's halo again increases his size so that he fills the panel and dominates the composition. Christ's arms are raised; in the left hand he holds a book and the right is raised in a gesture of blessing. The motion of his hands directs the eye away from Mary Magdalene towards Christ's face. He looks down at the repentant sinner performing an



act of humility. The oppositional masculinity that depends on domination of the Other is clearly at work here; Magdalene submits so that Christ may dominate; the feminine must comply in its role of inferior so that the superiority of the masculine becomes apparent.

In their discussions of the Mary Magdalene panel, most critics have focused on what she represents rather than on her actual figural portrayal. Usually the critical conclusion is that she represents a figure of penitence or a figure of ascetic contemplation (see Howlett and Meyvaert as an example of the former, Meyer Schapiro as an example of the latter). In one of the few feminist analyses of the female figures of the Ruthwell Cross, Carol Farr says, "Nearly all interpretations allegorize them [the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene] as seemingly gender-neutral types of the church or monastic ideals" (2).<sup>56</sup> However, I will argue that the monumental Mary Magdalene of the Ruthwell Cross establishes the dominant masculinity of Christ in much the same way that the feminized cross did in *The Dream of the Rood*.

Mary Magdalene provides an oppositional context for the definition of Christ in this panel. She is penitent, he is majestic. She is kneeling, he is standing. She is female, he is male. Her complicity in the opposition is necessary

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<sup>56</sup>I quote from a forthcoming article; page citations are to the unpublished text.

here; as I will show below, the female figure of the Virgin disrupts the opposition and Christ's masculinity specifically because she is *not* complicit. Farr interprets Magdalene and the other female figures on the cross as "representation[s] of monastic females that acknowledges their power and presence but simultaneously categorizes and subordinates them" (4). In a comparison between the pair of men (Paul and Anthony) and the pair of women (Martha and Mary), Farr says:

the sculpted image [of Paul and Anthony] probably presents the monastic ideal as sacerdotal, male, and based on humility and miracles. On the other hand, the female figures, although in triumph at the top of the shaft, suggest neither sacerdotal associations nor the miraculous. (8)

Similarly, the Magdalene image is not sacerdotal; in Farr's terms, it presents a feminine type of worship in that it "elaborates the ideal of humility by merging it with a familiar and concrete image of personal devotion" (9). Such a specifically female prototype may have been directed towards a specifically female audience, though, as Farr says, "a specific identification of patronage or audience as feminine remains speculation unless more can be learned of the eighth century context at Ruthwell through archeological excavation" (10). Images of female humility and chastity "made on this stone cross [were] especially relevant to female monastics and the concept of women in general" (13). While humility is not an exclusively female trait in Anglo-Saxon Christianity, it does resonate within the female half

of a male/female oppositional construction, especially within the context of the masculine Christ of the Ruthwell Cross. His majesty demands humility from others, be they male (the blind man) or female (Magdalene).

Farr's conclusions about the figure of Mary Magdalene, that for devout women "the powerful and triumphant are chaste and humble" (12), confirm my interpretation of the panel as a reinscription of masculine power and domination defined oppositionally by feminine subordination. Christ's majestic masculinity needs the feminine adoration and humility of Mary Magdalene. As Farr points out, any representation of Mary Magdalene has erotic undertones, since Mary Magdalene was a prostitute before she became a disciple (11). As such, she is a reminder of male use of the female body for masculine, sexual pleasure. The erotics of prostitution aside, Magdalene's former employment in the world's oldest profession serves not only to highlight the depth of her penitence and Christ's forgiveness of her sin, but also to signify the sexuality implicit in her female body as it bends to wash the feet of the masculine Christ. Like the diction choices of *The Dream of the Rood* (mount, embrace, tremble), the Mary Magdalene panel combines a subtle heterosexual eroticism with traditional devotion.

The composition of the Mary Magdalene panel is echoed in the composition of the largest panel on the Ruthwell Cross, the Christ in majesty on the north side. Schapiro

noted this compositional similarity in 1944 (237); both Mary Magdalene and the beasts are at the feet of Christ.

Interpretation of this panel has turned mostly on its presumed sources; the search for a source has obscured the discussion of the content of the text, both visual and written. Saxl argues that "this configuration is the usual illustration of Psalm xc.13: 'Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder'" (1), and others have followed in interpreting the beasts as evil animals over which Christ has triumphed. The inscription around this panel (of which Saxl quotes only the first part) contradicts this reading, however: IHS XPS IUDEX AEQUITATIS: BESTIAE ET DRACONES COGNOVERUNT IN DESERTO SALVATOREM MVNDI (Jesus Christ the Judge of Equity. The animals and serpents recognized in the desert the savior of the world).<sup>57</sup> The beasts in the inscription are not designated as forces of evil; indeed, they seem to be on the side of goodness as they recognize the majesty of Christ.

A look at the actual carving strengthens this interpretation; the beasts, more fantastic than real, hold paws as Christ stands, rather than tramples, on their snouts. Kristine Haney and others have interpreted this panel as a celebration of desert asceticism; just as the beasts adore Christ in the desert, so do the desert saints like Paul and Anthony in the panel directly below. Haney says that the main panel is "a glorification of Christ by

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<sup>57</sup>Reconstructed text from Howlett, *Inscriptions*, 75.

his desert saints" that would provide a focus for the audience's meditation (226).<sup>58</sup> Joseph Baird similarly sees the beasts as an example for Christians: the beasts act in a proper manner as they worship at the feet of Christ (48).

Again Christ dominates this panel. As in the other panels, his halo fills the space at the top; he stands on the beasts in such a way that none of his body, including his feet, is obscured. He raises his right hand in blessing and carries a scroll in his left. This Christ has the knowledge contained in the scroll and the power to bless; he looks at the viewer (in the Magdalene panel he gazed slightly downward) rather than at the adoring beasts. His draperies are less curving and more vertical than in the Magdalene panel; this is a more reserved, more austere Christ that commands the north side of the Ruthwell Cross. This panel is the largest on the cross; it shows a Christ who is worshipped, is worshipful, but who does not acknowledge those who adore him. He is in inaccessible majesty.

This repetition of domination and majesty in each of the Christ panels constitutes, in my view, a performance in Butler's sense of the word. The panels, when viewed together, provide four scenes that present Christ's masculinity as a gender performance of power and dominance,

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<sup>58</sup>For similar analyses, see Howlett, "Inscriptions"; Meyvaert; O'Carragain, "Christ Over the Beasts"; and Schapiro.

more awe-inspiring than welcoming. While Christ appears with a female figure only once on the cross, the gender oppositions made clear in the Magdalene panel resonate throughout the other Christ panels on the cross. Christ's masculinity reinforces a gender hierarchy that presumes masculine domination and feminine submission, a hierarchy similar to that outlined as "masculinism" by Brittan. That hierarchy is constructed but naturalized; Christ on the Ruthwell Cross reinforces an unquestioned assumption of the superiority of the masculine God.

The standard critical interpretation of the Ruthwell Cross sculpture program invokes the asceticism of Celtic Christianity. Schapiro, Meyvaert, and a myriad of critics see the cross, with its images of the desert, of humility, and of penitence, as a thematized whole that inspired ascetic contemplation and glorified the ascetic life. The oppositional masculinity and femininity that I see constructed by the figuration of Christ on the cross in no way conflicts with this more general interpretation; attention to issues of gender in a text do not preclude or replace attention to other issues. Women and men in late-seventh or early-eighth century Northumbria, whether lay or religious, would probably have seen the Cross as a glorification of ascetic Christianity in some form. However, they also would have found a confirmation of the gender roles of naturalized masculine domination and

celebrated feminine passivity which, according to Hollis, were being promulgated by the increasingly powerful Roman church.

Farr's speculations about a female audience or female patronage at Ruthwell (10) may seem far-fetched, although Julia Bolton Holloway has argued similarly that the Ruthwell Cross had female patronage (specifically Hild of Whitby). Holloway opposes the south side of the cross with its "scenes of *salus* and of women" to the more masculine north side images of the desert (Crosses 69). Such a patron or audience (as per Hollis' description) could indeed have identified with the female figures on the cross, glorified in their subordination to a distinctly masculine God. That audience would view the Ruthwell sculptures in much the same way as the Vercelli scribe read the related poem she copied into her devotional approximately three hundred years after the cross was carved: as divine instruction and confirmation of the oppositional gender role which she had adopted, the bride of the lamb rather than the soldier of Christ.

Christ is a dominant and dominating figure on the Ruthwell Cross, almost aggressive in the way he takes up space, the way his body is placed in each of the panels in which he appears. This dominant masculinity needs a feminine Other to dominate. The figure of the Virgin Mary, however, does not fit so neatly into this oppositional paradigm of dominant masculinity and subordinate femininity.

Just as she does through vocabulary in *Advent*, through composition and representation on the Ruthwell Cross, Mary disrupts that oppositional masculinity of Christ required for the hierarchy of Christianity.

On the Ruthwell cross, even more than in *Advent*, Mary is a maternal mother, performing within the maternal gender as she accrues power through her body, through nurturance, and through protection of her helpless child. As metaphorized virgin maternity in *Advent*, she ostensibly provides a model of passive and objectified femininity that is actually disruptive through the vocabulary of sexuality and property used to describe her. On the Ruthwell Cross, Mary's maternal disruptions of this construction of ideal femininity are even more apparent, and they indirectly pose a challenge to the heroic heterosexual masculinity of her son on the same Cross.

Mary's representations on the Ruthwell Cross show a desiring maternal agency, not an objectified feminine Other. She appears twice in the Cross's iconographic program, although two representations may be lost and another carving, which depicts Martha and Mary, was thought for a long time to be a visitation scene. The two lost representations may have been at the foot of the cross. There are dim outlines of two figures at the feet of Christ in the crucifixion at the bottom of the south side of the cross; one may have been Mary, since she is traditionally



one of the main mourners at the foot of the cross with John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene. At the bottom of the north side, scholars speculate that there may have a nativity to "balance" the crucifixion on the reverse (Saxl 5), since the two lowest scenes would then show the beginning and end of Christ's human life.

Mary was originally thought to figure in the "visitation" scene just under the transom on the south side. Scholars in the first half of the century assumed that the traditional depiction of two women embracing was a visitation and ascribed the inclusion of the scene to the cross's iconographic program of ascetic contemplation of the life of Christ (Saxl 6, Schapiro 238). In 1974, David Howlett reconstructed and reinterpreted the inscription surrounding the panel (which, in his reconstruction, reads "Martha and Mary meritorious ladies") so that the figures represent Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus; he argued that visitation iconography was the only template available for a scene depicting two women (Howlett, *Two Panels* 334). Paul Meyvaert has echoed this argument (139).

Howlett developed his argument in 1992, noting that neither of the women in the Mary and Martha panel has a halo, as the Virgin does in her other representations on the cross (*Inscriptions* 74). Thus it may be that the Ruthwell Cross Mary and Martha have been disembodied and metaphorized, just as Mary of *Advent* has been. Most

recently Paul Meyvaert has read them strictly as types of the religious life, active and contemplative, in his overarching view of the south side of the Ruthwell Cross as a paean to *vita monastica*. He says:

the figures of the two sisters did not symbolize groups with separate religious ideals but rather the tensions that existed within the monastic life as such, which every monk, whether cenobite or anchorite, had to face and resolve. (139)

The women are strictly symbols in Meyvaert's reading, symbols of parts of men's lives; Meyvaert mentions monks but never nuns who would "read" the text of the Martha and Mary panel.

Farr's reinterpretation of this panel makes its disruption apparent. She resists complete metaphorization of the figures, arguing that patristic and/or metaphorical interpretation tends to neutralize the gender of women on the cross (2). Farr sees the visitation iconography of the scene not as a usage of a handy template but a resonance of communities of women; the community of specific femaleness of the pregnant Mary and pregnant Elizabeth resonates in the depiction of the female community of the sisters Mary and Martha (4). In a "visitation" pose, Mary and Martha create a community where men and masculinity are not needed; the sisters face each other, joining hands, filling the panel. They do not look at the viewer; the image is completely self-contained. Such female subjectivity of the sisters resonates, to use Farr's term, throughout the images of Mary

on the cross; though she is not actually in the visitation panel, the use of her iconography there bespeaks a presentation of feminine agency that relates to other women and acknowledges its own bodiliness in an iconography of pregnancy. Perhaps such disruption is the reason for Robert Farrell's contention that the "visitation" does not even belong on the Ruthwell Cross (Reflections 369). Female subjectivity and community undermine the dominant masculinity of Christ, the main figure on the cross. The women force the viewer to acknowledge a bodily, female spirituality that is not based in worship of a dominant male God.

The Virgin appears on two extant panels, and in both panels Mary is a specifically maternal subject in the terms I have defined in chapters one and three. The first of these panels is the annunciation, above the crucifixion on the south side. There is very little commentary on this scene; most scholarship notes that annunciation occurred on the same date (March 25) as the crucifixion below it (O Carragain, Crucifixion 495; Meyvaert 109). Translation of Howlett's reconstruction of the inscription, a collation with Luke 1:28, reads "And having entered, the angel said to her, 'Hail, full of grace, the Lord [is] with you. You [are] blessed among women'" (Inscriptions 72). Howlett also connects the annunciation to the panel of Christ healing the man born blind (directly above the annunciation); the two

"contrast the sinless birth of Jesus with that of the man *caecum a natibitate*" (81).

The sculpted Mary of the annunciation, however, is remarkable for her presence. There is nothing symbolic, passive, or disembodied about her. Although embodiment or bodiliness might be an impediment to holiness in other texts with other terms, in this panel Mary's body (in which will grow the embryonic God) is part of rather than a detraction from holiness. Gabriel and Mary share the panel equally; they are the same size, showing that within the terms of this composition they are equally important. Though the panel is much weathered, it is possible to see that the angel (the figure on the left) is turned slightly toward Mary while it is Mary who assumes the dominant, frontal posture of Christ in the two main panels (Christ on the beasts and Christ with Mary Magdalene). Their haloes are the same size as well, indicating an equality of sanctity. Reconstructions of the panel from early drawings indicate that Gabriel's left arm is raised in a gesture of annunciation; his right arm holds his left elbow in a slightly ludicrous, defensive pose. Mary's arms are raised in what could be interpreted as a gesture of acquiescence, but the decisive stance of her entire figure belies that interpretation; she seems to receive the annunciation with a gesture of welcome, actively taking part in the process. This composition is especially striking in light of later

depictions of the annunciation, which tend to show the Virgin either passively receiving the annunciation or even shrinking from the tidings of the angel in a defensive posture. In this panel Mary performs within what I term the maternal in that her body is the source of her power. She is not a submissive virgin in the Ruthwell annunciation but an active, even controlling, participant in the bodily process which will result in the birth of the human God.

This virgin who acts with maternal, bodily agency is even more apparent in the Flight into Egypt panel, below the Paul and Anthony panel on the north side of the Ruthwell Cross. George Henderson argues that this panel is actually a "symbolic 'Coming out of Egypt'" (3) since the action of the panel must move from left to right (7). Meyvaert disagrees with Henderson's argument but agrees with its conclusions when he argues that the panel shows the journey back from Egypt through the desert, in accordance with the desert themes of the other "vita monastica" panels (to use Meyvaert's terms). Meyvaert states that:

The image of the passage through the desert, on the return from Egypt...was at once a reminder of the monastic life they were committed to, of the direction in which they were going, and of the dangers lurking before them if they faltered or turned aside. (130)

Both the flight into and return from Egypt entailed a journey through the desert, so it seems that either would be appropriate for Meyvaert's schema, though a return from implies a more felicitous destination. Howlett's

reconstruction of the inscription leaves the question open, as the *in* or *ex aegyp* is completely obliterated (Inscriptions 74).

Whether the panel depicts a flight into or return from Egypt, it shows a mother actively protecting her helpless child. Here Mary exercises the power of the nurturer and protector that I view to be crucial to the maternal. It is her choice to protect the infant Christ; the agency enacted in this panel stems from a desire to protect, not a desire to dominate or accrue status. The donkey fills the lower half of the panel. Fragments of what was probably Joseph appear at the left side; he seems to have been only partially included in the panel, obviously a secondary figure. The figure of Mary riding on the donkey and holding the Christ child occupies the center of the panel. Though weathered, her purposefulness is still apparent. She seems to hunch protectively over the child as she leans forward, toward their destination. The remaining sculpture suggests the figure of the child was carved in especially high relief, emphasizing his delicacy and need for protection by the solid figure of his mother. She was probably nimbed, and the blank space around her halo emphasizes her solitude, especially since the other extant panels on the cross are absolutely filled by sculpted figures.

Nowhere else on the cross is there so much blank space, such a sense of isolation, and subsequent determination, as

that in the Egypt panel. Mary is alone but successful in her quest to protect her child. Here especially is a female figure who performs within a gender category--the maternal--that is anything but passive, disembodied or oppositional. Mary does not perform as subordinate feminine to a dominant masculine in this panel. Her body is bulky and present rather than metaphorized. That solid body has borne and will shelter her son, the ironically helpless God who needs his mother, a maternal figure who willingly uses her power to protect him.

Farr has argued that the presentations of women on the Ruthwell Cross "seem to acknowledge the presence and power of female aristocrats" even as "their representation on the cross belongs to the early period of a long process of their subordination" (13). While Farr relates the images on the cross to the historical women in the culture that created it, I hope I have shown that the figures of Mary on the cross disrupt the construction of ideal femininity necessitated by the Christ panels. Reading the panels of the Ruthwell Cross as a textual sequence reiterates the performances of the gendered figures in those panels, performances that are reinscribed as they are enacted in each "scene." As in *Advent*, the performance of the "ideal woman," whom Jane Chance described as an archetype of passive femininity defined by men, subtly undermines the very hierarchy that tries to metaphorize and idealize her.

That systems attempts, but fails, to take away the importance of the very body that makes her Virgin.

It is, finally, the body of the Virgin Mary--equal in stature to that of the angel, protecting her child on the flight from Egypt--that refuses to disappear and ultimately exposes the un-natural fragility of the very oppositional gender hierarchy that constructed and attempted to disembody her in the first place. Mary's virgin, maternal body teaches us that the Christologies of *Advent* and the Ruthwell Cross, though created three hundred years apart, are both predicated upon an exploitation and denial of the Mother, a process that, even when veiled, can never fully succeed. Mary's body and its maternal performance ultimately reveal the fragility of the patriarchal Christianity to which it is essential, in that her maternal body exposes the vulnerability of the supposedly all-powerful God as it protects its child.

Mary's maternal performance in the paradigmatic gender couple of Christ and Mary alerts us to the possibilities of gender performances that undermine traditional masculine and feminine opposition. While I must leave the maternal for a while, returning to it in my discussion of Judith, it hovers throughout this dissertation. As I turn to the gender performances of Adam and Eve in the Junius 11 *Genesis*, Mary's maternal gender reminds us that stable gender categories are not always what they seem.



## CHAPTER 5

### ILLUSTRATIVE DISRUPTION: GENDER IN THE FALL

Adam and Eve present a more straightforward mixed pair than do Christ and Mary, if only because Adam and Eve lack the odd intergenerational relationships of Christ and Mary, wherein Mary is simultaneously called Christ's Mother, Bride, and Daughter. The mixed pair of Adam and Eve both reinforces and destabilizes a construction of oppositional masculinity and femininity; as their subjectivities mix and interact in the Anglo-Saxon poem and illustrations, the figures reveal the fragility of the binary hierarchy that the text seeks to reinscribe.

The Old English poetic version of the Adam and Eve narrative, the poem *Genesis* contained in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Junius 11, offers some striking narrative and visual differences from the biblical story. Most notable among these is that Adam is tempted first by the devil (whom he resists). In addition, both the illustrations and the text show that the devil disguises himself as an angel before appearing to Eve. Another difference from the Vulgate source is that Eve is praised for her loyalty to Adam and for her beauty even as she commits the original sin. Despite these differences, the Old English *Genesis*,

like the biblical narrative, can be read to contribute to a codification of gender roles that relies on an oppositional masculinity and femininity much like that constructed in *The Dream of the Rood*, in which the feminine is always the less valued in the opposition: Adam/Eve, masculine/feminine, spirit/body, reason/emotion.

In this chapter, however, I will argue that such a binary construction can never be wholly stable; in *Genesis*, the gender hierarchy is never fully secure, even with the command of God to strengthen it. After an examination of the manuscript context of the poem, I will read Sigmund Freud's essay "Female Sexuality" against the Junius 11 text, vocabulary, and illustrations to show that the gender performances of the Old English *Genesis* expose the fragility of oppositional masculinity and femininity rather than justifying and naturalizing that construction. As the gender performances of Adam and Eve blend in their mixed pair, they show that male domination of women, although God commanded it, is not wholly possible.

The poem I will refer to as *Genesis* comprises 2935 lines and is usually divided into two poems, *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*. *Genesis B*, lines 235-851, is an Old English translation of an Old Saxon *Genesis* poem, a fragment of which was discovered in the Vatican in 1894. Edouard Sievers had hypothesized in 1875 that these lines were a translation from Old Saxon, and the 1894 discovery confirmed

that hypothesis as "outstanding among the triumphs of Old English scholarship" (Gollancz lii). *Genesis B* has been treated separately from the rest of the *Genesis* text since that time.

The most recent indication of scholarly acceptance of this division is A.N. Doane's editions *Genesis A* (1978) and *The Saxon Genesis* (1991), two massive volumes that continue to institutionalize the concept of two separate poems. Aside from G.P. Krapp's ASPR edition (1931), the only editions that treat the poem as a single entity were published before the Vatican library discovery.<sup>59</sup> The only one I have been able to examine, Thorpe's 1832 edition, presents the poem in half-lines rather than in the full lines modern readers are accustomed to; the modern English translation runs on the right column, the Old English half-lines on the left. Thorpe numbers his lines by page rather than throughout the poem (which would have almost 6000 lines by his method!). The end of *Genesis B* is, of course, not remarked upon on page 52, where the line *forð libban sceoldan* (1.851b) is at line 30. Thorpe's introduction deals mainly with questions of dating the manuscript and the poems, and with the possibility of Cædmon's authorship.

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<sup>59</sup>The manuscript's pre-1894 editors: Francis Junius himself (1655), Benjamin Thorpe (1832), Karl Bouterwek (1851 and 1854), Christian Grein (1857), and Richard Wuelker (1894) (Krapp xlv-xlvi).

All of the post-1894 editions (except Krapp), and Sievers' own 1875 edition, treat *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* as two separate texts. It is interesting to note that Krapp lists only one edition of *Genesis A* (ed. Ferdinand Holthausen, 1914) but five editions of *Genesis B*, a list augmented by B.J. Timmer's 1948 edition, published after Krapp. This imbalance in number of editions published underscores the critical preference for *Genesis B*.

There are many reasons for this preference, one of which is aesthetic: *Genesis B* is usually taken to be much better poetry than *Genesis A*. Speaking of pre-Sievers readers, Gollancz says, "This passage, telling of the fall of the angels and the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan's emissary, must have struck many previous readers as being altogether grander in poetic style than any other portion of the volume" (liii). That section, according to C.W. Kennedy, "is marked by fullest poetic power" (xxxiii). Kennedy then discusses the possible relationships between *Genesis B* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Ann Klinck says that "*Genesis B* is distinguished from *Genesis A* by much greater vividness and dramatic intensity in the presentation of its characters" (Characterization 598), while J.R. Hall calls the *Genesis B* poet "a master of overall dramatic conception" (Favor 302).

Aesthetics, however, is only one of the reasons for the ongoing separation of the "two" poems. *Genesis B*, 616 lines

defined as a separate poem, is much more critically manageable than a vast, multi-subject 2936-line *Genesis*. Michael Cherniss even argues that *Genesis B* is not a translation of part of a much longer Old Saxon *Genesis*, but a translation of a nearly complete poem by itself. He states that:

There is a thematic and structural unity within the 616 lines of that poem which seems to deny the assumption that it, at least, is only a fragment of a much longer translation . . . tentatively, then, one is free to conclude that *Genesis B* is complete, or almost complete, in its present form, and that the originality and contribution of the translator to the original version cannot be determined. (482-483)

Cherniss' logic in this argument surely leaves something to be desired. He speculates that the three fragments from the 1894 Vatican Library find, which contain a bit of the Fall of Man, part of the story of Cain and Abel, and a section of the destruction of Sodom, were not part of one long poem since "the presence of the fragment from the *Heliand* proves that the copyist had more than one poem before him" (482). Despite the flaws in Cherniss' logic, however, his argument is an illustration of my contention that the 616-line *Genesis B* is appealing to critics in its manageable length and subject matter, so appealing that Cherniss tries to prove that it is a complete poem in its own right.

A 616-line poem lends itself to inclusion in anthologies,<sup>60</sup> to individual editions like those cited above, and to ongoing critical debate about its cruces and interpretations. A glance at both the *Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature* and *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* bears out this disproportionate amount of attention paid to *Genesis B*. In these two overviews of the discipline, both intended as introductions to the field, the authors spend much more time on *Genesis B*.<sup>61</sup> Greenfield sums up the critical privileging of *Genesis B* succinctly:

*Genesis A*, on the whole, is universally regarded as inferior to the poem inserted in its midst on the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve, a poem that in its conception and poetic power has often been compared with *Paradise Lost*. (150)

This critical preference for the separate and shorter poem is also evident in the numbers of critical articles published on *Genesis B* as opposed to *Genesis A*.

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<sup>60</sup>Krapp lists 26 editions in his "Partial Texts" list. Of these, 16 include all or part of *Genesis B*. Partial texts that do not include *Genesis B* tend to include parts of *Exodus* or *Christ and Satan* rather than *Genesis A*. The notable exceptions are Bright's *Anglo-Saxon Reader* (1891) and Turk's *Anglo-Saxon Reader* (1927), which not only have the same name but both anthologize *Genesis* ll.2846-2936 (the story of Abraham and Isaac).

<sup>61</sup>In the *Critical History*, Greenfield and Calder's three and half pages on *Genesis A* are devoted mostly to refuting Bernard Huppé's interpretation of the poem (discussed below); Greenfield then discusses *Genesis B* for four pages. Similarly, Godden's description of *Genesis A* in his "Old Testament Poetry" essay is slightly more than a page long; of *Genesis B*, three pages.

While acknowledging that *Genesis B* has a source separate from that of the rest of the poem, I wish to use one part of the poem, lines 169-964, as a single unit for an examination of the gender performances, constructions, and assumptions within those lines. While this assumption may seem odd to readers accustomed to the traditional division between *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*, there is ample justification for examining these lines as a unit within a single poem called the Old English *Genesis*. The following description and analysis of the Junius 11 manuscript shows that these lines can and should be considered a single textual section, even though that section has two distinct sources.

The manuscript does not present what is termed *Genesis B* as a separate poem; there is no break, no notation to indicate that ll.235-851 should be considered different from the rest of the poetry. These lines are on pp.13-40 of the manuscript.<sup>62</sup> They show no visual differences from the rest of the poem; Ker describes pages 1-212 as an individual unit (406-407). The same hand wrote the lines on all these pages in the same way, in "a distinctive upright hand" (Ker 408). The system of punctuation is the same for the sections called A and B: "a medial point marks the pauses in the middle and at the end of a line of verse" (Ker 408).

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<sup>62</sup>Junius paginated the folios sometime before 1655, so critical references to the manuscript refer to pages rather than to the more usual recto and verso folios.

*Genesis B* does begin at the top of a page, but the leaves that came before it, which would show the exact place where the Old Saxon translation began, are missing. *Genesis B* ends on page 40 in the middle and is not visually evident as a separate text on the page. The last line of *Genesis B*, 1.851, is on line 8 of page 40. The scribe punctuates the "ending" of the poem just like the end of any other sentence. The last word of *Genesis B*, *sceoldan*, is followed by a medial point and *Genesis A* resumes with *Pa com*. Doane states that sections end with a triangle of dots ••• (A 15), but the only such triangle on page 40 is at the bottom of the page, corresponding to line 871 of the text (*Genesis A*), after Adam tells the Lord that he knows that he is naked. The punctuation on page 40 indicates that the scribe did not consider line 851 the end of a poem or even of a section.

The system of capitalization also argues against viewing 1.851 as the end of a poem in the manuscript. Krapp says that "The large capitals are used at the beginnings of poems or sections of poems, and nowhere else in the manuscript" (xx). The large capitals he refers to are zoomorphic and elaborate; they were drawn by the scribe who did the illustrations. Capitals later in the text become plainer and were executed by the scribe rather than the illustrator (Krapp xx). Large capitals two pages before and two pages after 1.851 indicate the beginning of Eve's renewed temptation of Adam (*Pa spræc Eue eft*, 1.821, p.38)



and the beginning of God's interrogation of Adam (*Him ða ædre god andswarede*, l.872, p.42) but no capital indicates an ending to a *Genesis B* section at l.851.

The fitt numbers, too, do not indicate l.851 as the end of a poem or section. Krapp divides *Genesis* into 41 fitts, though they are not marked consistently throughout the manuscript. The first marked fitt is vii at line 325, almost 100 lines into *Genesis B*; the next is xvi at l.918, 67 lines after *Genesis B* ends. Krapp's suggested divisions into fitts that are not marked does not indicate l.851 as the ends of a fitt, though fitt xiv ends soon after at l.871.

The illustrations in the manuscript provide more textual evidence for considering *Genesis* as one poem. In his source study of the illustrations of Junius 11, Thomas Ohlgren argues that an illustrated Old Saxon *Genesis* served as the source for the drawings of both *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* (Light 57). Barbara Raw has also noted that the drawings for the A sections conform to the details of the B section (Derivation 148). Much critical debate has centered on the amount of cooperation between the scribe and illustrator; Gollancz envisions almost complete cooperation while Henderson sees almost none (summarized in Doane, A 20-22). Whether they cooperated or not, the manuscript was illustrated as a single unit with drawings taken from a single exemplar.

Similarly, in her discussion of the manuscript's construction, Raw has argued that *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* may have been presented as a single work in other manuscripts, now lost, besides Junius 11. Her reconstruction of the damaged and incomplete second gathering of the manuscript shows that "the fragmentary state of gathering 2 . . . cannot be used as evidence that *Genesis B* was first combined with *Genesis A* in Junius 11" (Construction 195). Her argument shows that the two poems were considered one poem by the compilers in that they were combined more than once and then copied as one work more than once. We have no other copies of this compilation, but Raw's argument shows that an assumption of two different poems is most likely something quite different from what the manuscript's compiler and audience had in mind.

Doane also presents what he sees as the two separate poems to have been previously compiled and copied into what is now Junius 11 from a single exemplar. While there is some doubt about whether this exemplar contained *Christ and Satan*, the last poem in the codex, it did contain the same *Genesis* that is in Junius 11:

The evidence of the manuscript indicates that the scribe was following an exemplar which contained the same texts in the same order, including *Genesis B*.

(A 11)

Doane refers not to the gathering construction, as Raw does, to reach this conclusion, but to the section, or fitt, numbering: "The most conclusive evidence for a preexisting

exemplar already containing the first three Junius poems . . . . is the section numbering" (A 12). While the actual marks for fitt division, as I noted above, are sporadic, the consistency of the numbering even after some have been missed implies that the scribe was using the numbering from the exemplar. It is interesting that Doane, who sees two separate poems, provides new evidence for the manuscript to have been copied at one time by one person from one other complete manuscript. I interpret this evidence to show that the Anglo-Saxon scribe, and the community that scribe worked for and in, viewed the poem as one complete entity that was transmitted from manuscript to manuscript as a single unit.

Finally, at the lexical level there is evidence that Anglo-Saxon readers or scribes considered *Genesis* as a single text. In the Vulgate and in the "Ælfric Paraphrase" of the Heptateuch,<sup>63</sup> Eve is referred to as "the woman" or "þæt wyf" until after the expulsion from the garden, when Adam names her "Life" since she is the mother of all living things (Crawford 90; Genesis 3.20). While numerous scholars begin their analyses of *Genesis* with a list of the poem's differences from the Vulgate story, none has noticed that Eve is named in *Genesis* in both the A and B sections before the expulsion from the garden (which occurs at ll.943b-944). She is repeatedly addressed and referred to as Eve in the B

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<sup>63</sup>British Library, Cotton Claudius B.IV, edited in S.J.Crawford, ed., *The Old English Version of the Heptateuch*, EETS 160 (London: Oxford UP, 1922, repr. 1969).

section;<sup>64</sup> her first naming in the A section is at 887, when God is questioning her about her transgression.<sup>65</sup>

Both of these supposedly separate poems name Eve when the scriptural and intermediate sources do not; I consider this consistent use of her name further evidence to consider *Genesis* as a single textual unit.

Doane argues that the interpolation of *Genesis B* into *Genesis A* was a practical rather than aesthetic matter. He says:

The important point that must be noted is that the only material absolutely and certainly lost from *Genesis A* in the third gap is *Genesis* 3.1-7, the Fall of Man, the only verses of *Genesis* which *Genesis B* is concerned with. It is a very reasonable presumption that it is the previous loss of this material from *Genesis A* which was the occasion for the interpolation of *Genesis B* in the first place. (A 10)

and:

The reason *Genesis B* was interpolated into A was not esthetic, as nearly everybody assumes, but practical. The compiler of Junius 11, or, as I believe, of its exemplar, had on the one hand a body of Old English texts (our *Genesis A*, *Exodus*, and *Daniel*), badly marred because the crucial episode of the Fall of Man was missing. On the other hand he had a complete, illustrated Old Saxon *Genesis* (already translated into English Saxon?). He therefore took only what was lacking in his primary material, the illustrations and the Fall of Man (including, because inextricably bound up with it, the Fall of the Angels) and disregarded the rest. (A 22)

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<sup>64</sup>lines 419, 548, 612, 648, 729, 767, 790, 791, 821.

<sup>65</sup>Krapp, in his edition of *The Junius Manuscript*, inserts the word "Eve" at line 186 to make the line more metrically "correct," but that naming is not in the manuscript (Krapp 8).

Since Doane produced separate editions of these poems (which he thinks were combined for practical reasons), he seems to be setting himself up as aesthetic rather than practical; his concerns are not those practical ones which motivated the scribe but rather aesthetic in that the poems (for him) are separate in style and source and should be presented separately. Doane praises *Genesis A* (A 55-56), so his division is not so much aesthetically hierarchical as differential. Even though their compiler purposefully put them together, that scribe's practical needs seem not to be as important to Doane as a modern reader's perception of the poems as different texts because they have different sources and styles.

Such a perception of two separate texts within one manuscript text is the sort of issue addressed in H.R. Jauss' *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, wherein he differentiates between the "horizons" of a work's receptions, or readings, in different eras. Jauss says:

The psychic process in the reception of a text is, in the primary horizon of aesthetic experience, by no means only an arbitrary series of merely subjective impressions, but rather the carrying out of specific instructions in a process of directed perception. (23)

The horizon of a work changes with each reader and each era that receives it. In his discussion of Jauss, Allen J. Frantzen says that the horizon "link[s] the cultural environment of a text to the cultural environments of its readers" (*Desire* 123). There are a number of cultural

horizons at work in this chapter; these include, but are not limited to: the horizon of the scribe who made the Junius 11 manuscript, that of the pre-Sievers editors like Junius and Thorpe, that of post-Sievers readers of the poem, and my own horizon, wherein I want to shift the focus of aesthetic reception away from Sievers' philology to the manuscript context of the text.

In Jauss' terms, the post-1894 horizon of *Genesis* includes the "instructions" to read two poems. Readers, according to Jauss, bring to a text expectations that arise "from a pre-understanding of the genre" (22). A text presented as a separate, perhaps complete poem inserted into the midst of a different, and inferior, poem will be read as a separate poem, if only because the book the reader is holding contains just the shorter, superior poem.

Jauss rejects the notion of a teleological development of the history of literature, discarding "the perspective that in this period [the Middle Ages] one might find the first stage of our literature" (109). His focus is on genre, and one of his examples of the futility of teleological analysis is the "development" of modern drama from the medieval cycle play (104-105). Once the reader can go beyond teleology, Jauss states, "The literature of the Middle Ages can once again become an irreplaceable paradigm . . . significant in itself" (109). Our modern "horizon" sees *Genesis A* and *Genesis B* as generically distinct: one, a

mere paraphrase and the other, a work of great poetry. Teleology is at work in those critics from Kennedy to Greenfield who link *Genesis B* to *Paradise Lost*.

The evidence of the manuscript, however, indicates a quite different horizon of reception. While reclaiming the original medieval horizon is impossible, we can discard egregious "instructions" that have appeared upon our modern one. The manuscript indicates that the "horizon" of the scribe and the scribe's community defined *Genesis* as one text, generically defined as Old Testament poetry. The "facts" of Sievers' discovery are indisputable, but his conclusion--that *Genesis B* is a separate poem--is not.

The manuscript context of *Genesis* demands that it be read as one poem. That context, to use Fred Robinson's phrase, is the "most immediate." Robinson says, "When the scholar using an edition returns to the manuscript or has recourse to a facsimile, he often discovers that the codicological setting is an essential part of the meaning of the text" (Consider 7). Robinson is discussing macaronic verse when he says, "modern editors constantly deracinate texts" (Consider 12) but his comments are equally applicable to *Genesis*. The "triumph" of Sievers' scholarship, to use Gollancz' word, has been so compelling for the scholarly community that he and the editors and scholars that followed him completely deracinated *Genesis B* from its context. It has been separate in its editions and discussions for so

long that its manuscript context has been forgotten or ignored.

Although he is discussing various versions of Bede's *History*, Robinson alludes to *Genesis* in his discussion of manuscript context:

A return to manuscript contexts might suggest new ways to examine old questions about authorship and textual integrity, such as . . . the relation of . . . *Genesis A* to *Genesis B*. In all cases, however, interpreters of Old English Literature would be prudent when they consider the various contexts of a poem not to neglect its position and appearance within the manuscript in which it is preserved, for its most immediate context can sometimes be its most important context. (Context 29)

As I have argued above, the "context" of *Genesis* shows that the poem is one textual unit. The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records edition is the only twentieth-century textual version of *Genesis* that reproduces this poetic context in that the poem is presented as one text. One hundred years of solitude for *Genesis B* end when the reader goes to the manuscript and discovers that the scribe of Junius 11, the scribe of its exemplar, and the scribe's community read the Junius 11 manuscript *Genesis* as one poem and were not aesthetically distressed by the "interpolation" that Sievers finally discovered almost 900 years later.

The forgoing examination of the manuscript allows a consideration of the gender construction presented in lines 169-964 of *Genesis*, although those lines include all of *Genesis B* and parts of *Genesis A*. These lines should be considered one textual unit which presents the narrative of



the creation, fall, and punishment of Adam and Eve. Within the manuscript context of the poem, this choice of lines is not arbitrary. Line 169 begins at the top of page nine in the manuscript with the unmarked *fitt iv* (Krapp xxxix). Line 964 falls in the middle of page 46 and while it does not mark the end of a *fitt*, it marks the ending of the story of Adam and Eve before the birth of Cain and Abel. Line 965 begins with a capitalized *ongunnon*, with the capital indicating the beginning of a new section.

Within this complete story of the Fall, we can examine this Anglo-Saxon version of the first gendered performance from start to finish. To see Eve merely as she who ate the apple is to ignore the Eve who was created from Adam's rib and who was then cursed with childbirth. A view of Adam only as the one tempted is incomplete without the following picture of Adam cursed to work for his food. When examining Adam and Eve as characters, especially as arbiters of gender construction that have influenced western culture, we need to examine the complete narrative as presented in the manuscript. That narrative, contained in lines 169-964, reveals performances of masculinity and femininity that are based in the fragility of opposition; selected vocabulary in and illustrations of these lines, however, mix the gendered pair of Adam and Eve. Words and pictures break down the masculine/feminine opposition and present a feminine subject

that does not allow itself to be defined as Other to the masculine.

Criticism of *Genesis*, like that of much Old English poetry, has been heavily source-based. Scholars have delved into the written text and into the illustrations in hopes of determining the sources of the poetry<sup>66</sup> and the art.<sup>67</sup>

Most of these source studies separate the "contents"--i.e., the written text--from the illustrations (and their sources) of the manuscripts. For example, Doane says:

In a textual edition a fullscale discussion of the illustrations would be out of place, but since they have important bearing on the questions of the date, provenance, and compilation of the manuscript, they must be discussed in some detail. (A 16-17)

Doane's comments seem to indicate that a discussion of the illustrations is something of a burden; he refers to his edition as a "textual edition," firmly separating the text from the illustrations, a separation that has been constructed by a privileging of text over drawing. The drawings, in Doane's and others' views, do not illuminate the meaning of a text but merely provide information about dating and sources of that text.

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<sup>66</sup>For discussions of textual sources of the poem, see Evans, Murdoch, and Woolf ("Fall").

<sup>67</sup>For discussions of a lost Old Saxon *Genesis*, Carolingian Bibles, Apocalypse commentaries, the *Physiologus* and mediterranean exemplars as sources for the Junius 11 drawings, see Ohlgren ("Light"), Raw ("Derivation"), and Temple.

Not all critics of *Genesis* are source critics. In her critical survey of scholarship on *Genesis B*, Gillian Overing discusses the difficulty of categorizing that scholarship:

In pursuit of Eve, I initially tried to divide critical viewpoints into those that argued more or less for a greater degree or lesser degree of exoneration of Eve. The pro-Eve and anti-Eve lists soon began to merge, however, and the distinction became irrelevant . . . So instead of trying to divide critics into pro or con factions, I am going to look briefly at a dozen or so of these recent critical arguments, loosely grouping them under the more Christian aegis of Rosemary Woolf or under the more Germanic aegis of J.M. Evans. (41)

While what follows here is sorted under the same rubric, I see the scholarship as more definitively, rather than loosely, divided between exegetical and Germanic. The desires of the critics who have examined Eve seem to have less to do with blaming or exonerating her and more to do with classifying *Genesis* as an example of a particular genre, with particular sources, be they religious or heroic. My own desires are to examine gender performances rather than to classify the poem as a member of a specific genre; either as a heroic epic (with Eve as tragic lead) or as didactic lyric (with Eve as immoral transgressor), the poem attempts to present its two main figures within the terms of traditional masculine/feminine opposition.

Much criticism of *Genesis* is exegetical, focusing on the religious aspects of the poem, especially how much blame

to place on Eve for her sin.<sup>68</sup> Especially in the Old Saxon translation, the poet is very sympathetic to Eve, referring constantly to her good intentions, her beauty, and her innocence. Stricter critics tend to damn her despite the poet's sympathy, even advocating that readers ignore that sympathy and instead focus on Eve's sin. Rosemary Woolf argues that the poet's "apologetic comments" do not absolve Eve but "reveal his sympathy, not her innocence" (196); she accuses Eve of vanity:

The devil's disguise was not impenetrable, and . . .  
Eve listened with a willful credulity springing from  
nascent vanity. (196)

Most exegetical critics judge Eve for her actions alone: she disobeyed the command of God, and thus is morally wrong.<sup>69</sup>

Another group of critics leans towards absolving Eve; this group tends to read *Genesis* as a Germanic heroic poem rather than as a purely religious one. J.M.Evans states that "the stage is set for the major events of the story, which will be played out against this vividly painted backdrop of Germanic military concepts" (119-120). Evans and critics like him concentrate on the aspects of the poem that can be read as part of a Germanic *comitatus*; they see the relationships between God and Adam, Satan and the Tempter,

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<sup>68</sup>The most doctrinally strict exegetical reading of the entire poem is Huppè's in *Doctrine and Poetry* (New York: SUNY Press, 1959).

<sup>69</sup>Adding to Huppe's and Woolf's exegetical arguments about Eve's guilt are Karen Cherewatuk, Margaret Erhart, R.E. Finnegan, Thomas Hill, and John Vickrey.

and Adam and Eve as typical lord-thane relationships of Germanic poetry (like *Beowulf* or *The Wanderer*). These critics tend to have one of two concentrations. Some focus on the irony of the lord/thane model as it can be applied to Satan and the Tempter; after all, Satan is bound in hell and cannot give his thane gifts of treasure and honor for fulfilling his quest.<sup>70</sup>

The other *comitatus* critical focus is on the relationship between Adam and Eve, and it is here that most feminist critics have pitched their tents. Eve is called *ides*, usually translated as "noblewoman" or "lady", throughout the poem, and the use of the word, according to critics like Pat Belanoff and Jane Chance, underscores Eve's place in the traditional Anglo-Saxon role of peaceweaver. Chance argues that Eve, who listens to the serpent's council that she must mend the supposed rift between Adam (her lord) and God (her Lord), actually oversteps the bounds of the traditional role:

[Eve] was the exemplar for the disobedient wife, the uninformed virgin bride, and her behavior, of which the Anglo-Saxons disapproved, would thus be portrayed as an inversion of the role of peaceweaver through an arrogation of the heroic role of retainer. (65)

A peaceweaver's role was to give council, provide heirs, and look beautiful (Belanoff, Fall 827 and elsewhere). Eve's

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<sup>70</sup>See Cherniss as well as J.R. Hall's "Serving the Lord," Alain Renoir's "Self-Deception," and Ohlgren's "Texts and Contexts" essays.

council leads to expulsion from the garden; her intentions were good, but the results were calamitous. Chance argues that "the poet exonerates Eve, to a certain extent, because she faithfully pursues her role as peace-weaver" (75).<sup>71</sup>

Feminist critics like Chance and Belanoff defend and even celebrate Eve because of her role as peaceweaver, who keeps the interests of her lord foremost in her mind.<sup>72</sup>

All of these readings, whether source-based, exegetical, Germanic, and/or feminist, reinforce traditional notions of gender roles. These readings see masculine and feminine, Adam and Eve, lord and peaceweaver, as opposite and separate, yet dependent on one another for definition. The story of the Fall, after all, is usually interpreted to codify woman's socially constructed inferiority to man; its proponents invoke the story, in stunning circular logic, to show that that inferiority is natural. In their discussion of the early Christian Fathers' writings on the place of woman, Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsser state:

Eve's act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden became evidence for all women's inherent weakness and evil, and the principle justification for her eternal subordination to her "natural" superior, the more spiritual and rational male. (78-79)

Eve was weak, fleshly, and earthbound: "The Church Fathers portrayed Eve as object, as the cause of lust and the

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<sup>71</sup>This statement contradicts Chance's other assertion that Eve goes beyond her role as peaceweaver.

<sup>72</sup>See also Ann Klinck and Alain Renoir for similar defenses of Eve.

personification of all that was uncontrollable" (Anderson and Zinsser 79). This analysis of the biblical story of the Fall both proves and reinforces, in its multiple retellings and places in the western psyche, the idea that woman is sensual and bodily evil and that she needs to be controlled by the rational, intellectual man. The Old English version of the narrative can be seen as doing much the same thing, even as the narrational differences from the biblical version set it apart.<sup>73</sup> Such a reading reinscribes a construction of gender performance that privileges the masculine side of an opposition (leader/follower) while assuming the naturalization of that opposition as well.

Interestingly enough, feminist critics of *Genesis* seem to subscribe to traditional--oppositional--notions of femininity as well. While they may not state that woman is the equivalent of sense and the body, they construct different feminine roles, as peacemaker (Belanoff and Chance) or as arbiter of "feelings" (Klinck) that play and expand upon a traditional femininity defined only against one or another male roles. The role of peacemaker is based on marriage, the woman as daughter who becomes wife to make peace between her father and her husband. While Chance

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<sup>73</sup>Critics who explicitly use this binary opposition in their analyses include John Vickrey and Thomas Hill, who read Adam and Eve as allegory for reason and sense; J.R.Hall, who blames Adam for his failure to lead Eve as he should have; and Woolf, whose analysis assumes that women should not have power over men.

ascribes power to the peaceweaver role and Belanoff details the collapse of the peaceweaver's power in an increasingly ecclesiastical world, the notion of the peaceweaver reinforces a traditional construction of femininity that depends on the masculine (husband, father, even son) for the woman's identity. Ann Klinck's view of Eve and other women who "offer greater opportunities for the portrayal of thoughts and feelings, especially of an intimate kind" (Characterization 606) merely reinforces the notion of the feminine as the opposite of the masculine: emotional rather than intellectual.

The text of *Genesis* itself overtly reinscribes this opposition. Throughout lines 169-964, the reader is continually reminded that Eve exists for Adam, not in her own right. God creates her as a support for Adam:

Forþon him heahcyning,  
 frea ælmihtig      fultum tiode;  
 wif aweahte      and þa wraðu sealde,  
 lifes leohtfruma,      leofum rince<sup>74</sup> (ll.172b-175)

(Therefore for him the high king, the lord almighty, created help; he animated a woman and the light-author of light gave this helpmate to the beloved man.)

God's initial motivation for creating Eve was that Adam not be alone in paradise (ll.170-171a). In the initial temptation scene of Adam, Adam refers to Eve in the same terms, as a woman who exists only in relation to himself: *me*

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<sup>74</sup>Text throughout from G.P.Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript*, ASPR vol.1, (New York, Columbia UP, 1931). Translations are my own. Further line citations appear in my text.



*þas bryd forgeaf / wlitesciene wif* (he gave me this bride, the beauty-shining woman, ll.526b-527a). Even as he castigates her after the Fall, Adam defines her only in relation to him:

Nu me mæg hreowan      þæt ic bæd heofnes god,  
 waldend þone godan,      þæt he þe her worhte to me  
 of liðum minum,      nu þu me forlæred hæfst  
 on mines herran hete.

(Now I for myself can regret that I prayed to heaven's God, the good ruler, that he here make you for me from my limbs, now [that] you have deceived me into the hate of my lord, ll.816-819a)

Adam masculine performance in these lines--the performance of speech in narrative--defines the feminine only in relation to his own subjectivity. For him, Eve does not exist outside of her relation to him.

The tempter as well presumes some stereotypically feminine traits in his dialogue with Eve; he calls her *wif willende* (l.560), a desiring or willful wife, and encourages her to coax or entice her husband to eat the fruit (rather than to reason with him about it): *Span þu hine georne / þæt he þine lare læste* (you entice him eagerly so that he fulfills your teaching, ll.575b-576a).

Even as she tempts him to sin, Eve is invoked as a loyal wife to Adam, who follows the tempter's advice to get Adam out of trouble with God. The poet refers to her as *þam þegne* at l.705, underscoring the hierarchy within the pair and her loyalty to Adam. Directly after that reference, the poet explains:



was) performed by male or female bodies. The components of the curse on Adam are simply not as gender-specific as is the curse on Eve.

God's curse to Eve is one that applies only to women, unlike Adam's more neutral punishment. To Eve he decrees that:

þu scealt wæpnedmen  
 wesan on gewearde, mid weres egsan  
 hearde genearwad, hean þrowian  
 þinra dæda gedwild, deaðes bidan,  
 and þurh wop and heaf on woruld cennan  
 þurh sar micel sunu and dohtor (ll.19b-924)

(You must be in male power, constrained firmly with reverence of men, miserable to suffer the error of your deeds, to wait for death, and through weeping and lamentation to bring into the world son[s] and daughter[s].)

In the curse, Eve is ordered into the inferior position in this gender hierarchy, but such a construction is actually nothing new within the gender terms of this poem; she has been oppositionally defined and inferior throughout the text, as I have shown.

The addition of sorrow in childbirth raises the issue of Eve's maternity and the possibility of a maternal gender performance in this text like that of Mary in *Advent* and on the Ruthwell cross. As I discussed in chapter one, biological maternity does not constitute a maternal gender performance. Eve is invoked as mother a number of times throughout the text, most notably when the poet comments on the consequences of her actions for her descendants. Right before she takes the apple to Adam, the poet remarks:

Swa hire eaforan sculon      æfter lybban:  
 þonne hie lað gedoð,      hie sculon lufe wyrcean,  
 betan heora hearran hearmcwyde      and habban his  
 hylde forð.

(Thus her descendants must afterwards live: when they do evil, they must work for [divine] love, must amend to their lord harmful speech and have his grace forthwith, ll.623-625)

Eve's actions necessitate penance for her descendants. She is not troubled by this, even after she is made aware of the consequences of her actions. Her concerns in her speeches are herself and her husband. She does not comment on those sons and daughters she must bring forth, or the pain with which they will arrive. As such, she is not a maternal mother in the terms I have previously defined. She does not accrue power through nurturance and protection of her children. She does not use the materiality of her body to disrupt a patriarchal, oppositional schema.

Eve is not maternal in a performative sense of the word; this absence of maternal performance in this section of *Genesis* leads me conclude that within this narrative, oppositionality can be disrupted but not fully deconstructed. There may not be a space in this narrative that can exist outside of hierarchy. As I will argue below, both Adam and Eve disrupt the hierarchy, and Eve temporarily reverses it, but the idea of the hierarchy itself remains ultimately intact throughout the text, even as it is reversed and challenged.

The oppositional subjectivity assumed in a gender construction of the masculine as rational leader and the feminine as the not-masculine sensual temptress is made explicit in psychoanalytic terms in Sigmund Freud's "Female Sexuality." This essay discusses masculine as well as feminine psychosexual development; Freud describes masculine development so he can show how feminine development differs from it, a stellar example of the male as normative, the female deviant. Freud's most important sign of gender is the penis, which (for him) defines not only physical but also psychosexual differences between the sexes. Little boys become masculine because they fear the loss of the penis:

In his [the little boy's] case it is the discovery of the possibility of castration, as proved by the sight of the female genitals, which forces on him the transformation of the Oedipus complex . . . it is precisely the boy's narcissistic interest in his genitals--his interest in preserving his penis--which is turned round into a curtailing of his infantile sexuality. (Freud 229)

Since the little boy understands, through the threat of his father, that incest with the mother would result in castration, he identifies with the gender role exemplified by his father and renounces his mother as love-object. Freud refers to these steps as "all the processes that are designed to make the individual fill a place in the cultural community" (Freud 229). Part of that cultural community is a masculinity wherein men feel "a certain disparagement in their attitude towards women, whom they regard as being

castrated" (Freud 229). Men define themselves, according to Freud, by their possession of a penis.

A meeting of Freudian theory and the tenth-century text and illustrations provides an inroad to understanding both the assertion and the tenuousness of the manuscript's oppositional gender construction. To have/have not a penis is just another in the infinite list of oppositions in which the masculine is assumed to be privileged, and an ironic literalization of this Freudian penis-focus is the word *wæpned*, which (in two forms) appears twice in *Genesis*. While *wæpned* is translated "male" (Hall, *Dictionary* 394; Doane, *Genesis A* 402), it literally means "weaponed." Here indeed is a popular image of an Anglo-Saxon masculine figure: weaponed, wielding a sword or battle axe as he goes to fight the enemy. According to this word, to have a weapon is to be a man. To be weaponed is to be masculine, and those who carry weapons are masculine.

*Wæpen* then works as a mark of masculine gender much as the penis works in Freud's theory. Freud said that to have a penis is to be a man, and the subsequent equation of weapon with penis is not as farfetched as it may seem: T. Wright and R.P. Wuelker, in their 1884 *Old English Vocabularies*, translated *wæpen* as "membrum virile," the male member (Hall, *Dictionary* 394), anticipating Freud's 1931 essay and my discussion of Adam's masculinity. *Wæpned* marks the masculine and differentiates it from the feminine.

Interestingly enough, however, it is used only at times when such an oppositional masculinity and femininity is being called into question, when masculinity needs the added strength of a marker to differentiate itself from a feminine Other.

Both uses of *wæpned* (*wæpned* in l.195 and *wæpnedmen* in l.1919) in *Genesis* are grammatically ambiguous. The first is presented as a part of a sequence of variants describing Adam and Eve. The Lord blesses "ða forman twa, fæder and moder, /wif and wæpned" (the first two, father and mother, woman and man, ll.194-195). In the chiasmus, *wif* is synonymous with *moder*, *wæpned* with *fæder*. All these words except *wæpned* are nouns; *wæpned* is a substantive adjective that must be translated as a noun. If the translator wants to be completely literal, "one" needs to be added for the sentence to make any sense: father and mother, wife and weaponed one. It is especially interesting to note that the only other use of *wæpned* in Old English poetry is also in *Genesis*, l.2746, where it refers to Abraham in the exact same construction, *wif and wæpned* (Bessinger 1369).<sup>75</sup> Only for this specific poem, then, would it seem that to be weaponed is to be male; in Freudian terms, the need for the penis to define masculinity has been projected into the need for a weapon.

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<sup>75</sup>More common in *Genesis* and other Old English poetry is the phrase *wif and wer*, which means woman and man.

The other use of the word is also grammatically ambiguous. It comes in the curse of God upon Eve and can be translated either specifically or generally, that Eve will live in Adam's male power or in male power in general: *þu scealt wæpnedmen / wesan on gewealde* (ll.919-920). The grammatical problem is the opposite of that of *wæpned* in l.195; while *wæpned* is an adjective that needs to be translated as a noun, *wæpnedmen* is a noun that needs to be translated as an adjective. A literal translation of the phrase is "You must be in the power of weaponed-men" (translating as a genitive). It is easy to see why the more graceful "You must be in male power" (translating as an adjective) has been preferred.

*Wæpnedmen*, like *wæpned*, occurs only twice in Old English poetry (Bessinger 1369). The other usage is in *Beowulf* at l.1284 and refers again to a description of the relation between men and women. The *Genesis* poet uses the word to define Eve's submission to weaponed-men. The *Beowulf* poet is discussing the comparison of Grendel's mother to male warriors, *wæpnedmen*:

Wæs se gryre læssa  
efne swa micle, swa bið mægþa cræft,  
wiggryre wifes be wæpnedmen . . . (ll.1282-1284)<sup>76</sup>

(The terror was less, even as great as is the strength of women, the battle-terror of the woman, when compared to the weaponed-men)

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<sup>76</sup>Text is from F. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf* (Lexington: Heath, 1950). Translation is my own.



Both of these poets are dealing with situations where women have upset the usual order of the sexes. Eve disobeyed God; Grendel's mother has killed Æscher, Hroðgar's trusted retainer, and is about to give Beowulf a hard fight. The poems define these disruptive women in terms of weaponed men, stating that these women are not as powerful, though the actual narratives show something quite different. If we continue with the Freudian equation of weapons with penis, this sign of masculinity--the men are weaponed-men, not just men--is necessary in the attempt to disempower the disruptive female figures.

Perhaps a Freudian reading of an Old English poem's vocabulary seems fanciful. Perhaps to say that femininity is usually defined in terms of not-masculinity is a modern concept, not applicable to Anglo-Saxon culture. I wish to show through additional lexical study, however, that the idea of defining women through men was as pervasive for the Anglo-Saxons as it was for Freud.

While Belanoff and others have examined Eve as *ides*, an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman, no critic I have discovered sees Eve primarily as *wif*. In the Vulgate and in the Ælfric Paraphrase, Eve is referred to only as "þæt wif" until Adam, in a dramatic example of the masculine defining the feminine, names her. While she is named in *Genesis* as Eve before the Fall, she is also referred to as *wif* (in various forms of the word) fourteen times (Bessinger 1425). *Wif* is

variously translated as "woman" or as "wife" (Hall, *Dictionary* 408; Doane, *Genesis A* 405, *Saxon* 394), but Julia Penelope and Cynthia McGowan argue that by the end of the ninth century (25-50 years before *Genesis* was copied into Junius 11), the word *wif* had ceased to mean woman and referred only to a woman who was sexually attached to a man:

The word *wif*, which once referred to a "female human being," lost its wide range of usage and gradually came to refer only to *wimmin* (sic) attached to men toward the end of the ninth century. (497)

Belanoff comments on the loss of words, like *ides*, that describe women's power; this loss occurred "somewhere in the transition period between Old and Middle English" (Fall 823). She states that as growing ecclesiastical power and finally the patriarchy of the Normans overcame the Anglo-Saxon archetype of the beautiful, wise noblewoman, the need for words like *ides* disappeared. Similarly, Penelope and McGowan argue that the idea of a woman attached to a man became the norm, and the words for unattached women were lost:

As the range of social opportunities for *wimmin* (sic) continued to narrow, so, too, did the available terms which designated female participation in social activities outside the home..in the midst of this lexical turmoil, the compound *wifman* appeared for "female human being." As *wimmin* were increasingly defined as the "Other" and subordinate to proximate male control in the home, so the compound further defined *wimmin* in terms of males. (500)

Even the word for a woman who was not specifically attached to a man contained "man" as part of its compound: for a woman not to be attached to a man was to be like a man.

Since Eve is *wif*, she is defined by her relationship to a man. Although she does manage to control her own subjectivity for a short time in the drawings and the poetry (which I will discuss below), the very language that describes her defines her in terms of a man. *Wif*, in a literal translation of *Genesis*, should be translated "wife" and not "woman," since by the time the poem was copied the word referred to a woman defined by her relationship to a man, just as our modern word *wife* does.

All of the forms of words for beauty and shining, *sceonost*, *scienost*, and *wlitegost*, also augment a definition of Eve as feminine determined by the masculine. Belanoff describes the traditional association of women in Old English poetry with shiny-ness and brightness (Fall 822). Eve shines like the gold-adorned queens of *Beowulf* and like the Cynewulfian saints, but within her own poem she shines like Satan as well (Belanoff, Fall 824). Belanoff discusses the positive image of the Anglo-Saxon noblewoman who shines and gives wise council; she then analyzes Eve's lexical association with Satan as a part of the declining status of women within the larger Anglo-Saxon culture: "the glow once connotative of stately regalness or holy sainthood would

have developed instead connotations of deceptive appearance" (Fall 826).

Chance notes that *wlite* and *scine* and its variants are regularly used throughout Old English literature to describe gems, flowers, the sun, stars, jewels, and treasure. Chance connects Eve's shining to the unfallen Lucifer, to Eve's vision, and to the description of the Tree of Life:

Eve's beauty resembles treasure and precious objects; its shining splendor akin to that of stars and sun resembles the glory of the initial creation by God. Indeed, three other figures or symbols in the poem are described similarly, probably in order to link them with the virgin bride Eve as equally "shining" in beauty--unfallen, prelapsarian, perfect. (67-68)

Chance's association of forms of *wlite* and *scyne* with prelapsarian perfection, however, ignores the fact that Eve is still described as *wifa wlitegost* even after she is fallen (1.822). While the shining light of Lucifer, of her vision, and of the Tree of Life undoubtedly indicates prelapsarian perfection, Eve's shining-ness relates not to her innocence but to her femininity since it continues to exist after the Fall.

Gillian Overing discusses gold-adorned queens as "visible treasure" in her analysis of women in *Beowulf* (*Language* 104). These women literally reflect their husbands' wealth in their shininess; they are a means to show off the man's prestige, defined by the possession of treasure. While Eve has no jewels or gold to wear in paradise, her glow is also a reflection of Adam's

masculinity. She is *wifa wlitegost* (ll.627, 701, 822), the most beautiful of wives. In modern terms, she is a trophy wife, whose good looks enhance the status of her husband. Adam, the presumption goes, must be quite a man to have a wife so beautiful. Not only is her beauty and glow repeatedly emphasized, but in her femininity Eve is the *only* most beautiful, most shining woman in Old English poetry. While words for beauty and shining also describe Satan, Eve's vision, and the Tree of Life, the superlative refers only to Eve. *Sceonost* and *scienost* are unique to Eve in Old English poetry (Bessinger 1018-1019); while other things may shine, they do not shine as much. While there are a number of beautiful women and things in Old English poetry, only Eve is *wlitegost*, most beautiful (Bessinger 1451).

This lexical femininity of most shining, most beautiful serves to enhance Adam's masculinity and endorse a construction of the feminine which exists for the benefit of the masculine: Eve's beauty is a version of "visible treasure" that pre-dates material wealth. Adam has no one to impress, in the garden of Eden, but in order to present him as a masculine hero of his own story, the poet must present Adam's wife as a reflection of his status. Since she has no jewels, she must perform this function through her physical beauty, which leads right back to the definition of traditional femininity as physical rather than spiritual or intellectual.

These traditional notions of masculinity and femininity described and assumed in the Old English narrative and vocabulary are at work in some of the Junius 11 illustrations as well. As a whole, the illustrations are a combination of what are usually termed the Winchester and Utrecht (or Rheims) styles. Winchester style is characterized by full color drawing and a bar and acanthus border construction (Saunders 17); its influence on Junius 11 shows in the full color drawing of God on page 11 and the use of the acanthus to indicate all the flora in the garden, including the forbidden tree (see, for examples, pages 11 or 34). In addition, another indication of Winchester style was the adoption of the Carolingian "shrugging gesture" wherein the elbows are close to the body while the hands are outstretched; the page 13 illustration from Junius 11 is an especially good example of this posture.

The Utrecht style, named for the Utrecht Psalter (produced in Rheims in the ninth century) consists of a sketchier outline drawing. Utrecht-style figures are characterized by humped backs, spindly legs, and "lively action" (Saunders 29). Saunders concludes that, although the two styles were usually combined in varying degrees, the Utrecht style was particularly suited to an illustrative series (she uses the *Psychomachia* as an example) "in which the purpose is more to teach a lesson than to decorate a page" (31).

Certainly, the Junius 11 drawings of the Fall "teach the lesson" of the codification of gender roles demonstrated in the narrative and vocabulary. The illustrations on pages 10 and 45 both show the masculine as the leader of the feminine, even though the earlier one illustrates a scene that takes place before the curse.<sup>77</sup> The composition of the scenes is strikingly similar. On page ten, the illustration literalizes the medieval convention that the man must act as mediator between God and the woman; Adam stands between God and Eve and is elevated slightly above her. He stands in three quarter profile; Eve's body faces front while her face is turned toward God. At the top of page 45, Adam is foregrounded and again in three quarter profile; Eve's body, again, is frontal (and clothed, since they are being expelled from the garden). Her gaze is obscure; it could be directed toward either Adam or God.

In the lower portion of page 45, Adam continues in his traditional masculine role and leads his wife, who takes his arm as they leave the garden. Gollancz notes that Adam carries a spade and bag to conform to his new role of worker (xliii); he also contends that Eve is carrying a spindle-whorl (ibid).<sup>78</sup> While of course the tradition is that Eve was a weaver and Adam a gardener, the "spindle-whorl" looks

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<sup>77</sup>Discussed illustrations from Junius 11 appear in the figures appendix in order of pagination rather than in order of discussion.

<sup>78</sup>Ohlgren also says this object is a spindle (Catalogue).

exactly like the apple of the drawings on page 24, 28, and 31. The illustrator gave Eve's traditional iconographic symbol the look of the symbol of her weakness. In this illustration Adam and Eve leave the Garden with symbols of their gender, but Eve's symbol plays upon another motif in the drawings; the spindle/apple defines the woman as the tempted one who must be led.

Other pictures that illustrate this traditional, oppositional notion of gender construction are on pages 20 and 24; both show Eve's temptation by the serpent. Page twenty directly relates to a crux within the *Genesis* text. At line 491 we are told the tempter changes himself into the likeness of a snake: *Wearp hine ða on wyrmes lic*. This change, according to Alain Renoir, provided the impetus for Adam's accusation that the self-styled messenger from God did not look like an angel: he looked like a snake (I.Q. 265). Eve refers to him as *godes engel god* (1.657), God's good angel, when she speaks to Adam, though we have not been informed that he changed his shape again. Ohlgren argues that the illustration on page 24 confirms that a second transformation has taken place (Illustrations 205). On page twenty, Eve is looking at a serpent; on 24, she takes the apple from an angel.<sup>79</sup> Gollancz invokes traditional biblical iconography in his discussion of the deviations of

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<sup>79</sup> Ohlgren does not directly address why she would be looking at a snake on page 20 if the devil transformed himself before speaking to Eve.



the illustrations from the text (he is discussing this illustration not in terms of snakes and angels but in terms of the lack of an illustration for the initial temptation of Adam):

As regards the departure by the artist from the poetical text before him . . . the artist is probably influenced by the biblical narrative. (xli)

Both of the illustrations, pages 20 and 24, construct Eve's traditional femininity in showing how she is being tempted. Page 20 defines Eve physically in her gesture. Though Gollancz gives her credit for restraining her hand (xli), Eve needs to restrain herself *physically* from moving to obey the serpent's orders. She cannot resist purely through mental effort, as Adam does before her. Similarly, the page 24 drawing shows Eve as feminine in that she is succumbing to temptation, weak in opposition to Adam's illustrated strength.

My final example of traditional, oppositional gender role performances in the drawings is the top illustration on page 31, which shows the "delectation" (to use Vickrey's word) of Adam.<sup>80</sup> The reader is tempted by the apple as well. The composition of this illustration, with its mirror image-stances of Adam and Eve and the extra balance created

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<sup>80</sup>The delectation in this illustration, for the modern sensibility, is debatable. In aesthetic judgments of the Junius 11 drawings, the word "grotesque" keeps popping up (Wormald 38); Junius Herbert said that the nudes "only become endurable" when they have donned their drapery (qtd in Morey 178).

by the angel/tempter on the left and the acanthus tree on the right, forces the reader's eye to the relatively empty center, which contains the apple as it passes from her hand to his. Her left fingertip seems to caress his palm, infusing the temptation with a sensuality that could be read as particularly "feminine" in that it is bodily and tactile rather than spiritual and intellectual.

Within the narrative, critical readings of the narrative, and selected illustrations, however, that gender hierarchy is undermined and reversed. Eve does demonstrate a feminine subjectivity and agency, especially in the temptation scene and in a number of drawings, that resists masculine codification of her as Other. She cannot escape that binary paradigm, however; her subjectivity does briefly control his, reversing the hierarchy, so that the idea of the hierarchy and power structures within it remain intact.

Both Belanoff and Overing address this issue of feminine subjectivity and power, Overing more theoretically. Both interpret Eve as a powerful subjectivity in the temptation scene. Belanoff sees the poet's attestation of Eve's mental inferiority as an attempt to distract the reader from her actual superiority. The poet tells us that Eve has a *wacran hige*, a weaker mind (l.590) and *wifes wac gepoht*, a wife's weak thought (l.649).<sup>81</sup> Belanoff states:

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<sup>81</sup>Alain Renoir argues that the comparative in *wacran hige* refers to the tempter, not to Adam, and that Eve is not to blame for not being smarter than a supernatural being (I.Q.

More specific, in considering Eve's strength in relation to Adam's, is that, whatever the cause, it is she whose will finally prevails: Adam eats the apple. He can resist the devil but not Eve . . . she is able to persuade Adam to do her bidding, and she is able to do what the devil could not. (Fall 829)

Thus Eve controls the action of this section of the narrative. Belanoff also notes that Eve has the maturity to accept responsibility for her actions while Adam does not (Fall 829); not only does she control the action but she readily takes the blame as well.

Overing's argument is much more involved, but like Belanoff she sees Eve as a controller of the action, at least in the temptation scene. Overing is "looking for Eve, . . . identifying a female subject and its desire where none has been identified before" (Reading 38). Overing sees Eve, for most of the poem, as part of Adam's identity: "Her role is to assist in realizing the dimensions of Adam's essentially human and psychological drama, to amplify his role as subject" (Reading 47). In these terms, Eve is object or Other to Adam's subject; as a traditional feminine Other, she exists merely to enlarge the scope of his masculine subjectivity.

Overing reads Julia Kristeva against the poem to discuss Eve as subject in terms of language. While Kristeva argues for a post-Freudian view of the feminine, especially the maternal, as pre-linguistic and thus unable to act as

subject within language, Overing argues that Eve briefly disrupts this construction of subjectivity by signifying as a feminine maternal body. Her action separates the Word from the word, the signifier from the signified, in an act that defines language and the symbolic:

Her deed, or rather her consumption of the fruit, sets words finally adrift from the Word. In *Genesis B*, Eve provides passages into the symbolic: she makes language possible. And it remains to ask, *what is transmittable* as a result, what are the terms of this contradiction when the maternal body, linguistic antimatter, as it were, meets language. (Reading 55)

This success of Eve's to act as subject in a tale that continually defines her as Other is short-lived. Overing argues that the pinnacle of Eve's success is Adam's eating of the fruit. However, the poet takes away that success just as it has been achieved. Overing uses the language of movies when she says:

The poet chronicles Eve's success in just these terms, as a triumphant and irresistible overflowing of desire. Adam is convinced as he identifies with her desire . . . but his experience is cut short in two highly dramatic ways. The first is that the poet cuts abruptly away from the human pair and focuses on the laughter and delight of the tempter. And the second is that Eve's incipient subjectivity ceases to elude forms of masculine representation. (Reading 60)

The confusion that results from a signifying woman cannot be tolerated. Overing states that by the end of the poem "Adam is (re)established as narrative center, as oedipal subject/hero contending with the feminine as obstacle and object" (Reading 61).

Certain illustrations of the manuscript also reveal Eve as a signifying woman who controls representation. As such, she upsets the traditional construction of masculinity, defined by the marker of a weapon in Anglo-Saxon terms or of a penis in Freudian terms. If Adam is masculine, he who leads with his rational mind, he should be depicted with a weapon, or at least with a penis. The artist of Junius 11, although he was dealing with nudes, left out both the weapon and the penis. Adam has no need for weapons in the narrative of the Fall (they would be useless against the supernatural forces of God and the devils). Although they are shown together, naked and unashamed in seven illustrations, Adam and Eve look pretty much the same from the waist down. They both have the "spindly legs" that characterize the Utrecht style, abdominal flaps that hang down into the genital area, and blank crotches rather like those of modern Barbie dolls (the illustrations on pages 10, 11, and 13 are good examples). In these illustrations of our oldest gender story, Adam has no sign of masculinity; he is not marked as a "have" to oppose Eve as a "have-not."

How, then, to tell the difference between Adam and Eve in the drawings? Freud says that the male child defines his masculinity through his penis and that, eventually, the female child defines her femininity through her lack of a penis. Freud says that the girl's attitude about women in general stems from this female castration complex, which is

not a fear of being castrated but a realization that she already is:

When the little girl discovers her own deficiency, from seeing a male genital, it is only with hesitation and reluctance that she accepts the unwelcome knowledge . . . the child invariably regards castration in the first instance as a misfortune peculiar to herself; only later does she realize that it extends to certain other children and lastly to certain grown-ups. When she comes to understand the general nature of this characteristic, it follows that femaleness . . . suffers a great depreciation in her eyes. (Freud 233)

Again, Freud here defines femininity as not-masculinity; to be female is to not-have a penis.

To return to the Junius 11 drawings, since Adam has no penis, no weapons, no clothes, nothing that could define him as masculine in our reading of the drawings, the viewer must rely on Eve for identification not only of herself but of Adam as well. Eve's breasts, not Adam's penis, differentiate her from him. In all of the illustrations that show Eve naked, all but two depict her with distended, elongated, and obvious nipples.<sup>82</sup> Though Freud discusses the penis as a marker of the privileged gender, in these illustrations the female breast is the gender marker, the determining factor. Instead of a definition that privileges the masculine, in these illustrations the masculine is

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<sup>82</sup>The first is on page 31, where her arms obscure her breasts; in this illustration she offers the apple to Adam, however, so the depiction of the narrative enables us to identify the relatively sexless figures. The second is on page 36; it is discussed on pp.182-83 of this chapter.

defined by lack: Adam does not-have breasts, and that is his defining characteristic. In the first illustration of the creation of man (page 9), God bends over a figure in the lower right corner of the picture. If the viewer does not see the brief line indicating Adam's rib in God's hand, this figure could easily be taken for Eve. The hair is long (Adam's hair changes lengths throughout the cycle) and Adam's breasts look distinctly feminine, round and defined. It is only in a comparison with the figure at the left, which is marked "Eva" and displays obvious female nipples that the viewer can make the sure identification of the righthand figure as Adam, the masculine. Eve's breasts serve as similar signifiers on pages 11, 13, and in both illustrations on 34: they enable the reader to tell at a glance what is feminine and what is masculine. Freud defined the feminine as the not-masculine, but the drawings of Junius 11 define the masculine as the not-feminine, the figures that do not have definitively nipples.

Eve's subjectivity resonates in other illustrations as well. In the illustration on page 36, the second of the drawings in which Eve's breasts are not prominent (the first was discussed in note 82), Adam and Eve cover their genitals with leaves and touch their faces in gestures of despair after the Fall. Eve's breasts are not needed because Adam now has a beard, a sign of masculinity. Until, on page 45, they are shown with clothes to differentiate them, the

fallen Adam has a beard.<sup>83</sup> That sign of masculinity, however, developed from feminine action of the Fall. An appropriate contrast is with the nudes of Cotton Claudius B.IV. In each of its four illustrations of the creation and Fall, Adam has a beard and short hair and Eve has long hair (Dodwell 6R, 6V, 7R, 7V).<sup>84</sup> The signs of gender in Cotton Claudius B.IV are apparent from the beginning, even though the artist uses Eve's long hair and carefully placed legs and trees to eliminate the need for portraying breasts or genitals. In Junius 11, the feminine continues to control awareness of gender in that the action of the woman gives the man a beard. Femininity has represented masculinity.

The illustrations again provide disruption of the ascendance of the masculine at the end of the narrative. The final illustration in the Adam and Eve sequence is on page 46 of the manuscript and is the reader's last glimpse of Adam and Eve before they begin their lives defined by God's curse.<sup>85</sup> Like the illustrations in which Eve is the signifier of gender, this last drawing upsets the gender hierarchy so carefully constructed by the narrative and

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<sup>83</sup>He is not bearded on page 41, where presumably Eve's full body covering of leaves as opposed to his exposed torso allows the viewer to differentiate them.

<sup>84</sup>See Illustrations appendix for a reproduction of Cotton Claudius B.IV, folio 6V, as an example.

<sup>85</sup>Adam and Eve are each depicted throughout the Cain and Abel sequence as well, usually performing the deeds God has ordained: Adam is shown working in the fields, Eve in childbed.



vocabulary of the poem and reconstructed by the poem's readers and critics.<sup>86</sup> Even Overing sees the end of the poem as a reaffirmation of traditionally gendered subjectivity. This last illustration seems definitive since it is the final one; its position privileges it, giving it more weight than the others. It shows Eve as a feminine subject in a part of the tale where the narrative and all the critics read only a masculine subject. On the left, the angel closes the door to paradise, which opens almost outside the frame of the picture. Adam and Eve walk away from the door. Adam carries his shovel and his bag, as he does in the similar drawing on page 45.<sup>87</sup>

It is the differences from the drawing on page 45 that are important, however. Eve is not carrying her mark of gender, the feminine spindle/apple. In fact, she is not carrying anything at all and both her arms make evident the motion of her body away from the Garden of Eden and out of the picture into a different life. She is in front, leading Adam, and he manages to hold her arm even though he is also holding his shovel. Their stance is the opposite of that on page 45, where he leads her. He looks back toward the door

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<sup>86</sup>The following argument about the page 46 illustration is similar to, but developed separately from, that of Catherine Karkov in "Margins and Marginalization: Representations of Eve in Oxford, Bodleian Library Junius 11" forthcoming in *Texts and Margins*, eds. Sarah Keefer and William Shippey (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996).

<sup>87</sup>This illustration is discussed on p.174 of this chapter.

and the angel, while she looks toward their destination. Eve is slightly larger than Adam as well. This illustration shows her as leader, as controller of the action, while the accompanying narrative clearly states she is to spend the rest of her life in male power, as object rather than subject.

This drawing makes explicit my argument that the gender roles constructed in the Anglo-Saxon *Genesis* seem obvious but are not. Overing contends that Eve demonstrates feminine subjectivity in the section where she convinces Adam to eat the apple; while I agree with her, I argue that Eve also demonstrates subjectivity periodically throughout the illustration cycle. Ohlgren says that "to ignore these illustrations is to ignore the manuscript as it was intended to be read" (Illustrations 199). We cannot ignore the feminine subjectivity in the illustrations. Eve's breasts are the signifiers of gender throughout; her actions provide the masculinity of Adam's beard; she leads the way out of the drawing, out of the text, in the last illustration.

I realize that my argument for feminine subjectivity conflicts with the traditional construction of masculinity in the narrative, wherein the masculine defines and controls the feminine. I discussed this construction with reference to the words *wæpned*, *wæpnedmen*, *wif*, and forms of *wlite* and *sciene*, all of which augmented a Freudian interpretation of the feminine defined as the not-masculine. But I hope to

have demonstrated the back-and-forth motion of the gender performances in this illustrated and written text; as some of the illustrations and much of the diction reinscribes an opposition that values the masculine above the feminine, other illustrations show the disruption of the feminine present in the text as well, a feminine subjectivity that refuses to acquiesce to acting as Other to a privileged masculine. While the narrative of Adam and Eve has reinscribed masculine privilege, this version of it also reveals the weakness in the framework of that hierarchy. Such a reading also, I think, necessitates a skepticism about the possibility of complete masculine (or feminine) domination of the Other; no matter how relentless the reinscription of the binary, the Old English *Genesis* indicates that that very binary is doomed to fail in that it can never be fully solidified.

There were only 250 copies of the Junius 11 manuscript facsimile made in 1927 (Gollancz endleaf), and this is the only publication that reproduces the text and illustrations together (Ohlgren reproduced the drawings without the text in 1992).<sup>88</sup> The feminine subjectivity in them has been neglected since the illustrations are not as widely available nor as widely studied as the text. The words I chose for lexical studies explicitly define men as powerful

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<sup>88</sup>Thomas Ohlgren, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Textual Illustrations*, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications), 1992.

and women in terms of those men, as wife or beautiful treasured possession. The drawings are neglected in studies of the poem, since most critics and students have access only to the words, but the drawings in Junius 11 remind us that power relationships between the sexes are fraught with tensions that consistently undermine oppositions despite attempts in language and in interpretation of that language to codify those traditional oppositions.

Adam and Eve perform in the Junius 11 *Genesis* in both traditional and unstable genders of masculinity and femininity; that traditional opposition of masculine/feminine precludes other genders. Though Eve is a mother--of Cain, of Abel, of Seth, and (according to some creationists) of all humanity--she is not maternal. Overing refers to Eve's as a "maternal body" (Reading 55), but Eve's body in this poem is a feminine Other to Adam's mind or spirit. Eve's body and actions do not provide her with maternal power or subjectivity as I have defined it in relation to the Virgin Mary; she does not gain empowerment through nurturance and protection of her children or through her material body. Eve is defined subordinately through her relationships to male figures (angels, devils, Adam, God). The maternal as a gender performance is not in force in *Genesis*, thus illustrating that merely being a mother does not mean that a female figure will perform within the maternal gender.

I turn now to another text in which the maternal does not figure overtly, since the female member of the mixed pair operates within a gender performance that is neither feminine nor maternal, but masculine. Hroðgar and Modþryðo of *Beowulf* remind us that gender--masculine, feminine, maternal, or otherwise--is not dependant on biological sex.

## CHAPTER 6

### TEARS AND HANDS: MASCULINITY IN *BEOWULF*

The biblical figures of Christ and Mary and Adam and Eve, in their mixed pairs, present textually constructed genders that operate explicitly within a Christian framework of binary masculine/feminine oppositions. Even so, those oppositions are challenged and fragmented, usually by the feminine, defined as Other but occasionally acting as Subject, and by the maternal, which asserts with a material body a different sort of power structure. As I turn to *Beowulf*, overt Christianity recedes from the text, created by a Christian but set in pre-Christian Scandinavia. In *Beowulf*, such oppositions as masculine/feminine, Adam/Eve, or dominant/dominated evaporate into what Carol Clover has described as a gender continuum in early Scandinavian culture. Clover's rubric enables a new way of interpreting the characters of *Beowulf*; masculinity, in the world of the poem, is power, specifically the power to control the actions of others. The aging king Hroðgar and the violent queen Modþryðo illustrate Clover's assertion that the gender of power is masculine, and that action, rather than biological sex, is the determinant of that gender. Modþryðo, the female, is ultimately masculine, while

Hroðgar, the male, slips toward effeminacy (in Clover's terms) since he does not wield power in the manner that Modþryðo and Beowulf do.

Masculinity in pre-Christian Scandinavia, and in *Beowulf* in particular, has been the subject of much recent critical attention. Clover, Allen Frantzen, and Clare Lees have each discussed the inextricable relationship between masculinity and power; as Lees puts it, "*Beowulf* ritualizes aggression both physically and verbally to enforce obedience of the dominated to the dominant" (142, italics hers); both parties, in this situation, are usually male. In her analysis of the sex/gender system constructed in the Norse sagas, Clover describes a system in which "there was finally just one 'gender,' one standard by which persons were judged adequate or inadequate, and it was something like masculine" (379). Drawing on the one-sex model of Thomas Lacquer, Clover uses incidents from the sagas to show that while men had inherent advantage in Norse heroic society, their superiority was by no means assured. Women were frequently lauded for the way in which they wielded power, men frequently ridiculed for their lack of power. Along this continuum of power, biological sex did not fix a subject's place; as Clover says:

gender, if we can even call it that, is neither coextensive with biological sex, despite its dependence on sexual imagery, nor a closed system, but a system based to an extraordinary extent on winnable and losable attributes. (379)

Women who settled feuds, controlled land, defended themselves, and went on Viking raids were "masculine," while men who stayed home to dally with servant girls were not. Clover attributes the "frantic machismo of Norse males" to this cultural system "in which being born male precisely did *not* confer automatic superiority" (380, italics hers). Masculinity, and its power, had to be earned.

The figure of Hroðgar, king of the Danes, forces an analysis of the relationships among age, power, and masculinity in *Beowulf*. He resists his slide towards effeminacy in two specific assertions of masculinity, of power, in the text. The first is heterosexual, a departure to and return from his wife's bed; the second homosocial, his leave-taking of Beowulf. In both of these instances, however, Hroðgar's masculinity is actually undermined as he oversteps the bounds of heroic society. In psychoanalytic terms, Hroðgar must renounce his Fatherhood, without even the consolation of death made complete by knowledge that he struggled to maintain his masculine, patriarchal power to the end. In *Beowulf*, Hroðgar does not die; he just fades away.

As I discussed in chapter one, the relationship between gender and power is one of Frantzen's subjects in his essay "When Women Aren't Enough," in which he argues that men and masculinity in medieval texts must be investigated just as women and femininity have been. Frantzen disparages those



critics who ostensibly write about gender but have ignored men and masculinity because "to write about men was unnecessary, for everything already written was written about them" (449). To read Clover with Frantzen is illuminating; Frantzen's brief analysis of Hroðgar as a "manly man" places him (Hroðgar, that is) at the most masculine, most powerful point of Clover's continuum. The poet calls Hroðgar's actions *manlice*, at l.1046; Frantzen's analysis of editors' equation of "manly" with "nobly" or "generously" shows that "Hroðgar seems to define the word 'manfully' rather than to be described by it" (461). While Frantzen prefers to read *manlice* as a reference to class, *manlice*, via Clover, lexically places Hroðgar at the pinnacle of masculine power: high in status by virtue of class *and* gender.

Hroðgar's designation as a "manly man," like many of the poet's epithets that describe the aging king, belies the inherent weakness of his position within the narrative. Clover discusses the weakness that comes, inevitably, with old age for those "men once firmly in category A who have slid into category B by virtue of age" (381). Hroðgar is just such a man, though Clover, in her only citation of *Beowulf*, refers to the lament of the old man who must watch his son die on the gallows rather than to Hroðgar as an example of a man "whose lamentation is precisely the effect of disabled masculinity" (383, n.68). Hroðgar's frequently

cited grief for the horrors in Heorot is another Beowulfian example of this "disabled masculinity," a gender construction defined by lack of power. His grief is always presented in indirect narrative rather than in direct, spoken statement; for example, *Swa ða mæl-ceare maga Healfdenes / singala seað* (ll.189a-190a, Thus the son of Healfdane continually brooded over the time-sorrow). Hrothgar cannot even speak his own grief; the narrator must do it for him.<sup>89</sup>

Lees looks at "Men and *Beowulf*" (the title of her essay) as well as men in *Beowulf* as she examines the way that male and female critics have read *Beowulf* in the last sixty years, taking Tolkein specifically as an example of a male critic who assumes an ideal, implicitly male reader for the poem: "'Man' in Tolkein's essay emerges as the liberal humanist construct of the universal male" (133). This assumption of masculinity has impeded examination of the text's male characters; Lees proceeds with just such an examination, exposing the inherent weakness of male-based patrilineal genealogy, though such genealogy "is the only institution available" (142). The strongest male-male bonds in the poem are those of lord and retainer, not father and son (142), so that the weakest of bonds forms the basis of society. This inherently weak base exposes the fragility of masculinity in the text: ultimately, "power is played across

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<sup>89</sup> See similar constructions at ll.129-130, 146-149, 170-171.

the bodies of individual men" (145) in a struggle that is necessarily fruitless since "desire, channeled through the institutions of heroism and family, comes to rest in the dead body of Beowulf . . . the only good hero, after all, is a dead one" (145-146). Only a dead hero can rest with his reputation, and hence his masculinity, intact. Lees sees *Beowulf* as a poem primarily about power relations between men: how they dominate each other, how they define their masculinity through ritualized aggression.

Within the context of these three readers, Clover, Frantzen, and Lees, I undertake my own exploration into masculinity in *Beowulf*, specifically into the figure of Hroðgar, the man too old to be a man. Critical judgment about Hroðgar, especially pre-1985, tends to fall into one of two categories: one group sees Hroðgar as wise old king, the other as weak old king. No matter which category these critics fall into, however, almost all agree that Hroðgar's main function in the poem is to provide some sort of foil for Beowulf.

Those critics who see Hroðgar as prudent and explicitly celebrated are best represented by John Leyerle, who in 1965 argued that Hroðgar's choice not to fight Grendel himself is an example of kingly prudence. The duty of kings is to protect their people; had Hroðgar fought Grendel (and inevitably lost), his people would be leaderless, much as the Geats are after Beowulf's fight with the dragon. Rather

than let his young sons and his kingdom be torn apart by his untimely death, Hroðgar trusts in God that some solution to his trouble will be found. Leyerle says, "Hroðgar's restraint in avoiding battle with Grendel was the prudent choice of a lesser evil" (92). Similarly, A.E.C. Canitz states that "although the vacating of the hall at nightfall may not look particularly heroic, it is the best solution in the absence of other alternatives" (103). Wisdom and restraint are more important, in Leyerle's and Canitz's judgments, than monster-fighting abilities. For Leyerle, in the inevitable comparison with Beowulf, Hroðgar actually is actually the better king: Hroðgar "is the nearest to an ideal king in the poem--not Beowulf" (97).

Another interpretation of Hroðgar as wholly good and praiseworthy focuses on his act of creation in the building of Heorot, a symbol of harmony in a civilized world. Hroðgar's creation of Heorot (11.64-85) is described just before the scop's song of God's creation of the world (11.90-114), creating a parallel between the two (Halverson 596). Raymond Tripp says that "Hall and builder are offered as emblems of ancient excellence" (Exemplary 127). John Halverson argues that Heorot represents the positive force of humanity in a hostile natural world. For Halverson, Grendel and his mother represent "silent, frightening, and monstrous" nature while Heorot "is a world that represents the imposition of order and organization on chaotic

surroundings" (601). Similarly, Michael Swanton sees the glory of Heorot reflected in Hroðgar: "the whole structure of Scylding society is seen to be harmoniously, morally, and justly ordered, through Hroðgar's kingship in Heorot" (92). In these terms, Hroðgar is not a weak old man who needs someone else to kill his monsters for him, but "one who graciously accepts an expected debt of gratitude" (Swanton 107).

That debt is the focus of much praise of Hroðgar's diplomatic expertise. At lines 457-472, Hroðgar makes it clear to Beowulf that he views Beowulf's arrival not so much as a godsend but as a requital for a debt Beowulf owes him through Ecgþeow, Beowulf's father:

For gewyrhtum þu, wine min Beowulf,  
 ond for arstafum usic sohtest.  
 Gesloh þin fæder fæhðe mæste;  
 wearþ he Heaþolafe to handbonan  
     mid Wilfingum; ða hine Wedera cyn  
 for herebrogan habban ne mihte.  
 þanon he gesohte Suðdena folc  
 ofer yða gewealc, Arscyldinga.  
 ða ic furþum weold folce Deniga  
 ond on geogoðe heold ginne rice,  
 hordburh hæleþa; ða wæs Heregar dead,  
 min yldra mæg unlifigende,  
 bearn Healfdenes; se wæs betera ðonne ic.  
 Siððan þa fæhðe feo þingode;  
 sende ic Wylfingum ofer wæteres hrycg  
 ealde madmas; he me aþas swor (ll.457-72)<sup>90</sup>

(For done deeds and for favors you, my friend Beowulf, visited us. Your father achieved the most battles. He became for Heatholaf [a member of the Wylfing tribe] a hand-slayer, against the Wylfings; then because of him

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<sup>90</sup>Text here and throughout from Fr. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd edition (Lexington: D.C.Heath, 1950). Translations are my own.

the race of Geats might not have lacked for war-terrors. Thence he sought the folk of the South-Danes, the Scyldings, over the rolling waves, when I first ruled the folk of the Danes and in youth held the wide kingdom, the treasure-city of warriors; then was Heregar dead, my older brother unliving, the son of Healfdane; he was better than I. Since then I settled that feud with riches; I sent to the Wylfings over the water's ridge time-honored treasures; he [Ecgþeow] swore oaths to me.)

In this speech, Hroðgar lets Beowulf know that Beowulf owes Hroðgar, not the other way around. This is one example of what Stephanie Hollis calls "Hroðgar's full diplomatic brilliance" (45). This "brilliance" is most obvious for Hollis in the way that Hroðgar gives kingly war-treasures to Beowulf with instructions that Beowulf tell Hygelac their history; she reads this instruction as a diplomatic means for Hroðgar to let Hygelac know that, in Hroðgar's mind, Beowulf should be the successor to the Geatish throne (45). This focus on Hroðgar's political acumen is also John Hill's point when he says that "Hroðgar's is, perhaps quintessentially, the consciousness of the superlative, juridical king" (*Cultural* 131).

All of these critics and others like them<sup>91</sup> rely on the voice of the poet, who continually tells the audience that Hroðgar is *god cyning*, *helm scyldingas*, or *mære þeoden* (a good king, protector of the Scyldings, a great lord). Most of the critics who fall in the opposite camp, arguing

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<sup>91</sup>See Brennan, Bridges, Gardner, Nelson, Schuecking, and H.B. Woolf for similar praises of Hrothgar as good if not ideal king.

that Hroðgar is weak, read these epithets somewhat ironically: how can Hroðgar be "protector of the Scyldings" if Scyldings are routinely being eaten by a monster? John Niles says that "the words of praise remain, but they begin to ring slightly hollow as the facts of the plot belie them"; the world of Hroðgar's Heorot presents "a gloomier present whose daytime splendor masks an inner reality of cowardice and indecision" (108) while Hroðgar is only "the shell of a good king" (110).

Some critics see this weakness as inevitable, due to old age, and therefore somewhat excusable: "Their [the Danes'] weakness, their debasement or deterioration, is variously manifest in the ineffectual old age of Hroðgar" (DuBois 383). F. Anne Payne states that Hroðgar, "walking the narrow line of humiliation, is no longer heroic" (29), allowing that he once was in younger days. Others are less charitable; Edward Irving remarks on "his habitual passive role . . . [his] business of handing out advice that at all times has been thought most suitable for senior citizens" (Heroic 356) while W.T.H. Jackson calls Hroðgar "king in name only" (29). Carmen Cramer notes that Beowulf usually speaks in the present tense while Hroðgar speaks only in the past tense, "an indication of his passivity even though his rank is higher than Beowulf's" (43). Similarly, with a tone of contempt Rene Derolez says that "all the time the king just sits and broods and laments" (55).

In his analysis of the "theme" of *sapientia et fortitudo* in *Beowulf*, Robert Kaske remarks that while *Beowulf* has both wisdom and courage, *Hygelac* seems to be all courage and *Hroðgar* seems all wisdom (432). Kaske does not leave *Hroðgar* simply to be wise and not strong; he points out that the supposedly wise *Hroðgar* makes some very bad decisions: marrying *Freawaru* to *Ingeld*, letting *Hroðulf* stay at his court, forgetting to tell *Beowulf* that there was a second monster after the first one had been killed (435), thus undermining his reputation for wisdom as well.

Finally, *Hroðgar* has been accused of that worst of medieval Christian vices, pride. Much of the critical discussion of *Hroðgar* centers on his "sermon" (or "harangue" as *Klaeber* and other have called it), ll.1700-1784, usually interpreted as a lesson to *Beowulf* about the pitfalls of kingship and power.<sup>92</sup> Critics have both discussed the patristic sources of this speech (*Goldsmith*) and affirmed its inherently secular nature (*Cherniss*, *Kindrick*). Critical focus on the speech suggests that it is, as *Stephen Bandy* says, "the ethical center of the poem" (91). With examples and gnomic statements, *Hroðgar* warns *Beowulf* about the sin of pride, and there is a veritable critical industry

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<sup>92</sup>*Klaeber* outlines the speech into four divisions, an introduction (1700-1709), the *Heremod* section (1709-1724), "the 'sermon' proper" (1724-1768), and the conclusion (1769-1784); most critics have followed these divisions in their analyses of the speech.



that focuses solely on whether Beowulf took that advice (an industry I am not going to add to here).

Margaret Goldsmith calls the speech "a piece of moralizing in the mouth of a rather sententious old man" (*Mode* 207), leaving no doubt about her opinion of Hroðgar's character, and she also accuses Hroðgar of having committed the very sin against which he is warning Beowulf. For Goldsmith, Grendel came to the Danes because he embodied all the prideful evil that already was at Heorot (378); the speech warns Beowulf not to "be corrupted insidiously, as Hroðgar was, by success and wealth" (378). For Goldsmith, Hroðgar is not only weak but corrupted as well.

Similarly, Roberta Bosse and Jennifer Wyatt see Hroðgar as prideful and ambitious, Heorot a symbol of his quest for earthly glory (265). Bosse and Wyatt's argument is inherently flawed, however, by their assertion that Hroðgar undergoes a form of Christian conversion in the poem, during which he "is permitted to realize the power of the full meaning of redemption" (269). James Earl much more convincingly argues that Grendel acts within the narrative as a corrective to Hroðgar's prideful assumption that his kingdom was safe, prosperous, and whole. When Grendel comes, "Hroðgar had become misled, by his own success as a king, into believing that his power might be unchallengeable" (*Necessity* 87). Where Bosse and Wyatt see

Christian conversion, Earl sees a "necessity of evil" that determines the moral action of the poem.

More recently, the decline of structuralism and the rise of post-structuralist criticism have led to an acceptance of ambiguity rather than opposition in textual analysis; rather than Hroðgar being weak and old (or prideful) in opposition to Beowulf's strong youth, critics in the late eighties and early nineties have viewed Hroðgar as a source of tension in the poem, a tension that, I contend, comes from his faltering masculinity.

Sara Higley touches on this sort of ambiguity in her analysis of liminality in the scene, described by Hroðgar, of the deer on the bank of the mere. Rather than plunge into the evil waters, the deer will allow the hounds to pull it down (ll.1368-1372a). Higley delineates linguistic connections between the hart and Hroðgar, whose hall, Heorot ("Hart"), is adorned with deer-antlers. Then she discusses the symbolism of the hart, in its "liminal state" between the world of the mere and the world of the forest:

Hroðgar is not the coward Unferð is, and the hesitation of the stag on the bank is not so simply explained. The stag is ambiguous as a symbol. It is a figure of both strength and weakness; as the emblem of Denmark, it gives its name to the palace; as food for the king's table, it is pulled down by his dogs. (352)

The hart epitomizes the difficulty of Hroðgar's position as besieged king, and for Higley a simple commendation of

wisdom or condemnation of weakness is inadequate to Hroðgar's role as old king.

Old kings are the subject of Edward Irving's essay in which, like Higley, he determines that there is no one definitive identity for Hroðgar; Irving sees "contempt as well as respect" for the figure of the old king in literature (he discusses Priam, Nestor, and Charlemagne in addition to Hroðgar) (Old Kings 260). Like most critics, Irving sees Hroðgar as a foil to Beowulf; Irving sees this contrast working in two ways: Hroðgar as a foil for Beowulf the young hero and for Beowulf the fighting old king. "Hroðgar must be granted the very maximum of formal dignity, on the one hand, but it must somehow be a dignity fully consonant with his real impotence" (260). Irving is harsh in his description:

Customarily we see Hroðgar in passive, if not indeed in feeble, attitudes and poses: sitting on his throne, sometimes preaching and sometimes in dummy-like silence; weeping; going wearily off to lie down in his bed. (262)

Hroðgar's passivity contrasts with Beowulf's action as an old man; where Hroðgar waited, Beowulf acts. The ambiguity stems from the results of that action and inaction: Hroðgar is still alive to lead his people, however "feebly," after Grendel is dead, while Beowulf dies as a result of his action, leaving his people at the mercy of various Swedes and Frisians who have been kept at bay by Beowulf's power. Irving notes that Beowulf and Hroðgar share a number of

epithets; "the conventional phrases of the poem suggest that old age and death are to be calmly accepted as the majestic culminations of a natural cycle" (267). In the end, both the Danes and the Geats are torn apart by feud, the Danes from within, the Geats from without.

Critics like Higley and Irving are taking *Beowulf* criticism in the direction described and taken by Overing in *Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf*. Overing notes in her introduction that "Teaching this poem can be in itself a deconstructionist exercise in dismantling hierarchical oppositions"; among the oppositions that need to be dismantled is "whether Hroðgar is weak or strong" (xv). Overing's reading of the many layers of signs in the "sermon" does not just dismantle but goes beyond the opposition weak/strong to examine "the remarkable and multifaceted prism of sign interaction" throughout the scene: not just the words Hroðgar speaks, but the signs carved on the hilt of the sword<sup>93</sup> and the hilt itself.

Though Overing's discussion of gender ultimately focuses on the feminine, her discussion of the "masculine economy" of *Beowulf* provides entree into my analysis of Hroðgar's fading masculinity. In Overing's terms:

In the masculine economy of the poem, desire expresses itself as desire for the other, as a continual process of subjugation and appropriation of the other. The code of vengeance and the heroic

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<sup>93</sup>Also discussed by Frantzen, "Writing the Unreadable *Beowulf*," and Schrader.

choice demand above all a *resolution* of opposing elements, a decision must always be made. (70, italics Overing's)

For Overing, masculinity in *Beowulf* entails dominance and resolution; no ambiguity, of hierarchy, of gender, of decision, is permissible. She continues:

A psychoanalytic understanding of desire as deferred death, of the symbolic nature of desire in action, is often not necessary in *Beowulf*; death is continually present, always in the poem's foreground: the hero says "I will do this or I will die." Resolution, choice, satisfaction of desire frequently mean literal death. (70)

Men in *Beowulf*, for Overing, live in a world of absolutes: they will fight the monsters or die, they will avenge a death or die. Overing reads *Beowulf* himself to trouble this absolute assertion, but acknowledges that the absolute resolution is intact even at the end of the poem. The masculine characters define themselves against an unfavorable Other: men are strong, noble, generous (much like the definitions of *manlice*, discussed by Frantzen, which I noted above); the Other is weak, ignoble, miserly--and might as well be dead, for within the masculine economy of this poem, those attributes have no value.

Hroðgar's masculinity, to return to Clover's continuum of masculinity, is slipping downward away from those positive values of nobility and generosity towards effeminacy, towards Otherness. He does not and cannot make the ultimate masculine statement--I will defeat the monster or die--no matter how *manlice* he is in his distribution of

gifts (perhaps the greatness of those gifts is an attempt, on some level, to make up for his inability to make that statement). In two scenes that have received surprisingly little critical attention, these slips in his masculinity become apparent: his departure to and return from Wealtheow's bed, and his farewell to Beowulf. Both scenes underscore the weakness of Hroðgar's subject position in a society where men must dominate other men absolutely in order to declare themselves wholly masculine.

The first of these scenes is explicitly heterosexual, unusual in a poem that tends to avoid any mention of sexual relationships. Overing notes and expands upon Fred Robinson's observation that there is very little romantic love in *Beowulf*:

Robinson has noted the absence of "love" or "romantic passion between the sexes" in *Beowulf* . . . the secondary nature of the emotional marital bond provides a possible explanation for the hero's apparent celibacy. While scholars have pondered over Beowulf's marital status, Robinson suggests that the poet might simply have considered that "Beowulf's marital status was of insufficient interest to warrant mention in the poem." (73-74)<sup>94</sup>

For Overing, "marriage is valued as an extension of this larger emotional context," the context of male-male relations, cemented by a marriage alliance (74). The unusualness of the first scene I will examine, actually two

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<sup>94</sup>Overing is quoting Fred Robinson, "Teaching the Backgrounds: History, Religion, Culture," in *Approaches to Teaching Beowulf*, eds. Jess Bessinger and Robert Yeager (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1984), 118-119.

scenes separated by the fight with Grendel, stems partially from this lack of attention to domesticity in *Beowulf* and other Old English poetry. In the poem, only Hroðgar obviously (even ostentatiously) goes to the women's quarters to find a woman (Wealtheow).

The entrance and exit, in which Hroðgar leaves Heorot and then returns the following morning, frame Beowulf's fight with Grendel. The lines in question follow, with literal translations:

ða him Hroþgar gewat mid his hæleþa gedryht,  
eodur Scyldinga, ut of healle;  
wolde wigfruma Wealhþeo secan,  
cwen to gebeddan (662-665a)

(Then from him [Beowulf] Hroðgar went with his troop of heroes, the prince of the Scyldings, out of the hall; the war-chief wished Wealtheow to seek, the queen as a bed-companion)

Eode scealc monig  
swiðhicgende to sele þam hean  
searowundor seon; swylce self cyning  
of brydbure, beahhorda weard,  
tryddode tirfast getrume micle,  
cystum gecyþed, ond his cwen mid him  
medostigge mæt mægþa hose (918-924)

(Many a man went valiant to the high hall to see the curious-wonder [Grendel's arm]; just so the king himself from the bride-bower, the guardian of the ring-hoard, stepped glorious with a great troop, known for excellence, and his queen with him traversed the mead[hall] path with a troop of maidens)

This exit and entrance are juxtaposed with Beowulf's fight, which Overing would term an ultimately masculine action in that Beowulf has asserted that he will kill Grendel or die trying. This juxtaposition highlights the lack of such absolutist masculinity in Hroðgar's actions, actions which

push him downward, on Clover's continuum, away from masculinity and towards effeminacy and (ironically in this context) impotence. In both of these passages there are some evident ironies. Hroðgar the "war-chief" is seeking his queen, not a valiant battle; indeed, he and his "troop of heroes" are very conspicuously *leaving* the scene of battle, calling into question, by their actions, the veracity of these epithets.

In the following passage describing Hroðgar's return to the hall, the poet uses a form of exaggeration which accentuates Hroðgar's lack of absolutist masculinity as he returns to his hall that (he thinks) has been purged for him. Why does Hroðgar need "a great troop, known for excellence" when he is going only from one place of safety (the women's quarters) to another (daylit Heorot)? Tripp argues that the diction and structure of this return to the hall conveys "an implication that Hroðgar returns like a cock with his flock of hens" ("Avian" 61). Tripp comments on the relatively large number of hapax legomena (most notably *brydbure*, bride-bower, which Tripp also reads as pun-like bird-bower) to show that there is humor, specifically "avian humor" in this scene that presents Hroðgar as an Anglo-Saxon Chanticleer. While Tripp relies on some shaky connections with much later Middle English words for his argument, I think he is correct in asserting the humor of this scene. What Tripp does not see is that



the humor of this scene is at Hroðgar's expense; the scene implicitly ridicules Hroðgar. Just as Chanticleer is a figure of exaggerated, pompous masculinity in Chaucer, Hroðgar here becomes a ridiculous, randy old man. Hroðgar might sleep with the queen, but he does not fight the monster or die, and as such his masculinity is imperilled, not affirmed, by his obvious and unique heterosexual relations in the poem.

This sense that Hroðgar's "grand" departure and entrance are less than heroic is strengthened by John Niles' reference to the Danes' sleeping quarters during Grendel's twelve-year control of Heorot. In the process of documenting the decline of the Danish line ("The glories of the Danes are now past," 108), Niles notes that when the Danes leave Heorot to Grendel, they probably go to sleep in the women's quarters:

Faced with the sudden loss of thirty of his thanes, Hroðgar simply sits, immobilized by his sorrows. None of his surviving retainers offers to challenge the monster, and the aged king is unwilling or incapable of undertaking the task himself. The only thought his retainers have seems to be to find themselves a more secure place to sleep *after burum*, "among the bedchambers" (140a), presumably among the women's quarters. (108)

Grendel is not interested in the women's quarters (Niles points out that the surest way to avoid being eaten is simply to leave Heorot). The change is obviously a reduction in status for the men; to sleep in the same space as women, rather than merely to have sex with them and then

go sleep in the hall with other men, is to taint oneself with effeminacy, with cowardice. It is cowardly to avoid a battle, especially with a foe who has killed so many of the Danish *comitatus*, but the Danes do so every time they sleep away from Heorot, with the women. The Danes regain some of this hall-sleeping masculinity after the fight with Grendel:

Reced weardode  
 unrim eorla, swa hie oft ær dydon.  
 Bencpelu beredon; hit geondbræded wearð  
 beddum ond bolstrum. Beorscealca sum  
 fus ond fæge fletræste gebeag.  
 Setton him to heafdon hilderandas,  
 bordwudu beorhtan; þær on bence wæs  
 ofer æpelinge yþgesene  
 heaposteapa helm, hringed byrne,  
 þrecwudu þrymlic. Wæs þeaw hyra  
 þæt hie oft wæron an wig gearwe,  
 ge æt ham ge on herge, ge gehwæper þara,  
 efne swylce mæla swylce hira mandryhtne  
 þearf gesælde; wæs seo þeod tilu (1237b-1250)

(A countless number of earls occupied the hall, as they often had done before. They bore the bench-planks; it [the hall, the benches] was over-spread with bedding and bolsters. One of the beer-drinkers eager and joyful sunk into hall-rest. They set for themselves at their heads the battle-shields, the bright board-wood; there on the bench was for the nobles easily visible the battle-towering helmet, the ringed byrnie, the strength-wood [spear] magnificent. It was their custom that they often were ready for battle, whether at home or in the army, each of them, even just as the time befell the need of their man-lord.)

Even in this scene, however, the Danes' preparedness does them no good, and Grendel's mother comes to take Æscher, probably the "one" referred to at 1.1240. Sleeping in the hall with comrades is an assertion of masculinity; repeatedly sleeping in the women's quarters is definitively not.

The final irony in this scene is that Hroðgar's sexual activity has failed to produce a son of the correct age, old and strong enough to continue Hroðgar's line. Hroðgar's age and the youth of his sons (too young to defend themselves against their cousin Hrothulf) suggest that he has had some trouble in conceiving sons. His sons were not born until he was already past his prime; in an ideal Beowulfian world, they would "now" be the same age as Hroðulf and ready to take over most of Hroðgar's duties (including, presumably, monster-fighting). Instead, they are still in need of protection. His daughter Freawaru is old enough to be married to Ingeld the Hathobard, suggesting that she is the eldest of his children even if not dramatically older than her brothers. While I do not want to endorse any notion of a paternal masculinity that is strengthened by the births of sons and weakened by the births of daughters, *Beowulf* is a poem notoriously interested in paternity, in "patrilineal genealogy" (to use Lees' term) of father and son. Daughters, as critics from Eliason to Overing have noted, usually do not even rate names in genealogical lists. A daughter does not increase a man's masculine prestige in the way the son does.<sup>95</sup> Many critics have written about Hroðgar's attempted adoption of Beowulf at ll.946b-948a: *Nu ic, Beowulf, þec, / secg betsta, me for sunu wylle / freogan*

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<sup>95</sup>For a more thorough discussion of daughters in Old English poetry, see chapter eight's discussion of the relationship between Judith and her maid.

on *ferhþe* (Now, Beowulf, best of men, I wish to love you like a son in spirit).<sup>96</sup> I would like to add to their interpretations the point that this scene may be yet another way for Hroðgar to try to recoup some of his fading masculinity: by adopting a powerful, strong, intelligent, adult son who does make the absolutist, masculine statements that Hroðgar no longer can.

This lure of an absolutely masculine son colors all of Hroðgar's dealings with Beowulf. Their relationship, much more than Hroðgar's physical relationship to his queen (he never speaks to her, though she speaks to him), determines his slip downwards on Clover's continuum. Not only does Hroðgar sleep with the women, he no longer can dominate men in the way a *mandryhtne* (man-lord, l.1249) should. In the relationship between Beowulf and Hroðgar, Beowulf is unquestionably the one with the power, both physical and emotional.

Nowhere in the text is this power made more apparent than in the second scene under discussion, the farewell scene before Beowulf and his Geats go back to their boat. As Hroðgar says goodbye to the hero, his thoughts and his actions reveal his lack of emotional control; this lack is yet another instance, like the Grendel-kin attacks, in which Hroðgar's lack of control shows his waning masculinity. In

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<sup>96</sup>For analyses of the legal and emotional action of this scene, see Foley, Hansen, Hill ("Hrothgar's Noble Rule"), Hollis, and Irving ("What to Do with Old Kings").

this scene, Beowulf is in control, and as such is the dominant male in a situation that Hroðgar wished to construct so that he as Father would dominate and accrue power from Beowulf as Son. I quote the passage in full with a literal translation following:

Gecyste þa cyning æpelum god,  
 peoden Scyldinga ðegn betstan  
 ond be healse genam; hruron him tearas  
 blondenfeaxum. Him wæs bega wen  
 ealdum infrodum, opres swiðor,  
 þæt hie seoððan no geseon moston,  
 modige on meþle. Wæs him se man to þon leof,  
 þæt he þone breostwylm forberan ne mehte;  
 ac him on hreþre hygebendum fæst  
 æfter deorum men dyrne langað  
 beorn wið blode. Him Beowulf þanan,  
 guðrinc goldwlanç græsmoldan træd  
 since hremig (1870-1882).

(Then the king kissed the good nobleman, the prince of the Scyldings took the best thane by the neck; tears fell from him, the grey-haired one. In him, old and wise, was the expectation of two things, the other more strong, that they might not see [each other] afterwards brave in counsel {1876a}.

The man was by him so loved that he could not forbear the breast-welling; but for him in his spirit (with heart-bounds fast because of the dear man) secretly longed the man [Hroðgar] with blood. Away from him Beowulf thence, the warrior gold-adorned, trod the greensward, exulting in treasure {1882a}.)

This passage spans folios 170v and 171r.<sup>97</sup> Much of the

edge of folio 171 has crumbled away, probably due to damage

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<sup>97</sup>The foliation of the *Beowulf* manuscript, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, is a matter of some dispute; I am following what Dobbie terms the "old" foliation since I am working with the Zupitza facsimile, the only facsimile readily available. Dobbie and more recent critics tend to follow the "official" foliation, which includes in its count blank leaves in the beginning of the manuscript. For a complete description of the manuscript, as well as of the various possibilities of foliation, see Dobbie ix-xx. The poem *Judith*, the subject of chapter eight below, is in the same manuscript; I address other manuscript issues of Cotton Vitellius A.xv there.

in the 1731 fire as well as age, but most of the words or parts of words now missing<sup>98</sup> were recorded in one of the Thorkelin transcripts or are visible in part (like the *w* of *wæs*) (Zupitza 86). As such, none of the words in this passage is in question, as far as manuscript presentation goes, though I will below take issue with some editor's choices in grammatical definitions. Frantzen refers to "the ways in which Anglo-Saxon editors have used glossaries to shape translations from their editions" (Enough 461); editors and critics, especially Thomas Wright (the only critic to comment on this scene at length), have interpreted this part of the text in such a way that it glosses over the homoerotics of the scene. The emotional and physical presentation of Hroðgar's farewell underscores the fragility of Hroðgar's masculinity as he tries to assert himself as a Father figure but ends up positioning himself as an effeminate Other.

The erotics in the farewell scene cross the line that demarcates male-male social relations (the *comitatus*) and male-male eroticism. Lees notes that the lord-thane bond is actually the strongest of bonds in the poem (142), and the Geats epitomize that bond throughout the poem. The troop attending Beowulf waits on the bank of the mere after the

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<sup>98</sup>Missing are the end of *seoððan* (l.1875), *wæs* (l.1876), "breost" from *breostwylm* (l.1877), *on* (l.1878), "deo" from *deorum* (l.1879), and "lo" from *blode* (l.1880). The *no* at l.1875 is an emendatory addition.

Danes have given up; Beowulf demonstrates unwavering loyalty to his lord Hygelac and Hygelac's son Herdred; even at the end, as most of the Geats run away, Wiglaf shows Beowulf the kind of loyalty demanded in this male-male bond. Beowulf has made it clear to Hroðgar that his primary loyalty lies with Hygelac, not Hroðgar (most especially in his pre-battle boasts, l.435, ll.452-454, ll.1482-1488). However, Hroðgar seems almost desperate to have some sort of primary bond with Beowulf; his attempted "adoption" indicates this desire. Lees refers to the farewell scene in her assertion that "the poet reserves his most emotional language to express these displaced bonds [between father and son]" (142) and Chickering goes so far as to say that "it almost seems as though the language of erotic poetry were being misapplied to a father's love for a son" (348). The unusual physical and emotional description in the scene highlights this desire as well.

The first word of the farewell scene, *gecyste*, might seem to set an erotic tone for the scene, but kissing in Old English is not necessarily erotic; indeed, more often than not, it is religious.<sup>99</sup> Saints kiss their followers,

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<sup>99</sup>Like the words analyzed in my discussion of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood* (chapter 2), *gecyste* probably had secular, more erotic meaning as well as religious meaning but the religious uses are the ones most frequently preserved in the extant corpus.

kisses of peace seal treaties.<sup>100</sup> The combination of the kiss and the embrace (*be healse genam*), however, suggests that scene is more emotionally charged than the usual goodbye; when Hroðgar starts to cry (*hruron him tearas*), that suggestion is confirmed. While Chickering says that the emotion of this scene, "asks us to widen our conception of the pattern of feelings in heroic life" (348), I contend that the scene shows that Hroðgar's actions are outside the bounds of "heroic life," that to cry, embrace, and kiss at a farewell are distinctly non-heroic behaviors that indicate desperation rather than resolution.<sup>101</sup> Nowhere else in Old English poetry do men display such overt emotion towards each other.<sup>102</sup> I am not suggesting that there is any kind of homosexual relationship between Hroðgar and Beowulf; I want to emphasize the homoerotic nature of this scene to show that the "normal" male-male relationship of the

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<sup>100</sup>There are over 150 uses of forms of *cyssan* and *gecyssan* in the Microfiche Concordance.

<sup>101</sup>Carolyn Dinshaw discusses such male-male kisses in later medieval English literature when she acknowledges that "innocent kisses often occur between men at moments of heightened emotion in late Middle English texts" but also points out that "the Fathers and Doctors of the Church saw that kisses between men could be sinful, a possible first step in homosexual encounters that were spoken of in terms of one partner's feminization" in "A Kiss is Just a Kiss: Heterosexuality and its Consolations in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*" *Diacritics* 24 (1994) 210.

<sup>102</sup>The one exception could be the fantasy of the narrator of *The Wanderer*, who imagines laying his head in his lord's lap (ll.41-44); this emotionally charged moment, however, exists only in the narrator's mind, while the farewell scene occurs within the textual "reality" of *Beowulf*.



*comitatus*, with which the Danes have been having so much trouble, has broken down to the point where Hroðgar's emotional actions break down the masculinity he "normally" would affirm in such a male-male relationship. A lexical analysis of *blondenfeax*, "grey-haired," a word used repeatedly to describe Hroðgar, confirms this teetering masculinity I see in the beginning of the farewell scene.

*Blondenfeax* is used only in poetry, never in prose (MCOE B015), and it refers exclusively to older people who are having intergenerational trouble with younger people. Uses outside *Beowulf* refer to Sarah and Lot (in *Genesis*) and within *Beowulf* to Hroðgar (three times) and to the Swedish king Ongeneow (once). Reading the descriptions of Hroðgar as *blondenfeax* against these other uses highlights his incapacity as he strives for the power of the Father in the farewell scene.

The first *Genesis* use is yet another reference to the paternity problems of Abraham:

he þæs mældæges  
self ne wende    þæt him sarra,  
bryd blondenfeax,    bringan meahte  
on woruld sunu (2341b-2344a)<sup>103</sup>

(He [Abraham] of that distant day did not himself know, that to him Sarah, the grey-haired bride, would bring into the world a son.)

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<sup>103</sup>Text of this and other *Genesis* quotations from A.N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: U Wisconsin P, 1978). Translation is my own.

Abraham and Sarah's problem is that they do *not* have a child to carry on the patrilineal genealogy. Sarah, the oxymoronic "grey-haired bride," has not yet borne the son who will ensure the continuation of the line. In an odd way, Lot, in the other *Genesis* use of *blondenfeax*, has the same problem: he needs to engender children to continue his line. The only women available are his adult daughters, upon whom falls the blame of instituting incest:

Hie dydon swa.        druncon eode  
 seo yldre to        ær on reste  
 heora bega fæder    ne wiste blondenfeax  
 hwonne him fæmnan to    bryde him bu wæron  
 on ferhðcofan    fæste genearwot  
 mode and gemynde    þæt he mægðe sið,  
 wine druncen    gewitan ne meahte (2600-2606).

(They [the daughters] did this. The elder went before [first] to the drunk father of them both in bed. The grey-haired one did not know in spirit and in mind what women to him as brides [came]. Both were to him in spirit fast constrained so that he, drunk with wine, might not know the action of the maidens.)

The daughters, rather than Lot, initiate the incest that solves Lot's problem. As a "grey-haired" parent, he solves his problem of ensuring his paternal line by getting drunk and letting his daughters commit the greater sin. The implication is that Lot is somehow to be forgiven, since the ultimate result of his (in)action is the continuation of the line. Both grey-haired Sarah and grey-haired Lot manage to solve the problems they have with their children and their lineage.

Hroðgar, however, does not, and the remaining use of *blondenfeax*, the only one in *Beowulf* that does not refer to

Hroðgar, makes that clear. The other *Blondenfeax* usage in *Beowulf* refers to Ongenþeow, who is the sort of old king who does everything Hroðgar does not. He is called *blondenfexa* as he dies in battle:

þær wearð Ongenðiow ecgum sweorda,  
 blondenfexa on bid wrecen,  
 þæt se þeodcynig ðafian sceolde  
 Eafores anne dom (2961-2964a)

(There became the grey-haired Ongenþeow brought to bay by the edges of the sword, so that the people-king must submit to the sole judgment of Eofor.)

Ongenþeow dies in battle, enacting Overing's ultimate masculine statement: "I will triumph or I will die."

Ongenþeow has already killed Hæthcyn, Hygelac's brother, at Ravenswood; Eofor continues the feud by killing Ongenþeow to avenge Hæthcyn's death. Though *blondenfeax*, Ongenþeow is not passive, feeble, crying, or sleeping with women. He preserves his masculinity intact until the end of his life, showing that, in *Beowulf*, a man's advancing age does not necessarily mean a downward movement on Clover's continuum.<sup>104</sup>

In contrast to heroic and grey-haired Ongenþeow, the three references to Hroðgar as *blondenfeax* occur at key moments when he is acting in a manner that undermines his masculinity, defined as his ability to make absolute statements or to exert power over other men. The last of

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<sup>104</sup>It also interesting to note that in the critical discussion of age and Hrothgar's heroism, "age" prototypically becomes the age of old men; elderly females are elided from discussion (for example, Irving, "What to do with Old Kings").

these is the use in the farewell scene, to which I will return in a moment; the others occur at Hroðgar's departure from the shore of the mere when the Danes think Beowulf has probably been killed and at one of Hroðgar's retirements to his bed (discussed above as a feminizing action):

Blondenfeaxe,  
 gomele ymb godne ongeador spræcon,  
 þæt hig þæs æðelinges eft ne wendon,  
 þæt he sigehreðig secean come  
 mærne þeoden (1594a-1598a)

(The grey-haired ones, old [knowledgeable] about goodness, together said that they did not expect again this hero, who had come victorious to seek the famous lord.)

Wolde blondenfeax beddes neosan,  
 gamela Scylding.

(The grey-haired one wished to seek his bed, the ancient Scylding.)

In the first of these passages, the word *blondenfeaxe* is plural, referring not only to Hroðgar but to all the Danes who lack the faith in Beowulf that the Geats (who remain by the shore) demonstrate. The second reference occurs the night before Beowulf's departure; again, Hroðgar has deliberately absented himself from the place of battle and the place of male bonding, where warriors sleep in the hall together, ostensibly prepared for battle.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>It should be noted that Beowulf does not sleep in Heorot on the night of Grendel's mother's attack -- *næs Beowulf ðær / ac wæs oper in ær geteohhod / æfter maþðum-gife mærum Geate* (Beowulf was not there but other [accomodation] was previously assigned to the noble Geat after the treasure-giving, ll.11299a-1301). Beowulf, however, was assigned those quarters, while Hrothgar always actively seeks his bed.

The associations of *blondenfeax* seem to determine Hroðgar as a parent who is having trouble with his "child," especially in that Beowulf refuses to be a son to Hroðgar, as we shall see in a moment. In addition, Hroðgar is *blondenfeax* and ineffectual, in contrast to Ongeneow, who is *blondenfeax* and heroic and super-masculine. All of these lexical associations build upon one another to present a grey-haired king who is trying to control a situation in which he cannot control even himself.

The emotional tone of the farewell scene has elicited relatively little critical comment. Even in editions of *Beowulf*, notes on the scene tend to focus on the odd construction *him wæs bega wen* (l.1873) or on the lost letters in the manuscript rather than the unusual content (Dobbie, Klaeber, Wrenn). Chickering devotes a section of his commentary to "Hroðgar's Tears," noting that the emotion in this passage can be appreciated only by parents who have watched children depart (347). In 1967 Thomas Wright analyzed the scene in detail, and while Chickering says that Wright's conclusions come "at the cost of contorting a number of familiar formulas" (348), Wright also manages to interpret the scene in such a way that the tension of emotion and desperation disappear. Wright not only contorts familiar formulas, but reads Hroðgar and Beowulf as representational ideas rather than characters, conveniently dismissing the discomfort the scene produces in the reader.

Wright begins by questioning a reading of the passage that "turns him [Hroðgar] from a stalwart if tragic king to a sentimental ancient whose concern for his own mortality is neither admirable nor Teutonic" (39). Wright is unabashedly in favor of interpreting Hroðgar as an active participant in the heroic ethos; he refers to his "interest in restoring Hroðgar to the good eminence he deserves as a vigorous and exemplary figure in the epic" (39). Wright also discusses at length the *him wæs bega wen* line, in his translation removing the emendation of *no* at l.1875 so that Beowulf and Hroðgar *do* (rather than do not) expect that they will see each other again (41). This reading begins Wright's argument that the poet "is at pains to justify and explain Hroðgar's emotional outburst" (41). Wright's use of the word "justify" is illuminating; the emotion of the scene obviously unsettles him and needs to be accounted for.

The second half of Wright's reading focuses on the last three lines of the farewell scene, and he restructures the grammar of the scene in a manner of which I thoroughly approve.<sup>106</sup> Most editors read *langað* as a noun (longing) and *beorn* as a verb (burned); they translate ll.1879-1880, in effect, "secret longing burned within his blood." Like Wright, I reverse these grammatical usages, so that *langað* is a verb (longs, desires) and *beorn* is a noun (a warrior, a

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<sup>106</sup>In fact, I read Wright's article after I had done my translation, only to discover that he had made the same grammatical changes that I had.

man).<sup>107</sup> The usual grammatical construction de-personalizes the "longing" and lessens the emotional effect; the more active, immediate "the warrior desires" conveys a more subject, emotional intensity.

At this grammatical juncture Wright and I part company, however. Wright reads the last lines of this scene within a "generalizing intent of the poet" and sees in the tears not sorrow at Beowulf's departure but joy in "the continuity of valor" (43). For Wright, Hroðgar is "submitting to tears that acknowledge, not gratitude and regret, but fellowship and a sense of destined succession" (44). His tears show "a bond well known among men who have shared combat together and discovered in their mutual strength unsuspected kinship" (43). Wright seems untroubled that Hroðgar and Beowulf have very specifically *not* shared combat, they have no "mutual" strength (Beowulf conducted both battles alone), and that Beowulf has rejected Hroðgar's offer of kinship by asserting his ties to Hygelac.

Wright's translation of these lines, translating *langað* as the emotionally neutral "belongs to," reads: "for in his

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<sup>107</sup>Wright does not address the lexical precedents for such translations, so I shall do so here. *Beorn* occurs as a verb infrequently in Old English poetry; occurrences cited by Dobbie include *Guthlac* (ll.938, 964, 980) and *Christ I* (l.540). In contrast, forms of *beorn* mean "man, warrior," 10 times in *Beowulf* alone. *Langað* occurs seven times in the Old English corpus (MCOE L002); see appendix one for details about the other six uses, all of which are third person singular verb forms. If *langað* is a noun, it is the only usage of the word in that way; concordance evidence points to Wright's and my grammatical interpretation, that *langað* is a verb.

heart he held him fast / in the custom that belongs to dear men / as a warrior of the same blood." My translation emphasizes rather than neutralizes the emotion of the scene: "but in his [Hroðgar's] spirit (with heart-bounds fast because of the dear man) the man secretly longed for him [Beowulf] with blood." Where Wright sees a generalized heroic bond, I see an emotional power struggle. Wright's translation puts Hroðgar and Beowulf on relatively even ground; they are each powerful as well as ingratiatingly indebted to the other. His reading depends, however, on ignoring the faltering masculinity and power of Hroðgar that has been constructed in the text previous to the farewell scene; rather than a bonded camaraderie, the farewell scene bespeaks emotion wherein the aging male longs not just for Beowulf's approval and acceptance but for the power implicit in becoming the father of the powerful son.

Beowulf is unmistakably the figure of power in this scene as throughout the poem. His response to Hroðgar's outburst of emotion is the same as his response to the offer of adoption: he ignores it, thinking about his gain, his treasure, and not about its source. In a striking change of tone, after the poet tells us that Hroðgar is longing for Beowulf in his blood, Beowulf simply walks away (*him Beowulf þanan*, away from him Beowulf thence, 1.1880). His power over Hroðgar is absolute, just like everything else about him. The syntax of one of Hill's sentences makes Beowulf's



absolute control of the situation clear: "He has come to love this great warrior as a son, to hope for a kinship and a continuing relationship in any connection Beowulf might want or allow" ("Rule" 175). Beowulf has the power to "allow" Hroðgar to have a relationship with him. Later in that essay, Hill defines Hroðgar's love for Beowulf as "anxious" (176). Similarly, Irving comments on the power Beowulf demonstrates in this scene:

Hroðgar's deep love for Beowulf . . . evident . . . in his outburst of tears when Beowulf leaves to return to his own people, is wholly justified and genuinely touching--but it betrays a terrible dependence. ("Old" 263-64)

Irving's sense of Hroðgar's dependence here confirms that, in the farewell scene, Hroðgar does not "move up" on the continuum of masculinity. Rather than a shared masculine bond, his inability to control his emotions and Beowulf's neglect of their expression show his to be a figure of impotence, crying while Beowulf walks away.

Hroðgar's attempt to adopt Beowulf is another strategy that fails; had he succeeded, he would have become the Father to Beowulf the powerful Son and as such accrued power through his implicit domination of the son. A foray into psychoanalytic theory and psychoanalytic readings of *Beowulf* reveals that fatherhood, as Lees has intimated, is a fragile institution in *Beowulf*, and Beowulf chooses Hygelac, rather than Hroðgar, as the Father to whom he submits himself in his oedipal drama.

The Oedipus complex is one of the primary concepts in twentieth-century psychoanalytic theory. As I discussed in chapter one, it describes the process of "the child," implicitly male, as he grows into a contributing member of society who obeys and accrues status from its laws. The resolution of the Oedipus complex, first described by Sigmund Freud and refined by (among others) Jacques Lacan, is a form of socialization. For Freud, children, like Sophocles' Oedipus, wish to kill their fathers and have sex with their mothers. He says of a spectator of Sophocles' play:

He reacts as though by self-analysis he had recognized the Oedipus complex in himself and had unveiled the will of the gods and the oracle as exalted disguises of his own unconscious. It is as though he was obliged to remember the two wishes--to do away with his father and in place of him take his mother to wife--and be horrified at them. (331)

Lacan's expansion of Freud determines, partially through linguistics (Meaning 78), that the resolution of the drives represented in the Oedipus complex is the child's entrance into language, the Symbolic. This resolution implicitly requires acceptance of the Law of the Father. As the child acquires language, he no longer wants to kill his father and have sex with his mother; the Father becomes a revered figure of power, power in which the Child can share, while the Mother, the Other without the phallus, is renounced as object.

For Lacan, the phallus and the paternal are entwined. The power to create and regulate language depends on both: the phallus "is a signification that is evolved only by what we call a metaphor, in particular, the paternal metaphor" (Possible 198). Lacan links "the signifier of the Father, as author of the Law, with death" (Possible 199); powerful concepts of death, the phallus, signification, and Law meet in the figure of the Father.

Just as psychoanalytic theory has tended to ignore the Mother in favor of a focus on the child, the Father has become a signifier, a metaphor, or a Law-wielding phallus discussed only in relation to the child. To be Father to a child with a resolved oedipus complex necessarily imparts a good deal of phallic power to the Father. This psychoanalytic model of generational power informs Hroðgar's relationship with Beowulf; Hroðgar *tries* to be Beowulf's Father (I capitalize to indicate the psychoanalytic associations of the word), and his failure in that role indicates that he does not have the power of the phallus. An interesting contrast is with the other *blondenfeax* man in *Beowulf*, Ongenþeow, who is killed by the younger Eofor in a multi-generational feud. As such, Ongenþeow could be read as Father in an Oedipus complex in which the son/younger man *succeeds* in killing the Father (and Eofor marries Hygelac's daughter as part of his reward). Ongenþeow dies with his masculinity and position as Father intact (as Lees says,

"The only good hero . . . is a dead one" (146)), while Hroðgar has to live as a rejected Father, his masculinity faltering.

Psychoanalytic readings of *Beowulf*, like Lacan and Freud, tend to focus on the son, on Beowulf. For example, James Earl argues that readers/listeners of *Beowulf* identify with Beowulf in his position as thane only in the first half of the poem; as Beowulf becomes more of a "superego" in the second half, the reader transfers that identification to Wiglaf (Origins 84-85). Hroðgar might receive some attention as a father-figure who gives Beowulf advice (Hansen), but the focus is rarely on him. One exception is Strother Purdy, who reads Grendel as Hroðgar's dream, a creation of his unconsciousness (267): Hroðgar and Grendel never appear together because they are, in some way, the same (268).

Another exception is John Foley, whose essay "Beowulf and the Psychohistory of Anglo-Saxon Culture" argues that the poem "transmits the story of the psychological development of individual and of culture" (135). Foley's analysis takes an odd turn when he reads Hroðgar and Grendel as the good and the terrible fathers that Beowulf must face in his psychological development. For Foley, "the benevolent, positive aspect of the archetype is projected in the character of Hroðgar, under whom the hero-ego Beowulf must serve his heroic apprenticeship" (138); at the same

time, Hroðgar is " a symbolic projection of the ego's successful adjustment to maleness" (140). While Hroðgar and Beowulf as father and son is nothing new, Grendel as father strikes me as bizarre. Since Grendel has a mother, he is defined in the poem as a son, not a parent. Grendel functions more as a bad son to Hroðgar or an evil double of Beowulf (as suggested by Hill, *Cultural* 123) than a "terrible father" whom Beowulf must castrate (Foley 150).

These critics seem not to notice that Beowulf implicitly rejects Hroðgar's Fatherhood in a number of ways. He walks away with no comment after Hroðgar's emotional farewell embrace (Hill refers to "the world of a young man who has yet to meet and lose someone dear to him" {177}). He does not respond to Hroðgar's offer of adoption in his speech that follows the offer (ll.958-979); he does not respond to the "sermon" or "harangue" either, except to sit down and continue feasting (ll.1785-1789). He repeatedly affirms his loyalty to Hygelac, *Hygelac min*, his uncle.<sup>108</sup> Hroðgar is a father-figure in the eyes of *Beowulf* critics, but not in the eyes of Beowulf. Hygelac, not Hroðgar, is Beowulf's father-figure.

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<sup>108</sup>Rolf Bremmer shows that the relationship between sister's son and mother's brother is an important one throughout most cultures; in *Beowulf*, Bremmer argues, that relationship is often mutually satisfying, while the father's brother-brother's son relationship is fraught with tension. See Bremmer, Rolf, jr. "The Importance of Kinship: Uncle and Nephew in *Beowulf*" *Amsterdamer Beitrage zur Alteren Germanistik* 15 (1980) 21-38.

In psychoanalytic terms, if Hroðgar is not the Father, he does not have the phallus. He does not determine signification and metaphor. He does not control the Law, the imposition of cultural norms. He can see himself in the position of powerful masculinity, in the position of Fatherhood, but is not actually there. The last scene in which we see Hroðgar is the farewell scene, his last-ditch attempt to assert masculinity by playing the role of Father to Beowulf as Son. If Beowulf had responded at all to Hroðgar's emotion, his tears, the longing in his blood, it would have been an acknowledgement that Hroðgar held some sort of power over him. But he does not respond. Hroðgar is left at the veritable bottom of Clover's continuum, crying as the hero walks away without speaking.

The two scenes I have discussed, Hroðgar's exit from and entrance to Heorot and the farewell scene, show that Hroðgar's masculinity is in jeopardy in this poem that constructs the masculine, as Overing defines and problematizes it, in oppositional absolutes. Neither through heterosexual relations with his wife nor through paternal, quasi-erotic relations with Beowulf can Hroðgar regain his fading masculine power. Just as in the medieval Scandinavia that Clover describes, masculinity is an achievable or losable quality in *Beowulf*, and Hroðgar has lost it, despite his pretensions to the contrary. As such, he functions in the text as a warning to other masculine

figures about the fragility of that masculinity; perhaps, at some level, Beowulf faces the dragon so that he will be like Ongeneow and die with his masculinity intact rather than, like Hroðgar, fade into effeminate irrelevance.

To think of masculinity as an achievable quality is somewhat akin to Butler's notion of gender as performance; achievable masculinity affords a new way of looking at the "evil queen" of Beowulf, Modþryðo, and watching her disruptive gender performance. Hroðgar tries to retain the power associated with masculinity; Modþryðo wields that power in a masculine performance that undercuts the absoluteness of the masculine opposition of *Beowulf*. She forces an acknowledgement that masculinity is not "natural" but constructed, since a woman can say, in Overing's terms, "I will do this or I will die."

After surveying critical views of Modþryðo and her role, I will examine two words, *mundgripe* and *handgewripene*, which reveal Modþryðo's lexical association with Beowulf and show that she cannot merely be dismissed as an evil queen who becomes good after marrying the right man. She is neither a reformed peace pledge nor a heroic Valkyrie. Instead, her character both confirms and denies a masculine economy that depends on women as commodities. In the terms described in Irigaray's *Women on the Market*, Modþryðo's masculine performance manages to subvert the usual use of women as objects in exchanges between men.

The brief episode in question tells the story of Modþryðo's actions before and after her marriage to Offa; it appears abruptly in the text after a description of the Geat queen Hygd. Unlike Hygd, Modþryðo was not initially good, wise, and generous, a model queen:

Bold wæs betlic, bregorof cyning, heah in healle, Hygd swiðe geong, wis, welþungen, þeah ðe wintra lyt under burhlocan gebiden hæbbe, Hæreþes dohtor; næs hio hnah swa þeah, ne to gneað gifa Geata leodum, maþmgestreona. Mod þryðo wæg, fremu folces cwen, firen ondrysne.	1925
Nænig þæt dorste deor geneþan swæsra gesiða, nefne sinfrea, þæt hire an dages eagum starede, ac him wælbende weotode tealde handgewriþene; hraþe seopðan wæs æfter mundgripe mece geþinged, þæt hit sceadenmæl scyran moste, cwealmbealu cyðan. Ne bið swylc cwenlic þeaw idese to efnanne, þeah ðe hio ænlicu sy, þætte freoðuwebbe feores onsæce æfter ligetorne leofne mannan. Huru þæt onhohsnode Hemminges mæg; ealodringende oðer sædan, þæt hio leodbealewa læs gefremede, inwitniða, syððan ærest wearð gyfen goldhroden geongum ceman, æðelum diore, syððan hio Offan flet ofer fealone flod be fæder lare siðe gesohte. ðær hio syððan well in gumstole, gode, mære, lifgesceafta lifigende breac, hiold heahlufan wið hæleþa brego, ealles moncynnes mine gefræge þone selestan bi sãm tweonum, eormencynnes. Forðam Offa wæs geofum ond guðum, garcene man, wide geweorðod, wisdomes heold eðel sinne; þonon Eomer woc hæleðum to helpe, Hemminges mæg, nefa Garmundes, niða cræftig.	1930
	1935
	1940
	1945
	1950
	1955
	1960

(The hall was splendid, the king very valiant, high in the hall, Higd very young, wise, accomplished, though she had resided few winters under the castle enclosure,



Hareth's daughter; she was not lowly thus, however, nor too niggardly of gifts, of treasures, to the people of the Geats.

{1931b} Modthryth carried on, excellent queen of the folk, a crime terrible. None fierce of more dear companions dared to venture that, except a great lord, so that one of a day gazed at her with eyes, but for him a deadly bond was ordained, was considered, twisted by her hand; quickly thereupon a sword was appointed on account of a hand grip, so that the ornamented sword must settle it, (must) show the death-evil.

{1940b} It is not such queenly custom for a noblewoman to perform, however she may be peerless, that a peace-weaver deprive a beloved man of life after pretended injury. Indeed the kinsman of Hemming stopped that; the ale-drinkers another (story) tell, that she less of harms to a people, of hostile acts performed, since first she was given gold-adorned to the young champion, beloved for nobilities, since by father-counsel she sought the hall of Offa over the pale flood by a journey.

{1951b} Since she has there enjoyed well living of lives on the throne, good, famous, she has held the high love with the chief of warriors, of all the race of man as I have heard the best between the seas, of mankind. Because in gifts and in battles Offa, a spear-bold man, was widely exalted, he held with wisdom his native land; from him Eomer was born as a help to warriors, Hemming's kinsman, nephew of Garmund, powerful against evils.)

Critics have tended to view this story of Modþryðo only within the larger context of the poem. They see the Modþryðo episode as a digression from the main narrative and hence a less important though thematically necessary part of the text. Adrien Bonjour and Constance Hieatt see Modþryðo as a foil or contrast to Hygd, Higelac's queen, who is described as a good queen, young, beautiful, wise, and generous in the lines leading up to the Modþryðo episode (1925-1931). In contrast, Modþryðo orders men who dare to look on her to be killed (1933-1940). However, after her marriage to Offa, Modþryðo changes to become like Hygd,

generous, loved, and fertile: a good queen who managed to overcome her wicked tendencies. While many critics<sup>109</sup> agree that Modþryðo's primary function in the poem is to create a contrast with Hygd, Hieatt argues that she also creates a foil for Heremod, the king who went from good to bad (ll.898-915). This analysis sets up a number of neat binary oppositions: Modþryðo/Hygd, Heremod/Beowulf, Modþryðo/Heremod.<sup>110</sup> Such oppositions reveal more about the critics than they do about Modþryðo; they explain Modþryðo so that, within the framework of such oppositions, "the passage . . . be considered as truly Beowulfian" (Bonjour 55). Both contrasts, with Heremod and Hygd, are necessary or the "link with the rest of the poem would decidedly be too tenuous" (Bonjour 54).

Another "explanation" of the episode is patristic: David Allen reads the Modþryðo story as an Christian allegory, with Offa as Christ the bridegroom. "Released from a nightmarish world in which her wishes were law, Modþryðo finds happiness in submission" much like the good Christian does in submission to Christ (126-127). Edward Irving and Randall Bohrer both read the Modþryðo episode as a triumph, within the context of the poem, of the right, "natural" order of male over female, focusing on the "tamed shrew"

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<sup>109</sup>Bonjour, Hieatt, Chickering, Eliason are the main examples.

<sup>110</sup> Chickering's summary of formalist analysis of the poem is very thorough: H.D. Chickering, ed., *Beowulf: A Dual Language Edition* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 349-352.

aspect of the passage. For Bohrer, Modþryðo shows the terribleness of a woman not controlled by a man, "especially appropriate if we see one of the poem's major themes as celebration of the triumph of patriarchal values" (142). Irving says, "But all is well. The exertions of a strong minded husband can bring Thryth back to her proper role" (73). These statements reveal the critical desires of their authors to naturalize male domination of women, at least in the world of the text.

Another focus of formalist critics is the abrupt transition to the Modþryðo story. In order to show the passage's stylistic similarity to the rest of the poem, critics have sought other points in *Beowulf* at which the subject matter swings suddenly from one narrative to another without warning. Chickering notes similar transitions at 915 and 1214: "throughout the poem, the poet seeks to bring unlike elements into meaningful juxtaposition, and the piercing change from Hygd to Modþryðo was meant originally, I believe, to be forceful, not forced" (352). Klaeber also fits the digression into a larger vision of the poem; he sees the poet as a commentator on the events of the narrative so that the story of Modþryðo is an opportunity for the poet to make a moral exemplum like others in the poem: "the author's strong disapproval of Modþryðo's behavior is quite in keeping with his moralizing, didactic propensities shown in sundry other passages" (198). For

these critics, the poet's use of Modþryðo is thematically appropriate. Similarly, Bruce Moore says:

In the Thryth passage there exist, in concentrated form, the two major patterns of the first part of *Beowulf*. First, there is the contrast which reveals the human capacity for good (Hygd) and for evil (Thryth). Secondly, there is the description of the triumph of good over evil. (131)

Norma Kroll also sees an evil to good "theme" in the episode: "Modthryth's later deeds demonstrate that people capable of evil can be capable of good" (119). This sort of thematic, moral analysis illustrates Overing's postmodern contention about criticism of the Modþryðo passage, that "a place is found for the unmannerly queen in the larger context of the poem, one that connects, and assimilates her through opposition" (102).

Modþryðo's name and her very existence have provoked considerable critical discussion. The crux "mod þryðo wæg" (1931) can be read to include or not to include a name; if there is a name, it can be read as Modþryðo or as þryðo. Critics have variously argued for one name or the other or claimed that the name is not included at all. Chickering sums up Wrenn's and Sisam's argument<sup>111</sup> that the name is not in the text:

Wrenn . . . and Sisam . . . took the view that *modþryðo* was a single compound word, "pride, arrogance,

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<sup>111</sup>C.L. Wrenn and W.F. Bolton, *Beowulf with the Finnesburg Fragment* (Exeter: Short Run Press, 1988), 170; and see Sisam's note in RES 22 (1946) 266. It should be noted that in Bolton's revised edition he moves from this position to acceptance of Modþryðo as a proper name.

violence of character," and that the name of the queen who "waged" *mod-pryðo* also contained the element *pryð*, and thus the scribe's eye skipped from one to the other, omitting a passage. (349)

Other critics have thought that perhaps the queen's name is Fremu (l.1932) or that a leaf of the manuscript is missing at this point (Klaeber 198).

Norman Eliason takes the Wrenn/Chickering argument one step further and argues that there is no separate female character who married Offa (the other critics do not dispute her existence, just her name). Eliason, like Wrenn and Chambers, sees *modpryðo* as a compound noun, but believes that it refers to the actions of Hygd, not of some "other woman." Eliason's version of lines 1925-1962 is that Hygd had men put to death for looking at her, was married to Offa, had Eomer, and after Offa died, married Higelac (Eliason 126). This argument not only shows that the story of *Modpryðo* could actually refer to Hygd; it also conveniently dismisses the problem of *Modpryðo* in the text, a problem that, without Eliason's convoluted argument, has "no satisfying solution" (125). Eliason is unable to absorb *Modpryðo* completely into his vision of the text --a problem that must have a satisfying solution--so he negates her existence entirely.

Historical critics stress the documented precedents for a number of the characters in *Beowulf*, and especially for *Modpryðo*. First among these precedents is Queen Drida, who married Offa I and who was banished from her father's

kingdom because of "the intrigue of certain men of ignoble blood whose offers of marriage she had proudly rejected" (Klaeber 197). Another candidate is Cyneþryð, the wife of Offa II, about whom were told "legendary stories of cruelty" (Klaeber 197); finally, there is Hermethruda, a Scottish queen who has a minor part in Saxo Grammaticus' story of Amleth (Smithers 422).<sup>112</sup> Certain similarities and echoes among these names help to place Modþryðo definitively in history. As Constance Hieatt says:

If we can even tentatively accept the idea that the Beowulf poet may have changed, or even inverted, some names for thematic purposes, why may he not have changed þryð, Cyneþryð, or Eormenþryð to Modþryðo? (179)

The current consensus among historical critics is that the name is Modþryðo.

The political aims of feminist critics are quite different from those of the traditional (mostly male) critics discussed above, but feminists, with the notable exception of Overing, also tend to shape Modþryðo and her story into a unified vision of Woman, be it in *Beowulf*, Old English Literature, or Anglo-Saxon culture at large, to "explain her."

Mary Kay Temple examines the uses of the word *ides*, commonly translated as "noblewoman," to place Modþryðo along a continuum of extraordinary women in Old English

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<sup>112</sup>For overviews of the historical precedents for Modþryðo, see Hieatt (178) and Chickering (350).

Literature. Jane Chance also uses the word *ides* and the Eve/Mary opposition to argue that "the primary conventional secular role of Anglo-Saxon woman demanded her passivity and peacemaking talent" (xiv). Chance sees Modþryðo as an Eve-figure at the beginning of her story and as a Mary-figure at the end; as such, Modþryðo acts as a bridge between Hygd (a Mary figure) and Grendel's mother (Eve) (Chance 105). Part of Modþryðo's role is to confirm or duplicate Grendel's mother's actions: "both antitypes of the peace-weaving queen behave like kings, using the sword to rid their halls of intruders or unwanted 'hall-guests'" (Chance 106).

While Chance sees Modþryðo on a continuum of women characters in *Beowulf*, Helen Damico places Modþryðo firmly in Scandinavian legendary and cultural tradition rather than simply in Old English literature. For Damico, the binary opposition is not Mary/Eve but the two sides of the "valkyrie diptych," the two sides of the war-goddesses from Scandinavian literature and legend. On one side is the battle-demon valkyrie, who kills the warrior; on the other is the gold-adorned, courtly valkyrie who serves the warrior in Valhalla (Damico 51 and elsewhere). Modþryðo actually encompasses both of these types, since her story involves a change in character: she personifies "the progression of the fierce war demon to gold-adorned warrior queen" (Damico 49) as she changes roles from man-killer to Offa's model wife.

Modþryðo does act as a foil to Hygd and historical precedents for her character do exist. However, two distinctive if ambiguous words in the Modþryðo passage reveal a Modþryðo who is not so easily subsumed into patterns of the poem or of Old English literature that most critics present. These words, *mundgripe* (1938) and *handgewriþen* (1937), link Modþryðo with Beowulf in such a way that the categories of good and evil, masculine and feminine, become much harder to distinguish. Although lexically she is linked to the hero, the narrator tells us that she performed criminal acts (*firen ondrysne*, 1932). She deprives beloved men (*leofne mannan* 1943) of life, but she is an excellent queen of the people (*fremu folces cwen* 1932).<sup>113</sup> It seems that even the poet cannot quite make up his mind about her.

Modþryðo's strongest lexical links with Beowulf appear in 1937 and 1938, *handgewriþene* and *mundgripe*, literally translated as "twisted by hand" and "handgrip." *Handgewriþene* describes a deadly bond, *wælbende* (l.1936). Klaeber says *handgewriþene* "seems to be meant figuratively" (199) since Modþryðo probably manipulated the events "by hand" and did not literally forge deadly bonds. However, the other two uses of forms of *wriþan* in the poem are decidedly literal: in l.963-4 Beowulf literally twists

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<sup>113</sup>Kemp Malone thinks that *fremu folces cwen* refers to Hygd, not to Modþryðo (Hygd 356), but he is alone in this reading; the phrase is in apposition to *mod þryðo wæg*.



Grendel to his deathbed (*Ic hine hrædlice heardan clammum / on wælbedde wriþan þohte*) and in l.2982 the Geats, presumably including Beowulf, bind up the wounds and the corpses on the Swedish and Geatish battlefield (*Ða wæron monige, þe his mæg wriðon*).

Here, forms of *wriþan* associate Modþryðo with Beowulf in instances where he is heroic (conquering Grendel, assisting his wounded comrades) and she is evil. Of course words have different connotations in different narratives, but the lexical association with the hero and his actions questions two usual critical assumptions: first, of Modþryðo's all-encompassing evil and, second, of a figurative translations of *handgewriþene*. Since Beowulf the noble hero is also associated with forms of *wriþan*, the use of the word in the Modþryðo passage clouds a reading of her as a pure termagent. The other uses in the poem are literal; why must the word be translated figuratively here? Modþryðo, the queen with the ambiguous motives and character, could indeed forge or twist deadly bonds: literally put the men to death herself.

A similar problem with literal and figurative translations arises with the other word that associates Modþryðo and Beowulf: *mundgripe* (l.1938), both a clear link from Modþryðo to Beowulf and one of the most ambiguous words in the section. *Mundgripe* occurs only in *Beowulf* (MCOE M023, 164); there are no other usages in the Old English

corpus that might guide us to a wider interpretation of the word. Beowulf is the only other character in the poem with *mundgripe*, twice in the fight with Grendel and once in the fight with Grendel's mother:<sup>114</sup>

1.379-81: *he pritiges manna mægen-cræft on his mundgripe heaþorof hæbbe* (Beowulf has the strength of 30 men in his handgrip)

1.751-3: *he ne mette middangeardes, eopan sceata on elran men mundgripe maran* (Grendel has not met any man with a stronger handgrip than Beowulf)

1.1533-4: *strenges getruwode, mundgripe mægenes* (Beowulf rejects Hrunting for handgrip in the fight with Grendel's mother)

While it is easy to translate *mundgripe* in these instances, scholars have had much more trouble with it in relation to Modþryðo. Klaeber says that it could be "an allusion to a fight between maiden (or father) and suitor" (199) but prefers instead to translate it as "seized" or "arrested." Similarly, Hieatt refers to it as "the method she uses, presumably by proxy, to pin down her victims" (177, italics mine); Chance translates *mundgripe* as "arrest" (105), Damico as "hand-seizure" (46). If there is bodily contact, Klaeber suggests maybe the father is involved (though he gives no reason at all for this speculation); Hieatt assumes that

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<sup>114</sup> The other use of *mundgripe* is actually an emendation of the manuscript reading *handgripe* at ll.965-66: *he for handgripe minum scolde licgean lifbysig* (In Beowulf's handgrip, Grendel struggles against death). All editions I have examined accept this emendation, but I have not included it in my text since the manuscript reading makes sense as it stands.

Modptryðo would not engage in physical contact with the men who dared to look at her.

Perhaps they do not want to think of actual contact between Modptryðo and her suitors, although the word is most definitively literal in its other uses. Even though the word is literal in reference to Beowulf the hero and his good deeds, it is assumed to be figurative when referring to a woman and her bad deeds. Hieatt does remark on the link between Modptryðo and Beowulf through the word:

elsewhere, this word is associated with Beowulf alone, and its use here may be an indication of the misuse of strength and power in contrast to Beowulf's own exemplary use, recalling the contrast between Beowulf and Heremod. (177)

Contrast or no, *mundgripe* associates Modptryðo with the hero just as *wripan* does, and those associations suggest--but do not confirm-- literal uses of the word in the Modptryðo story as well.

And what is the story of Modptryðo? The associations of these two words (which link Modptryðo to Beowulf) enable us to acknowledge and play with ambiguities rather than to totalize or eliminate them. Is Modptryðo really evil? did she wrestle with men? did her father pack her off to Offa? does she illustrate an antitype of peace weaver? is she an Eve figure who becomes a Mary figure? The ambiguities in the text show that Modptryðo cannot be dismissed as simply another example, albeit extreme, of a tamed shrew.

This ambiguity surrounding Modþryðo forces an examination of the construction of gender in the poem. After all, the usual assumption of Modþryðo's evil is that she has repudiated the conventional female role of passive peaceweaver and taken matters of violence, best left to men, into her own hands. The traditional view of the passive peace pledge complements the traditional view of the active hero in this male/female opposition. Within this opposition, power belongs to the masculine. Except for Modþryðo, only men have the power of violence and the power of wealth in the social systems described in *Beowulf*. Overing points out that "female failure is built into this system" since women "embody . . . peace, in a culture where war and death are privileged values" (82). Men have the opportunity to succeed, while the most a woman can hope for is to delay the inevitable war and failure of her role as peace weaver. However, for Overing this tidy opposition of active, warlike man/ passive peaceful woman is actually disrupted by the feminine, which drives a "wedge of ambiguity and paradox" into the neat pairs (xxiii). While Overing discusses the other female characters in the poem as well, she highlights Modþryðo because "she escapes, however briefly, the trap of binary definition" (108).

Modþryðo, in the first half of her story--and in the second half, though less obviously--not only disrupts the construction of gender in the poem but manages to take

control of it briefly. This control both comes from and produces the power she wields. Modþryðo has the ultimate power, that of life and death, over the men in her hall. This power is masculine in terms of the gender construction of the text; those who wield power are men, like Beowulf or Higelac, and those who are completely powerless are women, like Hildeburh or Freawaru. Although Hieatt thinks that Modþryðo's linguistic associations with Beowulf serve as a contrast involving the use and misuse of power, Modþryðo's lexical associations with Beowulf underscore the masculinity of her actions. Because she is wielding power as she arranges the deaths of the men who have offended her, she is constructing her gender, and that gender, within the terms of the poem, is masculine. Modþryðo is making an absolute, masculine statement, in Overing's terms, but with an interesting twist: You will not look at me or you will die.

Butler says that the construction of gender is an ongoing, circular process that builds upon itself: "'Intelligible' genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire" (Trouble 17). In these terms, it is usual to assume that Modþryðo is evil (as Hieatt does) since she is acting against the usual assumptions about females. However, Butler also emphasizes that gender is constructed by the discourse that contains it. To use Butler's examples, "the feminine" refers to very

different ideas in the works of Simone de Beauvoir and Monique Wittig. Simply because Anglo-Saxon scholars have always discussed the feminine gender in terms of passive peace pledges and a Mary/Eve opposition is no reason to continue to do so. We can view Modþryðo's gender as masculine, a gender she has the power to construct on her own. In Clover's terms, Modþryðo is ultimately masculine because she wields power over other men. As Butler says, "gender proves to be performative--that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (Trouble 25). Modþryðo's performances, to use Butler's terms, are masculine.

To say that Modþryðo has constructed a masculine gender for herself is to say that she acts, within the textually constructed world of *Beowulf*, like a man. To borrow a phrase from Frantzen, Modþryðo is a "manly woman" because her actions, her performances within the text, are masculine. Butler says that "That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (Trouble 136). Viewed in this light, Modþryðo's gender is determined not by the author calling her a *cwen*, a queen (a

noun feminine in grammatical gender as well definition),<sup>115</sup> but by her violent, authoritative, and powerful action.

While critics have not wanted to consider the possibility of literal contact between Modþryðo and men, a masculine construction of gender allows, even encourages that interpretation. If Modþryðo is masculine, why should she not attach *wælbende* (deadly bonds) to those who have offended her, literally put them in chains with her own hands? This would not be a feminine action, according to the text's definition of femininity, but I read Modþryðo to construct her own gender, to assume power that is unfeminine within the context of the poem. In doing so, she "reveals a trace of something that we know cannot exist in the world of the poem: the trace of a woman signifying in her own right" (Overing 106). To achieve power, Modþryðo has had to assume the masculine gender, for her society does not permit the feminine to put offenders in chains and cut their heads off.

The culture of the poem defines Modþryðo by her sex, sees her as feminine; her assumption of the masculine gender defines her deeds as *firen ondrysne*, a terrible crime in her society. The ambiguity of her gender and her sex seeps into

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<sup>115</sup>Interestingly enough, in light of my own and other's arguments about women being defined only in terms of their relations to men, Klaeber's primary definition for *cwen* is not queen but "wife (of a king)" (314). For a discussion of Klaeber's editorial construction of women in *Beowulf*, especially *Wealhtheow*, see Josephine Bloomfield, "Diminished by Kindness: Frederick Klaeber's Rewriting of *Wealhtheow*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 93 (1994), 183-203.

the poet's narrative. Modpřyđo is evil but also *fremu* (excellent), she performs *leodbealewa* (harms to people) but is also *aenlicu* (peerless). The poet cannot condemn her completely with his language, though he sometimes presents her (and critics have read her) as an example of a bad woman.

Indeed, in the beginning of her story Modpřyđo is a bad woman if considered within the gender-related values determined in the larger framework of the poem. Modpřyđo does not even have a legitimate reason, in masculine terms, for killing the gazers, because she is not avenging the death of a kinsman. For Modpřyđo, there is no reliance on "the familiar and familial vengeance code that pervades the poem" (Overing 105); although her actions show a masculine gender, the motives behind them do not. This sexual ambiguity (of her body, of her actions, of her intentions, of the language used to describe her) is too much for the narrative to bear, and Modpřyđo, after 13 lines of disruption (1931-1944), seems to settle down into a more obviously feminine gender. She has disrupted the masculine economy, the binary definition of gender, on which the poem and its culture depend.

That economy is one that depends on women defined as commodities to be traded between and passed among men. Irigaray states that "The society we know, our own culture, is based upon the exchange of women" (170). While Anglo-



Saxon England or early medieval Scandinavia may not be "the society we know," it is markedly similar in that an even more obvious exchange of women formed its basis. Freawaru and Hildeburh are traded like commodities to their families' enemies to buy an alliance, a tenuous peace. Irigaray says, "*Woman has value only in that she can be exchanged*" (176, italics hers); a woman is not an independent, signifying subject. Irigaray could be counseling Hroðgar when she says, "Wives, daughters, and sisters have value only in that they serve as the possibility of, and potential benefit in, relations among men" (172). Hroðgar's wife, Wealtheow, his daughter, Freawaru, and his unnamed sister ("Healfdane's daughter") are all products in the masculine peace-pledge economy, traded for political alliance. Overing points out that women in *Beowulf* are so thoroughly objectified that most of them do not have names: of the eleven women in the poem, only five are named (Wealtheow, Freawaru, Higd, Hildeburh, Modþryðo); the rest remain nameless (the old woman at Beowulf's funeral) or defined simply as a man's wife, mother, or daughter (73).

Irigaray points out that within this masculine economy a woman is worthless unless at least two men are interested in exchanging her (181). Modþryðo's marriage can be viewed in this light; she goes to Offa's hall *be fæder lare*, by father-counsel. "Lare" here could be translated to mean an

order of her father rather than advice;<sup>116</sup> Modþryðo seems to acquiesce to the masculine economy (l.1950) that defines her society and thus is exchanged between two men. In Irigaray's terms, Modþryðo seems to have subscribed to society's version of normal womanhood, "a development that amounts, for the feminine, to subordination to the forms and laws of masculine activity" (187).

However, Modþryðo does rebel against that economy, especially in the first half of her story, when she performs within the masculine gender. Within the first thirteen lines of her narrative, she refuses to become a commodity like those defined in Irigaray's essay. Overing emphasizes that Modþryðo will not allow the men in the hall--presumably potential husbands--to gaze at her. While most women are commodities, "the gold-adorned queens who circulate among the warriors as visible treasure" (Overing 104), Modþryðo refuses to become one. "At the center of Modþryðo's rebellion is her refusal to be looked at, to become an object" (Overing 103). While Overing attributes Modþryðo's rebellion to her momentary disruption of the social and textual structures of *Beowulf*, I prefer to interpret Modþryðo more specifically as an active subject who has constructed her own gender. Her masculine gender both allows and forces her to be an active subject; thus, she cannot be

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<sup>116</sup>Klaeber (366) and Wrenn (256) both suggest "bidding," with its connotations of compulsion, as a possible translation.

an object. Modþryðo has the power to rebel, to refuse, since she has assumed the masculine gender.

Her refusal of commodification points even more strongly to literal readings of *handgewripene* and *mundgripe*; the implications of bodily contact show the physical nature of the way the men wanted to view her and she refused to be viewed. Since Modþryðo performs within a masculine gender, we can now read the passage as a story of a queen who bound and decapitated with her own hands those men who offended her.

The literal translation of *mundgripe* allows even another interpretation of the story, and I wish to allow for a multiplicity of interpretations and acknowledge that version as well. While all critics assume that the *mundgripe* is probably figurative (even Overing translates it as "seizure" {104}) and either Modþryðo's or her father's, I would argue that the *mundgripe* is not only literal but could be the man's. This interpretation calls for a translation of *æfter* (*æfter mundgripe*, 1.1938) as "on account of" or "because of": because of an actual physical handgrip (a man touching this powerful woman), the sword was appointed. In this reading, Modþryðo has the power to refuse to be touched as well as looked at, which in Irigaray's terms rejects both the culture's definitions and commodifications of women. Irigaray says that woman has two bodies, "her natural body and her socially valued, exchangeable body" (180); in this

version of the story, Modþryðo will not allow the men to touch her natural body nor to look at her as "visible treasure" to be socially exchanged.

The poet does not see the situation as a woman asserting her right not to be looked at and possibly touched: he refers to the men's actions as "pretended injury" (*ligetorne*, l.1943). *Ligetorne* is unique in Old English to Modþryðo's story (MCOE L011,201); the narrator needs an unusual word, a compound of "lie" and "trouble" to emphasize that the actions of men concerning women's bodies are not injuries in the terms of the culture to which the men are accustomed.<sup>117</sup> Critics have tended to agree with the poet, that these injuries are pretended; Irving says "it is evident that these men are innocent victims of her accusations" (73). Evident? To whom? Perhaps to another man, within or without the text, who sees nothing wrong with examining the possible merchandise, as it were. Herein lies Modþryðo's ultimate disruption: she refuses to agree that the actions of the men are *ligetorne*, and wields her power to punish the offenders.

However, it is generally agreed that Modþryðo changes into a more conventional Anglo-Saxon woman upon her marriage to Offa. Since she has been given to Offa, the poet tells

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<sup>117</sup>In a way, this "case" is not so different from discussion in the 1990s about sexual harassment. To many men, sexual harassment is a "pretended injury" while to many women it is a wholly legitimate grievance. It seems that Modþryðo has something in common with Anita Hill.

us, the ale drinkers tell a different story; Modþryðo lives well on the throne, good and famous, loving her husband (ll.1945-1953). Traditional critics call her change a reform: Modþryðo has become more like Hygd, the traditional gold-adorned queen. Feminist critics seem a bit saddened by the passing of the man-killer and the assumption of the traditional role; even Overing says that Modþryðo rebels against but does not conquer the masculine symbolic order (105). Overing attributes her "reformed wifely personality" to the flaw in her rebellion, namely that "the violent form of her rebellion confronts the system on its own death-centered terms" (105). However, I want to argue that Modþryðo not only disrupts the masculine symbolic order but continues to rebel against it even after her disappearance from her own story.

It is easy to see Modþryðo as a conventional woman, silent and passive at the end of her story. The traditional view sees Modþryðo sent to Offa *be fæder-lare* as a gold-adorned peace pledge. After three and half lines (1951b-1954) praising her as a good, traditional queen, the poet moves on to praise her husband and does not mention Modþryðo again. She has disappeared from a story which is supposedly hers. Her body disappears as well as her name; her son Eomer is born not from her but *þanon* (l.1960), from him,

i.e. from Offa.<sup>118</sup> There is no need to mention the passive woman who does her duty as gold-adorned, fertile queen.

However, after her marriage to Offa, Modþryðo may not be the conventional gold-adorned queen that she seems to be on the surface. Close examination of the description of her life at Offa's court shows her unconventionality in a continued "rebellion" against the binary oppositions that defined her as virago and now as passive peace weaver. First of all, although she went *be fæder lare*, she *gesohte*, sought, Offa's hall. I choose to translate *lare* as "advice," without the authority-laden translation of "order,"<sup>119</sup> so that considering advice from her father, Modþryðo actively sought (journeyed to) Offa's hall. Once there, she is *in gumstole*, on the throne, not walking among the warriors serving them drink; the tableaux shows her in the place of power, not in the position of servitude.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup>The existence of Modþryðo's son raises the question of the possibility of a maternal performance for her. I see Modþryðo to be like Eve of *Genesis*, however, in that she is a non-maternal mother. Modþryðo's material body disappears in the grammar of the narrative, and her desire for power is rooted in a masculine desire for domination and control, not a a maternal desire to nurture and protect.

<sup>119</sup>Klaeber suggests not only "bidding" (mentioned in footnote 115), but "instruction," "precept," and "counsel" (366); Wrenn, in addition to "bidding," includes "teaching" and "advice" (256).

<sup>120</sup>The unusualness of this tableau within West Saxon culture is made apparent by Asser's comment that "the people of the West Saxons do not suffer a queen to sit next to the king" (qtd. in Pauline Stafford, "The King's Wife in Wessex, 800-1066," *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990),

she is described as *mære* (famous) in line 1952, an adjective normally reserved for (male) heroes.<sup>121</sup> These words all hint that Modþryðo is not the typical queen the critics have taken her to be after her marriage.

Most important, however, is her success in marriage. Modþryðo rebels against the system by succeeding in its terms, terms that are (as Overing points out) set up to ensure women's failure within the terms of patriarchal society (although Overing reads the women of *Beowulf* as hysterics who trouble rather than sanction that society, and as such question the validity of their "failures"). In a society that values war, killing, violence, and glory in battle, the peace-weaver actually strives against everything the society values. The other women in *Beowulf*, as numerous critics have noted, fail, as indeed they are destined to do. Wealtheow fails to prevent her nephew Hroðulf from killing her sons and taking the kingship; Hygd's husband Higelac dies in a feud with the Frisians; Beowulf tells us how Freawaru will fail as a peace-pledge between the Hathobards and the Danes; Hildeburh loses her brother, son, and husband in the wars she could not prevent as peace pledge between the Frisians and the Half-Danes. All of these "conventional" women adhere to the role their society has determined is

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<sup>121</sup>Forms of *mære* occur 31 times in *Beowulf*; of these, 15 references are to a *þeoden*, a (male) prince (Klaeber 371).

appropriate for them; all succumb to the failure built into that role.

The cornerstone of Modþryðo's unconventionality is her success in the role in which the others fail. She resists and disrupts the system both before and after her marriage. We have no sure evidence that Modþryðo was actually a peace-pledge. The text refers to her as *freoðuwebbe*, peace-weaver, but this reference occurs before her marriage, when she is depriving beloved men of life (ll.1942-43). We do not know her nationality and the text does not tell us whether her people were feuding with Offa's. The only evidence that she may be a peace pledge, if it can be called evidence, is that Modþryðo is *gyfen goldhroden* like any other conventional woman. However, the treasure she brings with her to the marriage could be a dowry in a friendly alliance as well. Unlike the other marriages described in the poem, Modþryðo's succeeds both emotionally and politically. Offa is not embroiled in a blood feud; he is

þone selestan bi sǣm tweonum,  
eormencynnes. Forþam Offa wæs  
geofum ond guðum, garcene man,  
wide geweorðod, wisdomes heold  
eðel sinne (1956-1960)

(the best between the seas of mankind. Because Offa was, with gifts and battles, a spear-bold man, widely exalted, he held with wisdom his native land).

With this great king Modþryðo *hiold heahlufan* (l.1954), held the high love. They obviously have a good marriage; their successful son who is *hæleðum to helpe* (l.1961), a help to



warriors, follows Offa as king. Modþryðo's supposed acquiescence to the status quo actually undermines it; her success as a queen (not a peace-pledge) defies the system that devalues yet necessitates the woman as peaceweaver. Only in Modþryðo's case does the "patrilineal genealogy" work without a hitch; while Lees discusses the fragility of father-son bonds and successions, in Offa's family those bonds are strong. I suggest that they are strong because Eomer has two masculine parents, both watching out for him. Patrilineal genealogy *cannot* work when the mother is a peace-weaver; she will inevitably fail, as Overing has shown. Modþryðo's masculine performance strengthens this most masculine of bonds within the poem. Her actions are not "feminist," an inapplicable word, but assert a masculinity of the sort Clover describes. In *Beowulf*, the ultimate masculine act may be to leave one's kingdom intact to one's son--and in this as well Modþryðo has succeeded as she performs in her masculine manner.

Within this analysis of *Beowulf*, there is no space for feminine signification. To read *Beowulf* as a narrative of characters striving for masculinity is to preclude a signifying feminine except as an ultimately ineffectual disruption. While this may trouble some critics, I propose that this very exclusion of the feminine (and of the maternal and of other gender performances) serves to trouble not the concept of Clover's continuum or my reading of

masculinity in the text but the entire structure of the society it represents. *Beowulf* asserts a patriarchy in which only one gender performance is valued and reminds us of the exclusionary nature of a society in which power is defined only as dominance and control over Others.

The genders of Hroðgar and Modþryðo confirm that gender is not "natural" within the world of *Beowulf*, but dependent upon performance and power wielded over others. Modþryðo is more masculine than Hroðgar: she fights her own battles and her son succeeds to the throne. By discarding traditional assumptions about masculinity and feminity in the poem--the good king, the tamed shrew--and investigating lexical associations with the figures under discussion, I hope to have shown that the masculine continuum in *Beowulf* reveals a textual culture fraught with tension in that gender is not determined by sex or status but by action.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE MASCULINE HOLY HEROISM OF GUTHLAC

Christ and Mary, Adam and Eve, and Modþryðo and Hroðgar in their mixed pairs seem to be self-evident choices, joined variously in primary texts, in sculpture, in illustration, and in source texts so that their gender performances mix and complement each other, providing insight into the ways in which the masculine, the feminine, and the maternal inform, oppose, and destabilize one another. My final pairing, however, upsets this "natural" textual pairing, and joins two figures who seem disparate in every way.

Initially, Judith from *Judith* and Guthlac from *Guthlac A* seem to have very little in common. *Judith* is a canonical text; *Guthlac A* is consistently neglected by critics and general readers. Judith is an Old Testament heroine; Guthlac is a local English eighth century saint. *Judith* is full of narrative action which includes an attempted rape and a murder; *Guthlac A* consists mostly of didactic religious speeches wherein Guthlac affirms his faith in the power of God to drive away demons. These striking disparities between the poems, however, can be fruitful

ground for examination of the role of gender in sainthood, for both Judith and Guthlac are holy heroes.

The interplay of heroism, gender, and sanctity creates a tension when these two poems are read against each other, a tension that becomes more apparent when visual representations of these figures are examined as well. As I noted in chapter one, Judith has frequently been a subject of feminist and gender analysis, as have most of the major female figures in Old English poetry, while Guthlac's masculinity has been assumed and untreated, like the gender performances of most male figures. Judith and Guthlac, on one level, engage in unusual gender performances in that Guthlac submits to divine will and relies on divine assistance in what seems like a traditionally feminine way while a seemingly masculine Judith wields a sword and takes an active part in her struggle against Holofernes and the Assyrians. The connotations of the words "hero" and "heroine" tend to imply the same sort of absolute binary oppositions that warrior/peaceweaver and active/passive construct (heroines lie tied to the railroad tracks, after all, while the heroes rescue them). However, Judith and Guthlac as heroine and hero challenge those assumptions in their performances in their poems.

I initially chose them as a mixed pair because of this gender challenge, but a more thorough examination of intersections of gender performance, asceticism, community,

and vocabulary in the poems and in visual representation suggests that Guthlac and Judith do not merely invert a binary gender construction so that Guthlac is feminine and Judith is masculine. Both of these heroes suggest new gender performances in that they expand upon the categories of masculine and maternal in such a way that reveals possibilities for multiply performed and variously defined genders.

I read Judith's gender to be maternal, much like that of the Virgin Mary of *Advent* and the Ruthwell Cross; Judith's maternal heroism develops from the mother-daughter bond she creates with her maid. Judith's gender performance demonstrates the possibilities of the maternal separate from biological motherhood. Guthlac's masculinity is based in his ascetic isolation and independence; his gender performance is very specifically not defined oppositionally against a feminine Other. His gender shows that, unlike that of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood* or on the Ruthwell Cross, there are possibilities for masculine performance that do not rely on domination of an Other in a binary opposition. Because Guthlac's masculinity does not rely on an Other for definition, it is less fragile and less prone to disruption than that enacted by Christ of *Dream* and on the Ruthwell cross.

This reading of Guthlac's masculinity, I will argue, allows for a reading of *Guthlac A* as a poem that celebrates

maaculine isolation as a form of holy heroism. Guthlac's heroism, and the masculine performance related to it, is most apparent in the textually distinct *Guthlac A*, wherein he seizes control of an island in the Crowland fens from various devils by resisting their temptations and tortures. The two main events of the poem are the temptation wherein the devils force Guthlac to view the sins of youths in monasteries and the torture of a visit to the mouth of Hell. Aside from these two episodes, the "action" of the poem consists mostly of argumentation between Guthlac and the devils, with occasional intervention by St. Bartholomew, Guthlac's divine intercessor and patron saint. Bartholomew orders the devils to retreat from the hell mouth and to return Guthlac to his rightful place. The poem ends with a peaceful flowering of Guthlac's hermitage after the devils have been banished.

After a discussion of the manuscript context of the poem, I will examine its critical genealogy, its connections to the eremitic, monastic tradition, and two unusual words within it to show that masculinity, holiness, and isolation are interrelated concepts in this poem. Then I will discuss selected visual representations of Guthlac that seem to point to similar conclusions about his gender performance.

Since I explicitly rejected the notion of a poem called "*Genesis A*" in chapter four, it may seem odd that I examine *Guthlac A* as a separate unit of text here, rather than a

whole *Guthlac* poem comprised of the units now called *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*. The manuscript context of the poem, however, shows that *Guthlac A* is distinct from *Guthlac B*, though related to it by virtue of their subject matter. The title *Guthlac A* is editorial and unfortunate, as it implies a only a sectional division, while the actual manuscript context shows *Guthlac A* to be a separate poem in its own right.

The text of *Guthlac A*, which details a part of the saint's life and torments by devils in his fenland hermitage, has been identified as an individual poem only relatively recently. Just as there has been editorial debate about the degree of separation among the poems Krapp and Dobbie call *Christ I*, *Christ II* and *Christ III*, editors have debated the relationship (and even the starting points) of the poems now called *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B*, which follow the *Christ* poems in the Exeter Book. The beginning of *Guthlac A* is clearly marked in the manuscript as the beginning of a new poem. The first line of *Guthlac A*, *Se bið gefeana fægrast*, is at the top of folio 32 verso, all in small capitals except the *æ* and *st*. Krapp and Dobbie say that "The formal appearance of this part of the manuscript is therefore similar to that of the three major divisions which make up the text of CHRIST" (xxx).

Despite this manuscript presentation, the first 29 lines of *Guthlac A* were appended to the end of what is now

called *Christ III* by Thorpe (who saw an extra poem between *Christ* and *Guthlac* called "Of Souls after Death") in 1832 and Grein (1857 and 1898) (Roberts, *Poems* 16-17). Thorpe indicated one long *Guthlac* poem, beginning at the present line 30, while Grein indicated two. Manuscript presentation encourages such a division into two poems; *Guthlac B* follows *Guthlac A*, with a definitive break in space on folio 44b and a line "almost entirely filled with bold capitals" (Roberts, *Poems* 14). Standard editorial procedure, followed by Gollancz (1895), Krapp and Dobbie (1936), and Roberts (1979) is now to separate it into two poems, A (ll.1-818) and B (ll.819-1379), with consecutive numbering throughout.

Critical viewpoints about the degree of separation between the two poems vary widely. The poems' most recent editor, Jane Roberts, argues that they were written by two poets in different places, aimed at different audiences, and focused on different facets of the saint's life (*Poems*, 48-50; *Metrical*, 119). Gordon Gerould suggests new editorial titles that emphasize their separateness: "Guthlac the Hermit" and "Guthlac's Death" (77). Roberts stresses that the poems, however separate, are nonetheless presented together in the manuscript, and that they complement each other. The manuscript order, in which *Guthlac A* follows *Christ III*, informs our understanding of the poems' meanings; Roberts says:



The poems can well be read in sequence, but not as a single narrative with linear progression, and the sequence should be extended backwards. (*Poems* 49)

Roy Liuzza also argues that the poems of the Exeter Book inform each other in their order, and suggests that the scribe or compiler may have altered the beginnings and endings of the poems to make them flow into one another more smoothly (9). In a similar vein, Daniel Calder sees "a rough attempt at biographical unity" within the two poems (66), while Alexandra Hennessey Olsen goes so far as to see the two as one long composite, finally omitting the A and B designations by the end of her discussion of the single, unified "poem" (118).

Throughout this chapter, I will focus on *Guthlac A* as delineated by capitals and spacing in the manuscript, with an awareness of the way it is informed by its surrounding manuscript context. As I did in my discussion of a specific section of *Genesis*, here I have let the poem's presentation in the manuscript guide me to the unit of text I will examine. The numerous Jaussian "horizons" of this text suggest a variety of ways of reading and editing the poem(s); by following the manuscript presentation of *Guthlac A* as a separate unit of text, I hope to examine the gender performance of the hero in that unit without distraction from other units of text, clearly delineated as separate in the manuscript. *Guthlac B*, although it describes the same saint, seems separate in content as well. *Guthlac B*

describes Guthlac's death and some of his miracles; he is not "heroic" in the *B* presentation the way he is in the *A* presentation.

As with the other texts I have discussed, source study has been a focus of criticism of both *Guthlac A* and *B*. *Guthlac B*'s source is readily apparent in Felix's *Vita Sancti Guthlaci*, dated between 730 and 740 (Colgrave 19), but the source of *Guthlac A* is somewhat more troublesome. While Gerould states that "'Guthlac the Hermit' is certainly dependent upon the *Vita* for its substance, though by no means for its form" (84), Roberts concludes that Felix is not a source but an analogue (*Poems* 12), citing (among other things) the *vita*'s lack of a reference to the temptation of Guthlac wherein the devils lift Guthlac up in the air and show him the sins of youth in monasteries (ll.414-420). Roberts suggests sections of Gregory's *Dialogues*, psalms, the *Visio Pauli*, and the *Vitae Patrum* as possible sources for *Guthlac A* (Sources 3-11), but there is no single, known source for the contents of the poem.

Guthlac's popularity in Anglo-Saxon England is attested to by the wealth of materials that survive from the Old English period. There is an Old English translation of Felix's life (British Library Cotton Vespasian D.21),<sup>122</sup> an excerpt of that translation included as the final homily in

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<sup>122</sup>P. Gonser, ed., *Das Angelsaechische Prosa-Leben des Heiligen Guthlac* Anlistische Forshungen 27 (Heidelberg 1909).

the Vercelli Book,<sup>123</sup> probably to be read on St. Bartholomew's Day, and an entry in the *Old English Martyrology*<sup>124</sup> in addition to the two Exeter Book poems. These other versions are strikingly different from *Guthlac A*, however, in their tone if not in general content. All of the *Guthlac* materials refer to the hermit who lived in the fens of Crowland and who died in 714 (his death is recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*).<sup>125</sup> *Guthlac* became a significant figure in his national church as one of Anglo-Saxon England's most famous contributions to the eremitic spiritual movement.

The other *Guthlac* texts are marked by more concrete narrative detail and more specifically physical description than is *Guthlac A*; for instance, things like the devils or the gates of hell are vividly portrayed elsewhere and assumed in *Guthlac A*. The devils in *Felix* are wonderfully horrific:

. . . terrible in shape with great heads, long necks, thin faces, yellow complexions, filthy beards, shaggy ears, wild foreheads, fierce eyes, foul mouths, horses' teeth, throats vomiting flames,

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<sup>123</sup>Donald Scragg, ed., *The Vercelli Homilies*, EETS 300 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1990), 383-392.

<sup>124</sup>G. Herzfeld, ed., *An Old English Martyrology*, EETS 96 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1900; repr. New York: Kraus, 1973), 56.

<sup>125</sup>Recorded in the Parker Chronicle (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 173) and the Laud Chronicle (Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Laud 636) as the only event of 714. See G.N. Garmonsway, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (New York: Dutton, 1953, repr. 1975), 42-43.

twisted jaws, thick lips, strident voices, singed hair, fat cheeks, pigeon breasts, scabby thighs, knotty knees, crooked legs, swollen ankles, splay feet, spreading mouths, raucous cries. (XXXI)<sup>126</sup>

In *Guthlac A*, the devils are *feondas* and *teonsmiðas*, among other referents, but they are never described.

This lack of engaging physical description in *Guthlac A* is possibly one reason for that poem's mostly tepid critical reception; critics have perceived the poem to be devoid of event (the narratives of the temptations, at the monastery and at the gates of hell, occupy only 14 and 27 lines if dialogue is excluded).<sup>127</sup> Rosemary Woolf in 1966 decreed *Guthlac A* to be "shapeless" in that "this lack of variety in content is reflected in monotony of tone, which is didactic and narrowly heroic, unvaried and unsubtle" (56) while T.A. Shippey states that "the poem's scheme is barren of any psychological depth . . . there is little narrative interest or change in the saint's circumstance" (130). The generally low critical opinion of *Guthlac A* is summed up in John Pope's comment about the missing leaf in the Exeter Book between lines 368 and 369 (the only textual loss in the poem): its loss "can be accepted with comparative equanimity" (27). The loss is probably almost all dialogue, no action: l.368 breaks off at a speech by Guthlac either to

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<sup>126</sup>Translation from Colgrave, 103.

<sup>127</sup>The showing of youth's sins is at ll.412-426; the narrative of the hell-door temptation (broken by long didactic speeches) is at ll.557-578 and ll.685-691.

himself or to an angel; l.369 picks up in the middle of a speech by Guthlac to the devils.

Much criticism of *Guthlac* A tries to overturn such aesthetic judgments of the poem, often relying on the poem's Christianity and effectiveness in conveying doctrine, either to a specifically learned, monastic audience<sup>128</sup> or to a more general lay audience.<sup>129</sup> Fred Robinson has shown how the etymology of Guthlac's name, *belli munus* or "reward of war," "shape[s] the very theme and conception of [the poet's] narrative to a considerable degree" (Significance 45). He reads the martial imagery of the poem (Guthlac is often referred to as *cristes cempa*) as a complement to the name-etymology rather than a vague reference to a heroic, Germanic tradition (Significance 45). Whitney Bolton also refers to the meaning of Guthlac's name when he argues that Guthlac (who was a war-leader before he became a hermit) "turned . . . from the literal meaning of his name to the ethical" (600).

Only three critics attempt to look outside the bounds of Christianity to interpret the poem, and even they roam only to field of Germanic pagan heroism before they return to an explicitly Christian reading of this (admittedly, very explicitly Christian) poem. Olsen, Karl Wentersdorf, and Michael Cherniss each see elements of pagan or secular

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<sup>128</sup>See articles by Wright, Groos, Thundy, and Shook.

<sup>129</sup>See articles by Lipp, Hill ("Age"), and Bridges.

heroism in the poem, elements which are subsumed into the poem's Christianity. Olsen's reading examines Guthlac as a hero, and compares the poem's vocabulary to that of more obviously secular or pagan texts (hell in *Guthlac A* is like the swamp in *Beowulf*). Olsen concludes that "The Christian and heroic language and images work together to make the audience wish to obey the call to live an eremitical life" (47). Wentersdorf is more specifically pagan in his reading of poem, which sees Guthlac's fenland island as a former pagan grove-sanctuary: "The poem implies that the island was uninhabitable because of the presence of powerful heathen forces" (139). Wentersdorf interprets Guthlac's final, triumphant possession of the *beorg* (about which more later) not only as a personal victory over demons for Guthlac but as an institutional victory of the church over the vestiges of pagan religion in England.

Even more emphatically, Cherniss asserts that the heroic diction of *Guthlac A* "has been largely drained of its heroic associations" (233). Cherniss examines motifs of heroic poetry--treasure-giving, battle, and exile--to show how the motifs have been "absorbed" and changed by the poem's Christianity. The prologue states that Christian men give their treasure as alms (Cherniss contrasts this with heroes giving their treasure away for loyal service); the battle in *Guthlac* is spiritual, rather than physical, and

exile is self-imposed and blessed for the hermit, rather than a torture or a curse (228).

All of the critics of *Guthlac A*, even those who actively search for more heroic, secular content and theme in the poem, end where they began, at the Christian doctrine that the poem expounds. For the poem is markedly didactic, homiletic, and non-canonical. There are no engagingly deformed demons for Guthlac to fight. There seems, when setting upon the poem's critical genealogy, no other way to read this poem.

One reason for this constant emphasis on Christian doctrine in readings of *Guthlac A*, I would argue, is that Guthlac is not a woman. Since his masculinity is assumed rather than investigated, there seems to be no need to examine the way his gender is constructed within the text, the way there does seem to be a need with the heroine of the markedly similar poem *Juliana*. Like Guthlac, Juliana fights a demon and engages in long, doctrinal "dialogue" with the demon. Yet much recent criticism on the poem is an investigation of the way gender works in *Juliana*, not examination of the doctrine she expounds.<sup>130</sup> Guthlac's

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<sup>130</sup>See, for instance Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "Cynewulf's Autonomous Women: A Reconsideration of Elene and Juliana," *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and A.H. Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990), 222-234; Jane Chance, "Brave Judith, Juliana, and Elene: Allegorical Figures of the Soul. Christ, and the Church," *Woman as Hero in Old English Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1986), 31-52; Rolf Bremmer, jr., "Changing Perspectives on a Saint's Life: Juliana," *Companion to Old English Poetry*, eds. Henk Aertsen

masculinity is in the background, not questioned, though one of Cherniss' comments about the heroism of the poem shows how fragile that assumed masculinity is: "Heroic ideals in such poems [*Guthlac A* and *Christ III*] will appear in emasculated form by virtue of their having been detached from their ideological matrix" (220). For Cherniss, the heroism in *Guthlac* has been "emasculated" by the overarching Christianity of the poem.

The issue of masculinity in the poem is obscured by critics who do not, as Thelma Fenster says, "locate men as material, gendered entities" (xii). Fenster advocates an assumption that "gender is constructed, that it depends on a network of oppositions and dependencies that are context-bound" (xii). An investigation of *Guthlac A* using such a paradigm as Fenster's shows that *Guthlac's* Christian heroism and his masculinity are enmeshed; his faith is part of his masculinity, a gender grounded in asceticism and isolation, one that relies on presumed competition between men.

The connotations and associations of masculinity within some key vocabulary of the poem reveal that an oppositional masculinity and femininity cannot work in an analysis of gender in this poem; there are no feminine figures to "ground" his masculinity. Even the men with whom *Guthlac* is implicitly compared (as I will show in my analysis of some of the poem's vocabulary) are absent from the text. His is



a masculinity grounded in itself, opposed to nothing. Guthlac's gender performance is based in asceticism and isolation, and opens up a variety of possibilities for masculine performances that are not dependent on domination and hierarchy, at least not within the text.

Guthlac's odd relations, if they can even be termed relations, with other men are not homosocial in that there is no exchange of women effected; those relations are isolated instances of comparison that mark Guthlac as a holy, and holier, male among men who are not actually in the text but are implicitly compared to him throughout. This comparison is not a continuum like that defined by Clover which I discussed in chapter six; these "other men" are not present in the text in the way that Beowulf and Hroðgar appear together to determine Hroðgar's slipping power and masculinity. All of Guthlac's relationships with other human beings have been cut from the poem. Felix's *Vita* includes a number of important relationships in Guthlac's life, both with men and with woman: his sister Pega, his abbess Ælfthryth, the prince (later king) Æthelbald, his servant Beccel, and numerous miracle-seekers, fellow monks and soldiers. Guthlac's only contact with others during *Guthlac A* is with the non-human angels, devils, and St. Bartholomew. His masculine gender is performed and defined alone.

Such isolation was a cornerstone of ascetic life (Brown 215 and elsewhere),<sup>131</sup> and Guthlac's life is very much in the ascetic tradition that started with Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*, written between A.D. 356 and 362. Anthony's life was presented by his biographer so that other monks could read it and emulate him and his practice. In his preface to the life, Athanasius states that he addresses the life to other monks so "that you also may bring yourself to imitate him" (195). The *Life* states that Anthony was imitated during his lifetime; many believers came to his cell to benefit from his teaching and to see how he practiced what Athanasius refers to as "the discipline." This discipline, which resulted in holiness and miracles, entailed constant mortification and denial of the body:

And his discipline was much severer, for he was ever fasting, and he had a garment of hair on the inside, while the outside was skin, which he kept until his end. And he neither bathed his body with water to free himself from filth, nor did he ever wash his feet, nor even endure so much as to put them in water, unless compelled by necessity. (ch.47, p.209)

Peter Brown analyzes Anthony's endurance of bodily deprivation in terms of his relationship to the community. The community revered him for his "discipline," but the irony in that reverence is that the "discipline" proved that Anthony, in isolation, did not need that community.

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<sup>131</sup>Brown does note that this isolation was not necessarily geographic; some monks lived only a day and half's journey from a settlement (215).

Brown describes Anthony's Egypt as a land constantly on the brink of famine, where hunger was the people's greatest fear. The community revered Anthony and ascetics like him because they could conquer hunger, the prime enemy of the community. Denying the existence of hunger, according to Brown, meant denying the community and everything that came with it: family support, sexual satisfaction in marriage, and the brief seasonal plenty that came when the Nile flooded. Once this separation from community was complete, the monk achieved the sort of holiness that Anthony does in the *Life* (217).

That holiness was also specifically masculine; Anthony's followers were all men. This is not to say that only men were ascetics or that women ascetics were masculine, merely that geographic isolation was an exclusively masculine aspect of asceticism. The feminine ascetic landscape entailed isolation within, not without, the community (Brown 261-63); an example is Anthony's sister, whom he ordered into a life of a "dedicated virgin" before he departed to the desert (Brown 214). Only men went to the desert or the fens. An exception to this ascetic rule of thumb is Mary of Egypt, who spent the end of her life as a desert hermit; notably, everyone who stumbled upon her in the desert thought she was a man.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Her narrative is discussed in some detail in chapter two above.

To a great extent, Guthlac's life, in all its textual manifestations in Anglo-Saxon culture, resonates within this Antonine tradition of asceticism.<sup>133</sup> Like Anthony, Guthlac leaves his aristocratic family for a religious life. Like Anthony, Guthlac battles demons and conquers temptations as he takes literal and spiritual possession of his hermitage.<sup>134</sup> Like Anthony, after these battles Guthlac finds an earthly peace that enables him to perform miracles both before and after his death. *Guthlac A*, however, touches only briefly on Guthlac's pre-religious life, and the only post-battle miracle involves the transformation of his *beorg* with flowers and birds; it does not involve people. Just as Anthony practiced "the discipline," Guthlac's eremitic life is associated with the disciplinary icon of the scourge, which does not appear in Felix's *Vita* but does appear in *Guthlac A*, in the illustrations of the

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<sup>133</sup>Benjamin Kurtz sees Felix's *Vita* as a direct descendant of the life of Anthony (140), as well as of Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert*, though Kurtz views Guthlac of *Guthlac A* as ultimately more heroic than ascetic. See also Roberts, "Prose," and Bjork for analyses of the textual relationships between Guthlac and Anthony.

<sup>134</sup>The "reality" of those demons has been a subject of recent critical debate, with Daniel Calder and, to a lesser extent, Michael Cherniss seeing the demons as psychological projections of Guthlac's soul while Thomas Hill argues that the demons "are an aspect of spiritual reality which impinges most significantly on our consciousness" (Middle 183). The demons are real within the context of the poem, and I shall refer to them as "real" throughout this chapter.

Guthlac Roll, and on extant sculpture from Crowland Abbey as well as its monastic seal.<sup>135</sup>

Such asceticism is described in the opening lines of *Guthlac A*. Only in the desert, enduring the sort of punishment that Anthony and Guthlac endure, can man find God:

Sume þa wuniað        on westenum,  
 secað ond gesittað    sylfra willum  
 hamas on heolstrum.    Hy ðæs heofoncundan  
 boldes bidað.        Oft him brogan to  
 laðne gelædeð,        se þe him lifes ofonn,  
 eaweð him egsan,        hwilum idel wuldor . . . (ll.81-86).<sup>136</sup>

(Some then dwell in the waste-lands, seek and settle by their own wills homes in the darkness. They remain at that heavenly dwelling. Often those who begrudge them life [demons] bring to them [hermits] terrors as hostility, show them horrors, sometimes vainglory.)

This section of the poem does not directly refer to Guthlac, but Guthlac is introduced immediately afterwards (l.95) and he does live in such isolation and endure such torments. I see Guthlac's isolation as an exaggeration of the Antonian tradition. Guthlac's demons are the more terrible for his absolute solitude; Guthlac of *Guthlac A* has no visitors or fellow desert/fenland monks, as Anthony does, to break the relentless assaults.

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<sup>135</sup>George Henderson suggests that Crowland Abbey at one point had a scourge as a relic of Guthlac and notes that "the scourge comes into the imagery of St. Guthlac exclusively, to start with, as a visual image" (84).

<sup>136</sup>All text from G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, ASPR vol.3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 49-72. Translations are my own.

Guthlac's gender performances, then, exist in an ascetic, wasteland isolation which I read to be a specifically masculine part of the ascetic tradition. Like the female ascetics discussed by Brown, Anglo-Saxon female saints practiced their asceticism within a defined female community; the numerous female saints in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* are excellent examples of women who practice forms of holy discipline, most notably enduring sickness, within a supportive community of other women. In contrast, Guthlac's masculinity derives, in large part, from his geography of isolation: on an island, separated from even a religious community as well as from the larger community, he battles his demons alone and emerges victorious. Such solitary combat serves elsewhere in Anglo-Saxon culture to define and celebrate masculinity: Beowulf's single combats with the Grendel-kin share this feature with Guthlac's battles. Guthlac's asceticism, his scourge and his fasts, serve to purify his interaction with this explicitly masculine environment.

Within the context of this ascetic tradition, isolation and masculinity and holiness become interrelated terms. An intensification of one term intensifies the others as well: to be more isolated is to be more holy and more masculine (recall the isolation of prototypically masculine dreamer-narrator of *The Dream of the Rood*). Such masculine isolation, especially that of Guthlac in *Guthlac A*, wherein

all possible earthly companions have been eliminated from the narrative, seems to eliminate the possibility of any relationship, competitive or otherwise, with other masculine figures.<sup>137</sup>

But to be "more" of any quality implies a comparison, and Guthlac is "more" isolated, holy, and masculine than other men, men who appear implicitly in some of the unusual vocabulary of the poem. The vocabulary of *Guthlac A* reveals comparative relationships with other men, especially in examination of two specific words which describe only masculine forms of holiness. These two words are rare in the Old English lexicon but prominent in *Guthlac A*; such a dissonance between their overall scarcity and their importance in the poem points to a need for unusual vocabulary to describe the unusual situation of Guthlac in his fenland. His is a masculine performance wherein the Other exists only in the resonances of unusual vocabulary, not in the narrative itself.

The two words, *gierelan*, "clothes," and *eardfæst*, "home-bound" or "earth-bound," describe two important concepts that help to define notions of holiness in the

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<sup>137</sup>Guthlac's companion Beccel in *Guthlac B* provides just such a relationship, and the lack of women to mediate that inter-masculine relationship (through Sedgwick's paradigm of homosociality) may have caused some critical suspicion of a homosexual relationship between Guthlac and Beccel. Though I have not located any such suspicion, Thundy seems to be reacting to something like it when he states repeatedly that Guthlac and Beccel do *not* have a homosexual relationship (Friendship 147 and 158).

poem: appropriate display and adornment of the body, and control of space. In the Old English corpus, both *gierelan* and *eardfæst* are used exclusively to describe men who assert or jeopardize their masculinity through the way they wear clothes and the way they control space. Through this lexicon, Guthlac enters into a competition with other men in which the reader or listener compares Guthlac to the others to find that Guthlac is more holy and thus more masculine than the others to whom the same vocabulary is applied.

*Gierelan* occurs in three different forms only five times in the Old English corpus (MCOE G040). Despite modern culture's association of clothing and adornment with feminine display, this Anglo-Saxon word occurs only in reference to men's clothes, and then to the question of the appropriateness, usually religious, of those clothes. *Gierelan* seems to be used exclusively in instances where cultural and textual approval or disapproval of masculine display is at issue.

The uses of *gierelan* in *Guthlac A* are of the latter type, and both are combined in formula with forms of *gielplic*, "boastful" or "ostentatious." The first reference is to Guthlac's asceticism; the *gierelan gielplices* are among the items Guthlac has renounced for his faith:

þæt he his lichoman  
 wynna forwyrnde      ond woruldblissa,  
 seftra setla      ond symbeldaga,  
 swylce eac idelra      eageana wynna,  
 gierelan gielplices (ll.163b-167a).



(So that he from his body withheld joys and worldly-bliss, softer dwellings and feast-days, just as also [he withheld] vain joys of the eye, apparel ostentatious).

The implicit comparison here is with other men, including Guthlac in his pre-religious life, who do indulge in such worldly joy, who do live in soft dwellings, eat feasts, and wear ostentatious and worldly clothing. Guthlac is superior to the men who do not have the physical and moral strength to endure such denial. In isolation, Guthlac is an *anbuendra* (1.88), an "alone-dweller," who competes with other men through the use of *gierelan* in the text in this linguistic version of masculine competition for holiness.

This comparison between the two types of men is made even more explicit in the other use of *gierelan* in *Guthlac A*, where the clothes are worn and enjoyed by the dissolute youths in monasteries:

Hy hine þa hofun        on þa hean lyft,  
 sealdon him meahte    ofer monna cynn,  
 þæt he fore eagum     eall sceawode  
 under haligra        hyrda gewealdum  
 in mynsterum        monna gebæru,  
 þara þe hyra lifes     þurh lust brucan,  
 idlum æhtum        ond oferwlencum,  
 gierelum gielplicum,    swa bið geoguðe þeaw,  
 þær þæs ealdres     egsa ne styreð (ll.412-420)

(They raised him then high in the air, gave him power over mankind, so that he with eyes beheld all before him in minsters the behavior of men under holy guardians' control, those who through pleasure enjoyed their lives with empty possessions and arrogance, clothing ostentatious, as is youth's custom, where fear of the elder did not check [them].)

The nature of this temptation has been variously interpreted as temptation to despair (since the young monks are worldly

rather than holy) or to pride (since Guthlac could feel superior to them) (Hill, Middle 184). This passage resonates with others in the poem which condemn worldly splendor in men's lives, for instance in the general comment about *Bið him eorðwela ofer þæt ece lif hyhta hyhst* (For them is earthly wealth over that eternal life the highest of hopes, ll.62-63a) or the more specific advice to Guthlac against those who *purh nepinge wunne æfter worulde* (through audacity strive for worldly things, ll.128b-129a). The use of the competition-laden *gierelum* in the passage about the youths in monasteries does not necessarily show a sin of pride on Guthlac's part since he is not making the comparison or glorifying himself; *gierelum* alerts the audience of the poem to make a comparison wherein which Guthlac's holy isolation is emphasized in relation to the worldly camaraderie of the sinful youth.

There are no other uses of *gierelan* in poetry; prose usages occur in Alfred's version of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, in the Vercelli homily on the Life of St. Martin, and in an Old English-Greek gloss. All of these uses refer to the appropriateness of men's clothes, and the first two are explicitly contrasted to inappropriate uses, inviting comparison and competition between the men.

The gloss is the most troublesome of the three prose references. It occurs in a Latin-Old English glossary, but the Old English *wudewan gierela* glosses the Greek

*theristotedes*.<sup>138</sup> The Greek suffix *-edes* can mean "son of," "in the image of," or "in the form of." The root of the word could be related to *therido*, "to harvest," or to *theristrion*, "a light summer garment," but more likely there was an error somewhere in the transmission of the gloss, a theta for a chi, for the Greek *Cheros* means widower, and *wudewan gierela* means "widower's clothes."<sup>139</sup> "In the image of a widower" and "widower's clothes" may not be exact translations of each other, but each conveys the idea that there is specific way that a widower should look, in that his clothes or his presentation of himself should be different from that of other men. The appropriate masculine display of *gierela* differentiates the widower from non-widowers and provides immediate identification of one who adheres to social custom by making that display.

The other two prose uses of *gierelan* contrast religiously appropriate masculine display with inappropriate display, making explicit the competition between men for holiness indicated by clothing. The Vercelli homily refers to St. Martin's giving half his cloak to the beggar after his more prosperous companions had ignored the beggar;

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<sup>138</sup>Gloss #1338 in J.J. Quinn, ed., *The Minor Latin-Old English Glossaries in MS Cotton Cleopatra A.III*, unpublished diss., Stanford, 1956.

<sup>139</sup>I am indebted to Christopher Synodinos of the Classics department at Boston College for the Greek analysis in this paragraph.

christ appears in a dream to St. Martin, wearing the half of the cloak which Martin had given away:

He ða wolde þone cwide ge[trymm]an in þære godan  
dæde, ond hinesylfne geeaðmedde to þæn þæt he wolde  
in þæs þearfan gierelan ætwyn ðam eadigan were  
sancte Martine.<sup>140</sup>

(He [Christ] then would fulfill that saying in the good deed, and so humbled Himself that He wished to appear in the garment of the beggar to the blessed man St. Martin.)

Martin is rewarded for his holiness by a vision of Christ; his companions either mock him or reproach themselves, and they have no visions of God. Like Guthlac, Martin does not commit the sin of pride (*ne wæa he hwæðre oht þan [ufor] in oferhygd ahafen*) because of his favor with the Lord; it is the reader who compares him to his companions (who are found wanting). Martin's holiness is superior, in the readers' minds if not in his own, to that of his companions. *Gierelan* shows his action to be a display of holiness even as it seems an anti-display of clothing; after all, Martin cuts his already modest cloak in half.

Ostentatious clothing of the kind that Guthlac renounced and Martin's friends wear is the subject of the final use of *gierelan*, which contrasts not clothes with other clothes but the religious intentions of holy and unholy men, all priests, who wear those clothes. Gregory's

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<sup>140</sup>Text of Vercelli Homily 18 from Donald Scragg, ed, *The Vercelli Homilies*, EETS o.s.300 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1992), 295. Translation by Laird Edman in Lewis Nicholson, ed., *The Vercelli Book Homilies: Translations from the Anglo-Saxon* (New York: UP of America, 1991), 119.

*pastoral Care* discusses the appropriate use of gems on a bishop's robe; the gems become a metaphor for his virtue:

Soðlice ða gimmas ðara halignessa to ðæm wæron gemacod ðæt hi scoldon scinan on ðæs hiehstan sacerdes hrægle betwux ðam halegestan halignessum. Ac ðonne ða sacerdas to æfæsðnessum and wearðunga ures Aliesendes ne bædað ða ðe [him] underðiedde bioðmid hira lifes geearnungum, ðonne ne beoð hira ðære halegestan halignesse gimmas on ðæm gerenum ðæs biscepes gierelan, ac licgeaðtoworþne æfter strætum, ðonne ða hadas ðære halgan endebyrdnesse beoð forgiefene ðæm widgillan wegum hiera agenra lusta, and beoð getigede to earðlicum tielengum.<sup>141</sup>

(For the gems of the sanctuaries were made in order to shine on the robe of the highest priest among the holiest holinesses. But when the priests do not incite their subjects to virtue and reverence of our redeemer with the merits of their life, their gems of the holiest holinesses are not in the ornaments of the bishop's robe, but lie scattered up and down the streets, when the offices of holy ordination are left to the wide roads of their own desires and are tied to earthly occupations.)

The passage contrasts the highest priests who wear the *biscepes gierelan* correctly and those who don't, those who use the bejeweled clothes to reflect the glory of God and those who waste the gems as they wear the clothes for their own earthly glorification. The judgment made by the reader and by Gregory is based on the moral and holy superiority of those who wear the clothes correctly.

In all five of these uses of forms of *gierelan*, the male subjects perform a display of holiness that is based on the correct wearing of a certain type of clothes. *Gierelan*

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<sup>141</sup>Text and translation from Henry Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, part 1, EETS o.s.45 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1871; repr. Millwood: Kraus, 1988), 134-135.

refers only to men, and as such I read it to signify degrees of explicitly masculine holiness, with clear demarcations between good and bad, holy and unholy, and even, I would argue, more masculine and less masculine. The "real men" are those who wear their clothes correctly, display appropriately, and do not indulge in the sin of pride in their holy masculinity even as the reader is forced to conclude their superiority through the diction of the text. Guthlac can be read as prototypically masculine because *gierelan* describes only men. The uses of the word in the poem -- that he does not wear boastful clothing -- affirm his gender performance of heroic, masculine holiness. The clothes, so to speak, make the man.

Just as *gierelan* connotes masculine display, *eardfæst* seems associated with masculine control of space. At first reading, *Guthlac A* seems inundated with different words for home and settlement,<sup>142</sup> and the poem at times seems to focus almost too intently on the power of various figures--all masculine (Guthlac, devils, God, Bartholomew)--to control space and make homes.

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<sup>142</sup>Nouns, adjectives, and verbs relating to homes and settling include: *eðel*, *ham*, *wunian*, *gesittan*, *boldes*, *æpelu*, *beargspel*, *setl*, *bearg*, *earde*, *hus*, *hleonað*, *wic*, *botles*, *wonge*, *sele*, *eardfæst*, *geard*, and *burh*. Many of these occur repeatedly in various forms throughout the poem to refer to Guthlac's literal home on the island as well as to the heavenly home Guthlac works toward. A notable comparison is with the use of *eðel* in the last line of *The Dream of the Rood*, wherein God provides a heavenly home for Christ and his followers.

*Guthlac A*'s primary narrative content deals with Guthlac taking the *beorg*, the home of the demons, away from them and then becoming "home-bound" in the *beorg*, making it his chapel. Laurence Shook argues that the *beorg* is actually a burial mound or tumulus, in which Guthlac lived while he built his cell (Burial 7). For Shook, the poet's "use of the barrow removes it from the category of mere geographical appendage to a religious theme and makes it the center of the poem" (10). Paul Reichardt wants to translate *beorg* as "mountain" rather than "barrow," since Guthlac climbs a metaphorical mountain in his quest for "spiritual achievement" (335); Wentersdorf agrees with Shook that the *beorg* is a barrow, and interprets the word within its pagan connotations of heathen religion (139). Calder's more psychological reading calls the *beorg* "the center of his [Guthlac's] and all spiritual worlds" (73). Olsen links the *beorg*, through common diction, to the dragon's barrow in *Beowulf*; both Guthlac and *Beowulf* take over the barrows that were previously inhabited by evil doers (34).

This critical focus on the *beorg* shows the importance of home-space in *Guthlac A*, and it is an odd sort of settled-ness, a specifically masculine home-space, a place of demons and a male saint. This home is a home for men, not for women. And just as there are no women who wear *gierelan*, there are no women who are *eardfæst*. This is not a feminized, Other-like space, just as Guthlac's masculinity

is not defined in opposition to a feminine Other. Men, including a masculine God, control their own and others' space in a way that asserts masculine dominance, often a dominance achieved (like Guthlac's) by submission to God.

*Eardfæst* occurs eight times in three forms in the Old English corpus, only twice in prose. *Eardfæstne* occurs in Riddle 49, "Bookcase": *Ic war eardfæstne anne standan / deafne dumban se oft dæges swilgeð / þurh gopes hond gifrum lacum*<sup>143</sup> (I know of one that stands fixed to the ground / deaf and dumb who often during the day swallows / useful gifts from the hand of a servant). The bookcase is "home-bound" and its space is controlled by the servant that reshelves its books as well as by the thane who controls the contents of the bookcase, contents *þa æþelingas oft wilniað / cyningas ond cwene*, "which princes, kings, and queens often desire." The bookcase itself is an *eorp inwita*, a "dusky ignoramus," that is controlled by the masculine servant and by the masculine thane, who by his possession of the bookcase and the books it contains becomes more powerful than the princes, kings, and queens who want the books. The *eardfæst* bookcase gives its masculine owner control and prestige over both male and female figures.

Masculine control of space and its relation to power is more apparent in the uses of *eardfæste* in the Old English

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<sup>143</sup>Text and translation from W.S. Mackie, ed., *The Exeter Book: Part II, Poems IX-XXXII*, EETS o.s.194 (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1934; repr. Millwood: Kraus, 1978), 142-143.



Orosius. The first usage shows the inability of men to remain where they want to in the face of natural disaster:

Da þa Emilius Orestes wæs consul, Eþna fyr afleow up swa brad and swa micel, þætte feawe men þara monna mehten beon eardfæste, þe on Lipare wæron þæm iglande, þe þær nihst wæs, for þære hæte and for þæm stence.<sup>144</sup>

(Then when Emilius Orestes was consul, from Mt. Etna fire flew up so broad and so great that few men could be home-bound, of those men who were on Lipare island, which was nearest there, because of the heat and because of the stench).

The syntactical juxtaposition of Emilius Orestes' consulship with the eruption serves primarily as a marker of time but also as a reminder of the consul's ineffectiveness in the face of the volcano. The men who are driven from their homes are *men þara monna*, men of those men; while the clauses need not be right next to each other (indeed, the sentence makes more sense to modern ears when they are separated, as the translation shows), the repetition of words for "men" emphasizes the gendered nature of this space that only a "few men" can control.

Men control space in the other *Orosius* usage as well, this time space that other men wish to control. Valentinian forces the Saxons out of Rome:

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<sup>144</sup>Text from Henry Sweet, ed., *King Alfred's Orosius*, part 1, EETS o.s.79 (London: Trubner and Co., 1883), 226. Text is identical in the newer edition: Janet Bately, ed., *The Old English Orosius*, EETS s.s.6 (London: Oxford UP, 1980), 119. Translations are my own.

on þam dagum Valentinianus geniedde eft þa Seaxan to hiera agnum lande, þa hie woldon winnan on Romane; þa wæron eardfæste neh þam garsecge.<sup>145</sup>

(In those days Valentinian again forced the Saxons to their own land; when they wished to triumph in Rome, then they were earth-bound near the ocean).

Here, to be *eardfæst* conveys weakness; the Saxons wished to leave their homes to invade Rome (and thus expand their home-space in the process), but the Saxons have been forced to stay home by Valentinian rather than forcing him not to be *eardfæst*. Valentinian controls the space; he dominates the Saxons.

Two uses of *eardfæst* in the Meters of Boethius connote the righteousness of the ordering of space by God. In Meter Seven, a meditation on good places to build metaphorical houses, *on þære dene drihten selfa / þara eadmetta eardfæst wunigað* (in the valley of humility God himself dwells home-bound, ll.37-38).<sup>146</sup> In Meter Twenty, the word is a substantive adjective. The meter is a meditation on the way God used elements (earth, fire, water, air) in creation:

Hafað fæder engla	fyr gebunden
efne to þon fæste	þæt hit fiolan ne mæg
eft æt his eðle,	þær þæt oðer fyr
up ofer eall þis	eardfæst wunað. (ll.153-156) <sup>147</sup>

<sup>145</sup>Sweet, *Orosius*, op.cit., 288; Bately, *Orosius*, op.cit., 152. Translation is my own.

<sup>146</sup>Text from G.P. Krapp, ed., *The Paris Psalter and the Meters of Boethius*, ASPR vol.5 (New York: Columbia UP, 1932), 161. Translation is my own.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid, 181.

(The father of angels bound the fire even so securely that it may not be joined again [to itself] in its own region, where that other fire up over all the home-bound [earth] dwells.)

In both of these verses, God is ordering the world, defining space and limiting use of that space. He is specifically a father in Meter Twenty, in Meter Seven a *drihten*, a word that is also used in Anglo-Saxon to denote an earthly lord. In the *Meters*, an emphatically masculine God orders the world, determining what will be *eardfæst* in what space.

In the *Paris Psalter*, *eardfæst* also places a people in accordance with the will of God, places them so strongly that they cannot be moved from the *eardfæst* position:

pa þe on drihten heora      dædum getreowað  
 hi beoðon Sionbeorge      swyþe gelice;  
 ne mæg hine on ealdre      ænig onhreran  
 þe eardfæst byð      on Hierusalem (ps.124.i.1-4).<sup>148</sup>

(They who trust in the deeds of their Lord, they will be strongly like [those] in Zion-city; nor may any move him who since ancient [times] is home-bound in Jerusalem)

The power to claim space and settle there is again provided by the *drihten*, the masculine God. The masculinity of this space is also made apparent by the use of the masculine singular *hine* (referring to long-time Jerusalem residents) in line three when a more neutral plural that connotes both masculine and feminine could have been used.

Another use of *eardfæst* in Old English refers to contested occupation of space between men in *Genesis*. Abraham has made a covenant with Abimelech to dwell in

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<sup>148</sup>Ibid, 122.

Bersabee, the site of the sacrifice of Isaac. The Old English *Genesis* is grimmer than the Bible's account, which presents Abraham as a master of his settled land once he has sealed the covenant with Abimelech. In contrast, *Genesis* presents Abraham as something of an exile:

Siððan wæs se eadega eafora þares  
 in filistea folce eardfæst,  
 leod ebreā, lange þrage,  
 feascraft mid fremdum (ll.2834-2837a).<sup>149</sup>

(Thereupon was the prosperous son home-bound among the Philistine folk, [was] the prince of the Hebrews for a long time destitute among foreigners.)

Like the Saxons under Valentinian, Abraham here is home-bound in a place he does not wish to be because of the power of another masculine force. One could interpret that force as God, since Abraham's life as patriarch and prophet has been ordained by God, or as Abimelech, who has the power in their relationship to determine where Abraham should settle.

Finally, Guthlac is home-bound in heaven, the reward for his virtuous life on earth:

Him wæs lean geseald,  
 setl on swegle, þær he symle mot  
 awo to ealdre eardfæst wesān,  
 bliðe bidan (784b-787a).

(To him was a reward given, a dwelling in heaven, where he always may forever be home-bound in eternity, [may] remain happy.)

In this poem that is overwhelmingly about becoming settled in one specific place, Guthlac's ultimate home in heaven is

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<sup>149</sup>Text from A.N. Doane, ed., *Genesis A: A New Edition*, (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 217. Translation is my own.

granted to him by an unspecified agent in this sentence; that agent could be God, St. Bartholomew, or the good angel. Heaven becomes a masculine space that Guthlac is entitled to because of his acceptance of and strengthening of the relationships of power among these masculine figures, himself included. Guthlac's control of his *beorg*, his earthly home, leads to a heavenly home; both homes are defined by masculine control of space, just as other uses of *eardfæst* in the corpus point to a similarly masculine control of home-space or settlement.

Guthlac's homes are strangely isolated in their ascetic landscape, however; there is no feast in heaven as there is in the similar *eðel* at the end of *The Dream of the Rood*. The emphasis in *Guthlac A* is the ascetic struggle to get to heaven, not the pleasant rewards of the heavenly home. The isolation of masculine asceticism latent in the Antonine influence on the poem becomes apparent in the diction I have investigated.

The masculine associations of these vocabulary words in the corpus reveal the interconnectedness of Guthlac's isolation, masculinity, and holiness throughout the poem. *Gierelan* and *eardfæst* both point up an abstruse kind of masculine competitive relation, one that happens in inter- rather than intra-textual association. Both words are used in situations where men compete or are compared for strength and for degrees of holiness. While Guthlac, our hero, is

always successful, he is also always alone, even in heaven. There is no feminized Other. This solitude is an integral part of his masculinity; part of his power derives from his ability to conquer his struggles alone.

This solitude is made visually apparent in the only extant illustrations of Guthlac's life, in the late twelfth century "Guthlac Roll." While there is no direct connection (of provenance, of style, or of time period) between the Exeter Book poem and the Guthlac Roll, a comparison of the two texts, one visual and one written, reveals a consistency in the portrayal of Guthlac as an isolated, masculine figure who is celebrated for his holiness in terms of that isolation and masculinity. The British Museum Harley Roll Y.6 is in a unique format, nine feet long and six and half inches high, with eighteen six-inch circular medallions depicting events in Guthlac's life. George Warner associates the roll with the translation of the saint in 1196 (18) and suggests that the illustrations were probably models for stained glass windows or (less likely) models for sculpture to fill spandrels in the abbey (19). Francis Wormald argues that the drawings could be models for metal roundels on the newly translated saint's shrine (263). Whatever their use, they testify to the ongoing popularity of Guthlac's cult after the Norman Conquest; as George Henderson says in his discussion of the Roll, "St. Guthlac's

history, Anglo-Saxon, royal, and visionary, had all the ingredients for success in the thirteenth century" (85).

In all but one of the drawings Guthlac is isolated from the other figures in some way; this compositional isolation echoes the isolation of Guthlac emphasized in *Guthlac A*. The drawings are in narrative sequence in the roll;<sup>150</sup> Warner extrapolates from the construction of the Roll that three medallions depicting the early life of Guthlac are missing (2). Warner says,

They tell their story simply and directly, and with rare dramatic force. Without the exaggerated mannerisms of an earlier period, they are remarkable for firmness and precision of line and vigorous draughtsmanship, and there is distinct advance in the drawing of the human form, in emotional expression, and in the arrangement of drapery. (17)

An example of Guthlac's isolation in the roundels is the second drawing (the first is incomplete), wherein Guthlac is differentiated from the soldiers by his dress and by the line of space dividing the medallion; the soldiers and horses are crammed into the left side of the circle, and Guthlac is separated from them both by space and by his gesture of dismissal as he leaves this community. The only illustration in which Guthlac is an active member of a community is illustration five, where Guthlac, Beccel (the servant), and Tatwin (the boatman) build Guthlac's chapel on the island. In all the others, Guthlac's posture or

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<sup>150</sup>The discussed illustrations of the Guthlac Roll appear in their manuscript order in the figures appendix.

placement in the medallion highlights his isolation and separateness, as he kneels while others stand (number three, number nine) or an architectural element divides him from other figures (number 6, number 12).

I wish to focus on scenes that both the Guthlac Roll illustrator and the *Guthlac A* poet chose for inclusion; these events, in their transmission through written, oral, and visual history, heighten a perception of the construction of Guthlac's masculinity as an interrelated term with his holiness and isolation, as I have already shown in my discussion of the lexicon of *Guthlac A*. There are three medallions that illustrate the events included in *Guthlac A*, and all three include demons and a scourge, the sign of ascetic discipline.

In the first of these illustrations, number seven, Guthlac's isolation is combined with a seeming powerlessness. Beccel sits below in the chapel, seemingly oblivious to the torment of his master above him. Outside and above the chapel, *demones ferunt Guthlacum in aerum, cedentes eum*. Warner sees "an element of humour" in the presentation of the demons (17), and while they are delightfully grotesque, their placement in the medallion underscores Guthlac's isolation. They surround him completely. The three that are not holding him up in the air are scourging him with black scourges. Guthlac holds his hands out to heaven, from which there is no response.



Guthlac is alone in torment with his demons, and his servant and his God do not respond to his distress.

The next medallion, number eight, seems, at first glance, to break the isolation so carefully constructed by the composition of the previous medallion. The demons have taken Guthlac to hell-mouth, where a king, a bishop, and two tonsured monks are being swallowed by the monstrous mouth. The devils surround him again, but only partially, and one demon is actually turning Guthlac over and looking up his drapery, contorting Guthlac's body into a quasi-erotic, quasi-humiliating pose. Not only do these demons torture Guthlac with scourges, they expose his genitals for their own voyeuristic pleasure. Another demon, again with an all-black scourge, reaches up from the hell mouth to lash Guthlac.

The break in the isolation seems to come from St. Bartholomew, with whom Guthlac makes eye contact as *Sanctus Bartholomeus fert flagrum Guthlaco*. A comparison with the text of *Guthlac A*, however, shows that this illustration actually demonstrates another kind of isolation, a masculine isolation of independence. In *Guthlac A*, Bartholomew (who is not named until l.723) saves Guthlac from the inferno and orders the demons to take Guthlac back to his *beorg*:

	ða cwom dryhtnes ar,
halig of heofonum,	se þurh hleoþor abead
ufancundne ege	earnum gæstum;
het eft hraðe	unscyldigne
of þam wræcsiðe	wuldres cempan
lædan limhalne,	þæt se leofesta

gæst gegearwad      in godes wære  
on gefean ferde.    (684b-691a)

(Then came the Lord's messenger, holy from heaven, who through speech ordered heavenly terror for wretched spirits; he ordered [them] again quickly to lead limb-whole the guiltless glory's champion from that exile-journey, so that the most loved spirit, prepared with God's protection, might depart in joy.)

While Bartholomew saves Guthlac during this scene in *Guthlac A*, in the Guthlac Roll illustration Bartholomew gives Guthlac a scourge, which is outlined in black but not colored in, so to differentiate it from the scourges of the demons. In the illustration, Bartholomew gives Guthlac the means to save himself instead of stepping in to control the action.

That Guthlac makes good use of the heavenly scourge is made apparent in the next illustration, number nine, where he stands alone within the ornamental architecture of his chapel, scourging a demon. The demons are outside the chapel, and Guthlac has to reach outside to grab the demon by the neck and beat him. The chapel has become inviolate because of Guthlac's individual strength, not because of Bartholomew's heavenly intervention. Even the eroticized humiliation of Guthlac's posture in plate eight has been reversed, as Guthlac forces a demon with engorged testicles to bow before him, proving his sexual as well as physical and spiritual supremacy over the demons.

The Guthlac Roll illustrations are a celebration of Guthlac's sainthood and holiness, although we do not know

their specific purpose. I find them interesting if somewhat tangential to my argument about the masculinity constructed for the saint in *Guthlac A* because the isolation of Guthlac in the poem has become visually evident, even obvious, in illustrations of the narrative produced approximately 200 years later.

In these two texts, Guthlac acts as a signifier of isolated, holy masculinity; all three of those terms are related. In the vocabulary of *Guthlac A* and the illustrations of the Guthlac Roll, Guthlac's holiness and heroism are determined by his isolation and his triumph within it. He is defined by his superiority to other men and his geographical or compositional power through isolation. Like Beowulf, Guthlac will conquer his enemies or die trying. His gender is constructed in isolation, in celebration of his individual holy conquest. This sort of heroism seems resistant to the Christianity of the poem, relentlessly reiterating Guthlac's dependence on and faith in God, and yet this masculinity emphasizes the individuation of the ascetic quest for God, a quest that is necessarily conducted alone throughout the hagiographical tradition.

Within the terms and categories of this dissertation, Guthlac enacts a masculinity that does not depend on a feminine Other for definition. Unlike Christ of *The Dream of the Rood* or Adam of *Genesis*, Guthlac does not require a

feminized Other against which to define himself. Yet this gender performance leaves him by himself, to the point where even his patron saint will not intervene to help him. While a description of masculinity that does not require opposition may seem liberating for the possibilities of varied gender performances and categories, the end result, in this case at least, is extreme isolation. Guthlac's gender performances in *Guthlac A* and the *Guthlac Roll* illustrations alert us to the possibilities for masculine performances that do not necessitate domination of an Other, but they also reminds us of the difficulty in constructing relationships that do not fall into some sort of hierarchy.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE MATERNAL HOLY HEROISM OF JUDITH

A non-hierarchical relationship would require that the figures not be isolated even as one is not defined as Other. My definition of the maternal gender--one that does not need and cannot have an Other because of the bodily relationship with the Child--is a beginning for an examination of such a relationship. The mixed pair of Guthlac and Judith highlights the way that such gender performance relates to community, to others. Guthlac's holy and heroic masculinity is determined by his isolation from any sort of community, even a religious one. Judith, for all the supposed masculinity of her actions, enacts a maternal performance much like that of the Virgin Mary when she wields power in a mother-daughter community she creates with her maid in order to save her people.

Judith's gender, like that of many females in Old English poetry, has been subject to much scrutiny in recent years. Yet her relationship with her maid, the focus of my analysis of Judith's gender, has been elided; the maid is often cited only as one of the three characters the Old English poet did not cut from the Old Testament version of the narrative, and yet her importance as one of only three

is not investigated. The maid, I believe, is the key to Judith's gender performance. A reading of Irigaray's *Sexes and Genealogies* and examination of unusual vocabulary in the poem illuminate the relationship between the two women, a relationship that is reiterated in two sets of manuscript illustrations of the Book of Judith. The maid and Judith create a cooperative community of women, wherein Judith is a maternal figure; that female community constructs a heroism for Judith that is based on protection and generation rather than (like Guthlac's) on isolation, competition, and asceticism.

The Old Testament version of the narrative, specifically from the Latin Vulgate, has long been identified as the source for the poem. However, just as *Guthlac A* relates only selected events from the saint's life, *Judith*, in the form we have it, relates only the end of the Vulgate narrative, beginning with Holofernes' feast. As the Old English poem begins, Judith and her maid are already in the Assyrian camp outside the walls of their besieged city, Bethulia. The Assyrian general Holofernes has ordered a feast to celebrate his plans of raping Judith and conquering Bethulia; he becomes so drunk at the feast that he passes out in his tent. Judith decapitates him and leaves for Bethulia with her maid and Holofernes' head. The sight of the headless body terrifies the Assyrians at the same time that the sight of the head emboldens the

Bethulians, who triumph overwhelmingly in the ensuing battle. The poem ends with a song of praise of the greatness of God. The invasion by Nebuchadnezzar, the siege of Bethulia, and Judith's adornment and journey to Holofernes' tent have been either cut or lost.

E.K.V. Dobbie and others, notably David Chamberlain, postulate that about 1300 lines of *Judith* have been lost; they rely not only on the length Old Testament parts missing from the poem, but also on the fitt numbers in the manuscript. There is a "X" at l.15 of *Judith*, which may indicate nine previous fitts, each about 120 lines, that could have included a lost beginning of the poem (Dobbie lxi). Other critics follow Rosemary Woolf, who suggests that "apart from a few lines relating a few details . . . none of the poem is missing" (171).<sup>151</sup>

This critical fascination with the poem's "completeness" has been analyzed by Karma Lochrie, who argues that "the reasoning beyond such reconstruction is as self-perpetuating as it is unself-reflecting" (4). For Lochrie, a focus on the length of the poem sets up a contained system of criticism that occludes "any investigation of the cultural or ideological positioning of the text in the Old English *Judith*" (4). Following Lochrie,

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<sup>151</sup>Woolf follows Cook, who relied on "personal opinion" (Woolf 168) in his suggestion that the poem was virtually complete; other critics who regard the poem as almost complete include Huppe, Doubleday, Kaske, and Godfrey.

I will deal with the extant text of *Judith*, without entering that self-perpetuating argument that looks at the possible length of the text rather than the text itself. Lochrie's view of the operation of gender in the text differs substantially from mine, however, since she focuses on the relationship between Judith and Holofernes, while I will look at the relationship between Judith and her maid.

Lochrie explicitly rejects both allegorical and historical readings of the relationship between Holofernes and Judith. Those readings form the bulk of *Judith* criticism; allegorical readings tend to see Judith as a figure of chastity and/or the church, overcoming lechery or the devil in the form of Holofernes.<sup>152</sup> Lochrie and others point out, however, that nowhere in the text is Judith's presumed chastity made explicit; the word *mægð* can mean "maiden" or "virgin" but does not always do so.<sup>153</sup> Historical readings interpret the poem as a call to action against the Danes in Viking-ravaged Anglo-Saxon England; Alexandra Hennessey Olsen explicitly reads the poem as a

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<sup>152</sup>For example, see Bernard Huppe's analysis in *The Web of Words* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1970), 136-148. Similarly exegetical readings can be found in Campbell, Timmer, Kaske, Pringle, Godden, and Rappetti; Jane Chance, while her focus is feminist rather than exegetical, also reads Judith as figure of Chastity (*Woman as Hero*, 33).

<sup>153</sup>Hermann, Chamberlain, and Belanoff also remark on the text's lack of emphasis on chastity.



rallying cry against the rape of Anglo-Saxon women by the Danish invaders (292).<sup>154</sup>

Just as a few critics tried to read *Guthlac A* within the rubric of Germanic heroism, using the terms of a secular comitatus, some recent critics have seen Judith as a quasi-Germanic heroine. Chance interprets Judith not only as a figure of Chastity or the Church but also as "a militant warrior of God" (*Woman* 39) and notes the eroticism in her defeat of Holofernes: the decapitation "is described with erotic overtones to suggest the triumph of a right and natural sexual (and social and spiritual) order over the perverse and unnatural one" ("Structural" 255). Marie Nelson sees Judith's heroism as that of a "secular saint," a term she does not fully explain (12), while Paul Beekman Taylor interprets Judith's beauty as an aspect of her female virtue, a virtue that includes not just beauty but wisdom, courage, and moral judgment (216-217). Mary Godfrey compares Judith's heroism to Beowulf's: both characters decapitate enemies and then display the heads in

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<sup>154</sup>Other historical readings, less pointedly about rape than Olsen's, include David Chamberlain, "Judith: A Fragmentary and Political Poem," *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation*, eds. Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Frese (Notre Dame: U Notre Dame P, 1975), 135-162 and Hugh Magennis, "Adaptation of Biblical Detail in the Old English *Judith: The Feast Scene*" *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 84 (1983) 331-337. Ann Astell argues for a multi-leveled reading that includes both allegory and history in "Holofernes' Head: Tacen and Teaching in the Old English *Judith*" *Anglo-Saxon England* 18 (1989) 117-133.

an occasion for exhortation and display: the demonstration of rhetorical finesse and successful martial prowess against a vanquished enemy, summoned up through the visible sign of the decapitated head.

(5)

Helen Damico's is the view of Judith that relies most heavily on the vocabulary of pagan Germanic heroism; in Damico's terms, Judith is a manifestation of a "conventional stock character--the Germanic warrior-woman" (183). For Damico, Judith is much like the Valkyries of Old Norse and Old German literature, a "valkyrie-bride" whose beauty and strength combine to make her semi-divine in her heroism (187).

These explicitly Christian and explicitly Germanic-heroic readings point up what Patricia Belanoff calls a "poetic ambivalence in her [Judith's] characterization" (248). For Belanoff, the construction of gender in the poem is unstable expressly because Judith's characterization is neither specifically Christian (like Juliana's) nor Germanic-heroic (like Beowulf's). Belanoff says:

As a character Judith pushes back the boundaries of what it means to be a Germanic warrior and not just a female Christian warrior. For though the Judith-poet will not let her into the comitatus room even after he deemphasizes some of her feminine traits, the door is ajar. Judith is a strong and interesting character because she is not unified and coherent in relation to the old models. (260)

Belanoff shows how Judith destabilizes the categories of heroism that most other critics reinforce in their readings of the poem; Judith's female heroism is not based on her chastity, but she is still a woman.

Lochrie's analysis of the poem is almost exactly contemporary with Belanoff's and as such the two cannot comment on each other. Lochrie examines "the alliance between the economies of war and sexual violence in the world of the poem and, by implication, Anglo-Saxon society" (2). As she reads the poem and its connections between sex and violence, Lochrie exposes the constructedness of the "'natural' progression of things which leads from revelry with his [Holofernes'] male retinue to rape and, finally, to war" (8). For Lochrie, Judith is not a hero in the way she seems to be for other critics; while Judith succeeds in her quest and saves her people, she does not manage to overcome the system of sex and violence that undergirds the culture of the poem. She merely reverses the masculine sexual economy's "customary power relationships" as she uses violence for her own ends (13) in a poem that mocks and exposes but does not undermine the system (14).

That system is interpreted psychoanalytically by John Hermann in an article to which Lochrie is in part responding. Hermann sees much (often allegorical) violence in Old English religious poetry to be "complicitious with social violence" (1-2). In *Judith*, where Lochrie is concerned with violence against women, Hermann focuses on the violence of castration/decapitation effected by a woman on a man. His psychoanalytic reading ultimately subsumes and marginalizes the feminine in much the same way that the

psychoanalytic theories he uses do. His discussion does begin with Judith, whom he sees as a mother figure, especially in her allegorical guise as Mother Church (194). But Hermann, like Lacan and Freud, cannot help but focus on and ultimately identify with the (male) child Holofernes, whose refusal to accept the Law of the Father and whose incestuous desire for the mother-figure lead to a castration through actual decapitation rather than a metaphorical castration that would enable his possession of the potent phallus (194). Hermann postulates an implicit instruction to the monastic audience of the poem, an audience that identifies with the place if not the fate of Holofernes: "The monastic subject sublates sexual desire into the desire for God" (198) in exactly the way that Holofernes did not.

Hermann's marginalization of Judith begins when he identifies her with *Mater*, just as *The Mother* becomes object/Other in the theories of Freud and Lacan. The sexuality and gender of the *Mother* is subversive and enigmatic. What I have termed a maternal mother is, as I have shown in my analysis of the *Virgin Mary*, often too troublesome to a reigning paradigm not to be elided or marginalized. But in my own terms and in the terms defined in Irigaray's *Sexes and Genealogies*, Judith is a maternal figure. Moreover, in the female and feminine community the text creates between Judith and maid, Judith's gender construction actually overturns the masculine, patriarchal

paradigm of sex and violence that Lochrie and Hermann both describe. Judith's gender, like Mary's, is that of the maternal, and that maternal performance, in this reading, can redefine culture, if only momentarily.<sup>155</sup>

Throughout *Sexes and Genealogies*, Irigaray advocates woman's reclamation of maternal, female genealogy and a rejection of a cultural genealogy that separates the mother and daughter to make the daughter into only a mother in her husband's house. Irigaray says:

Each of us has a female family tree: we have a mother, a maternal grandmother, and great-grandmothers, we have daughters. Because we have been exiled into the house of our husbands, it is easy to forget the special quality of the female genealogy. (19)

Irigaray invokes a number of mythic archetypes to show how the mother-daughter bond is routinely severed in Western culture; for her, the primary myth in our culture is not Oedipus' patricide but Orestes' murder of Clytemnestra, the "original matricide" that was condoned by the gods as revenge for the murder of the father, Agamemnon (12). Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon for a number of reasons, all of which identify her as a woman noncompliant with patriarchy: she has taken a lover who is ruling the kingdom with her; Agamemnon had returned with his latest mistress, Cassandra; and Agmemnon had killed their daughter, Iphigenia, to get

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<sup>155</sup>This sort of conclusion echoes that of Overing in her analysis of the "hysterical" women of *Beowulf*, who cannot ultimately triumph over the patriarchal, absolutist system which they briefly challenge.

the right wind to sail to Troy (a mission devoted to reclaiming his brother's sexual rights over Helen). For Irigaray, the murder of Iphigenia, the "motive often forgotten by the authors of tragedy" (12), is the most salient of these motives; Agamemnon, like patriarchal structure, needs violence to sever the bond between mother and daughter. Irigaray's other examples include Athena, the patriarchal goddess "who proclaims herself daughter of the father alone and denies her maternal heritage" (134) and Demeter-Kore, the mother-daughter pair broken apart by rape by the god of the dead (131).

This reclamation of a female genealogy, Irigaray hopes, will lead to a society in which gender difference is accepted rather than subsumed in a hopeless attempt at neutrality that is actually a veiled masculinity. She writes, "Social and cultural acceptance of sexual difference has not been achieved and this can be the only goal of a movement for women's liberation" (193). Tenacious celebration of the mother-daughter bond is one step in this process; the following quotation shows the immediacy of myth in Irigaray's schema of female genealogy that can lead to acknowledged sexual difference:

But very few students of myth have laid bare the origins, the qualities and functions, the events that led up to the disappearance of the great mother-daughter couples of mythology: Demeter-Kore, Clytemnestra-Iphigenia, Jocasta-Antigone, to mention only a few famous Greek figures that have managed to leave some traces in patriarchal times.

I suggest that those of you who care about social justice should put up posters in public places showing beautiful images of that natural and spiritual couple, the mother-daughter, the couple that testifies to a very special relationship to nature and culture. (189)

This mother-daughter bond can become a paradigm for women's relationships with each other as well; rather than a feared phallic mother from whom the daughter needs to separate, the mother should instead be viewed as a source of strength. Women do not need to give up or renounce the love for the mother (as some psychoanalysts claim): such renunciation, for Irigaray, is "completely pathogenic and pathological" (20). Irigaray reminds us that "the first body we as women had to relate to was a woman's body and our first love is love of the mother" (19).

Irigaray extrapolates from this ideal mother-daughter relationship to describe women's relationships with one another without this genealogical tie. This bond will affirm sex difference and allow communication and cooperation rather than competition between women:

. . . love for sister-women . . . is essential if we are to quit our common situation and cease being the slaves of the phallic cult, commodities to be used and exchanged by men, competing objects in the marketplace. (20)

For Irigaray, women isolated in patriarchy, cut off from their female genealogies, are "reduced to being a womb or a seductive mask" (180). Such isolation can be combated with communication; one form this communication could take is a female ritual of sexual initiation: "In our tradition we

women perhaps miss the experience of discovering and living our initiation into sexuality *together*" (180, italics Irigaray's). The solitary nature of a woman's revelation of her own sexuality means that women "rarely initiate one another into their developing roles as women" (181) with the result that men define and initiate that sexuality. Women, according to Irigaray, need to develop a language that will allow them to communicate their sexuality to themselves and to each other; she asks, "How are existing languages to be remodeled so as to give place to a sexed culture?" (181).

Irigaray's French feminism, with its references to abortion, nuclear accidents, and advertising, may seem culturally distant from the Old English Judith, whom we left holding her sword a few pages back. But I believe that Irigaray's descriptions of female bonds and celebrations do speak to the Old English text and realize a new way of viewing it. Irigaray advocates celebration and enunciation of female-female bonds. Judith is unique in Old English poetry not because she wields a sword (Modþryðo does that too) but because she participates in a bond much like those described by Irigaray. Judith's uniqueness becomes apparent when the reader realizes that Judith is the only female figure in Old English poetry who works with another woman to achieve a common goal.

When I first read Irigaray's *Sexes and Genealogies*, I thought the concept of female genealogy would be



inapplicable to Old English studies; while fathers are formulaically included (Beowulf is routinely referred to as *Ecgðeows bearn*), mothers are not. As I emphasized in my discussion of *Beowulf*, patrilineal genealogy is a masculine obsession in Old English poetry. The mothers in Old English poetry are defined as mothers of sons: Grendel's mother, Wealtheow, Hildeburh, the Virgin Mary, (possibly) the narrator of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, Sara, Hagar. Often mothers are identified only through their husbands' or sons' names: Beowulf's mother, Noah's wife.

Wealtheow and Lot's wife are the only two mothers of daughters I have located in Old English poetry. The potential mother-daughter bond of Wealtheow and Freawaru is rendered inoperative by the textual separation of the two figures, however; we never learn of Freawaru's existence until Beowulf has left Denmark and he comments on her impending marriage to Ingeld after his return to Hygelac's court (ll.2020-2031). Lot's nameless wife, who turns into a pillar of salt,<sup>156</sup> does not interact with her daughters either; her reaction to her husband's offer of their daughters' virginity to the mob of sodomites warrants no mention in the text (ll.2466-2475).<sup>157</sup> Even less specific female relationship ("sister-love" in Irigaray's terms) does not seem to be portrayed in Old English poetry; the

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<sup>156</sup>*Genesis* 2565-2567.

<sup>157</sup>This scene is discussed in chapter three above.

interactions between Sara and Hagar seem to be the only interactions between women in the corpus, and they compete for Abraham's attention and for his patrimony in their sons' names. There is no "sister-love" there.

This pointed contrast between Judith and the other women in the Old English corpus is especially relevant when the manuscript context of the poem is considered. *Judith* is the "other" poem in the Nowell Codex, Cotton Vitellius A.xv, more often called "The Beowulf Manuscript" (making apparent the hierarchy of the texts contained within it). Scholars have tried to explain the seemingly odd manuscript pairing of an Old Testament adaptation with a long, heroic poem, noting that both poems show decapitations or that Holofernes is a "monster" like Grendel or the dragon. Three contemporary prose pieces that precede *Beowulf* and *Judith* in the manuscript also point to a compilation that had some sort of theme of monster destruction: part of the *Life of St. Christopher*, *The Wonders of the East*, and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*.<sup>158</sup> Within the terms of my inquiry, however, the juxtaposition of *Beowulf* and *Judith* next to each other in the same manuscript<sup>159</sup> is striking in regards to female-female relationships in the texts. While the

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<sup>158</sup>For a complete description of the contents of the manuscript, see Dobbie xii-xiii.

<sup>159</sup>Currently, *Judith* follows *Beowulf*, but see Peter Lucas, "The Place of Judith in the Beowulf Manuscript," *Review of English Studies* 41 (1990): 463-478, wherein he argues that *Judith* preceded *Beowulf* in the initial compilation.

women of *Beowulf* are irrevocably isolated from other women, to the point where the most successful woman in the poem (Modþryðo) enacts a masculine performance, *Judith* permits a female space for a maternal gender performance.

Such a female community as Irigaray describes does seem to be operating in *Judith*. The vocabulary of the poem presents Judith and her unnamed maid acting in a female community that I believe can be seen as a metaphorical mother-daughter bond. The maid, though not a biological child, is not an Other to Judith. They share the bond of similar culture, in that they are both female, Jewish Bethulians. More importantly, their bodily relationship involves food, sexuality, and the physical journey from Bethulia to the Assyrian camp and back. The maid is present at the failed rape and subsequent decapitation; the head goes into the bag that had held their kosher food:

þa seo snotere mægð      snude gebrohte  
 þæs herewæðan      heafod swa blodig  
 on ðam fætelse      þe hyre foregenga,  
 blachleor ides,      hyra begea nest,  
 ðeawum geðungen,      þyder on lædde,  
 ond hit þa swa heolfrig      hyre on hond ageaf,  
 higeðoncolre,      ham to berenne,  
 Iudith gingran sinre (ll.125-132).<sup>160</sup>

(Then the prudent maiden quickly put the head of the warrior so bloody into the sack in which her attendant, the pale-cheeked woman, thither had brought for them both provisions, for handmaids excellent, and it [the bag] then so gory gave to her in the hand to bear home, wise Judith to her maid.)

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<sup>160</sup>Text from E.V.K. Dobbie, ed., *Beowulf and Judith*, ASPR vol.4 (New York: Columbia UP, 1953). Translations are my own.

The shared food creates a physiological community between the women that transcends social class; they do not eat what the Assyrians eat. While the shared food could be interpreted to have eucharistic connotations, it suffices to see it as a means of separation of the women and the Assyrians as well as a means of bonding the women together.

I interpret the class difference between Judith and her maid to impart a maternal-filial temper to their relationship; Judith's power as mistress makes her the maternal figure in the relationship--she has the power and also the responsibility to protect and to nurture the maid as daughter figure. In the female community they create, especially in the journey back to Bethulia from Holofernes' tent, maternal power and shared goals work to show that the patriarchal system represented by Holofernes has been subverted. The description of the journey follows directly upon the allusion to the shared food. I quote the passage in full:

Eodon ða gegnum þanonne  
 þa idesa ba           ellenþriste,  
 oðþæt hie becomon,    collenferhðe,  
 eadhreðige mægð,     ut of ðam herige,  
 þæt hie sweotollice    geseon mihten  
 þære wlitegan byrig    weallas blican,  
 Bethuliam.     Hie ða beahhrodene  
 feðelaste     forð onettan,  
 oð hie glædmode     gegan hæfdon  
 to ðam wealgate (132b-141a)

(They went then straightaway thence, the noblewomen both courageous, until the maidens came, elated, triumphant, out of the army so that they clearly might see the walls of the beautiful city glitter, Bethulia. Then they

hastened forth (on) the course, adorned with rings,  
until they glad in spirit had gone to the wall-gate.)

The bond between the women is made apparent in this passage by the use of plural words to describe the women and their actions (I will discuss some of these below) and especially by the word *ba*, both (1.132), which creates a category unbounded by social class that describes the women together.

Such plurality would seem to necessitate critical examination of both women, but Judith's maid is routinely passed over in criticism of the poem, as I noted above; the fact that maid was very specifically *not* cut from the Old English poem has attracted little critical attention.

B.J.Timmer says that "Judith's maid remains very vague" (13); J.J.Campbell calls her (and the Assyrian soldier who finds Holofernes' body) "mere walk-ons" (155). David Chamberlain suggests that the handmaid takes the head out of the bag in Bethulia (a deviation from the Vulgate narrative) to distance Judith from the gore (157) while James Doubleday calls the maid "an extension of Judith herself" (436).

Similarly, Kaske says the maid "seems to reflect her [Judith's] perfections" (24) while Lucas argues that the maid is "a mere shadow against which to accentuate Judith's prominence" (22). Huppé uses the handmaid as a tool to describe Judith in stereotypically feminine terms. He refers to the plural adjectives in lines 129-140 when he says:

Although the adjectives, strictly speaking, are appropriate chiefly to Judith, by being shared they tend to generalize Judith's triumph, perhaps, indeed, to make it more human. Her deed was fearful, awesome, above and beyond the nature of her sex, indeed of humanity. By reflecting Judith's superhuman glory in the handmaiden, the poet succeeds in the simple narrative of the return to cast into a softer light the barbarous horror of Judith's slaughter of Holofernes. (170-1)

For Huppé, the handmaiden serves to brush away any vestiges of what he views as proto-masculine heroism that might still be clinging to Judith. Such heroism is exactly what Donald Fry has in mind when he interprets the maid as the heroic Judith's retainer in his analysis of the return to Bethulia as a manifestation of the "hero-on-the-beach" theme (180).

Only Helen Damico has done any extensive work on the presentation of the handmaid in *Judith*; her argument about the maid is intended to strengthen her argument that the character of Judith is a type of "valkyrie-bride" (186) or "Germanic warrior-woman" (183). As such, Damico translates the maid's designation of *foregenga* (1.127) as "'one who goes before', evoking the image of a standard-bearer" (185). Damico's focus is on one of the plural adjectives describing both Judith and the maid, *beahhroden*; because of the martial and glittering aspects of the return to Bethulia, Damico translates *beahhroden* as "shield-adorned" rather than the usual "ring-adorned," so it alludes to what she views as "warrior dress" (185).

Damico and Huppé both comment on the plural adjectives describing Judith and the maid on the return to Bethulia,

though not on the plural nouns that also link the two female figures (*ðeawum*, handmaids, 1.129; *idesa*, noblewomen, 1.133; *mægð*, maidens, 1.135). While Huppé interprets the maid's presence to lessen the heroic effect of the scene, Damico interprets the maid as an intensifier of the glory of the scene and, as I do, sees a breakdown in the class distinction between the two:

The heroic properties possessed by the warrior-woman, Judith, are properties of her maid . . . [the maid] is a mirror-image of her mistress, enjoying all the qualities appropriate to the warrior-woman--superiority of mind, conduct, courage, and obedience. *Beahhroden* further unites the women in a heroic sense, suggesting a concept of them, not as servant and mistress, but as victors in a campaign against the enemy. (185)

Both critics, with their seemingly opposite views, see the maid as an enlargement of an aspect of Judith's characterization (her traditional femininity, her heroism). For Damico and Huppé, the class barriers between the two women break down because the maid is merely an extension of Judith's heroism, not because Judith and the maid have a relationship unbounded by patriarchal class distinctions.

I maintain that, in the return to Bethulia, Judith and the maid have just such a relationship. The diction of these lines, with its plural nouns, verbs, and adjectives, presents a female community in the bond between Judith and the maid. The nouns that describe both the maid and Judith elide the class distinction between them; *idesa* connotes nobility, *þeawum* holiness ("handmaiden of the Lord"), and

*mægð* purity.<sup>161</sup> The two women together are *ellenpriste*, *beahhrodene*, and *glædmode*, plural adjectives that bond them grammatically. The other two plural adjectives, *eadhreðige* and *collenferhðe*, not only bond the women grammatically but point up the uniqueness of their cooperative, active feminine community.

*Eadhreðige* literally means "rich in victory," and is usually translated as "triumphant."<sup>162</sup> It occurs only in poetry, and only three times (MCOE E001), to refer to the three prominent heroines in Old English, Judith, Juliana, and Elene. Belanoff cites *eadhreðige* in her discussion of Judith's heroism:

. . . *eadhreðig* (triumphant), unique in its being used to describe only Judith, Elene, and Juliana in the Old English poetic canon. Elene is *eadhreðige* as she leaves on her sea voyage (line 266); the devil addresses Juliana as *eadhreðig mæg* in his attempt to convince her to worship pagan gods (line 257); and Judith is *eadhreðige* as she passes safely out through the drunken Assyrian army (line 135). Thus, *eadhreðig* evokes a quality possessed in common by the three female saints of Old English poetry, but only in *Judith* is the word used after the heroine's physical defeat of her enemy. (249)

Not only does the Judith usage occur after the confrontation with the enemy, it is the only one of the three usages that

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<sup>161</sup>For discussions of *ides* and *mægð* in this context, see Belanoff 257-259. Belanoff's discussion, however, focuses on Judith and does not mention that these words describe Judith's maid as well.

<sup>162</sup>In three glossaries, Cook's, Timmer's, and Bright's, *eadhreðige* is glossed "triumphant." Huppe gives the word an exegetical connotation when he translates it "in triumph blessed" (122).



is plural. While Belanoff does not remark on the grammatical difference, it is crucial. Elene and Juliana, like most of the women in the Old English corpus, are isolated among men. Elene is on a ship with part of her son's army, and no maids or female companions are ever mentioned. When she is called *eadhreðige*, Juliana has been thrown into prison (where a male devil appears to torment her) because she has refused to marry a government official as her father ordered. Juliana's mother is conspicuous in her absence; Juliana's isolation in a male world is absolute.

Thus, the plurality of *eadhreðige* in *Judith* is striking. The women are together and triumphant, their task achieved. They are rich in victory not only because Holofernes is dead, but because they achieved the victory together. As they move through the politically neutral space between the city and the camp, they make that space a female space through their specifically shared achievement.

Just as the plurality of the exclusively feminine *eadhreðige* is unique to *Judith*, so the feminine reference of *collenferhðe* is as well. *Collenferhðe*, like *eadhreðige*, occurs only in poetry, never in prose (MCOE C006). Its literal meaning is unclear: *ferhð* means "spirit, mind" and Clark-Hall suggests *cwellan*, "to swell," as a possible root. *Collenferhðe* is usually translated "elated" or "bold" and it

refers only to men, alone or in groups, except when it refers to Judith and her maid.<sup>163</sup>

Men who are *collenferhðe* are celebrated except on two occasions when the word seems to be used as a form of mockery. The first of these refers to one of the cannibals that Andreas encounters; the man has been picked to be the next meal and in his fear offers his son to the cook-pot instead in a grotesque parody of God's offer of his Son to mankind:

Cleopode þa collenferhð cearegan reorde,  
cwæð he his sylfes sunu syllan wolde  
on æhtgeweald (1108-1110a)<sup>164</sup>

(Then the bold-spirited man cried in an anxious voice, said he wished to give his own son into [their] power.)

Just as a cannibal giving up his son to save his own life is not "bold-spirited," the Jews who unwillingly follow Elene's orders are not "bold-spirited": *Eodan ða mid mengo modcwanige / collenferhðe, swa him sio cwen beað* (They went then with much mind-mourning, bold-spirited, as them the queen had bidden).<sup>165</sup> In both instances, ironic use of *collenferhðe* seems to show exactly what these people are not: they follow orders only under duress or they sacrifice kin to save themselves.

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<sup>163</sup>Translations for *collenferhðe* include "inspired, elated" (Cook); "bold, elated" (Timmer); "bold in courage" (Huppe); and "bold-spirited" (Bright).

<sup>164</sup>Text from George Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, ASPR vol.2 (New York: Columbia UP, 1932), 33-34. Translations are my own.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid, 76, ll.377-8; translation is mine.

More straightforward uses of *collenferhðe* praise a man or men who are engaged in great deeds; two examples will suffice.<sup>166</sup> During Wiglaf's final service to Beowulf, Wiglaf is described as *collenferhðe*:

hyne fyrwet bræc,  
hwæðer collenferð cwicne gemette  
in ðam wongstede Wedra þeoden  
ellensiocne, þær he hine ær forlet (2784b-2787)<sup>167</sup>

(Curiosity pressed him, the bold-spirited one, whether he might find alive in the field-place the prince of the Weders, deprived of strength, where he him before had left.)

The only one of the Geats to fulfill his vow of loyalty and fight with Beowulf during his last battle, Wiglaf is *collenferð* in action and intention. He follows orders to the last, bringing treasure so Beowulf can look upon the spoils of victory one last time before he dies. Wiglaf's honor, in this scene, is irreproachable.

Similarly, the heroism of the soldiers at the beginning of the sea voyage in *Elene* illustrates a group of men who are unequivocally *collenferhðe*; *Wigan wæron bliðe, collenferhðe, cwen siðes gefeah* (The soldiers were happy, bold-spirited, the queen exulting in the journey 246b-247).

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<sup>166</sup>See appendix two for complete texts and translations of other uses of *collenferhðe*. Other references to individual men are to Andreas (twice), Beowulf, St. Thomas, and an undifferentiated man in the *Wanderer's* gnomic wisdom. Other references to groups of men are to the converted Jews in *Elene*, the men camping on the whale in *The Whale*, and Andreas' companions.

<sup>167</sup>Text from Fr. Klaeber, *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Lexington: D.C. Heath, 1950), 105. Translation is my own.

The men are following the orders of the newly converted, victorious emperor Constantine; they are on a holy mission to recover the True Cross at Jerusalem.<sup>168</sup> Their bold spirits stem from their assurance that they are on the side of righteousness.

Judith and her maid are the only *collenferhðe* women in the corpus. Their uniqueness here is in their gender, not in their number, as it was the case with *eadhreðige*. It seems that the connotations of the two words work together: Judith and the maid share a feminine victory and co-opt, in one sense, the presumed masculinity of heroic elation. Elation, in success or purpose, is exclusively male except for this one instance when women share food, make plans, work together and create a successful female community.

The extraordinary nature of the vocabulary of this female journey is made apparent with comparison to the Vulgate and with Ælfric's homily on the *Liber Judith*. In Ælfric's text, the maid is referred to only as *pinene*<sup>169</sup> and she seems more like a chaperone than an assistant. Judith orders the maid to hold the door, *het hire pinene healdan þa duru* (1.303), but Judith does all the work, taking the head herself after cutting it from the body, *Heo*

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<sup>168</sup>For a darker interpretation of the action of *Elene*, see Hermann, *Allegories of War*, 91-118, wherein he argues that Elene's mission is one of forced conversion and submission to imperialistic power.

<sup>169</sup>Lines 204, 231, 272, 303, and 309 of the lineated Assmann text.

*nam þa þæt heafod* (1.307). The return to Bethulia from Holofernes' camp is accomplished in one line, *op þæt hi buta becomon to þam burhgeate* (1.310).

In the Vulgate, the maid is repeatedly called *abra*; Judith refers to herself as *ancilla* when she speaks of her relationship to God or her supposed relationship with Holofernes. While both *abra* and *ancilla* mean "female servant," the consistency of their use in regards to the two women respectively shows the connotations: to be a handmaid of the lord (*ancilla*) provides much more status than to be a servant (*abra*). The only deviation from these terms is Vagao's reference to Judith as a *bona puella*, a good girl, as he acts in his role of procurer for Holofernes (*Liber Iudith* 12:12). A comparison with the vocabularies of both Ælfric's text and the Vulgate narrative shows the unusual nature of the description in the Old English *Judith*, a description that reveals a female community led by Judith, successful in her maternal sexuality and performance.

In that community, Judith and the maid present an Irigarayan ideal female bond. They are agents, walking together toward their destination after saving their people. They are successful in cooperation; Judith has beheaded Holofernes while the maid is carrying the head in the bag in which she *hyra begea nest . . . pyder on lædde* (thither had brought provisions for them both, ll.128b, 129b). And finally, they are a mother-daughter "couple," to use

Irigaray's term. Judith in this scene enacts a maternal gender much like that of the Virgin Mary in *Advent* or on the Ruthwell Cross. She wields power, this time with a female companion, in order to protect. As Mary protects the infant Christ from Herod and nurtures him with love and food, Judith protects her people from Holofernes and ends the siege that was killing the Bethulians with hunger and thirst. *Judith* shows us that this maternal protection can entail violence; Judith as maternal performer uses violence to protect her child, as she decapitates Holofernes to save Bethulia. The maid as daughter assists, reveres, and imitates the maternal figure of Judith until the vocabulary blends them. Their purpose is preservation; they killed Holofernes to save their home, not to cover themselves in glory (though that was a secondary effect). To return to the poem's shared manuscript context with *Beowulf* and to the terminology of Overing's analysis of *Beowulf* for a moment, Judith and her maid make no ultimate masculine statement ("I will kill Holofernes or I will die") as they go on their quest because their quest is one of defense rather than of aggressive desire for glory.

The bond between the two women shows Judith as a maternal leader and reveals the place of the bond with the child, who can never be wholly Other, in maternal sexuality. The maid's class inferiority to Judith becomes translated into a type of childhood; her lesser status becomes a source

of a bond with Judith rather than a source of contempt or marginalization. A figure like Judith performing within the maternal gender derives power and satisfaction of desire through the bond with such a child. Judith's maternal sexuality contains an erotics that is devoted to preservation (of her home, her figurative daughter, and all the "children" of Bethulia who could not protect themselves) rather than satisfaction of masculine desire.

Judith is not described as wife or widow (or even, technically, virgin) because her sexuality is not limited to a heterosexuality defined by her relationship with a man. Judith demonstrates maternal sexuality and satisfaction of maternal desire that goes beyond the paradigm of two lovers, heterosexual or homosexual, to encompass different generations and a multiplicity of bonds, with men, with women, with other mothers, with children, whether or not related by blood. An assumption of limited heterosexuality was Holofernes' mistake. He perceived Judith only as an object of rape; he did not see that her sexuality necessitated the protection of herself and her "children."

This moment of female community fades after Judith and the maid re-enter the city. The neutral space of the field between the camp and the city seems to be liminal in that such a maternal bond can thrive to the point where it becomes apparent even in the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the text. That very vocabulary shows that the

Irigarayan community ceases to exist upon reaching Bethulia; the only reference to the maid within the gates is a singular noun, and, no longer *ides* or *mægð*, she is merely *pinenne* (a servant, l.172).

That shared, female community is also apparent in two illustration series of the Book of Judith, one in the San Paulo Bible and one in the Winchester Bible. While there is no feminine community of Judith and the maid in the Vulgate text, as its vocabulary shows, these illustrations of that text do show a feminine community much like the one presented in the Old English *Judith* so that there is actually a discrepancy between the representations of the women in the text and illustrations. The Winchester Bible, produced in Winchester in the early 1160s (Oakeshott 8), and the Carolingian San Paulo Bible, produced in Reims c.870 (Cahn 55), both depict Judith as a signifier of maternal heroism constructed within a female community. The intertextuality of the illustrations and the Old English poem shows a specific type of female relationship that spans geography and chronology: the differences between the texts in time and place of creation collapse in the portrayals of Judith and her maid.

The Winchester Bible is distant from the Old English *Judith* in time, made approximately 160 years after the Nowell Codex. Yet "Old English" was still in use during this time period; the manuscript now attached to the Nowell



Codex is a twelfth century production of Anglo-Saxon prose.<sup>170</sup> The Winchester Bible, a lavish production that testifies to the wealth and prestige of the Cathedral scriptorium, depicts Judith and her maid in a full-page sequential rendering of the Book.<sup>171</sup> This illustration (folio 331 verso) is an outline drawing, though it would probably have been colored in at a later date if the plan of illustration had been completed (Donovan 17, n.14). The artist is known as "The Master of the Apocrypha," an illustrator whose style is noted for a "sureness of line," a "tendency to drag down the lower corner of the eye," and placement of "a 'nick' over the knee" (Oakeshott 54). The scenes, divided into three registers, illustrate the major events of the Book of Judith; I will focus on the three depictions of Judith and the two depictions of her maid.

Judith appears twice in the second register, and the figure of the maid separates the two Judiths, as if she is attending both at once. The two figures of Judith show her controlling the action; she takes a drink from Holofernes at the feast (a deviation from the Apocrypha narrative, wherein she eats and drinks only kosher food prepared by the maid) and then turns around to cut his head off in his tent. The

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<sup>170</sup>The first part of Cotton Vitellius A.xv contains the Alfredian *Soliloquies of St. Augustine*, the gospel of Nicodemus, the *Dialogue of Solomon and Saturn*, and a fragment of the passion of St. Quintinus, all in Anglo-Saxon prose (Dobbie xii).

<sup>171</sup>This page is reproduced in the figures appendix.

"turn" of her figure is literal and explicit: Judith's gesture as she takes the drink mirrors her gesture as she cuts off Holofernes' head in the next scene. Taking the drink, she is in three quarter profile facing left, raising her arm for the drink; killing Holofernes, she is in three quarter profile facing right, raising her arm that holds the sword. With these mirror opposite positions, the Apocrypha Master depicts the moral messages of the Apocryphal text and its commentators: the drink leads to the sword, which of course leads to Holofernes' death.

In the beheading scene, on the right of the second register, the posture of the maid echoes that of her mistress. Like Judith, the maid is in three quarter profile and one arm is raised higher than the other. Both women lean forward towards the body of Holofernes; the maid holds up a curtain which is probably the canopy over Holofernes' bed but could be the "door" of his tent. They work in tandem to accomplish their goal: the maid is not just standing there waiting but is an active participant in the scene.

In the third register, the artist creates a narrative in the left scene by drawing Holofernes' head twice. At the far left, the maid holds the head in the bag, as she does in the Old English poem, doing her part in the endeavor. Next to her, Judith holds the head as she presents it to the people of Bethulia. The illustration presumes the narrative

of the maid removing the head and handing it to Judith or of the maid holding the bag while Judith removes the head; again, the women work as a team. In the Winchester Bible illustrations, Judith and the maid present a visual feminine community in the composition and action of their scenes.

To an even greater extent, the Carolingian Bible of San Paulo depicts the cooperative nature of the relationship between Judith and the maid and shows a bond that transcends the hierarchical relationship of mistress and servant. The San Paulo Bible again provides an example of intertextuality as Judith and the maid act as signifiers of female cooperation throughout time and space. A tenuous connection between the San Paulo Bible and Anglo-Saxon England can be made through Anglo-Saxon activity on the continent; Carolingian Reims had contact with Anglo-Saxon England as early as 782, when Alcuin of York became a scholar-guest at the court of Charlemagne (Stenton 189).

In the San Paulo Bible, one of only four illustrated Carolingian Bibles to survive, Judith is depicted seven times in the three-register full page illustration, the maid six times (in one representation, the maid attends to two separate figures of Judith).<sup>172</sup> The illustration is typical of that in the richly illustrated bible, which Walter Cahn describes:

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<sup>172</sup>This page is reproduced in the figures appendix.

There are narrative compositions of multiple scenes and more static images built around a central figure. The execution, influenced by the dynamism of the Reims tradition, tends towards greater animation and also a certain copiousness in its range of effects that marks the riper moments in the trajectory of stylistic development. (56)

The Judith miniature in the San Paulo Bible is by the "Master of Throne Images," whose images Joachim Gaehde characterizes as "animated narrative . . . [with] sketchy but coherent rendering of form" (360). Gaehde notes that the unusual "circular" narrative of the Judith miniature (Judith and the maid both leave and return to Bethulia in the top register) is probably due to a compression of the illustrations from the Master's sources (381).

That circular narrative highlights the relationship between Judith and the maid, as does one of the unique details included in this illustration series. Throughout the cycle, the women are dressed alike with only the decoration of Judith's outer garment to distinguish them.<sup>173</sup> They both wear dark robes with white shawls that cover their heads and shoulders. Judith's is decorated with a geometric pattern that is probably gold. In each of the six illustrations where they appear together, their bodies move in tandem, leaning towards Bethulia as they exit (top register right), swaying back from the body of Holofernes

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<sup>173</sup>I have not been able to locate a color reproduction of this page. The San Paulo Bible facsimile, a fifteen thousand dollar book, has not been purchased by a library in the United States (information obtained from a facsimile distributor at the 1994 Medieval Academy meeting in Boston).

(bottom register left), or gazing skeptically at Vagao in the Assyrian camp (middle register right). The circularity of the top register shows the cooperation needed to accomplish their task: the women leave and return together, and the maid carries Holofernes' head as Judith signals to the watchers on the wall at the return.

Another detail that shows the bond between the women is the direction of the women's gazes in the top left and bottom middle registers. In these sections, the women look not at the same thing with the same stance but look at each other, as if communicating and planning. The top left is the scene of departure and the bottom middle is the scene right before the decapitation; at both of these crucial moments, Judith and the maid look to each other for support and direction.

The final evidence of this relationship between the two is the "unique detail" noted by Gaehde (unique in that it appears in no other extant illustrations of the Book of Judith), that the maid is holding the scabbard of Holofernes' sword as Judith decapitates him (383). While Gaehde is interested in finding a source for this detail, I am interested in what the sheath represents: the maid, in holding the sheath, takes an active part in the execution, sharing responsibility and glory for the action.

These illustration series, separate from the Old English text in space and time, share signifiers of Judith

and the maid in mother-daughter communication and community with the Old English *Judith*. Judith is a hero, but not because she appropriates male power and uses it to her own ends. She is heroic because as a maternal figure she creates a bond with her metaphorical daughter, her maid, and they work together to achieve a common purpose. The bible illustrations and the poetic text of the return to Bethulia show this mother-daughter "couple," to return to Irigaray's terms, working for preservation and protection, specifically maternal goals, rather than for individual, isolated glory. The figure of Judith shows us a maternal sexuality that has gone beyond a one-to-one relationship with a man in conventional heterosexuality. Holofernes' intentions turn out to be merely delusions as the patriarchy and heterosexuality he represents are quashed by the two women, working together, producing a distinctly maternal heroism that ultimately benefits an entire society.

I read Guthlac's isolation and Judith's bond with her maid to be gendered characteristics. These characteristics define the heroism of the protagonists of the poems and illustrations, and examination of this mixed pair illustrates the different focuses of gendered heroism. Both figures are holy and heroic, but the portrayals of Guthlac indicate that a masculine, heroic holiness is achieved alone, while the maternal gender construction at work in *Judith* and the Judith illustrations posits bonding and

cooperation as the root of female heroic holiness. Though it is a stereotypical commonplace to say that men work alone while women work together, the gendered heroisms of these poems suggest just that. Irigaray's theoretical reflections on acceptance of sexual difference suggest, however, that the female or maternal version of this heroism is consistently devalued or even erased, as the role of the maid in *Judith* has been. Judith and her maid serve to highlight Guthlac's isolation, and force modern readers to question the value of the individuated masculine heroism of that text. I do not wish to advocate a reversal of a hierarchy, that "now" Judith's maternal heroism is somehow superior to Guthlac's masculine heroism. I wish to point out that Judith's heroism contrasts Guthlac's and its difference, not its opposition, shows a variety of possibilities for readings and definitions of holiness and heroism, both in Anglo-Saxon texts and in our interpretation of them.

Interestingly enough, both Guthlac's masculine and Judith's maternal genders are performed without an Other in opposition. As such, they are an appropriate "mixed pair" with which to close this dissertation, since they both seem to point towards a performance of gender that is not based on an ultimately fragile, binary opposition. Guthlac and Judith allow the possibility of gender construction that does not rely on hierarchy like that of the *Dream* Christ and

Cross. Such nonoppositional construction reveals opportunity for performance that does not require domination or oppression, and for new ways for readers of texts to examine and describe those performances.



CHAPTER 9  
CONCLUSION

Over the course of the last eight chapters, I have read psychoanalytic and gender theory against poetic and visual texts, explored varieties of gendered performances, examined composition and representation of visual images, and interrogated lexical usage in an attempt to show that, among the great variety of genders at work in these Anglo-Saxon texts, the maternal provides an initial point from which to depart the hierarchical and limiting opposition of masculine/feminine. That traditional paradigm, as I showed in my reading of *The Dream of the Rood* and the Ruthwell Cross Christ, relies on an often unacknowledged violence to keep the feminine position subordinate and passive in the face of dominating masculine aggression. Often, the feminine becomes complicit in the oppositional paradigm, as is the female scribe of the Vercelli Book.

My reading of the gender performances of Adam and Eve in the Junius 11 texts and illustrations, however, reveals a feminine subjectivity that achieves agency and disrupts the tidy paradigm as Eve, described in the text as feminine body and object, leads Adam from the Garden in the illustrations.

Another disruption of the binary paradigm comes from the more-masculine Modþryðo and the less-masculine Hroðgar of *Beowulf*; trying to describe Modþryðo in feminine terms occludes her success at fulfilling her sometimes violent desires and at producing the only intact patrilineal genealogy in the poem. Finally, Guthlac of *Guthlac A* and the Guthlac Roll illustrations defines a masculinity with no feminine Other; his holiness and isolation are somehow "enough" to make him masculine-heroic without reliance on subsumed violence enacted upon a dominated feminine Other.

These challenges to the masculine/feminine oppositional paradigm enable the reading of the maternal as a separate gender performance that serves to destabilize that paradigm further. When masculine and feminine performances can break down the very opposition from which they stem, other options for gender performance become apparent as well. I read the maternal as a gender category that performs a self-contained subjectivity that needs no specularized Other; because of the maternal bodily link between Mother and Child, that child can never be wholly Other to the Mother. The maternal performances of the Virgin in *Advent* and on the Ruthwell Cross and of Judith in *Judith* and in biblical illustration are characterized by powerful agency of nurturance and protection, Judith's enacted within a uniquely female community with her maid.

These maternal performances within the Anglo-Saxon poetic

and visual texts reveal not only their own disruptive possibilities but the possibility of reading other genders, as yet undescribed and untheorized, into these and other texts. At a 1995 conference on gender and medieval studies,<sup>174</sup> a session was devoted to the interrogation of single (i.e. never-married) women as a separate gender; during the closing roundtable at that same conference, "the chaste" was suggested as another possible gender. Suggestions for other possibilities of gender performance raise a variety of questions: if the maternal can be a gender, can the paternal be as well? How would "the paternal" be different from "the patriarchal"? Is there a performance of androgyny or asexuality? Are different types of homosexual performance actually different gender performances? For that matter, is there not a range of viable performances within that seemingly monolithic construct, heterosexual masculinity?

I stated at the beginning of this dissertation that I began my search for Anglo-Saxon motherhood because I am a mother. As I wrote this dissertation, my husband and I began to raise our family in a country plagued with violence, crime, racism, illiteracy, drugs, poverty, and hunger--and that country is generally acknowledged to be the most prosperous and most powerful in the world. As I formulated my theories of the maternal, examined manuscript facsimiles, and counted

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<sup>174</sup>"Studying the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: What Difference Does Gender Make?" held at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, October 27-29, 1995.

variants and usages of Anglo-Saxon words, I frequently asked myself, as a feminist and as a mother, how the production of a scholarly work on thousand-year-old texts could possibly improve the society in which I live and in which my children will grow up. Yet I believe that this somewhat arcane project is a small part of an academic feminist practice that, taken in its entirety, can eventually help to make contemporary American culture a better environment than it is now, for my own and others' children.

In this belief I rely upon the process of feminist theory working its way gradually from academic to mainstream circulation. What was yesterday's academic radicalism (from a mainstream point of view) is today's accepted issue; the most obvious example is daycare for children of working parents. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, feminists who called for high-quality, affordable, and accessible day care for young children were called communists; Strom Thurmond referred to implementation of daycare services as "the sovietization of America" (Steinfels 191). Though daycare has almost always been defined as a "woman's issue" (rather than as a family issue that affects women and men), it was also widely regarded as a remedy to inadequate parenting among the lower classes rather than as an educational benefit for all children and a way to allow both parents to work if they desired (Steinfels 84-85). This 1960s model of daycare bought into the premise that "the best place for mother and child was

together at home" (Steinfels 73), thus reinforcing the ideology of a middle-class, nuclear, patriarchal family in which women did not "really work" and that daycare was needed only by inadequate (i.e. poor and/or single) mothers. In 1995, the daycare debate still rages, but the focus has changed: daycare is used by all classes of parents, and the economic necessity for two incomes in one household is generally acknowledged. The existence and acceptability of the *issue* of daycare is no longer debated in mainstream politics, though solutions to the problems within the issue are by no means agreed upon.

I hope that the concept of a variety of genders will likewise move from academic theorizing to actual political practice in the same way that daycare is no longer a topic for the radical fringe but rather for the political center. Our society limits itself to two genders, masculine and feminine, assigned respectively to the male and female sex. Stringent patrol of gender roles has resulted in the loss of infinite opportunity in our country, most obviously in the loss of involved parenting by men, which is still considered more a topic for the comics page and slapstick movies than for real life. I envision a society where the maternal is enacted by both women and men, where it is respected but not worshipped (and thus neutralized). In that society the term "working mother" has become obsolete because all its members recognize that all mothers work, usually 12 to 14 hour unpaid days. In

that society the politics of maternity, complicated as they are by race and class, are not just "women's issues" but issues acknowledged to affect all facets of society. The maternal gender, embraced and accepted along with other gender performances that reach beyond traditional paradigms of masculinity and femininity, can become an example of nonhierarchical, nurturant, and empowering performance for women and men.

Acceptance of multiple genders will not solve all our late twentieth century problems, but it could set in place a process of analysis that is not bound by predetermined, gendered expectations. Such a process would enable more creative problem solving, respect for varietal gender differences, and a greater range of activities and performances by men and women as we work toward a society free of violence and poverty. I offer this dissertation in a spirit of feminism that is working towards long-term change in our conceptual models that will ultimately benefit our entire culture.

APPENDIX 1  
USES OF *LANGAÐ*

## APPENDIX 1

USES OF *LANGAÐ*

*Genesis* 495-497a:<sup>175</sup>

Ongun hine þa frinan forman worde  
se laða mid ligenum: Langað þe awuht,  
Adam, up to Gode?

(The hateful one began then to ask him at first with words,  
with lies: do you desire at all, Adam, [to be] above with  
God?)

*Soul and Body I* 152-154a:<sup>176</sup>

Forþan me a langað, leofost manna,  
on minum hige hearde, þæs þe ic þe on byssum hynþm wat  
wyrnum to wiste

(Dearest of men, therefore always to me it longs [it grieves  
me] firmly in my spirit, of this which I know of you -- in  
this affliction as a meal for worms.)

*Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni*, chapter 4, section 44:<sup>177</sup>

Þonne se dæg langað þonne gæðseo sunne norðweard oð þæt  
heo becymð to ðam tacne þe is gehaten cancer.

(When the day becomes longer, then the sun goes northward  
until it comes to the sign which is called cancer.)

*Byrhtferð's Manual*:<sup>178</sup>

Syððan langað seo niht and wanað se dæg eall þæt .xii.ma  
kt.Ianuarii cymð to mancynne.

(Afterwards the night grows longer and the day wanes until the  
12th day before the kalends of January [21 December] comes to  
mankind.)

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<sup>175</sup>Text from G.P. Krapp, ed., *The Junius Manuscript*, ASPR vol.1  
(New York: Columbia UP, 1931). Translations throughout this  
appendix are my own.

<sup>176</sup>Text from G.P. Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, ASPR vol.2,  
(New York: Columbia UP, 1931).

<sup>177</sup>Text from Heinrich Henel, ed., *Ælfric's De Temporibus Anni*,  
EETS o.s.213 (London: Oxford UP, 1942).

<sup>178</sup>Text from S.J. Crawford, ed., *Byrhtferth's Manual*, EETS  
o.s.177 (London: Oxford UP, 1929).



*Psalm 81, chapter 5 (82:5 in King James version):*<sup>179</sup>

Hi niston and na hig oneaton on þistrum hi langað; beop  
astired ealle grundwealles eorpan.

(They do not know and they do not understand. In this they  
languish; all the groundwalls of the earth are raised.)

*Durham Proverbs 9:*<sup>180</sup>

æfter leofan menn langað swiðost

(for love men long most eagerly).

---

<sup>179</sup>Text taken directly from MCOE L002.

<sup>180</sup>Text taken directly from MCOE L002.

APPENDIX 2  
USES OF *COLLENERHØDE*

## APPENDIX 2

## USES OF COLLENFERHÐE

*References to Individual Men:*

*Andreas* 537-539:<sup>181</sup> Ða hleoðrade halgan stefne  
 cempa collenferhð, cyning wyrðude,  
 wuldres waldend, ond þus wordum cwæð:  
 (Then with holy voice the bold-spirited warrior proclaimed, he  
 valued the king, glory's leader, and spoke these words:)

*Andreas* 1577b-1579a: Stop ut hræðe  
 cene collenferhð, carcern ageaf,  
 gleawmod, gode leaof.  
 (Stepped out quickly the brave bold-spirited one, he left the  
 prison, wise-minded, beloved by God.)

*Fates of the Apostles* 54-56:  
 Syððan collenferhð cyninges broðor  
 awehte for weorodum, wunddorcræfte,  
 þurh dryhtnes miht, þæt he of deaðe aras,  
 (Then this bold-spirited one [St. Thomas] revived the king's  
 brother before the multitude by wondrous skill, through the  
 might of the Lord, so that he arose from the dead.)

*The Wanderer* 70-72:<sup>182</sup>  
 beorn sceal gebidan þonne he beot spricedð  
 oppæt collen-ferð cunne gearwe  
 hwider hrepra gehygd hweorfan wille  
 (a man must when he speaks a boast until bold-spirited he  
 knows well where reflection of his heart might turn.)

*Beowulf* 1805b-1806:<sup>183</sup> wolde feor þanon  
 cuma collenferhð ceoles neoson

---

<sup>181</sup>Texts of *Andreas*, *Elene* and *Fates of the Apostles* from G.P.Krapp, ed., *The Vercelli Book*, ASPR vol.2 (New York, Columbia UP, 1931). Translations throughout this appendix are my own.

<sup>182</sup>Text of *The Wanderer* and *The Whale* from G.P.Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie, eds., *The Exeter Book*, ASPR vol.3 (New York: Columbia UP, 1936).

<sup>183</sup>Text from Fr. Klaeber, ed., *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, 3rd ed. (Lexington: D.C.Heath, 1950).

(The bold-spirited visitor [Beowulf] wished far from there to seek by ship.)

*References to Groups of Men:*

*Elene* 846-848a: Asetton þa on gesyhðe      sigebeamas III  
                   eorlas anhydige      fore Elenan cneo,  
                   collenferðe.

(They set then in view three victory-trees before Elene's knees, the single-minded, brave-spirited lords.)

*The Whale* 16-17a: ond þonne in þæt eglond      up gewitað  
   collenferðe

(and then up on that island [the whale's back] go bold-spirited men)

*Andreas* 349-350a: Þa in ceol stigon collenfyrhð,  
   ellenrofe...

(then on the ship stepped the bold-spirited ones, courageous.)

APPENDIX 3  
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18 Oct 95

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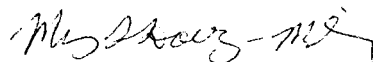
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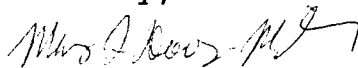
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**APPENDIX 4**  
**ILLUSTRATIONS**





Figure 1. Engraving of Ruthwell Cross, all four sides. All Ruthwell Cross illustrations reprinted by permission of Brendan Cassidy and Princeton University Press from Brendan Cassidy, ed., *The Ruthwell Cross* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

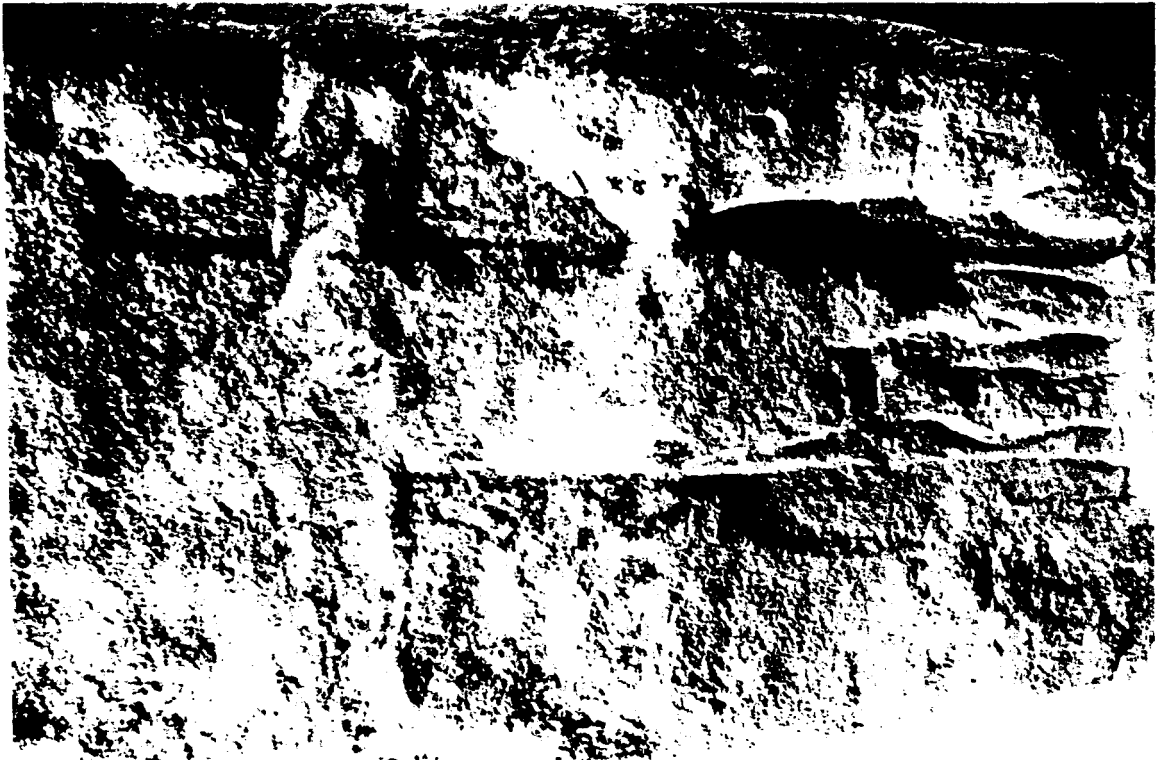


Figure 2. *Top*, Ruthwell Cross Crucifixion; *bottom*, Ruthwell Cross Annunciation.



Figure 3. Ruthwell Cross Christ Healing the Blind Man.



Figure 4. Ruthwell Cross Christ and Mary Magdalene



Figure 5. Ruthwell Cross Christ in Majesty.



Figure 6. Ruthwell Cross Martha and Mary (Visitation iconography).



Figure 7. Ruthwell Cross Flight into Egypt

de. 7 tall þouulde gŕcŕapt. brucad blæd daga.  
 7 þum hlæfte. 7 hefon fugla. Inc is halig fæh.  
 7 wile deon. ongeftalo gŕfild. 7 lifigthoe. ða ðe  
 land tnedad. fæhli lrethio cym. ða ðe flod pec  
 cet. gŕond hion nade. Inc hynad tall.



Figure 8. MS Oxford, Bodleian Library Junius 11, page 10. All Junius 11 illustrations reproduced from Israel Gollancz, ed., *The Cædmon Manuscript of Anglo-Saxon Biblical Poetry* (Oxford: British Academy, 1927).



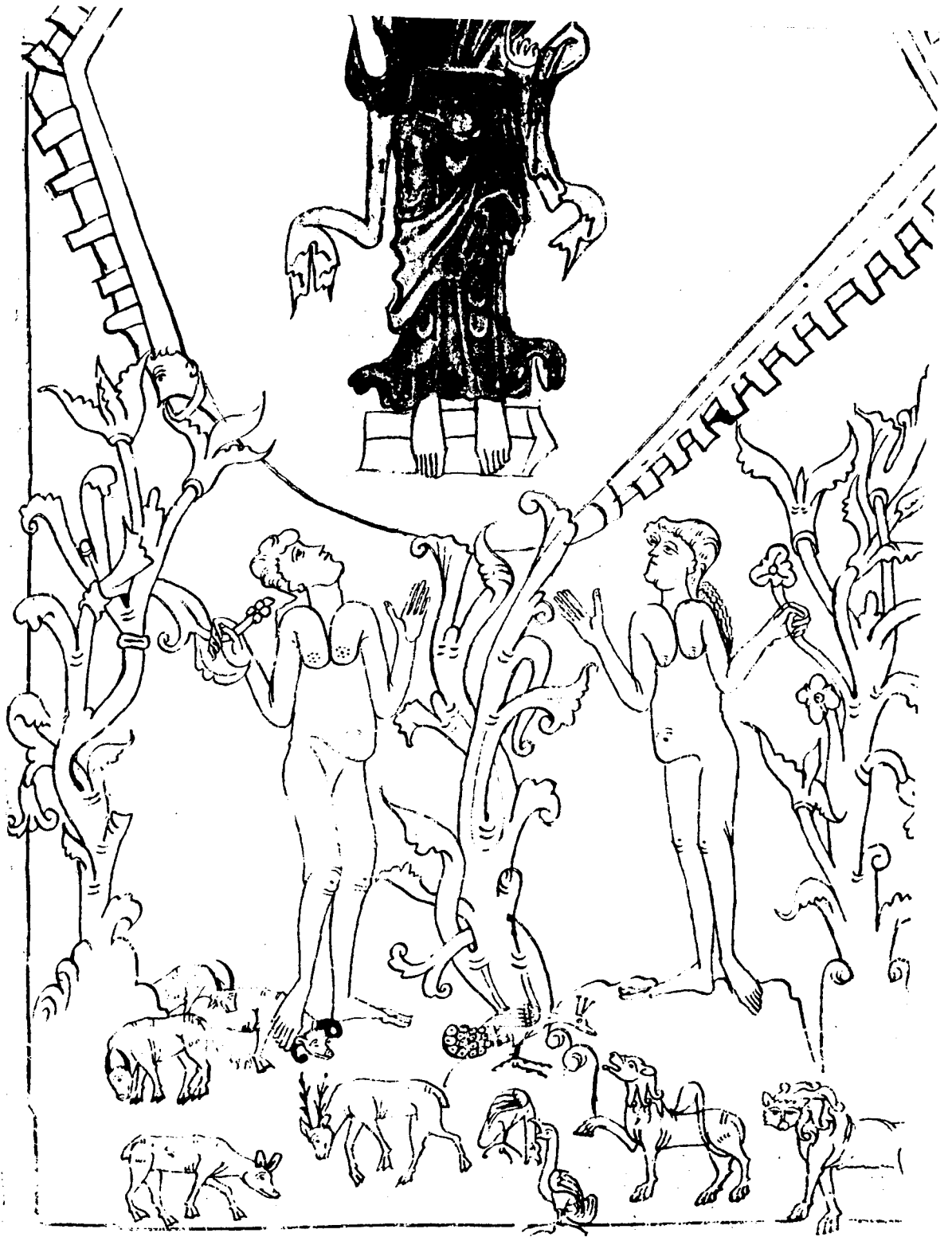


Figure 9. Junius 11, page 11.

buan. hpaetf unu p...  
 tth. tad fphid cyning. ftoð hif hand gylfne.  
 fomou on fande. nyftou forga pihc. to be  
 gnornanne. butan hfo godf pillan. lthgft  
 læftth. hfo pænon lfof gode. ðth ðth hfo hif  
 halig þoro. haldan polbon.

4. fahp

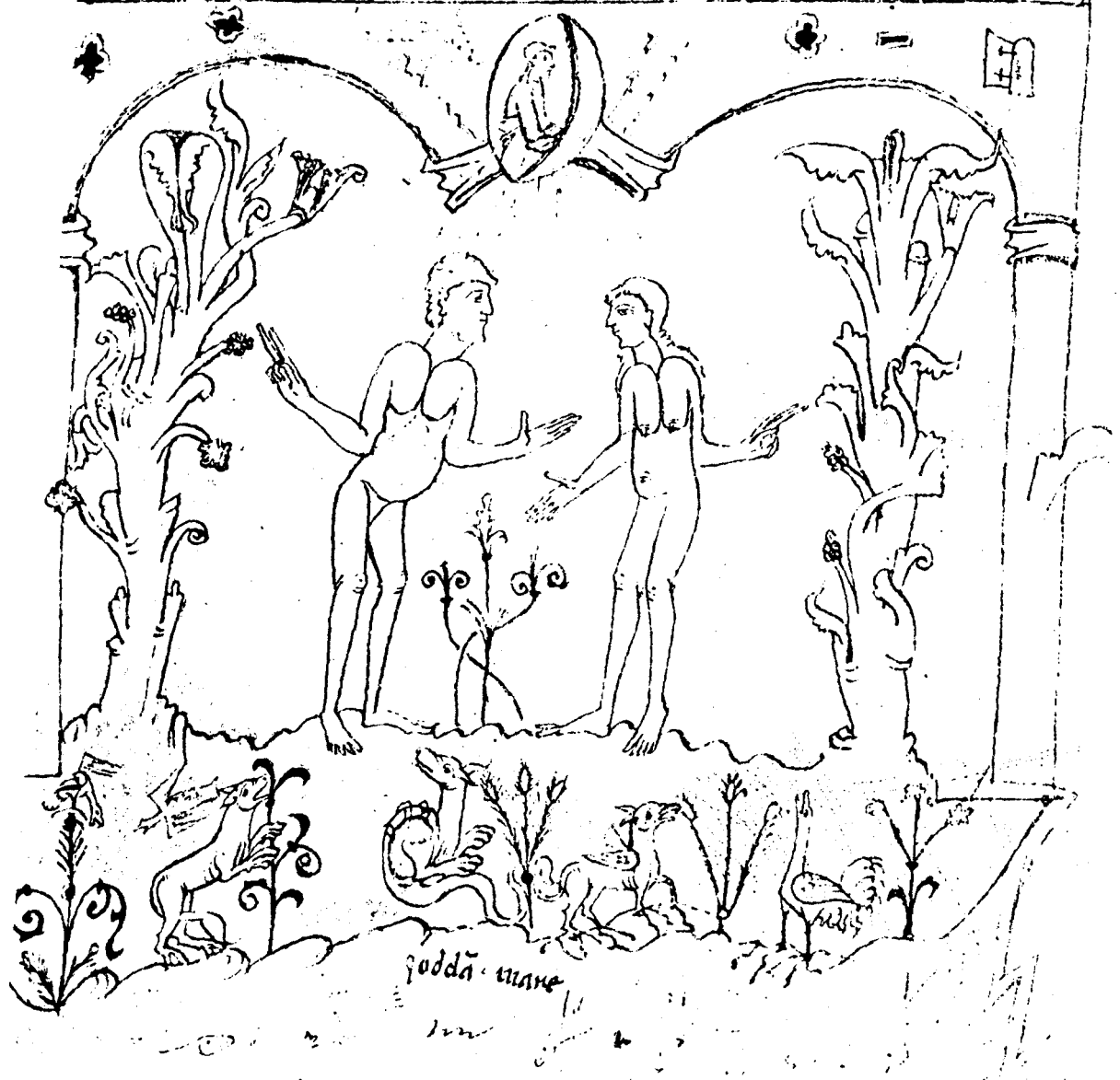


Figure 10. Junius 11, page 13.



Figure 11. Junius 11, page 20.

7onurte scipg. 7hum bebū dāid 7cyrēd. lytle hpile  
 7cēbde he hīr līf 7 motan. 7ecan þonne landa.  
 7pstanotc. on fyne 7cēbde 7þōndum þōpian.  
 þien 7 salta 7mēcna mēste: lādum to lang  
 ne hpile. 7pīte 7e lada gēhine. dypne dāwflī.  
 boda. þe pīd dīhtcā pām.



Figure 12. Junius 11, page 24.

þæt unsiht. oð þine on innan ongan. þuuan þyn  
 mæt gefstilt. hæfde hine þacran hige. meoð ge  
 mæncod. þæt þu hine mod ongan. lætan æfti þam  
 laran. for þou hit æþam ladan onfing. ofsi ðu  
 lraet þou. ðæt ðæt beama þibe sumne þæt þu. ne  
 þæt þu þynre dæd. monnum gnihtacod. þæt micel  
 pundon. þæt hit ece god. æftre polde. þæt ðu þolian.  
 þæt þu þe þe þe monig. for ladd be þam lygnum.  
 þæt þu þam laran com.

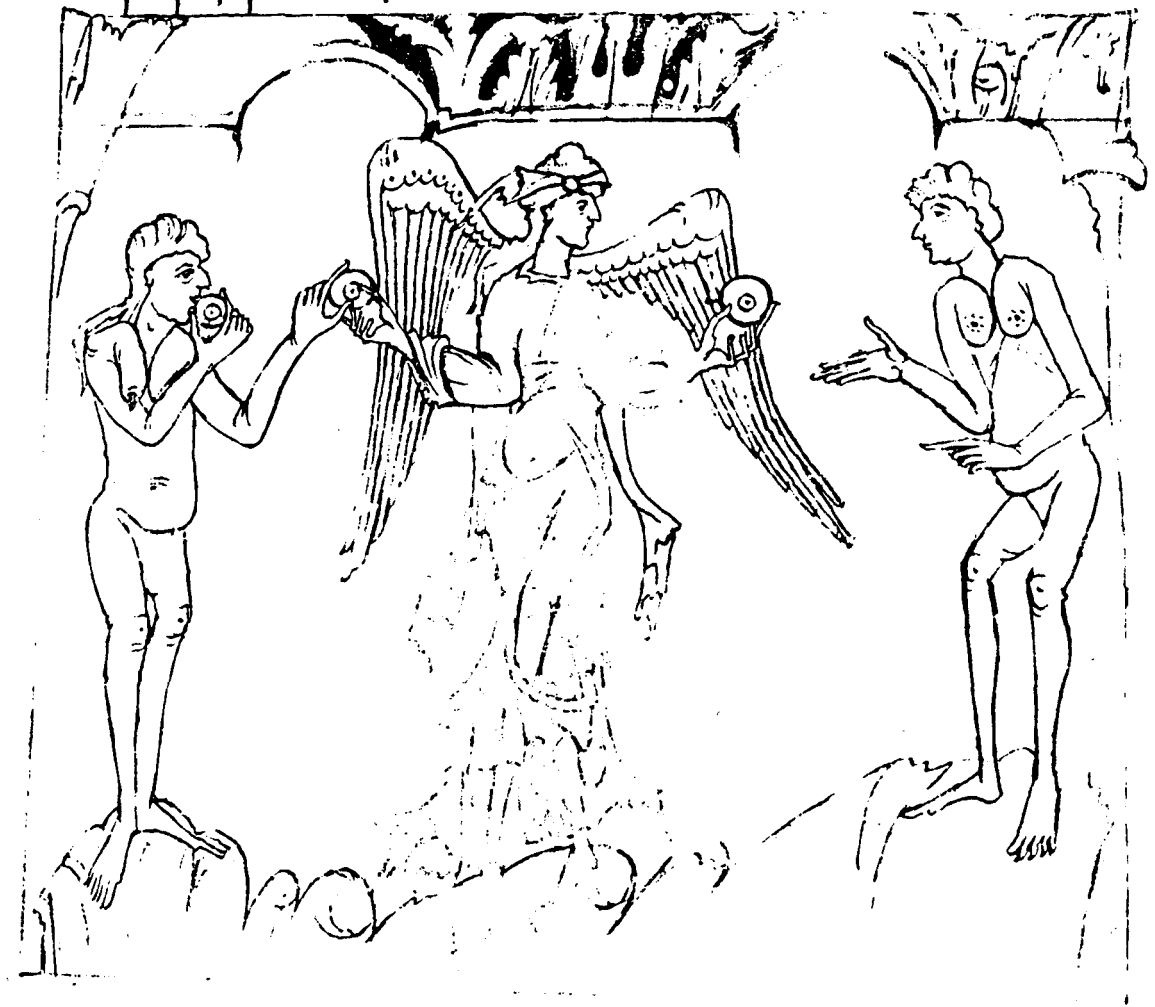


Figure 13. Junius 11, page 28.

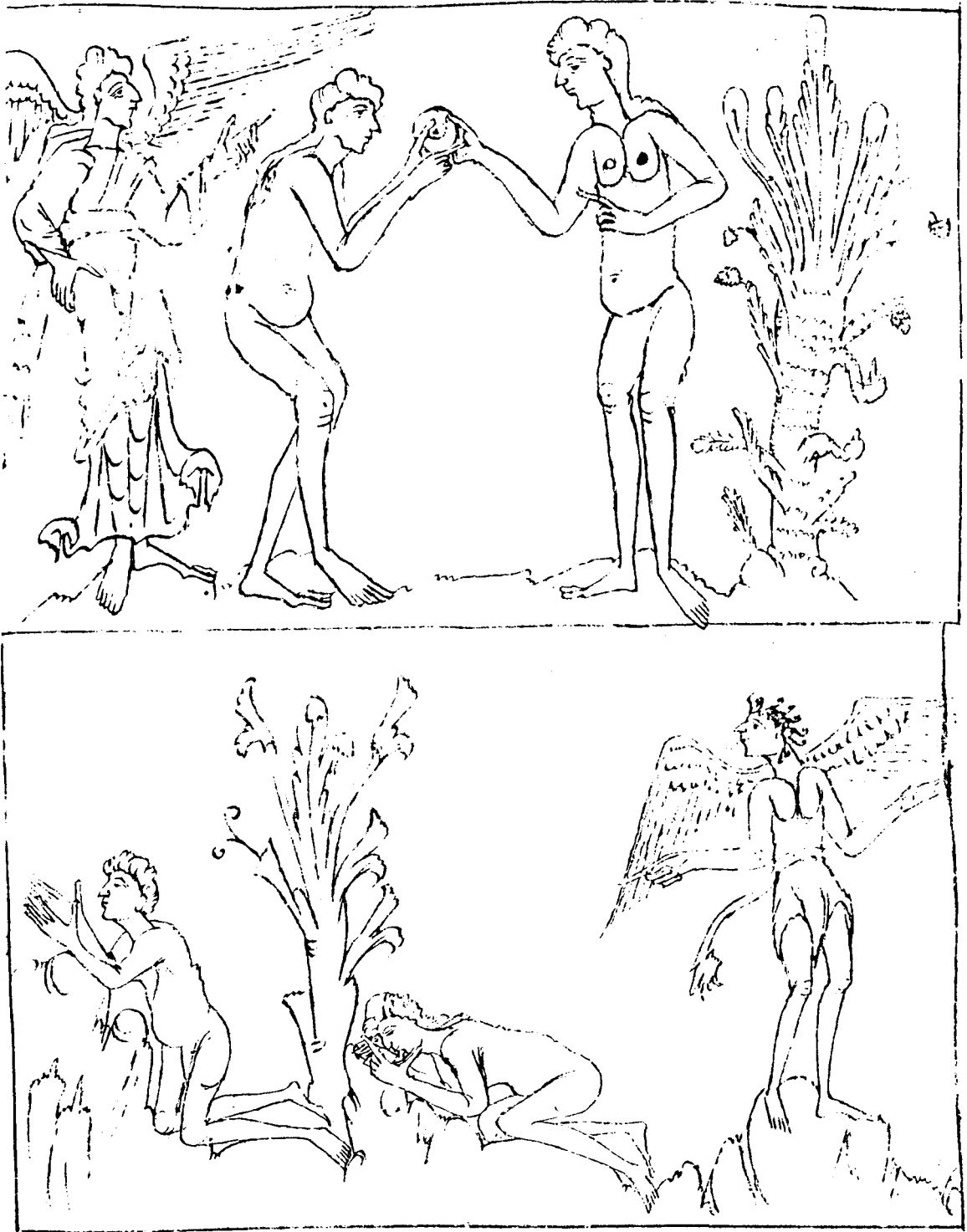


Figure 14. Junius 11, page 31.

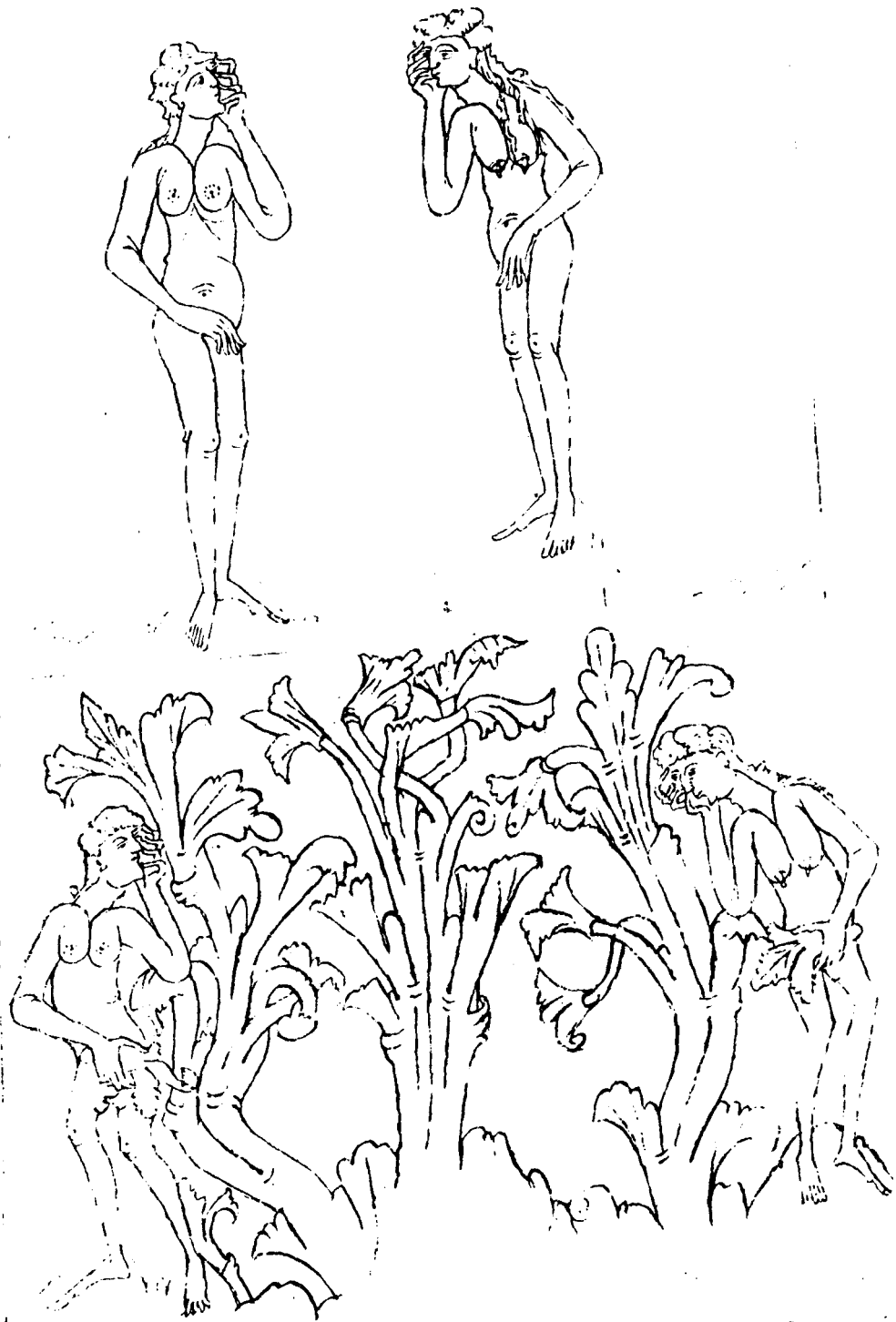


Figure 15. Junius 11, page 34.

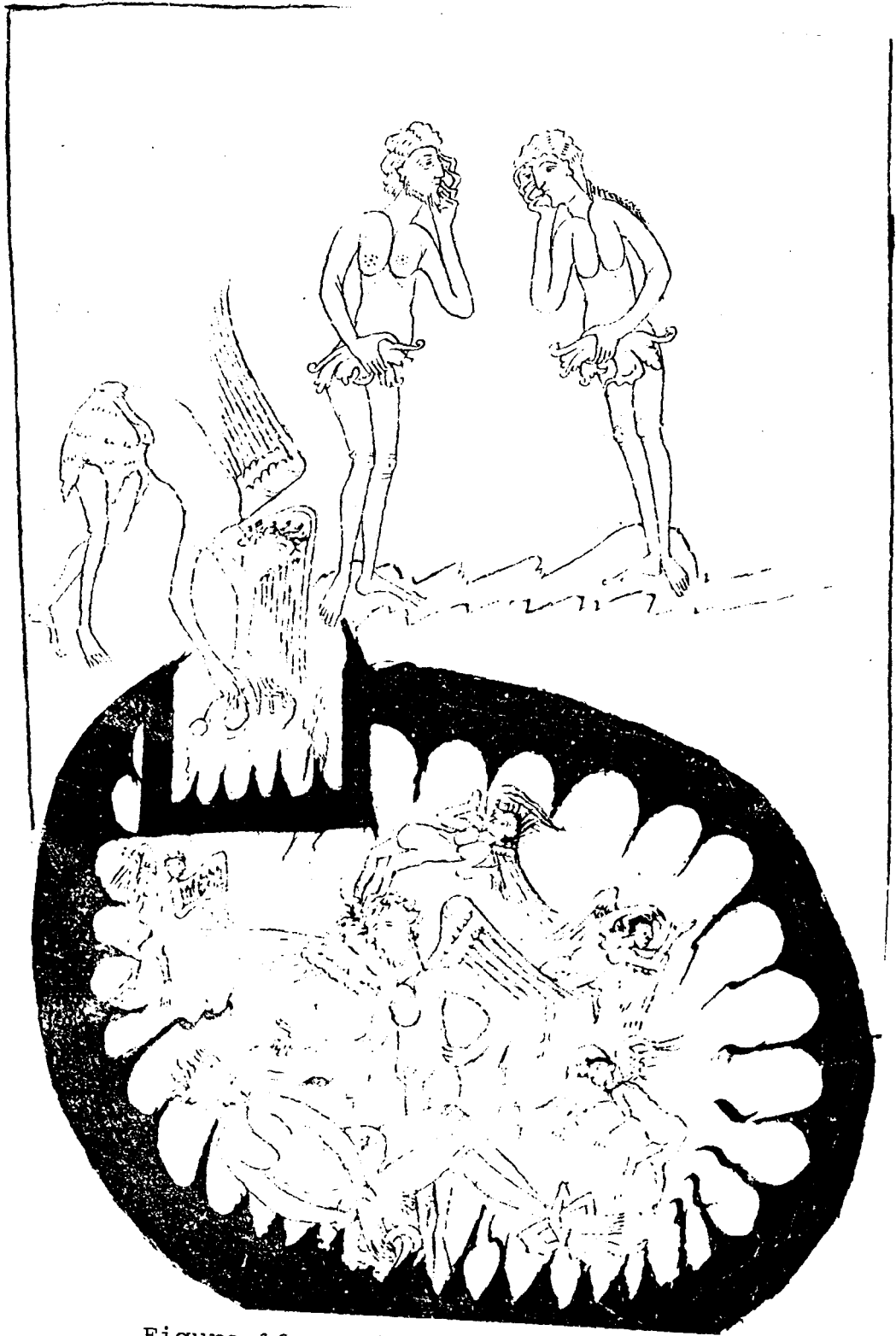


Figure 16. Junius 11, page 36.





Figure 17. Junius 11, page 44.

befnan hæfe. fynnre ƿwioe. nemæz ƿre ƿre  
 full. ænis gefenan. ƿom ƿcyldig mon. ac ƿepfand  
 hafad. miht ƿƿungdo. ƿef mæne lif. dugedum  
 dōne. dƿuhene hitalded.



Figure 18. Junius 11, page 45.

ne land. tawo gedyl. unspedigian. frembna gehpilene.  
 þonne se þrum stol pær. þe he a fca dæde. of adu  
 fth. pundon. Ongunnon he þa begodf hære. bþann  
 a fcauthian. fpa him metod bebtid. adamsf. fthian.  
 a fcaonari pænon. fpublicu tpa fnum bþann cþned.  
 can. fabel. uf cydad bec. hufu dæd fnuman. duge  
 þa fcahyndon. þelun fpi fte. þill gebnodon.

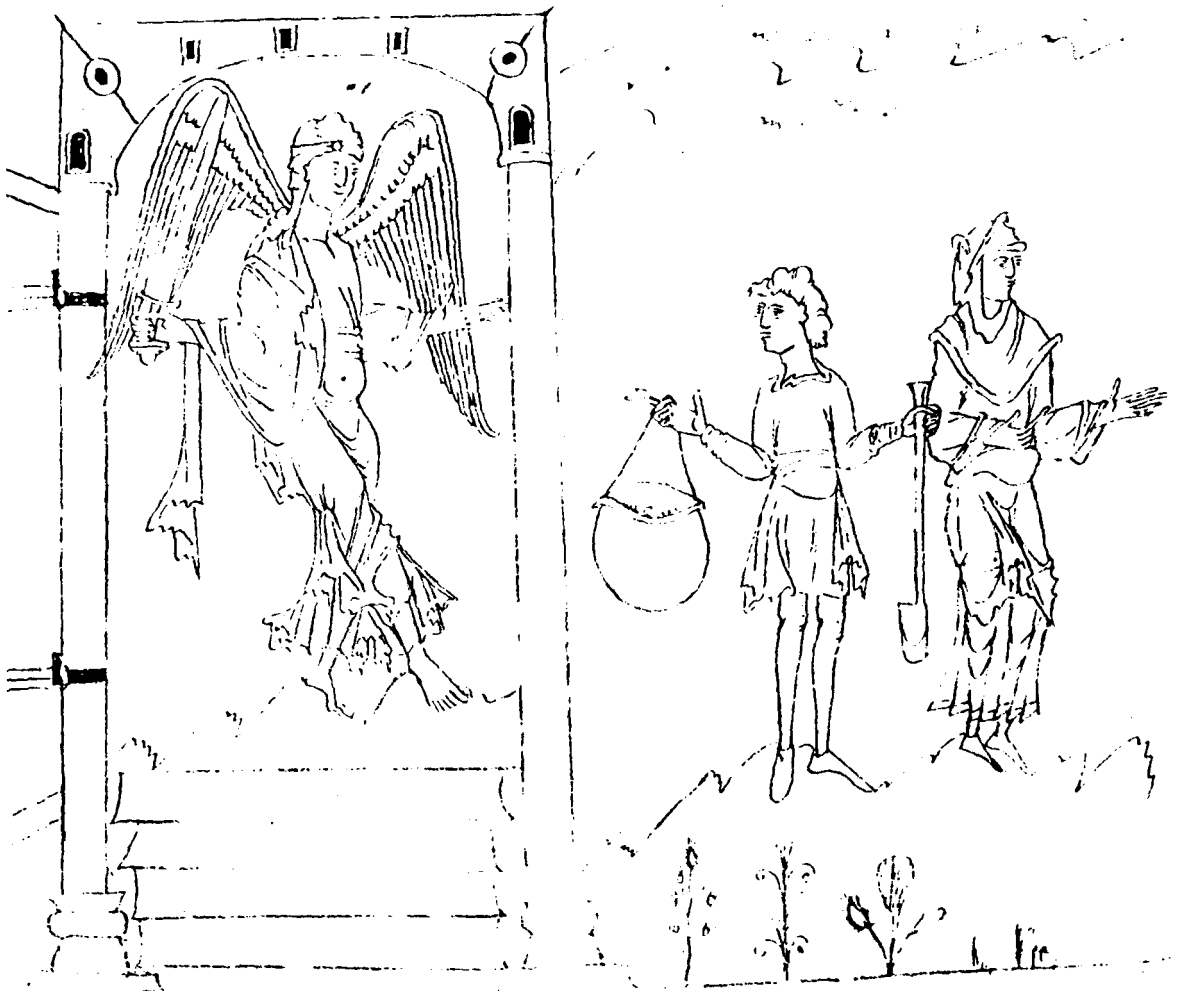


Figure 19. Junius 11, page 46.

þu þu uce nege mæca dazye mæne fuitam nif  
 dæfende god flæp on adam. 7 dæda he flet. dazye  
 of hif midan. 7 gefylde mid flæfere dæfðæt.  
 7 eposhte dæt sub de he genam. of adam eowum  
 7 lædde hito adame. adam dæcraed. dif is nu be  
 minum banum. 7 flæfere of minum flæfere. beo hi  
 ged fæmne. forðande heofon of hifere þere genam  
 of dan for læt fiman fæder. 7 modor. 7 ge broc hi  
 of hif þere. 7 hibrod buta on anum flæfere. Hif æru  
 wita adam. 7 hif þif nacode. 7 him dæf ne fetamod



7 ac fpylce fto neddre þær zeapre ðonne ealle ð  
 nyctenu. ðe god 7 eposhte of se eowdan. 7 seo neddre  
 toðam þife. Hif for bead god eow dæt gene æton o  
 treore biman paradifum. þær þif and þif. Of  
 treora þær me ðer ynd on paradifum þerðad. 7 o  
 treores þær me on middan neow na þange. god b  
 dæt uene æton. nepe dæt treof þere podon. ðe læf

Figure 20. London, British Museum, Cotton Claudius B.IV, folio 6V. Reproduced from C.R. Dodwell and Peter Clemoes, eds. *The Old English Hexateuch: British Museum Cotton Claudius B.IV*, (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1974)



Figure 21. London, British Museum, Harley Roll Y.6, roundel 2. All Guthlac Roll illustrations reproduced from Sir George Warner, ed., *The Guthlac Roll* (Oxford: Roxburghe Club, 1928).



Figure 22. The Guthlac Roll, roundel 3.



Figure 23. The Guthlac Roll, roundel 5.



Figure 24. The Guthlac Roll, roundel 6.





Figure 25. The Guthlac Roll, roundel 7.



Figure 26. The Guthlac Roll, roundel 8.



Figure 27. The Guthlac Roll, roundel 9.



Figure 28. The Guthlac Roll, roundel 12.



Figure 29. The Winchester Bible, folio 331v reproduced by permission of the Dean and Chapter of Winchester Cathedral.



Figure 30. The San Paulo Bible, folio 231v, reproduced from *Fruehmittelalterliche Studien* 9 (1975), tafel xlii.

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