

The Influence of Hagiography upon the Old English *Beowulf*

by



Robin Waugh

A thesis submitted to the Department of English
in conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

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ROBIN WAUGH

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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MASTER OF ARTS

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Preface

Abbreviations used in this thesis are the standard ones which appear in any recent volume of *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, except for specialized abbreviations, which I list in the table. Citations from *Beowulf* are from the third edition of F. Klaeber. I cite all other Anglo-Saxon poetry from Krapp and Dobbie's *The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. To keep confusion to a minimum, textual references name the author or his work first, and then refer to the particular saint's life. An author is never referred to as "Saint" or "St.". Uncredited translations in the appendix are my own.

My first acknowledgement must go to Prof. L. A. Desmond, who made valuable suggestions concerning this thesis, and started my interest in medieval studies. I received a great deal of help from Prof. Joseph M. P. Donatelli, who provided information, made many suggestions about the style of the thesis, and deserves many thanks for his perceptive criticisms. I must thank, with pleasure, Prof. L. G. Monkman, Louise Tully, Paul Loewen, Peter Wilman, Eric Slater, Jean-Paul Molgat and Jeff Long, who gave help when asked. The combination of Prof. Robert Emmett Finnegan's learning, teaching, patience, and rigour contributes to every word of this discourse. To him I owe my greatest debt, and express my greatest thanks.

to P. T.

Abbreviations

- ACM* Herbert Musurillo, ed. *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972.
- Aldhelm* Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren, trans. and intro. Aldhelm. *The Prose Works*. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, Rowman and Littlefield, 1979.
- Anon* The anonymous *Life* in Bertram Colgrave, ed. *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*. A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 59-138.
- Athanasius* *Life of St. Anthony* in Roy J. Deferrari, ed. *Early Christian Biographies. Fathers of the Church* vol. 15. Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1964, 125-216.
- CH* Benjamin Thorpe, ed. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric*. 2 vols. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1840. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1967.
- CM* *Crowns of Martyrdom* in H. J. Thomson, ed. *Prudentius*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. London: William Heinemann Ltd.. vol. II, 1951, 98-344.
- Eddius* Colgrave, ed. *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- EHD* Dorothy Whitelock, ed. *English*

- Historical Documents I.* c500-
1042. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode,
1955.
- Ennodius *Life of St. Epiphanius* in
 Deferrari, ed., 299-351.
- Eusebius Hugh Jackson Lawlor and John Ernest
 Leonard Oulton, trans. Eusebius,
 Bishop of Cæsarea. *The Ecclesiastical History and The Martyrs of Palestine*. 2 vols.
 London: S. P. C. K., 1954.
- Felix Colgrave, ed. *Felix's Life of Saint Guthlac*. Cambridge:
 Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- G of C* Alexandra Hennessy Olsen. *Guthlac of Croyland. A Study of Heroic Hagiography*. Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1981.
- Greg Odo J. Zimmerman, ed. Saint Gregory the Great. *Dialogues. Fathers of the Church* vol. 39. New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1959.
- HE* Leo Sherley-Price, trans. Bede. *A History of the English Church and People*. Revised R. E. Latham. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968.
- LS* Walter W. Skeat, ed. *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*. EETS 76, 82, 94, 114. London: N. Truber and Co., 1881-1900.
- NCE* *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America, 1967.

- NCH* Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder. *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1986.
- OEM* George Herzfeld, ed. *An Old English Martyrology*. EETS 116. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., Ltd., 1900.
- PL* J. P. Migne, ed. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*. Latin Series. Paris, 1844-1864.
- 2 Lives* Colgrave, ed. *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*. A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985. [This abbreviation is used to cite the editorial matter only]
- VC* Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert* in Colgrave, ed. *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*. A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 141-306.
- VH* *Life of St. Hilarion by St. Jerome* in Deferrari, ed., 239-297.
- VP* *Life of St. Paul the First Hermit* by St. Jerome in Deferrari, ed., 217-238.
- Whitby Colgrave, ed. *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*. By an Anonymous Monk of Whitby. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Chapter One: Introduction

Hagiography influences *Beowulf* directly, and this thesis assesses that influence. The study of saints' lives, or hagiography, appears in England in the first half of the eighth century (Colgrave "Earliest" 35). Saints' lives are the first writings of Anglo-Saxon culture. This genre was poised to affect all literature in the future, including *Beowulf*, which appeared while hagiography was flourishing (Chase, ed.). *Beowulf* and saints' lives warrant comparison. The comparison yields fresh analysis of the poem, improves understanding of Beowulf's virtue, and heightens perception of the monsters' wickedness. Saints' lives provide *Beowulf* with two plot events. The origin of these events explains some aspects of Grendel's strange home, some of the characters' actions, and some of the poet's attitudes. In a reading of *Beowulf* which compares it to hagiography, one may define more easily the poet's themes, symbols, and methods. In addition, the comparison helps to explain the techniques of medieval composition.

Beowulf is a natural product of its time period. Hagiography taught its poet, and he teaches through it. He creates a skilful polarity of immediate attitudes, and reveals them in two opposing bodies of knowledge, which are the revelations of *Beowulf*'s narrative voice, and the incomplete learning of the people in the story. The poet demonstrates, through the narrative voice's familiarity with saints' lives, that the characters in the poem are tragically insecure. Heroic man has a limited perception of his universe. When Beowulf hears of his hall's destruction, he fears some offence against "old law", *ealde riht* (2329-2331). The narrator knows that only God *se geweald hafað/ sæla ond mæla*, "has control of times and occasions" (1610-1611). Though perhaps good, the "heroes" of *Beowulf* remain outside God's approval, unless, purely by chance, they come across proper words or appropriate deeds.

The poet's attitude towards the heroic past is part of a philosophy which arose in England because of historical events. In 597 St. Gregory the Great sent a mission to the English. The

mission had to insert Christianity into Anglo-Saxon society and avoid moving too quickly or too harshly, because fast changes might seem threatening, and provoke the existing culture into a violent reaction against the new people and ideas. Gregory's plan for the conversion appears in a letter to Augustine. The pope's instructions tell the bishop not to destroy pagan shrines:

For if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God (*HE* 86-87).

Gregory wishes to combine the Roman Christian tradition and the Anglo-Saxon way of life (Stenton 69). His decision extends into all aspects of culture through his missionaries (Stenton 177-178; Godfrey 167): Roman models and ideas penetrate a well-developed society, which has its own forms and thought.

The characteristic event in the meeting of the two societies is conversion. Change of religion involves a conscious turning away from one set of ideas to another. To make a choice, the convert must clearly understand both sets. The two traditions seem to be opposites. The missionaries work in their characteristic institution, the monastery, to produce converts (*HE* 66, 91), while the Anglo-Saxons meet in their institution, the assembly, to administer war. The newcomers preach about Christ and His saints, while the scops sing of heroes and kings. The monks record the saints' lives on vellum (*HE* 85), while the court poets carry whole histories and genealogies in their heads. The monks' manuscripts declare the law and set the patterns for future writing (Attenborough 2-61; Deanesly 91), while Anglo-Saxons rely on memory and custom for law and literature (*Whitelock Audience* 44). Yet the assimilation between these two cultures is vigorous and wide-ranging.

The promise of heaven was Christianity's most potent attraction, but other facets of the new religion helped to convert: education, zeal, art, and scriptural authority (Stenton 179-181). New converts envied the monks' ability to write. The beautiful manuscripts of a monastery's library encouraged a new monk to make more manuscripts. Meanwhile, the Anglo-Saxon fund of ideas entered Gregory's system of learning (*Dream of the Rood*; Wilson 31), especially in the form of poetry. Bede saw one Anglo-Saxon's conversion as a miraculous reception of the power of literature (HE 250-253). Equally, all writing laboured for the church and betrays signs of Gregory's assimilation plan (Sisam 320-321; HE 289-294).

The monks fit the old literature into the new as much as they could, yet maintained a spiritual theme. Ancient forms address Christian issues, as in *The Dream of the Rood*. Created to change behaviour, written works come out of the monasteries as verbal missionaries, full of moral examples (Whitby 72).

The monks found they could teach through hagiography, which approximated the Germanic fables as stories of accomplishment (Wilson 16). The new literature was not meant to destroy the oral tradition, but to quicken it with narratives which would fit the scop's practise, and the church's teaching. The old lives were important because they helped to venerate one's ancestors. The converts adopted saints as spiritual ancestors, and accepted hagiography as a new form of heroic veneration. The ancient battles remained central to the stories, but changed into wars containing spiritual dimensions and heavenly victories. The fierce enemies of Anglo-Saxon song reappeared as foes with heathenism, and sometimes diabolism, added to their crimes. Christian writers exploited other attractions of folklore. They filled their saints' narratives with fantastic events (Olsen "Genre" 408). Fortunately for them, the monks found the "intrinsic opposition" of the Old English verse line "remarkably suited to representing Christian mysteries in their beauty and paradox" (G. H. Brown 25-26; *Christ I*). Saints' lives abounded, and influenced life and literature:

A brief glance at the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* is sufficient to demonstrate the enormous place this kind of literature must have taken in the spiritual and intellectual life of medieval people. And as it marked what we could call the dawn of our Occidental letters, its importance does not need our demonstration. Our novel, history, legends, tales, etc.—the whole of our narrative production—may be considered to have one of its main sources in the *vitae* and we feel authorized to say that, in the same way as our modern theatre was born on the parvis of our cathedrals, our narrative art takes its starting point in the medieval *scriptoria* (Boyer 27).

Lastly, the monks took joy in their literary task, and perceived magic in its execution (G. H. Brown 16). This spirit of marvel fills Bede's story of Cædmon's miraculous gift of poetry (HE 250-253). Morton W. Bloomfield suggests that the idea of divinely inspired poetry is part of Anglo-Saxon tradition:

It is possible that to the Anglo-Saxon of the eighth century, listening to the story of Beowulf was a way of attaining greater reality. Some of the power of the hero would be transferred to him as he participated vicariously through words in his deeds (“Understanding” 69).

The divine origin of verse allowed the monks to give added spiritual significance to the psalms and to other religious poetry. Writings helped to convert the Anglo-Saxons.

Roman culture and Anglo-Saxon oral tradition meet in *Beowulf*. The poem is a conscious, literary, imaginative, and sophisticated attempt to bring orally-composed poetry into an imported, ecclesiastical heritage. The thoughts and actions of the characters represent pagan heroic ideas. In contrast, the poem's narrator speaks in Christian terms. *Beowulf* puts these

two philosophies side by side (Tolkien 27) and dramatizes the intellectual conflict. In this respect, the poem imitates a conversion. The two sets of ideas appear side by side when the poet mentions God's creative power just after Hrothgar's construction of Heorot:

þær wæs hearpan sweg,
swutol sang scopes. Sæde se þe cuþe
frumsceaft fira feorran reccan,
cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worh(te),
wlitebeorhtne wang, swa wæter bebuged,
gesette sigehreliġ sunnan ond monan
leoman to leohte landbuendum,
ond gefraetwade foldan sceatas
leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop
cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfa. —
Swa ða drihtguman dreamum lifdon,
eadiglice, oððæt an ongan
fyrene fre(m)man feond on helle; (89b-101).

The scop's artistry forms the biblical narrative of the creation which celebrates Hrothgar's building of Heorot. But the sensibility of the characters in the poem contrasts with the sensibility of the poet-narrator, who knows about the coming evil, while Hrothgar's court does not.

Anglo-Saxon poetry was a public commemoration of the scop's subject, his memory, his music, and his art. Roman art arrives, and literature-as-event meets literature-as-form. Recognizable hagiography, like *Andreas* and *Guthlac A*: results. These poems use heroic language and figures. The *Beowulf*-poet, working in the same atmosphere as the authors of these saints' lives, demonstrates the clash between the two traditions, and reconciles it in his poem. He acknowledges that a new morality was revolutionizing all art.

As part of this new Christian morality, *Beowulf* describes a man approaching sainthood. He cannot grasp this prize. The possibilities for Beowulf's soul are held out for us to see, and locked away from the hero. Christian knowledge is privileged information. It exists only in the frame of the story, which is the poem's narrative voice.

Critics have recognized *Beowulf's* incomplete knowledge. They have studied the Christianity in the poem, and some have noticed hagiographical echoes. But describing the Christianity has proved difficult (Irving "Nature" 16; Goldsmith et al., 285). *Beowulf* has been examined alongside the bible (Tolkien 24), the apocrypha (Kaske "Enoch"), and the works of Gregory and Augustine (Kaske "Sapientia"), and these studies have clarified some of the poet's theological concerns, but even *Beowulf's* main ideas remain unclear. Saints' lives may help us to understand some of these ideas.

Arthur G. Brodeur says "the language of religious poetry is, in the main, comparable with that of the epic" (30), and Régis Boyer finds that these two kinds of literature exhibit similar stylistic principles: "simplification and enlargement of some points" (30). Since one genre may influence the other without an awkward assimilation process, broad parallels between *Beowulf* and saints' lives should not come as a surprise. T.M. Gang writes:

Perhaps it would not be excessively rash to suggest that *Beowulf*, so far from being a Christianized epic, is an attempt at a sort of secular Saints' Life: the sort of poem that would meet Alcuin's strictures on the heroic poetry without altogether sacrificing the heroic stories to instruction (1; cf. Lee 117; Bloomfield "Understanding" 66).

Beowulf and hagiography share outlooks. For instance, they agree that worship of the old gods is worship of the devil (Woolf 41):

Swylc wæs ɬeaw hyra,
hælenra hyht; helle gemundon
in modsefan, Metod hie ne cuþon,
dæda Demend, ne wiston hie Drihten God,
ne hie huru heofena Helm herian ne cuþon,
wuldres Waldend. Wa bið ɬæm ðe sceal
þurh sliðne nið sawle bescufan
in fyres fælm, frofre ne wenan,

wihte gewendan! Wel bið þām ȝe mot
æfter deaðdæge Drihten secean
ond to Fæder fælum freoðo wilnian! (178b-188).

In specific terms, *Beowulf* and Felix's *Life of St. Guthlac* have a corresponding phrase: "the saint address[es] his demon tormentors as 'the seed of Cain'" (Whitelock *Audience* 80; cf. Felix 106; *Beowulf* 107, 1261). If his enemies have the same origin as Guthlac's, *Beowulf*'s struggles take on a spiritual quality, and the epic hero becomes an ally of the saint against the devil. Dorothy Whitelock and Kinshiro Oshitari detail other correspondences between Felix's *Life* and *Beowulf* (*Audience* 80-81; Baker 89; cf. Felix 88-94; *Beowulf* 1740-1744, 84-101, 1776, 164, 2213). The *Beowulf*-poet did not necessarily know Felix's work (Whitelock *Audience* 81), because the routing of fiendish forces appears in other lives, such as Bede's *Cuthbert* and Athanasius's *Anthony* (Albertson 54-55; VC 215; Athanasius 145). Yet the writer of *Beowulf* knew details of hagiography.

Critics find parallels between his poem and the Old English *Guthlac* poems. Rosemary Woolf finds the same "epic passion" in *Guthlac A* and *Beowulf* (54). Stanley B. Greenfield cites a particular phrase in *Guthlac A* where a demon "rushes upon Guthlac *gifrum grapum* 'with greedy grasps,' somewhat as Grendel attacks his victims" (NCH 178). Alexandra Hennessey Olsen finds a similarity in the devils' inability to harm Guthlac, and Grendel's inability to approach the *gifstol* (*G of C* 35). Grendel and the demons are exiles (40; *Guthlac* 626a). *Beowulf's* beginning resembles the openings of *Guthlac's* "homiletic digressions" (*G of C* 19). Both works have a "static" plot structure (26; cf. Tolkien 30). There is "lack of steady advance" (Klaeber lvii) in both; no suspense at the end of either: the title of "saint" gives away the outcome of any saint's life, and the writer of *Beowulf* subordinates suspense to fate. The audience knows that the dragon-fight will be Beowulf's last as soon as the dragon appears in the poem (2397-2400). The battle itself overrides its own climax. Saints' lives and *Beowulf* tell their

stories in similar ways, and other connections exist between the two. The variety of parallels indicates hagiography's direct influence.

The *Beowulf*-saint comparison is at the heart of Bernard Huppé's militantly Christian interpretation of the poem: "for the author of *Beowulf* and his audience there can be but one ultimate hero, and he is Christ. Whatever is truly heroic comes from the imitation of Him, and the saint is the true hero" (40). Huppé reconciles the poem's Christianity with its story of pagan ancestors:

From the Christian point of view, the pagan events of the poem reveal the limits of heathen society, the limits of the righteous pagan, and the limits of the heroic ideal. Such Christian revelation is the primary thematic function of the poem. . . . Beowulf's flaw is tragic precisely because there are no means available to him by which the flaw may be redeemed. Thus his tragedy rests in his inability to rise above the ethos of his society, the mores of revenge and war which govern his actions. . . . in the last part. . . . He has become involved in his world and in the ethos of the feud. Though he remains heroic, his heroism is no more effective than is Hrothgar's helplessness (36-37).

Although Jesus and His saints are not mentioned in *Beowulf*, Huppé suggests that Christianity is fully integrated into the poem. The Christian faith is as much a part of *Beowulf* as the *duguth*. Christian passages are "numerous" (Brodeur 190). The poet, specifically, is Christian, not the poem, and he knows that the souls of the pagan past *ne cuþon, / dæda Demend*, "did not know the Judge of deeds" (180-181). The Christian context of the lost Scandinavian society increases the aching regret at Beowulf's death. The Christianity of the poem, far from being an interpolation, is a masterstroke which highlights the tragedy of the hero.

This tragedy is Beowulf's death. Huppé says that the death of this "great and virtuous heathen hero" (40) "is the point of *Beowulf*" (39). The king's ultimate failure "promote[s] by antithesis the concept of the Christian hero" (40). Pagan thought opposes Christian thought. This conflict forms the philosophy of *Beowulf*. The perfect epic hero represents heroic ideas, and the saint represents Christian ones.

The next chapter examines hagiography. The third one runs parallel to the second, and fixes the links between *Beowulf* and saints' lives. Chapter four compares plot events of the poem with events from hagiography. The last chapter shows how the interpretation of *Beowulf* changes when one compares the poem with saints' lives. My interpretation concerns the character of *Beowulf's* hero and the theme of relics.

Chapter Two: Hagiography

It is necessary to describe what hagiography says before exploring what hagiography and *Beowulf* say together. The two have the same origins, and similar purposes. The writers of *Beowulf* and hagiography use the same selection process when they begin to plan and compose. The two kinds of works share many ideas, and often express them in the same way. Saints' lives and *Beowulf* have the same appeal. All of these correspondences result from close contact. When the monks recorded the first saints' lives, heroic oral poetry was the most prevalent genre in Anglo-Saxon England. Hagiography showed vitality from its start, and persisted for over 400 years (Woolf 64). The *written* Anglo-Saxon heroic poem and hagiography grew up together in England.

Hagiography is a “narrative” (Delehaye *Legends* 64), which enshrines the life of its spiritually gifted hero, the saint. This kind of narrative has the purpose “of moral instruction” (68). The saint’s life becomes popular because the power of its hero appeals, and the wonder of its miracles captivates (Jones 52; Philippart 150).

The third- and fourth-century authors of saints’ lives write in three forms. The *acta* are the trial records of martyrs, originally recorded by an official or witness. The *passions* are the sufferings of martyrs; the *vitae* are lives of ascetics. *Acta* soon become indistinguishable from *passions*. *Vitae* are more like homilies. They take lives of hermits or bishops as their texts, and then celebrate and explain those lives. The *vitae* are simply longer and more formal compositions than the *passions*. By the time *Beowulf* is completed, the *passion* usually occurs within a systemized martyrology. Each day, a reader tells a martyr’s story from the series, which defines that day in liturgical terms, and fixes the chronology of the Christian year (Wilson 11).

A saint's life begins in a desire to venerate a known, good person. This desire grows into a community one (Delehaye *Legends* 19). The sense of moral outrage at actual martyrdoms causes community hero-worship and legends. In another theory of origin, Peter Brown proposes that saints' lives arise from political disintegration in the Dark Ages. With imperial social bonds in a state of collapse, people need to find a new centre of authority (116). The saint, venerated in a biography based on tradition, supplies the necessary centre of worship and association (Wilson 16-17). John Corbett puts this theory into an English context:

Martin. . . Oswald and Cuthbert. . . had the capacity, to an altogether unique degree, to weld the disparate segments of a tragically disordered society into a new consensus, based on *reverentia* for the saintly patron (74).

The origin of saints' lives in "les honneurs funèbre" (Delehaye *Origines* 24) is more securely documented (24-25). These honours originated in pagan ritual (28). Certain pagans believed that an ancestor's soul still existed in the tomb and deserved to be visited (Wilson 11). The inscriptions on these tombs led to the writing of some saints' lives (Jones 59).

Writers like Cicero served as models for the early hagiographers. Classical influences abound in the first lives, and some narratives betray the style, expression, and even "the form of the Latin epic" (Curtius 260). These early writings soon gain a quasi-scriptural authority, as clerics read them aloud in churches (Walsh 97).

The earliest hagiographers, by using both oral and written sources, give their work a dual nature: Roy Deferrari calls Sulpicius Severus's *Life of St. Martin* "a blending of the legendary and the historic" (xi). But one may not put the sources into only two classes (Delehaye *Legends* 11). The first hagiographers would discover all kinds of evidence: wills, letters, sermons, cenotaphs, shrines, relics. Each piece of information would require an individual assessment,

and the writer could use any fact or artifact. He may attach a different kind of credibility to each find. When completed, the written works take on their own authority. The later hagiographers use these first lives as sources. Traditional “motifs” (Campbell 55) begin to reoccur, as the primary biographies enter standardized forms such as martyrologies, calendars, and series of sermons.

A saint’s life contains four components. First, it tells the story of a man or woman’s life, gives a list of what he or she did, and begins with an assumption that an audience will accept these events as true, and that they happened to the celebrated individual. Biography unifies the life, which follows the events of (normally) one saint’s story. A saint’s life is a “specialized form of biography” (Gerould 1), and a “narrative” (2), with one unusual feature: the narrative tries to demonstrate the saint’s holiness. Severus writes in the prologue to his *Life of St. Martin*: “I thought it would be worth while if I wrote down the life of a very holy man, to serve in turn as an example to others” (103). But, again, it is not quite so simple. Most biographies end with death and memorial. Death in a saint’s biography is the climax; it is what his or her life is for: an inevitable, natural step, rather than a cutting off (Woolf 57). In complete contrast to *Beowulf* and any modern life, the death of a saint is simply one more holy deed of his life. A saint does not die, he sends his spirit along to God: “the fire did not touch them at all, but they yielded up their spirits to God like three lambs” (*OEM* “St. Speusippus” 25). This is not suicide, of course. It is a cooperation with God’s will that is so close that its knowledge of death is full, and the reason and will of the created may therefore be included in the moment of the creator’s retrieval of the soul. Death is not an end to be dreaded; instead, it is the fulcrum of a saint’s existence.

The second component is history. Just like biography, history is conceived by the hagiographer in his own way. History exists as background and setting for the story of the individual: “But, when an imperial edict was issued, requiring sons of veterans to be enrolled

for military service, he was handed over by his father, who was hostile toward his spiritual actions" (Severus 105). The writer cannot stretch facts too much, yet he plots them to contrast with the saint and serve as background for his moral example. The hero of a saint's life is at odds with family, government, and all community notions represented by the past, which, in hagiography, is not history in a modern sense (Jones 75). In his historical prologue, the writer establishes the negative character of the times. It is specific enough to say that the time is "long ago" and it may be necessary to heighten the details of the fierceness of the persecution, if they do not illustrate the opposition distinctly enough. Olsen believes that some hagiographers preferred the Orosian understanding of the past, which saw history as cyclic ("Genre" 419). This perception would accentuate the life and death of the saint against the background of "history. . . the continual repetition of the same cycle of events" (419). The ceaseless round contrasts with a saint's linear progression to his or her own doomsday.

The third component is eulogy. Eulogy (Olsen "Genre" 413) voices extremely high praise for a man or woman. Explaining why the hero is a saint and not a mere man, memorial passages become so conventionalized that some are lifted word-for-word out of one life and placed into another (Kurtz 106). The eulogistic voice has a purpose. Saints are cult figures, and their lives express public opinion. A saint's life is a community assessment of an individual (Delehaye *Legends* 19). At inspired moments, an emotional response to genius transfigures the bald facts in the story. The frankness of the eulogistic voice is as true as the saint's biography.

Elegy is the fourth voice of hagiography. This component is a coming to terms with death. In a saint's life, Christ has conquered death, and the believer may rely upon redemption and grace. There is consolation, and even security. Often the vision of a witness tells the world where the soul of the martyr has gone, firm in its immortality (ACM "St. Fructuosus" 183). The miracles at the saint's death and burial confirm to believers that the saint has gone to heaven (183-185). Healings and other marvels are also a sort of life after death.

The audience of *Beowulf* would be familiar with the inventory of pictures which forms the standard plot of hagiography. The date of *Beowulf's* composition remains uncertain. I have examined all saints' lives that appear to have been available to the English in the period 725-950. Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints* and *Catholic Homilies* are certainly too late (c. 1000), but use of them is justified, as he worked from material already existing in story form. I rely heavily upon the Old English martyrologist, who wrote around the year 900 (Cross 227-249).

Saints' lives show a patterning of events which becomes traditional, almost inevitable. Hippolyte Delehaye describes what happens in a passion:

Généralités sur la persécution, introduction du héros, arrestation interrogatoire, refus de sacrifier, tortures, renvoi en prison, vision céleste, nouvel interrogatoire, nouvelles tortures, nouveau séjour en prison et ainsi de suite jusqu'à l'exécution, tel est le programme l'hagiographe essaiera en vain de modifier en répétant certaines scènes, en introduisant quelques incidents, en répartissant diversement les interventions miraculeuses (*Passions* 221).

The writer introduces the character of the saint, sketches the historical background, and brings him into direct conflict with the authorities. The martyr identifies himself to the officials in response to a challenge: "At last when he came forward the proconsul asked him if he were Polycarp; and . . . he admitted it" (Eusebius 119; cf. LS "St. Alban" 417, ll. 53-58). The persecutor contradicts the martyr's faith: *Ær Datianus se casere nydde Valerium þone biscop ond þone ylcan diacon Vincentium to hæðenscipe* (OEM "St. Vincentius" 28). The challenges bring on a profession of faith: "Polycarp retorted: 'If thou vainly thinkest that I will swear by the genius of Cæsar, as thou sayest, pretending to be ignorant who I am, hear my plain speech: I am a Christian'" (Eusebius 119). Then, almost always, the persecutors bind the victim: "So

he is stripped of his garments, and his hands are tied behind his back" (*CM* "St. Cassian" 225; cf. *ACM* "St. Montanus" 219; Eddius 76). The authorities throw the martyr into prison, where privation and absence of light assail him:

Then with courage heightened he is taken up from the grid and thrust into a doleful dungeon so that the free enjoyment of light may not quicken his noble spirit. Deep down within the prison is a place of blacker darkness; the narrow stonework of a subterranean vault keeps it close-throttled, and there hidden away lies everlasting night, never seeing the star of day; men say this gruesome prison has a Hades of its own (*CM* "St. Vincent" 183-185; cf. *LS* "St. Denis" 185 ll. 239-243; *CH* St. Lawrence 42).

The captive never fails to respond bravely, and sometimes there are other prisoners to comfort. Nearly always, a miracle relieves the terrible deprivation: "His guardians. . . heard the holy man of God perpetually singing psalms, and saw the place in the darkness of the night all lit up within as if it were day" (Eddius 73-75; cf. Athanasius 145; *ACM* "Martyrs of Lyon" 71). This motif from an Anglo-Latin vita shows the persistence of the standard events from passions in the later, more complicated, and more "realistic" lives. Incarcerations, challenges, and professions of faith may happen at any point in the narrative, or in any order (Delehaye *Passions* 221).

The following are the most common kinds of torture. One is tearing of the flesh: "In a moment two executioners are tearing her slim breast, the claw striking her two girlish sides and cutting to the bone" (*CM* "St. Eulalia" 151). A second is flogging: "he ordered them to be flogged with bloody strokes of the lash" (Aldhelm "St. Babilas" 94). A third is the rack: "stretching the feet in the stocks, and keeping them stetched five holes apart" (Eusebius 143). And a fourth torment is submitting martyrs to the attentions of wild animals (144).

Torturers most often use fire, or some other kind of heat, against the martyrs. There are torches: "a fire from flambeaux set all round and raging against her sides and front" (*CM* "St. Eulalia" 153); hot griddles or implements: "they applied red-hot brazen plates to the most tender parts of his body" (Eusebius 142); ovens reminiscent of the furnace in *Daniel*: *ond þa het he hie eft sendan on byrnendne ofn, ond se acolode sóna*; (*OEM* "St. Eugenia" 6); hot baths of all sorts *þa het sum hæðen gerefa hi begen belucan on fyrenum bæðe* (*OEM* "St. Ananias" 24); and there are pyres:

Now when he had offered up the Amen and completed the prayer, the men who were in charge of the fire lit it; and when a great flame blazed forth, those of us to whom it was given to see it—who also were preserved to tell to the others what happened—saw a marvellous thing. For the fire formed into the likeness of a vaulted room, as it were a boat's sail filled with the wind, and made a wall about the body of the martyr; and it was in the midst, not as burning flesh, but . . . as gold or silver refined in a furnace (Eusebius 121).

A common stock of tortures pervades the earliest accounts of the martyrs. In the story of Blandina, the writer lists the torments with such detachment that they must have been a regular feature of hagiography: "And after the scourging, after the wild beasts, after the frying-pan, she was at last thrown into a basket and presented to a bull" (Eusebius 147).

In contrast to his physical bondage, the dying martyr usually frees his own soul. This event begins early in the history of the passion: "Then peacefully and painlessly as though belching he breathed his last and gave his soul in trust to the Father" (*ACM* "St. Pionius" 165). Witnesses usually consider the body precious, and often retrieve it from pagan authorities despite efforts to hide and destroy it. "For after the fire had been extinguished, those of us who

were present saw his body like that of an athlete in full array at the height of his powers (*ACM* “St. Pionius” 165). The body retains its beauty after its burial: “when Oswald was killed in battle, his hand and arm were severed from his body, and they remain uncorrupted to this day” (*HE* 150; Kurtz 131). The saint overcomes laws of nature, but his triumph arrives just short of bodily resurrection.

God punishes the tormentors, or their commander, and frequently damns the presiding official. The writer often contrasts the pagan’s soul with the saint’s:

þa forborn læs cyninges heall mid eallum his spedium, ond his sunu awedde, ond he sylf ahreofode ond tobærst mid wundum from þam heafde oð þa fet, ond he asette his swoord upweard ond þa hine sylfne ofstang (*OEM* “St. Matthew the Apostle” 174).

ond him sæde þæt him wære hell ontyned ond hire wite gegeawad, ond hine het efstan to þæm, ond þa sona æfter þæm swealt se casere (*OEM* “St. Phocas” 120).

In the last series of events, the hagiographer includes a vision which shows the heavenward journey of the martyr’s soul:

ond þa sægde se mon eallum folce, se þe hi beheafdade, þæt he gesuge hyra sawle þa hi ut eodon of þaem lichoman, swelce heo wæren mid gimmelum gefretwade ond mid goldebeorhtum hreglum gegerede, ond englas mid heora hondum heo gefeonde bæren to heofonum (*OEM* “St. Marcellinus” 92).

Then come the miracles at the martyr’s tomb:

"My boy, shall I tell you how you may be cured of this complaint? Get up, and go to Oswald's tomb in the church. Remain there quietly and mind you don't stir from it until the time that your fever is due to leave you. Then I will come and fetch you." The boy did as his brother advised, and while he sat by the saint's tomb the fever dared not touch him (*HE* 160-161).

Finally, the believers "bow down before [the saint's] relics rejoicing in them" (*CM* "St. Vincent" 203).

The vita is simply more "literary" than the passion (Earl "Typology" 24). Typically, the subject of the longer saint's life is a hermit. The trial, drama, and violence of an immediate, eye-witness account cannot liven up the vita-writer's story. Actual martyrdoms were (for the most part) over, by the time vitae came to be written, yet the pedagogical effectiveness of the martyr's story was plain. Starting from the passion, writers developed a new genre. They used classical models.

The vita simply expands the events of the passion (Farrar 83-84). The martyr's physical suffering develops into the voluntary abstinence adopted by the ascete. The martyr's prison becomes the cave occupied by the hermit (Athanasius 142-143), or Cuthbert's cell far from the outside world (Anon 104-105). The desert, the usual retreat of the holy man, is also a place of privation like a dungeon (Athanasius 143). The physical torture of the martyr turns into mental torment by demons. The writer treats these devils like the executioners of the passions: "[The Enemy] came one night with a throng of demons and cut him so with lashes that he lay on the ground speechless from the intense pain" (Athanasius 143; cf. Felix 102). Torture by fire is refashioned into a more literary trial: phantasmal flames appear for the saint to banish, or, natural fire miraculously obeys his command (VC 200-203; cf. Greg 28). Sometimes the writer, who wishes to make a doctrinal point, includes a symbolic blaze which the saint fights:

"Behold! the fire which you have kindled by your lusts has been prepared to consume you (Felix 107). The miracles are more complicated versions of the ones in the passion. The miracles of healing originate in the bible, but also in the magical recoveries after torture (Severus 112). When the beasts disdained to maul and eat their victim, the writer of a martyrdom treated the event as a miracle (Eusebius 145). In the vita, these wild beasts clatter in as a roaring crowd of phantoms. The saint dismisses them (Athanasius 144; Felix 114), and he may have an affinity for animals, or for all of nature (Anon 80-81; Kurtz 116). The light which visits a martyr in prison expands into a miraculous ending of all sorts of deprivation. Even in the passion, the light may appear along with an angel, the Saviour, the arrival of food and water, or even a vision of the garden of Eden (*CM "St. Vincent"* 186-188 ll. 305-310; *ACM "St. Perpetua"* 121). The writer builds explicit attachments to the bible, the eucharist, and other doctrine into the comforting miracles of the vita, where, for instance, Cuthbert receives three loaves of bread (Anon 78-79), and St. Bartholemew, who descends fortuitously within a great light, rescues St. Guthlac from the mouth of hell (Felix 106). Olsen and Jane Roberts characterize the greening of Guthlac's *beorg* (*Guthlac* 742) as the culmination of the poem's allegorical salvation history, and this climax announces a return to the garden of paradise (Olsen *G of C* 51; Roberts 57; Lee 108). As in the passion, miracles emanate from the saint's tomb (Anon 132-135), and believers find his body uncorrupted (Felix 160; cf. Corbett 69). The writers often give the hero of the vita an ability to see the future (Anon 124-125), which enlarges the faculty of the earliest martyr, Polycarp, who accurately predicts the manner of his own death (Eusebius 118). The vita develops from the passion, yet both kinds of saint's life provide their own specific parallels to other kinds of work.

The plot events of hagiography present one opportunity for comparison with other literature. But any major genre is also important for its ideas, and epics and saints' lives share a body of philosophy and attitudes. Certain themes reoccur throughout hagiography. Its purpose

is edification. Ennodius says, like many others, that he writes to “keep alive the memory of [the saint’s] virtues as an example for others” (304). Fundamentally, hagiography teaches the Christian how to act (Philippart 150). But the bible lists all of the saintly virtues, in much the same story-form as saints’ lives. Audiences may have found the figure of the saint attractive in his striving for the goal of salvation in an identifiable way. The ordinary man may have felt closer to victims of the passions, because the martyrs must live up to a plain, simple standard, and because they suffer.

Clerics brought saints’ lives gradually into the church’s service (de Gaiffier 134-166). Hagiography fulfills the same tasks as liturgy, and the saints have many links with catholic rites. This connection has allowed many interpretations. Musurillo finds that the passion is “an apocalypse in its own right” (xxv). Prudentius mentions that “the soul [is] cleansed in the scarlet baptism” (“St. Emeterius” 101; cf. Costelloe 107) of the martyr’s passion. Costelloe says that passions proclaim “martyrdom as a proof of the divine order of Christianity” (107).

Many critics take a typological approach in explaining hagiography’s bond with ritual. As Farrar says “The saint always functions with Christ as archetype” (86). Greenfield sees Juliana as “a figure of *ecclesia*, suffering and triumphing over her worldly tormentors” and this formula could be applied to many passions, especially those with female sufferers (NCH 169). The saints are ideals. They are concepts, not people, and although they appeal strongly because of their single-mindedness, saints are not characters. They are abstract, and veiled from criticism by being not quite human and not quite fact. As objects of popular cults, they stem from “ideals, hopes and fears” (Mullins 723), and retain the qualities inherent in community devotion. They are “personifications of abstract qualities”, for instance the “virgin-martyr” is a figure of “chastity” (Farrar 86). Yet Daniel Calder rightly warns:

—the basic typological equivalences in *Andreas* (and in most of the other Anglo-Saxon Saints' Lives) may also exist in the source. Indeed, they exist, strictly speaking, in all eternity. While the current research points to what is there, it does not truly *interpret* the poem. Identification of a typological system, however necessary, however applicable, should not be equated with analysis; discovery is not the same as understanding ("Figurative" 118-119).

Allegorical interpretations have a problem. Once the connections have been launched, the approach goes dead. Aldhelm's writings suggest readers who, not content to ponder simple equalities, demanded more substance and opportunity for hard thinking.

The saint functions as an intercessor (Wilson 25-26). He acts, like the church, as a mediator between man and God. Hagiographers encourage prayer to the saints, and stress the intercessor role of their heroes: "The saint is as much an instrument of our salvation in this way, as he is a model in a simple moral sense" (Earl "Typology" 36; cf. Lapidge 20).

The saint's intercessory power is difficult to imagine. Theology becomes especially complex when it attempts to be precise about man's communication with God. James Earl's article "Typology and Iconographic Style in Early Medieval Hagiography" shows that hagiography can involve very complex theology. The essay considers the saint's ability to intercess vitally important, and Earl outlines the relationship between the hagiographer and his subject. First, Earl fashions a connection between the unrealistic, "static" (21), conventional, two-dimensional figure of the saint in hagiography, and the icon. An icon is the depiction of a spiritual figure in a work of art. Earl adds that hagiography and icons have similar ritual purposes. He then asserts that the icon developed out of the relic and reliquary (20-21; Wilson 5, 14-15). The icon and the relic both contain the spirit and the actions of the saint, as his life contains his words. They are all memory pictures. A literary work is a "literary relic" (26).

The very creation of these saints' lives and icons is a miraculous project, made at the request of the Almighty (37). God is their creator because He created man in His image, so a relic is a miracle of God, and the relic progresses into the depiction of the saint upon the reliquary, into the icon, and finally into the saint's life. Since these are all made with God's hands, man, relic, image, and literary creation, they express God's liturgical truth (28-33), and work like "the stained-glass windows, the whole [cathedral] rightly be[ing] called 'the Bible of the poor'" (Boyer 34). The saint's life connects the artist, the saint, the writer, and the Lord, while it wrestles with the difficulties of man's relationships with the world, the Creator, and the creative faculty.

The miracles of these stories are a characteristic and prominent feature. Jones correctly dispenses with ideas that the Anglo-Saxons were a credulous people and tended to take the miracles of saints' lives as actual truth (62). Woolf says that a "taste" for the fantastic in hagiography, "must not be thought" to "necessarily indicate naiveté" (43). Miracles show God's order. He expects order in the world, and occasionally, though infrequently in the day of the writer, cares enough to impose it. Miracles in any Christian work have a purpose. Olsen specifies that the miracles in Bede's *HE* "demonstrate that England is a nation whose history, like Israel's, shows God's plan for the salvation of its people" ("Genre" 420). The Latin word used for miracle is *virtus* which originally meant "courage" or "power" (Corbett 68 n10). A saint's miracle stems from his essentially abstract nature. Lapidge says the saint expresses his purpose as intercessor and "vessel of God's grace" by "his ability to demonstrate this power through *virtutes* or miracles" (20). Magical acts appease somewhat a "craving for the marvelous" (Colgrave "Earliest" 40), but they demonstrate complex thought rather than simple. At the least, they are moral signposts, as Altman suggests (2). They are the link, much like the saint himself, between the divine order and man (Boyer 35), and they help, especially in the passion, to clarify justice and order (35). Miracles are closely attached to the mediator ability

of the saint. They show approval for the saint's right actions, which pave the way for the listener's own soul. It is not surprising that they become the most popular part of the saint's life, and multiply as the life grows older (Earl "Typology" 19).

Miracles have a certain logic. In the bible and in saints' lives, excluding visions and prophecies, most marvels begin in the thoroughly mundane, satisfy blandly human needs, and involve characteristically human activities. They concern elementary comfort: food, the body, and man's relationship with nature (Anon 78-79). A good writer sets the pre-miracle situation so that anyone may identify with it; then, when anyone would want a miracle, one appears. It tells of a moment of caring by God, and when sensitively rendered, the miracle can be very moving. It testifies that God can plunge a still creating hand into the ordinary world. An active, caring God would appeal greatly to the imagination of prospective converts, so hagiographers used the miracle as a tool to help the church expand.

The miracle is a kind of presentation of knowledge. Saints' lives have a specialized epistemology. In opposing the facts of biography to miracles, the saint's life asks questions about what we know and how we know it. The word "martyr" originally had the meaning "witness" (Earl "Typology" 22), and each story of a martyr is a kind of witness to super-worldly knowledge. Knowledge comes from the goodness of the saint and the goodness of the writer, not just from the facts as listed (Jones 75). The miracle and the saint's life provoke the listener to question the evidence that only a tangible world exists, and encourage him to consider how morality in this world may have significance in another.

A common miracle describes a vision of a soul being taken to heaven. With this journey as its climax, the passion exists as a contrast between suffering on earth and reward in the life after. Therefore, the question of how the body relates to the soul would naturally arise out of the saint's life (LS "On Auguries" 364 ll. 6-15). James L. Rosier argues that *Guthlac B* is

primarily concerned with the issue of a soul in contrast with its vessel, the body ("Death" 85-88). Hagiography details a contrast between the world and the spirit, which meet in the person of man. The body bears witness to the soul. In the desert lives, the spirit often chastises the body as a prison. But the body testifies to the purity of the *anima* within by its thinness and inadequate covering of rags (Wilson 10). Calder says *Guthlac B* "contains another important theme—the loss of beauty as a consequence of sin" ("Theme" 228). In the passion, the body's suffering leads to later glory, and the paradise to come is foreshadowed in any miraculous healing (Eusebius 142). The vision of a saint going to heaven proves the existence of the invisible soul, and acknowledges the saint's legacy, which is the chosen few who can see the miracle.

Relics, as parts of the saint's body, inevitably fit into hagiography. A relic inside a reliquary symbolizes a soul inside a body. Relics are parts of a holy body, which is a piece of God's work. They demonstrate the sanctity of the soul by their miracles. There is a small lesson in metaphysics in every passion and vita. Each life is the story of a soul told through various witnesses: angels, people who see the soul ascending, and the saint's now discarded body. The body itself testifies (Eusebius 142). The faith of the hero allows him to be completely in tune with his body, and it continues his work after his death, which affirms the existence of the soul, and of heaven.

Most church activity is participatory. The saints help to cause a church community. Farrar says, "one shares as much by reading of the saints as by hearing a sermon, giving alms, or going on pilgrimage" (89). "The authentic saints make contact with our spiritual ancestors", says Costelloe (107), and they form a past community which is brought to light in present community activity. John P. Hermann says that any spiritual conflict like a saint's life represents a movement from destruction to organization within the church family (10). Saints con-

firm social organization as they “simply return to the community in the form of relics” (Altman 6).

Finally, saints’ lives appeal by being good stories. Their events indulge in the “sensational” (Woolf 45), especially the gory proceedings of the passion. But these tortures and the physical discomforts of asceticism are human, imaginable, and understandable, although sometimes extreme. The physical disintegration of the saint adds a natural touch to the struggle against death. Death remains incomprehensible. Yet the connection between suffering and death is universal. The pain is a necessary part of a saint’s life, because it attracts attention, but also because it appeals directly to the lives of a people at war. The Anglo-Saxons were often at war. The punishments of a martyr’s ordeal are like the heroic descriptions of battles, but a martyr’s trials are passive.

With these ideas, saints’ lives appealed and proliferated, as the *scriptoria* flourished as the temple and *modsefa* of written work. Sophisticated in form, plot and thinking, it is impossible to deny the beauty of many saints’ lives, which is the “beauty of holiness” (Gerould 13). In the next chapter, the beauty and utility of hagiography will be set alongside *Beowulf*.

Chapter Three: General Parallels

There is a general similarity between *Beowulf* and hagiography. Their story is essentially the same: man's heroic suffering, death, and reward. *Beowulf* and hagiography treat the reward of the hero differently, but both relate a series of events in the here and now. Beowulf and the saint act in the real world, although the saint may know about the world beyond. Both have fights with terrifying foes, and witness or take part in miraculous happenings. The characters in *Beowulf* do not understand these miracles when they occur. The saint's life is as worldly, and as exemplary, as Beowulf's is. Beowulf lacks only the saint's knowledge.

There are eleven ways to compare heroic literature with saints' lives. First, the two forms share a foundation in the oral tradition (Campbell 56). The epic poet and the hagiographer both "put . . . floating traditions into literary shape" (Colgrave 2 *Lives* 11). Roberts says: "the details of Guthlac's life are so thoroughly pieced out with borrowings still recognizable that we are in danger of wondering if Guthlac ever existed" (7). The same quandary exists about Beowulf (Chambers 12-13, 103-140). Delehaye writes that the heroes of hagiography and epic literature have the same origins (*Legends* 62). Authors use the impressiveness of these heroes to give "authority" to their work (62). He finds that offerings were made at the tombs of heroes in temples (161). The secular hero is an abstraction of the community, built upon emotion, like the saint. Society's need for such a hero relates to Peter Brown's contention that saints emerge from the public's desire for political stability. Beowulf represents his culture's unity (2799-2801). He enters literature with the same responsibilities as a martyr or bishop: saints and heroes "reflect the structure of the societies which produce and honour them" (Wilson 37).

In amassing the raw material for *Beowulf*, the poet uses the same selection process as the writer of a saint's life. Inscriptions and a landscape of tombs may spark the hagiographer. Equally, barrows, ruins, and empty houses appear in *The Wanderer*, *The Ruin*, and *Beowulf*

(2456, 2545). The poet, like the hagiographer, uses all the material at his disposal. The range of his knowledge impresses the reader, and even exhausts him, by the end of the poem. Many characters in this epic represent an ancestral tradition which requires a sense of the past, and the writer carefully supports this “pastness” with everything he can: legends (884-897), historical events (2914-2921), marvellous acts (1605-1611), inscriptions (1694-1698a), existing stories (1071-1159a), and the bible (90b-98), each certainly transformed by his own thought, yet much like the material used by a hagiographer in crafting his saint.

The four component voices of hagiography (biography, history, eulogy, and elegy) form the four voices of *Beowulf*. This makes the third connection. The poem is first of all the story of a life, although this kind of biography might seem as “odd” (Hume 4) as hagiography sometimes does. The complete change in setting in the second part of the poem emphasizes the structural import of the biographical voice (Klaeber li). Beowulf himself is the narrative bridge between the two sections. The events form a sequence because they happen to the same person. As the biographies of saints relate many of the same events, so many of Beowulf’s acts are probably the same as the events in older oral and written narratives. Both genres have familiar “motifs” (Campbell 56).

The poet mentions Beowulf’s childhood, and provides the audience with the hero’s youth, age, and death, his setting in place and time, and his position within a respected line of kings. Yet, as in hagiography, the story hints at more. In a saint’s life, the biography of the hero is a metaphor for the life of his soul. Otherworldly life runs alongside earthly life and then eventually beyond it. In *Beowulf*, the Christian narrative voice puts Beowulf’s soul before the reader’s scrutiny (2329-2331). And both a holy and a heroic career have death as the ultimate purpose of life:

"Nu ic on maðma hord mine bebohte
frode feorhlege, fremmað gena
leoda þearfe; ne mæg ic her leng wesan" (2799-2801).

In both saints' lives and heroic poetry, a single character stands out from his world. In most other literature, interaction between people takes place, as in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and in the mystery plays. The vocation of Beowulf or a saint goes beyond human biography: the saint's purpose is to enlarge the city of God; the epic hero's is to represent his people's fortune, community, political power, war-strength, spirit and unity (Greenfield "Epic" 93, Chaney 12).

As in hagiography, the poet designs the history in *Beowulf* for a specific purpose. The sense of the past was as important for the poem's original hearers as it is important for the reader now. The poet respects old family connections, which require a feeling of long ago. He strove for this atmosphere, sensing the preciousness of the material he had to work with (1-3). A time-frame of "long ago" suits Beowulf's story, and the "tale" quality of the poem, as well as it suits Saint Anthony's story. Yet presumably the poem's audience would have a chronological sense of history. Bede and others computed the chronology of biblical events (Jones 11). These sequential records led to genealogies and calendars which proclaimed the events of martyrs' lives, and contained historical material. These would provide a writer and his audience with solid reference points for a literary time-frame (Alcock 9; Jones 11). The authority of ancestral tradition would hold too much weight to be ignored in such a large-scale story as *Beowulf*, and the Anglo-Saxons had linked their ancestry to biblical genealogies (Sisam 320). The *Beowulf*-poet had some freedom in constructing the history of his epic, but he had to include events which his audience would recognize as occurring before or after other well known events.

The writer of *Beowulf* strove, in the manner of a hagiographer, to create an historical background with a potential moral force to it. He grounded it in time in order to make it pertinent to man, but placed the events far enough into the past so that he could force the listener to recognize that the world has irrevocably changed: the old pagan heroic world has succumbed to the new Christian one with its commandments and precepts. Thus, *Beowulf* begins, as many saints' lives do, with a brief historical sketch of the times, which quickly establishes the era's character. The poem shifts from Denmark to Geatland because the hero-as-retainer and hero-as-king require different historical backgrounds. The Danes have a flawed history, a wise but aging king, and a future, however imperfect; the Geats have a flawed history, a perfect king, and a doomed race. History in *Beowulf* provides a moral background:

Beowulf's concerns may occupy the center of the stage for the moment, but it is the events in the background which provide the moral context. Beyond all lesser conflicts there looms the ultimate judgement of history (Bandy 246).

Beowulf the individual hero transcends his society, but he remains trapped in the era of "long ago". The action of the Finnsburg episode contrasts with Beowulf's cleansing of Heorot: corpses piled on a pyre, the destruction of a hall, and a frustrated man's *wælfagne winter* (1128), all lead to the eruption of catastrophic violence (1150-1153).

Beowulf's historical lore proliferates; the facts reveal the future as well as the past (J. M. Hill 7), and the poet rarely gives full stories all at once, yet he usually gives them in their entirety eventually. History almost dominates the second part of the poem (2426-2443, 2472-2509, 2913-2921). Robert Hanning comments that *Beowulf* "simultaneously reports, complicates, and explains the record of history" (86). The aim of the historical matter is a

calculated literary effect (Tolkien 28; cf. Dumville 133, 135). The poet makes both a “centre” and historical “edges” to his poem (Ker 253) deliberately:

[he] invites us to attend to the periphery of his poem. *Beowulf* spreads out on a horizontal plain; the poet knows every point on the plain and digresses freely. His inclination is to be all-inclusive and thus the poem acquires a kind of disintegrating, centrifugal force (Hamilton 97).

The poet relates the tribal history of the Geats in full (2922-3007, 3021-3027). The whole story of Heorot appears. The narrative of a battle-scene halts, so that the poet may describe the fate of the hall (82-85, 780-782). He wishes to emphasize that the world of *Beowulf* is finished. As the story rolls slowly to its end, paradoxically, the historical voice seems to be rushing abruptly from one event to another, trying to fit them all in. One might say that this voice is a far cry from the historical perspective which offsets the saint in hagiography. But its purpose is the same. There are several reasons for the increase of historical information at the poem’s finish. Beowulf’s people are not the “raging Herods” of hagiography, and their morality may not be condemned so summarily as that of the mob of persecutors in a saint’s life. By the end of the poem, the reader knows the hero’s character, and expects good actions. The poet therefore describes the background, rather than the hero, to indicate the disjunction between Beowulf and his milieu. At the end, the history appears more bleak, as fate may allow the lessons of history to make a society prosper (like Scyld’s 4-11), but only for a while. Finally, Beowulf contains all the goodness of the heroic ideal. Since he is a more complicated figure than a saint, he needs a more complex background to set him off.

Although both hero and environment are more epic and complicated than in hagiography, their opposition is simple to see. The history in *Beowulf* is a succession of feuds (Osborn 973),

clearly negative, while Beowulf's fights are almost exclusively positive. He battles monsters of unusual depravity. Hanning says: "*Beowulf* is not simply recalling the past as a body of exploits, but attempting to recreate it in order to pass judgement upon it from a point of view it never knew" (88). Saints' lives do this equally.

Beowulf is all that is positive in the poem. The old world is remembered accurately, completely, and fondly, but only Beowulf actually embodies the beauty of ancient pagan society. He makes Hrothgar into a good and wise king. Hrothgar's creation of Heorot is magnificent, but without Beowulf's cleansing this grand hall would remain a bloody shell, and the Danes built it upon the profits of war (64-65). Even Beowulf cannot keep war from engulfing Hrothgar's accomplishments, and for every Hrothgar there is a fratricidal Unferth perched at the feet of the king. The *þ*yle has his eye on the throne (500, 1163b-1166), and the king tolerates this. Hrothgar is wise (1698), but he remains inactive until the arrival of Beowulf, and even the wisdom of his sermon seems to arise from the golden sword hilt which Beowulf puts into the king's hands (1687-1699). Back in Geatland, the celebratory occasions, like those in Heorot, are due only to Beowulf's accomplishments. If feasts are a general and typical activity, the poet never describes them as such. Instead, they celebrate Beowulf's deeds, or are mourned as irretrievably gone (2456-2457, 2262-2265, 3021-3024). This funereal atmosphere at the end of the poem causes Earl to place an almost apocalyptic vision upon the poet's treatment of history ("Apocalypsim" 367). Repetition of events is a moral lesson, "as Christian-historical as Augustine's presentation of the fall of Rome" (367) which displays in *Beowulf* the "Dark Christian realism" formed by its "apocalyptic theme" (367). Like the city of this world, Beowulf's whole society is headed for disaster. Beowulf is meant to be greater than his people. By dying, he becomes a myth, in contrast to the history in the poem, but, at the same time, he is trapped along with the history in the poet's creation of a past society. A saint, though seen against the bloody panoply of history like Beowulf, gains release from time. The holy man

can exist in any hostile atmosphere, and remain the same in his capacity to gain heavenly reward. As Lee says, the “basis of the poem’s tragic nature is its account of being in time” (222). The tragedy is Beowulf’s. We hear of Beowulf as the mightiest man in *þaem dæge/ þysses lifes* (197), “in that day of this life”, and we see that Beowulf’s life is limited, where a saint’s is not. Like the daily passion read from a martyrology, the life of Beowulf defines spiritual time for the hearers.

Systematically, the poet switches to the voice of eulogy. This emotional exaggeration of the hero is a bow to the popular imagination, which reveres ancestors. All the superlatives which the poet uses to describe Beowulf are examples of eulogistic expression (196-197, 789-790, 1543). As in hagiography, these passages are more likely to resemble similar passages in related literature:

ond ymb w(er) sprecan;
eahtodan eorlscipe ond his ellenweorc
duguðum demdon,— (3172b-3174a).

cwædon læt he wäre wyruldcyning[a]
manna mildust ond mon(ðw)ærust,
leodium liðost ond lofgeornost. (3180-3182).

One may place this passage beside the following one in the anonymous *Life of Saint Cuthbert*, or any of the many like it: “For he was angelic in appearance, refined in conversation, holy in works, unblemished in body, noble in nature, mighty in counsel, orthodox in faith, patient in hope, wide in charity” (Anon 77).

Beowulf’s *mægen*, the increase of his strength by thirty times, also exalts him. The hagiographer similarly eulogizes his hero with *virtus*, the power of miracles. Beowulf’s power destroys the monsters, which are appropriate enemies for him to fight, not beasts which might appear at any moment outside one’s window in the eighth or ninth century. They are part of the

hero's amplification, which is more acceptable because the strange events occur in the distant past. The monsters contribute to his cult.

As the historical voice increases towards the poem's finish, so does the elegaic (Hughes 394). *Ende* becomes the overriding theme of the whole work (2342, 2813, 2844, 3046, 3063):

When we consider *Beowulf* as an act of cultural mourning, we can see to what use it puts the eschatological myth the culture inherited, under the influence of the apocalyptic myth it accepted with Christianity. The eschatological myth is first of all historicized, according to the demands of the new religion, and is then used to depict the death of the old heroic world, thereby clarifying the culture's renunciation of its own pagan past. The past is internalized and transformed in a strong Anglo-Saxon culture—all the stronger because it has been mourned for properly, respectfully, and lovingly, and not just discarded ("Apocalypsim" 370).

Earl's perception casts too much of a pall over the positive acts of *Beowulf*, and ignores the other three voices. The eulogistic last few lines, ringing like an inscription, make the reader and audience consider the accomplishments of the hero along with the loss of him. *Beowulf* is a memorial, with the positive and negative aspects of such a construction. Hagiography focuses on death as much as *Beowulf* does; the resolution is different. In a saint's life the promise of heaven forms the miraculous end of the story. Heaven is the assumed goal of the reader. *Beowulf* is stark. Beyond human accomplishment are only *Biowulfe's biorh* (2807), *soðfæstra dom* (2820), and

the establishing and subsequent loss of control over one's world; the facing and acceptance of death; the forces of oblivion trying to loosen the hero's clutch on a fame that will give him the only immortality his world offers (Irving "Nature" 20).

The elegaic voice appears in both hagiography and *Beowulf*:

Ða wæs wop ond heaf,
geongum geocor sefa, geomrende hyge,
sippian he gehyrde þæt se halga wæs
forðsiles fus. He læs faerspelles
fore his mondryhtne modsorge wæg,
hefige æt heortan. Hreber innan swearc,
hyge hreowcearig, læs he his hlaford geseah
ellorfuscne. He læs onbæru
habban ne meahte, ac he hate let
torn foliende tearas geotan,
weallan wægdropan. Wyrd ne meahte
in fægum leng feorg gehealdan,
deore frætwe, tonne him gedemed wæs (Guthlac B 1047b-1059).

Him wæs geomor sefa,
wæfre ond wælfus, wyrd ungemete neah,
se ðone gomelan gretan sceolde,
secean sawle hord, sundur gedælan
lif wið lice; no ion lange wæs
feorh æfelinges flæsce bewunden
(Beowulf 2419-2424).

Guthlac B is probably a later poem than *Beowulf*, yet both poets use elegy: one for pagan hopelessness, and one for Christian acceptance. The death scenes are masterfully handled by both poets (Rosier "Death" 89).

In *Beowulf*, as opposed to hagiography, death may not be treated so surely, as there is no Christ, no example of universal sacrifice for a known purpose. Instead, the great funerals, especially the last one (*Heold on heahgesceap* 3084), the lay of the last survivor (*dug(uð) ellor*

s[ic]eoc 2254), and the father's lament (*eaforan ellorsid* 2451), contain the attempts by *Beowulf*'s society to cope with death.

In a fourth correspondence, *Beowulf* and hagiography share an edifying purpose: "the poet intended to mix instruction with his entertainment" (Rogers 342; Schücking 347-410). Beowulf's behaviour is surely good enough to serve as a powerful example, and the gnomic passages indicate that the poet intended to do some teaching (20-25).

A fifth point of similarity also defines the purpose of the poem. *Beowulf* and saints' lives were read aloud to gatherings of people. The recitation of the acts of any revered figure from the past, sacred or secular, would have incantory accompaniment, mood, tone, and force (11-63, 86-98). The reader in church represents biblical authority, and the church surroundings help to underline the message of hagiography. The hall helps to underline the message of battle poetry.

In a sixth parallel, *Beowulf* has been seen as an allegorical figure of Christ (Klaeber li). As a saint's life follows Christ's, so does *Beowulf*'s (Olsen "Genre" 411). Unlike a saint, Beowulf lacks knowledge of Christ's model, which a saint uses to plan his life and work. Christological allegory is common in medieval literature, but the *Beowulf*-poet handles it especially unobtrusively (2406).

A saint may represent, besides Jesus, an abstract virtue (Farrar 86). One may apply this to *Beowulf*. As some saints are symbols of chastity, Beowulf is a symbol of *mægen* (1270-1273; Tolkien 27, 28). This word, Rogers notes, has a meaning of "divine power" (344), and implies "something of Christian virtue as well as physical strength" (345). Beowulf is so perfect that he represents virtue, and therefore he is like one of the virgin-saints of the passions. He is

introduced first by his power, not his name (196-198; Rogers 345). This is the seventh correspondence between *Beowulf* and hagiography.

The eighth is the theme of the relationship between soul and body (Lee 226). Throughout *Beowulf*, the poet often describes the treatment of the body after death. Cremation, a practise discouraged by the church, is the general habit. As the fire consumes Beowulf's body at his funeral, heaven swallows the smoke of the pyre. The poet hints by the image (3155) that the hero's soul ascends. But there is no statement of sure reward. The reader must ponder the issue of whether or not Beowulf has earned a place with God. There is also the curious suspense in the mere-fight, where Beowulf approaches Grendel with the giant sword, and the reader wonders if the monster is alive or dead:

He æfter recede wlat;
hwearf þa be wealle, wæpen hafenade
heard be hiltum Higelaces ðegn
yrre ond anræd,— næs seo ecg fracod
hilderince, ac he hræke wolde
Grendle forgyldan guðræsa fela
ðara þe he geworhte to West-Denum (1572b-1578).

This is a strange reversal of the usual roles. Beowulf presumably knows that Grendel is dead, whereas the audience is in doubt. Reanimation of the dead is a distinct and devilish possibility in the mere. The issue is whether or not Grendel's soul has flown.

The poem begins with a soul-and-body mystery, in the description of Scyld Schefing's burial at sea:

Men ne cunnon
secgan to soðe, selerædende,
hæleð under heofenum, hwa þær hlæste onfeng (50b-52).

Men do not know where Scyld's soul has gone (Osborn 974). As opposed to the witnesses of a soul's ascension in saints' lives, the inhabitants of the poem are cursed with ignorance. They do not know about miracles, or the nature of the soul. Scyld's ship, *isig ond utfus* (33), "icy and eager to go forth", may be compared with the barges in the *Quest for the Holy Grail*, which are vessels of spiritual mystery. One travels in them secure in faith alone. Without faith, the implications of spiritual wandering into endless ignorance and despair are daunting for Scyld. The witnesses to Beowulf's funeral, like Scyld's, see no further than "the slaughter of men", *wælnið wera* (3000).

Grendel and his mother are stealers of souls. This is one of the more terrible aspects of the kin of Cain: "it was the cruel ravages of Grendel which imperiled both the bodies and the souls of the Danes" (Brodeur 208), who fall into devil-worship. Not just beasts of prey, the monsters have a theological lesson in their evil. They do the devil's work, perhaps without knowing it, as Beowulf does God's work without knowing it, becoming His agent, but not His confidante. The monsters condemn their own souls, and victimize the souls of others, with their evil deeds.

Lewis Nicholson traces a soul-and-body metaphor through the "interlace" of the poem (241-245). The poet constantly refers to the human body as a house or dwelling-place. Nicholson finds that Augustine and Gregory use a dweller in a house as an analogy for the soul inside the body (241 n12; Augustine *PL* 36: 561; Gregory *PL* 75: 719). The most obvious presentation of this idea in *Beowulf* is in the word *ban-hus* (2508, 3147; Nicholson 242). It is significant that both uses of the word occur in a description of a character in despair and death: separation of soul from body is an event man cannot come to terms with emotionally. This becomes explicit in the father's lament (2444-2462a). Hrethel's empty house dramatizes pagan society's ignorance of the soul, and may be a similar image to Scyld's ambiguous funeral

(Nicholson 242). Unlike a saint's, Scyld's treasure-hung body bears witness to nothing. For the actors in the poem's story, the relationship of soul to body must remain a mystery.

Beowulf is the action of the poem. He is constantly in motion. It is interesting, therefore, that Gregory should say that human motion is proof that the soul exists (199). On the other hand, as Olsen points out, the inaction of the saints often shows their spiritual perfection: "*Juliana* explores the growth of this spiritual dependency whose outward sign is physical inaction" ("Genre" 423). To put these two concepts together, Beowulf shows by his herculean activity he has a soul indeed, but he is unable to display dependence upon anything but an iron shield in his moment of truth.

A ninth shared aspect of hagiography and *Beowulf* is a concern with man's knowledge and the process of experience. In the poem, the hero is ideally good, but he lacks crucial information. The poet creates an opposition between the knowledge of the narrator, who instructs through words in the commentary, and the knowledge of the characters inside the poem, who know things only through their actions and education (1251-1258). The poet asks for tolerance and sympathy for the characters' limited experience. They live in a universe where they cannot change the essentials: "The poet and his audience know that hope will come. The characters in the poem do not know it. They live in a world which knows Good Friday but not Easter" (Donahue 81).

The poet constantly demonstrates that the knowledge of the characters is limited and fallible. Whatever exactly the coastguard says (287-289; Greenfield "Words" 51), the idea of discernment is obvious in his gnomic passage. His job involves telling the enemy from the ally, and he recognizes the limits of man's means of judgement: words and deeds. Hrothgar, in his examination of the sword-hilt, treads only the realms of "natural wisdom possible to pagans" (Osborn 978; *Beowulf* 1687-1784). Grendel is man-like, and Calder imagines that the characters

possess some understanding of him, but have minimal comprehension of the “immeasurability and open-endedness” of the dragon (“Setting” 28, 30). Man constantly underestimates evil, has enormous difficulty defining it, and often, out of desperation, exaggerates it. Robert Emmett Finnegan notices a tragic instance of the hero’s ignorance:

In “poetic time” Beowulf promises a legion of ghosts, since the audience knows that, when required, these retainers will already have died on a Frisian beach. Here we see Beowulf as fallible, a prisoner of time whose vision is, like our own, strictly limited (51; cf. *Beowulf* 1197-1214, 1822-1835).

In one last example, Beowulf uses the following criteria to judge his own life:

“ne sohte searoniðas, ne me swor fela
aða on unriht. Ic ðæs ealles mæg
feorhbennum seoc gefean habban;
forðam me witan ne ðearf Waldend fira
morðorbealo maga, þonne min sceaceð
lif of lice” (2738-2743a).

The true *Metod*, the audience knows, would look upon kin-slaying and swearing false oaths as limited yardsticks for assessing one’s behaviour.

Beowulf relies on ability, intelligence, and experience only. Fate twists his promises, and this is the lot of pagan man. Beowulf embodies the separation of Christian knowledge from the unredeemed. He may, like the Danes, make a fatal step at any moment, as his world is full of traps rather than guidance. The poet explains his sympathy for the hero, in the necessary lines 183b-188, by

set[ting] forth true Christian doctrine and express[ing] the poet's feeling that it is a great pity that good men, with the best intentions, can through sheer ignorance of the One God plunge their own souls into damnation (Brodeur 205).

The Christianity of the poet and his audience sets them apart from the characters, adding to the sense of completion and loss (Irving *Reading* 103).

The God of *Beowulf* may be seen as a cruel miser of knowledge. Irving observes that "some part of him [God] is consistently withheld from us" ("Nature" 17). The poet rejects all echoes of the overt tract from his epic poem, and produces a mysterious, powerful, but closeted deity. *Metod* bestows knowledge as well as victory upon Beowulf and pagan society in the shape of the giants' sword hilt, but Hrothgar's court lacks the capacity to know the information completely. God's experience clashes with Heorot's. In the future, man will know the necessary facts fully. The hilt represents a covenant, and the continuum of time. The *Beowulf*-poet creates a pagan situation where man cannot have a pentecost, and God cannot have an epiphany.

Beowulf's most problematic shortcoming is his ignorance of the word. A saint banishes his demons with a prayer or a few words from the psalms. Grendel and the demons are connected: *Caines cynne* (107a; *G of C* 36). Beowulf must fight the *cynne* with his gift, the strength of thirty men, a tool he knows how to use. But since he can only fight, and does not know the Word of God, the monsters remain physical, unlike the evil spirits of hagiography. In a saint's life, the hero admonishes them, and they dissolve, although they may have physically assaulted him (Felix 102). Beowulf seems to lack the secret formula of the saint's words. The characters in *Beowulf* rarely see the spiritual. This is their flaw. Beowulf needs the gift of God in the solid form of a sword to kill Grendel's mother (1537-1556). Only Hrothgar comes to some kind of spiritual understanding. He speaks of the guardian of the soul in his advice to the hero:

"Bebeorh *þe* ðone bealonis, Beowulf leofa,
 secg betsta, ond *þe* *þæt* selre geceos,
 ece rædas;" (1758-1760a).

But the king cannot see all the words either (1687-1699), and his society is essentially insensitive to the word of God.

In a tenth point of contact, Brodeur says of the *Beowulf*-poet's ideas: "the number of Christian concepts which he expresses is small, and their variety is not rich" (34). The hagiographer also limits doctrinal points. Both writers may have consciously held back complex doctrine, with the purpose of conversion in mind. Piles of theological detail could not be loaded on all at once. Besides, the *Beowulf*-poet knew he could not write an epic about a saint: that hero's choices are too clear, his weapons too powerful, his actions too inactive, and his death not nearly so catastrophic as Beowulf's (Roberts 29). Saints' lives are primarily stories, not theology, and they make more simple points than the bible. They tend to concern the miracle and the reward in heaven rather than the complexities of moral issues. Hagiography has a morality, but it is the morality of action and condemnation. The author never subordinates the story to the minutiae of doctrine, just as the *Beowulf*-poet resists preaching. When the story of *Beowulf* is interrupted to discuss spiritual matters, the poet keeps the theology simple, one might almost say black-and-white (183-188), although other theological questions, such as the destination of Beowulf's soul, are much more complex, and the writer integrates them into the story seamlessly.

Bloodiness is the eleventh and last comparison. The sensational torture of the passion comes to mind when Grendel dismembers Hondscioh, when the Danes find *Æschere*'s head, and when Beowulf tears off Grendel's arm. The violence in both kinds of narratives has a purpose. The corpses of *Æschere* and Hondscioh are witnesses to the potential fate of Beowulf, and their butchered and vanished bodies focus attention upon several ideas: the opposition of

body and soul; the relationship between body and relic; the ownership of one's body by God; the relationship between suffering and death. Æschere's head is a relic, like Grendel's, when Beowulf brings the monster's remains to Heorot (Rosier "Hands" 12). God did not give either Æschere or Hondscioh magic strength, so they could not bind the demon. Beowulf's hand-grip sets him above others, and allows an explicit comparison of his character to a saint's.

This chapter shows that *Beowulf* and hagiography have similarities in eleven areas which involve many aspects of both. Inevitably, these two kinds of literature influenced one another. The next chapter will compare specific events in the story of *Beowulf* with events from saints' lives.

Chapter Four: Plot Parallels

Two plot events in the text provide specific evidence that the *Beowulf*-poet had hagiography in his mind as he composed his epic. Both of these events occur in Beowulf's second fight, which involves his immersion in the mere, where he grapples with Grendel's mother and finally dispatches her with a mysterious giants' sword. His work transforms the evil pool, as he rises triumphantly through it (1492-1622). The two elements of this fight which occur in saints' lives are the fiery composition of the haunted mere, and the light which appears at the death of Grendel's mother.

Previously, critics have treated the mere-episode as an example of Christian allegory. Klaeber says: "We might even feel inclined to recognize features of the Christian Saviour in the destroyer of hellish fiends" (li), but other writers have felt the need to supply specifics. Carefully, Klaeber applied proposals for Christian allegory to Beowulf's adventures with the dragon (217), whereas Allen Cabaniss paints this hero as a Christ-figure throughout the poem, and most conspicuously so at the mere. Cabaniss compares Beowulf's action at the mere to biblical events:

Thus, in a succession of ideas and motifs, there is a significant parallel between Beowulf's adventure and Christ's death, harrowing of hell, and resurrection. Closer examination, however, reveals that the apparent similarities to the "harrowing" are enveloped, as within widening concentric circles, by allusions to the deluge and creation (225).

Cabaniss connects *Beowulf* with the entire liturgy, and suggests that the service for Holy Saturday is the origin for all the poem's liturgical allusions (226). He says that a host of biblical

parallels come from the "rites associated with Christian baptism" (226), and he proposes that the poet links actions at the font with the plunge into the mere.

M. B. McNamee sees *Beowulf* as a series of dramatizations of man's salvation. He connects the mere-events with baptism and proposes a number of scriptural echoes which he finds within the poem:

To an audience familiar with this symbolic meaning of immersion into and emersion from waters infested by the powers of hell and purified by the powers of God, it would have been natural to see in Beowulf's descent into the serpent-infested mere and his triumphant ascent from those waters purified of their serpents a symbolic representation of the death and burial and the resurrection of Christ, and, in the purification of the waters, a symbol of the redemption of man from the poisonous powers of evil (340-341).

McNamee continues, saying that Beowulf's mere-story

would almost certainly have been taken as an allegorization of Christ's descent into hell. . . . and in his victorious return to his homeland, laden with gifts from Hrothgar, a representation of Christ's triumphal ascension into heaven (343).

The liturgical and biblical connections certainly add to one's understanding of the poem, but understanding increases when one builds upon McNamee's and Cabaniss's work, and moves in a slightly different direction. John Halverson demonstrates some of the risks in attempting this approach. He comments on the comparison between the mere-battle and the harrowing of hell: "if that Anglo-Saxon also connected the hero's underwater combat with the Harrowing of Hell, would he wonder why Beowulf retrieves no one from 'Hell'?" (264). The

question is a fair one. If the mere is like hell, it is also unlike hell in many ways, and if Beowulf is like Christ, he is clearly not a character “Christ” in the poem. Beowulf’s actions are vastly different than Jesus’s on the whole, and unless a connection contributes to the poem by clarifying, identifying, defining, or expressing an idea, character, dilemma, or event of *Beowulf*, Halverson is right to criticize the connection.

The mere-episode recalls baptism, and the harrowing, but one may also see this fight as the struggle of a saint. The audience would know that the mere is hellish, but not hell. The other-worldliness of the pool intensifies the difficulty of Beowulf’s task and tells the listeners that the hero is entering spiritually dangerous territory. Nevertheless, he goes into these struggles as a man: “So Beowulf is not Christ, nor even a precursor of Christ. He is the good man, manqué from the Christian poet’s view, struggling to defeat forces he cannot fully understand with weapons that often do not function at need” (Finnegan 54). Beowulf is only Christ so far as any man is Christ, and his feats are primarily physical ones. The hero is more like Guthlac than Jesus: they both support Christianity, but with very earthly actions, which primarily secure territory (*Guthlac A* 746). So, as it is the deeds of the Grendel family which make the mere evil, it is the physical exploit of Beowulf which changes the face of the *flode*. The lair of Grendel and his mother is evil because it is *their* place (Calder “Setting” 24). The descendants of Cain “exist solely in deeds and outward appearance” (Bandy 239).

To establish the connection explicitly, one phrase associates the mere with the physical sufferings of the martyr: *fyr on flode* (1366). The mixture of fire with water parallels the passion’s motif of a fiery bath. The imagery of confused elements adds to the feeling of danger—spiritual risk as well as adventure. The torture of fire and immersion in a fiery bath occurs with a frequency in saints’ lives which is almost impossible to number (*OEM* “St Caecilia” 209; *CH* “St. John” 575; *LS* “St. Eugenia” 49). At the appearance of such fire, *Beowulf’s* hearers would likely recall events from passions. The ordeal of Juliana is one of a

number of suitable parallels. Although this passion is late, her story was widespread and Bede mentions it in his historical martyrology (Greenfield *NCH* 167).

Ða se hearda bibead
 þæt mon þæt lamfæt leades gefylde,
 on þa onbærnan het bælfira mæst,
 ad onælan, se wæs æghwanan
 ymbboren mid brondum. Bæð hate weol.
 Het þa ofestlice yrre gebolgen
 leahtra lease in þæs leades wylm
 scufan butan scyldum. Þa toscaden wearð
 lig tolysed. Lead wide sprong,
 hat, heorogifre (577b-586a).

Now it will be argued that the mere is nothing like this boiling pot of lead; not in Hrothgar's account, not when Beowulf reaches the edge of the inland pool. This is true; but while the poet does not say that Beowulf "ascends" to Geatland and "resurrects" from the mere, Hrothgar says explicitly that there is fire on the surface of the lake. The idea of Beowulf undergoing this bath of fire, suggests the typical sufferings of the martyr. The two accounts of the mere make use of the passion, but also of the vita, in a series of references which together recall the central trials of hagiography.

Here is the mere as Hrothgar pictures it first:

"Nis þæt feor heanon
 milgemearces, þæt se mere standeð;
 ofer þæm hongiad hrinde bearwas,
 wudu wyrтum fæst wæter oferhelmað.
 Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,
 fyr on flode. No þæs frod leofað
 gumena bearna, þæt þone grund wite.
 Ðeah þe hæðstapa hundum geswenced,
 heorot hornum trum holtwudu sece,
 feorran geflymed, ær he feorh seleð,
 aldor on ofre, ær he in wille,
 hafelan [beorgan]; nis þæt heoru stow!
 Nonon yðgeblond up astigeð

won to wolcnum, þonne wind styrek
lað gewidru, oð þæt lyft drysmaþ,
roderas reotað” (1361b-1376a).

He describes the lake in a network of images of despair. The hart would lose its life on the shore rather than venture in, demonstrating that the mere promises spiritual peril. The fire on the water's surface recalls the phantasmal fire of the vita (VC 201-203, Greg 76), which is the work of devils and causes delusion. The frost-bound wood, so incongruous next to the fire, suggests a less common torture depicted in the passion, that of subjection to cold and freezing (LS “40 Soldiers” 247-249). Heat and cold together in the same location bring to mind accounts of hell, which often appear in saints' lives. Drycthelm's vision, which appears in Bede's *HE*, evokes a hellish place with hot and cold torture: “The side to our left was dreadful with burning flames, while the opposite side was equally horrible with raging hail and bitter snow blowing and driving in all directions” (290). An ordinary man receives this warning vision. An angel then tells him that the place of dual torment is not hell, but a place where souls are tried (292). Employing similar events, Felix describes how Guthlac is taken to the brink of the pit of hell by demons. The rendering owes something to Drycthelm's vision, but also resembles the mere in *Beowulf*, with its evil vapours reaching to the skies: “the sulphurous eddies of flame mixed with icy hail seemed almost to touch the stars with drops of spray” (Felix 105). These two descriptions indicate that when Beowulf enters the mere, he is encountering a place where his soul will be put to the test.

When Beowulf arrives at the mere's edge, the picture is different:

Flod blode weol —folc to sægon—,
hatan heolfre. Horn stundum song
fuslic f(yrd)leoð. Feða eal gesæt.
Gesawon ða æfter wætere wyrmcynnes fela,
sellice sædracan sund cunnian,
swylce on næshleoðum nicras licgean,

þa on undernmæl oft bewitigað
 sorhfulne sið on seglrade,
 wyrmas ond wildeor. Hie on weg hruron
 bitere ond gebolgne; bearhtm ongeaton,
 guðhorn galan (1422-1432b).

The mere looks as if it has been made over with Beowulf in mind, and (interestingly, if it represents baptism) it is swimming with the events of his childhood. It is a challenge like the Breca episode, and Beowulf prepares to meet it in the same way as he met the earlier venture. The mere is a shape-shifter like Grendel, who is sometimes man, sometimes giant, sometimes demon. Hrothgar's description reveals his inability to cope with the mere. Now on its brink, Beowulf's action is consistent motion, with little time for speeches: he kills a nicor and jumps in (1432-1495). He is confident, like a saint, that the evil powers cannot touch him, and he knows how to deal with monsters: he has a wonderful sword in his grip, and his grip has the strength of thirty men. But the mere's appearance should still make the reader ponder that Beowulf's fight may be more serious than the hero thinks. The shore is purpled with the blood of the wise friend and counsellor *Æschere*, who is like one of the Christians tortured in a passion before the executioners turn to the martyr himself. Felix's demons immerse Guthlac in the fen, as Beowulf will shortly undertake to do himself: "they plunged him into the muddy waters of the black marsh" (Felix 103).

The spirit-testing mere foreshadows the difficulty of Beowulf's second fight. He prepares for the battle and remains ignorant of its total meaning. The nature of the Grendel family becomes more obvious in their own environment. In Beowulf's pagan society they remain hard and real, a solid, uncomfortable threat to life and soul, unlike the physical monsters which turn into phantasms when a saint attacks them with prayer and psalm-singing. The audience recognizes the evil territory from hagiography, but it is not familiar to the main character—sundering the world of the past from the world of saints. Beowulf is not a saint. He must constantly prove

his courage through physical exploits. The comparison between Beowulf and a saint does not continue through every episode of the poem. But, in the second great fight, the connection helps to characterize the monsters as persecutors, and this identification of evil suits the conversion environment which produced the poem. Like the raging Herods of the mystery plays, destroyers of men join forces with the devil. The images of hagiography, which haunt these battles, also signal concern for Beowulf's soul, even if he is unaware of the danger.

The second and most telling event in the mere fight which corresponds to a typical plot event in a saint's life is the miraculous brightening of light which occurs when Beowulf kills Grendel's mother:

heo on flet gecrong,
sweord wæs swatig, secg weorce gefeh.
Lixte se leoma, leoht inne stod,
efne swa of hefene hadre scineð
rodores candel (1568b-1572a).

This action inevitably recalls the burst of light which enters the saint's cell, a prominent feature of the passion and vita (*OEM* "40 Soldiers" 38; *ACM* "St. Marian" 205, *HE* 291, *LS* "St. Julian" 110, *CM* "St. Vincent" 184). No important analogue that I can find has anything like this description in *Beowulf*: in the *Grettirsaga* the hero kindles his own light (Chambers 181), and Orm, in his story, gets fire and burns the bodies of his enemies (Chambers 192). To strengthen the audience's recognition of the brightening light as a motif from saints' lives, Beowulf almost immediately receives approval of his actions and comfort from God. A comparison with a saint makes sense in this instance, for God's miraculous favour in a passion does not prevent further torture or save the martyr from death at the end. Another miraculous sign supports the Christian interpretation of the brightening light. Beowulf uses a giant's sword, which he dis-

covered, perhaps, with divine aid (1555-1558). At Grendel's beheading, the sword melts away in an image of God's spring:

þa þæt sveord ongan
æfter heaþoswate hildegicelum,
wigbil wanian; þæt wæs wundra sum,
þæt hit eal gemealt ise gelicost,
ðonne forstes bend Fæder onlæteð,
onwinded wælrapas, se geweald hafað
sæla ond mæla; þæt is soð Metod (1605b-1611).

This spring imagery recalls certain miracles in hagiography which accompany bright light, for instance, the Edenic landscapes which come to the cell of St. Vincent and to St. Guthlac's barrow.

Besides these two obvious points of comparison with saints' lives, a case may now be made for other connections within the action of the mere scene. First, the depiction of Beowulf putting on his armour asks us to imagine a shining figure:

scolde herebyrne hondum gebroden,
sid ond searofah sund cunnian,
seo ðe bancovan beorgan cuþe,
þæt him hildegrap hreþre ne mihte,
eorres inwifteng aldre gesceþan;
ac se hwita helm hafelan werede,
se þe meregrundas mengan scolde,
secan sundgeblund since geweorðad,
befongen freawrasnum, swa hine fyrndagum
worhte wæpna smið, wundrum teode,
besette swinlicum, þæt hine syðan no
brond ne beadomecas bitan ne meahton (1443-1454).

Particularly, the helm is white, which symbolizes light and purity, and the brightness of the treasure lights up the whole exercise. Each piece of armour is charged with a duty contrasting with its beautiful appearance. The poet shows Beowulf putting his protection into the skill of

the metal-smith's hands, beyond his own preternatural grasp, and the whole passage reminds the audience of the ritual disarming of Beowulf before the Grendel fight. J. R. R. Tolkien first suggested that Beowulf's use of armour shows: "it was not yet the breastplate of righteousness, nor the shield of faith for the quenching of all the fiery darts of the wicked" (24). The poet sets up opposites, as a hagiographer does. The brightness of Beowulf putting on his war-gear, and his physical energy both at the mere and in the fight with Grendel, calls to mind the athletic beauty of the martyr's body (*ACM "St. Pionius"* 165). The first saints' lives associated their heroes directly with Paul's famous conception of the armour of God:

Ah, blessed martyrs, who were tested in the fire like precious gold, clad in the breastplate of faith and the helmet of salvation, crowned with a diadem and a *crown that does not fade* because they trod underfoot the devil's head! (*ACM "St. Fructuosus"* 184).

This passage secures Tolkien's observation.

It might be objected, as Beowulf dives off the bank, that a martyr often undergoes trials against his will, while Beowulf enters into his ordeals willingly. Actually, martyrs often go willingly to their torments and deaths, and at this point Beowulf is under more constraint to do what he is going to do than at any other moment in the poem. The attack of Grendel's mother comes as a direct result of Beowulf's defeat of her son. Since he has proved himself against one monster, his duty is to take care of the other. Hrothgar has presented him with gifts, and has promised more. The cycle of favours has now returned to the champion. And he has said he will kill her:

"Ic hit **þe** gehate: no he on helm losaþ,
ne on foldan fæm, ne on fyrgenholt,
ne on gyfenes grund, ga **kær** he wille!" (1392-1394).

Beowulf's philosophy constrains him. He relies habitually upon ancient law-by-custom: *Selre bið aeghwæm, / þæt he his freond wrece, ƿonne he fela murne* (1384b-1385; cf. Clark 431).

Then the hero's physical trials begin. The mere-wife grabs him, as the martyr is bound:

Grap ƿa togeanes, guðrinc gefeng
atolan clommum; no ȝy ær in gescod
halan lice; hring utan ymbbearh,
þæt heo ƿone fyrdhom ðurhfon ne mihte,
locene leoðosyrcan laðan fingrum (1501-1505).

A man protected but helpless, Grendel's mother bears him off to her den, as the demons bring Guthlac to the mouth of hell:

Bær ƿa seo brimwyl[f], ƿa heo to botme com,
hringa ȝengel to hofe sinum,
swa he ne mihte —no he ƿæs modig wæs—
wæpna gewealdan (1506-1509a).

Felix's account of Guthlac's testing says: "quicker than words they bound the limbs of the said man of God" they belaboured him, and "carried the afore-named servant of Christ, Guthlac, to the accursed jaws of hell" (103-105). The "enemy hall" in *Beowulf* (1513) is like the prison where the martyr waits for inevitable death, a place of darkness and privation.

At last on his feet and able to see the "mere-wife mighty" (1519), Beowulf takes a swing at her, only to find that in the very moment that the sword shines as a *beadoleama*, it, unlike the other equipment, will not do its duty:

Ða se gist onfand,
þæt se beadoleama bitan nolde,
aldre sceðan, ac seo ecg geswac
ðeodne æt ƿearfe; (1522b-1525a).

The physicality of the wrestling match which follows is more dramatic than the first one with Grendel, as the dam throws the hero *werigmod* to the floor (it is not his strength which is failing him) (1543) and sits astride him trying to do him to death with her knife:

Ofsæt þa þone selegyst, ond hyre sexa geteah
brad [ond] brunecg; wolde hire bearn wrecan,
angan eaferan (1545-1547a).

Beowulf has grave problems with the she-monster despite the fact that she is not as strong as her son:

Wæs se gryre læssa
efne swa micle, swa bið mæg þa cræft,
wiggryre wifes be wæpnedmen, (1282b-1284).

Beowulf bears comparison with a saint who enters into a similar battle, but equipped with the right gear. The battles with demons in the Guthlac *Lives* and the *Life of St. Anthony* are fought on a metaphorical level as the evil spirits offer dreams and temptations to the stalwart ascetic. In other lives, the connection with *Beowulf* is more obvious because the hagiographer expresses the battles between saint and foe in physical terms: "In such wise does the virtue that is in the martyrs beat down the filthy devil, constrain, torture, burn, enchain him, till the plunderer is so harried that he slips out of his victim's marrow and departs" (CM "St. Emeterius" 107).

Juliana also contains a scene where the saint binds a demon:

Hyre stefn oncwað
wlitig of wolcnum, word hleoðrade:
"Forföh þone frætgan ond fæste geheald,
oþlæt he his siðfæt secge mid ryhte,
ealne from orde, hwæt his æfelu syn."
Ða wæs þære fæmnan ferð geblissad,
domeadigre. Heo læt deofol genom (282b-288).

[There is a gap in the manuscript. When it resumes, the demon is speaking]

"Fæt þu mec þus fæste fetrum gebunde" (433).

I do not include the binding of the devil in my list of events commonly found in the passion, as it does not occur often enough. The hero's wrestling contest with a devil also connects with Beowulf's first fight with Grendel.

This kind of conflict brings the quality of Beowulf's victory to the spiritual level, where the magical cleansing of the mere makes more sense, as an event of spiritual renewal. A parallel with a saint suits the poem better than a parallel with Christ. Critics have long argued that the Grendel family is devil-like, yet clearly neither of the monsters is Satan, who is by necessity Christ's only true adversary. The demon-figure of hagiography fits the Grendel mold very well.

There are other parallels between the story of Beowulf and the generic one of the saints, besides the ones in the mere-episode. Other characters tend to notice that Beowulf is different from anybody else. Altman says of St. Cuthbert: "he is constantly singled out from the group which he is with, either by his own action, the group's recognition, or divine intervention" (5; cf. Anon 65). The monsters make Beowulf's fights stand out from the other man-to-man conflicts. The coastguard's assessment of the hero singles him out, and makes the reader picture Beowulf:

"Næfre ic maran geseah
eorla ofer eorlān, ðonne is eower sum,
secg on searwum; nis þæt seldguma,
wæpnum geweordad, næfne him his wlite leoge,
ænlic ansyn" (247b-251a).

He is singled out by Hrothgar's attentions, by his attainment of the kingship, and, in the manner of divine intervention, by the marvellous light in the mere and the gifts of the old giants' sword and of his *mægen*. Hrothgar's summing up of Beowulf's power is like a miraculous portent or prophecy of his future deeds:

“Donne sægdon ƿæt sæliðende,
þa ðe gifsceattas Geata fyredon
þyder to þance, ƿæt he ƿritiges
manna mægencraeft on his mundgripe
heālorof hæbbe. Hine halig God
for arstafum us onsende” (377-382).

Rosier has noticed that the whole point of the Breca episode is “to establish Beowulf as an experienced champion against monsters” (“Hands” 9), and therefore the proper vanquisher of Grendel. This exchange of boasts corresponds to the challenge and profession motifs of the passion. At Unferth's challenge, Beowulf proves himself the way the saints do, first with words, then with deeds. Unferth asks Beowulf to identify himself, as the interrogator asks a saint at a trial:

“Eart ƿu se Beowulf, se ƿe wið Brekan wunne,
on sidne sæ ymb sund flite,
ðær git for wlence wada cunnedon
ond for dolgilpe on deop wæter
aldrum neðdon?” (506-510a).

Beowulf's reply denies Unferth's representation of him just as the saint contradicts what the prefect or judge asks him to believe or do. He follows this with a bold assertion of himself:

Soð ic talige,/ ƿæt ic merestrengō maran ahte (532b-533), and he declares Unferth damned, much the way the saint condemns his tormentors:

“þeah ðu ہinum broðrum to banan wurde,
heafodmægum; ہæs ہu in helle scealt
werhðo dreogan,” (587-589a).

The audience would associate Unferth with Grendel, Cain, and therefore the devil, and would know that interrogators in the passion have these associations as well. The speeches lead to expectations about the coming fights, but they also allow a better understanding of the two opposing forces, and demonstrate the nature of Beowulf's beliefs. Unferth relates to the necessary opposing forces in hagiography: the scoffers who mock and scorn the martyr (Eusebius 143). They are not the main force of the evil, but a particularly human manifestation of it (Rosier “Unferth” 7), and so is Unferth. He is the human Grendel who ultimately joins the band which destroys Heorot.

If Unferth is like the persecuting authorities, Grendel is like the executioners of the passion, and his mother is like the gaolers. Grendel's steel-spur fingers recall a commonly mentioned instrument of torture, the scraping claw:

hand sceawedon,
feondes fingras; foran æghwylc wæs,
stið[r]a nægla gehwylc style gelicost, (983b-985).

This association deepens the evil of Grendel's acts, and puts him more certainly and uncomfortably within human ancestry by associating him with the actions of men in other well-known stories.

Beowulf strips before fighting Grendel, and this suggests the stripping of the martyr by the executioners, or the metaphorical adopting of an ascetic lifestyle. Remaining in the sea or mere for days may be conceived as the physical sufferings of abstinence or privation. These trials demonstrate the spiritual quality of Beowulf's battles, and contrast with the conviviality and

indulgence of the feasts. Beowulf stays close to Breca in the swimming contest, suggesting the leadership, charity, and comforting of others which the saint exhibits in prison: *no ic fram him wolde* (543b). This action contrasts with the sheer competitiveness of the acts of strength one finds in the battle-saga. The comparison of the epic hero's acts with the saint's holy deeds exalts Beowulf's good qualities.

In two last parallels, Gerould barely suggests that Guthlac and Bertold have a similar friendship to that of Beowulf and Wiglaf. Both assistants administer to the hero, and witness his death (84; cf. *Guthlac B* 1010-1059). Alan Brown cites a saint's vocal challenge to a dragon, and finds that this yell, and Beowulf's war-cry to his dragon, are both "bright" (444; *Beowulf* 2553), but one must remain tentative, as Brown relies on an emendation.

All of these parallels widen the perspective of this poem. They equate evil with sin. Evil spreads beyond Grendel's mother into the sword and armour Beowulf carries, encumbrances not needed by the saint. The variety of trials has a unity, since they are all found in saints' lives. God's action in the mere-fight becomes more intelligible, as he releases a miracle closely related to the cyclic miracle of the seasons. Beowulf does not understand God's action, but the audience does. One sees that Beowulf's relationship to God depends on a standard of behaviour the hero can only feel, not know. The physical feats of Beowulf and the transformation of the sympathetic environment, a process which initiates the brightening of the light and melting of the sword, are more understandable in the context of hagiographical miracles. Far from being a pool of inconsistencies, the mere mirrors Beowulf's progress with a saint's progress, and enlivens the poem with unexpected points of view.

Chapter Five: Character and Relics

The monks used Germanic traditions to ease the absorption of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. This practise led some critics to think that writers of the conversion era had a formula, or plan. The authors simply inject faith into the hero's staunch heart and pit him against demons and pagans instead of monsters and kinslayers (Campbell 56; Bethurum 53). Clinton Albertson relies most upon the hero=saint formula (22), but I have the same impression as Colin Chase of Albertson's extensive commentary in his book: "lively and stimulating but largely unconvincing. . . strained" ("Saints" 16; Albertson 158 n127). Chase thinks that battle-imagery moved into Anglo-Saxon religious poetry very gradually, and that acceptance of this imagery came quite late (163).

Actually, certain representations in both cultures matched to allow writers to make useful illustrations. Colgrave says:

the heroic poem of the *Beowulf* type and the saint's Life had certain features in common.

Both were concerned with the cult of the hero-warrior. The saint was a spiritual warrior and in the Latin lives he is often referred to as the *miles* or *athleta Christi* or *Dei* ("Earliest" 36; Tolkien 36).

Beowulf proves that Anglo-Saxon thought proceeds far beyond the formulation of simple equations like "a hero equals a saint." The *Beowulf*-poet watched Christian morality transform the mores and literary inspirations of his society. This poet does not assert "A hero is a saint", but asks the question "Is a hero like a saint?" Like any great writer, the author of this epic is concerned with moral questions above all. How the main character of his poem acts, and how

one might compare these actions to the performance of others, are the crucial issues of the poem:

such value systems [sovereignty and Christian monastic] can exist in the same culture and in the same person, where they can, and will, produce dilemmas and tensions, but. . . one need not be invoked as a norm by which the other must be judged (Chase "Pride" 46).

Beowulf dominates his poem so strongly that he must make up the major part of any discussion of it (Irving *Reading* 43). Whether he is bad or good, Christian or pagan, saint or sinner, saved or damned, are all puzzles which result from conflicts between the two moral systems of the poem:

The very important and very difficult task which faces the reader of *Beowulf* is in deciding if, or in what degree, Christian virtue, in the same sense that it is directed towards the love of God and neighbour, and not "classical" virtue, which is pursued either because it ennobles or effects temporal gain, can be discerned in Beowulf's actions (Whitman 281).

The poem does not allow the reader to think that a hero simply mimics a saint, or vice versa. The critic must gather all of the clues to Beowulf's character in order to achieve some kind of picture.

A Beowulf-saint comparison would be simplistic if Beowulf were evil. Margaret Goldsmith thinks Beowulf lowers himself to "arrogance and desire for the treasure" (87), while the whole poem preaches, through allegory, against the sin of pride (71; Whitman 278). There

is no pride in the desire for the treasure. Beowulf wishes to save his people with the only means he has, other than his own kingship (2799-2801). A stronger argument denies Beowulf sainthood because of his heathenism. Tolkien says “[Beowulf] was yet far estranged, and ‘had hell in his heart’” (45). The poet deliberately makes the hero’s behaviour contrast with his religion. If Beowulf sins, he sins without knowing it. The question of evil is indivisible from the question of blame.

There is a strong consensus about Beowulf’s moral worth, in opposition to Goldsmith and Whitman: “a perfect hero, flawless in ability and matchless in prowess” (Eliason 101), he shows a saint-like and Christ-like feeling for the community at every turn: “Beowulf resorts to arms out of concern for the defenceless and for the common good, not exclusively out of lust for conquest, ambition, or vengefulness. He is heroic and pious, a pagan prince of peace” (Frank 62). While I would not grant Beowulf piety, or unsullied motives in his crushing of Dæghrefn, his policy of peace is not typical of Germanic tribal society:

“Ic ðas leode heold
fiftig wintra; næs se folccyning,
ymbesytendra ænig ðara,
þe mec guðwinum gretan dorste,
egesan ðeon. Ic on earde bad
mælgesceafta, heold min tela,
ne sohte searoniðas, ne me swor fela
aða on unriht” (2732b-2739a).

He maintains peace, and gives up the raids which increase one’s personal glory. These attributes put him into King Oswald’s camp.

Yet “selflessness” would not be the right word to describe Beowulf. He never hesitates to serve others, but his motives are ambiguous. He is selfless within the wrong context. His deference is empty and disordered because the true model for sacrifice cannot exist for him.

He thinks *of* himself never, but *about* himself constantly: when he speaks, when he prepares for battle, and when he considers the news that the dragon has levelled his hall:

þæt ðam godan wæs
hreow on hreðre, hygesorga mæst;
wende se wisa, þæt he Wealdende
ofer ealde riht ecean Dryhtne
bitre gebulge; breost innan weoll
þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs (2327b-2332).

Like Adam, Beowulf speaks first to himself. He faces complete disaster and his first apparent doubts. Since Beowulf considers only one possibility, that there is a flaw within himself, he looks through his past for any weakness. The psychological accuracy of this moment of doubt is impressive. When Beowulf searches his soul, he may eventually get lost in human complications which the saint can ignore. Beowulf is not proud, but he places himself first in the kingdom, for all the right reasons. He inherits all the advantages and disadvantages of such an exalted position.

Certainly in the light of Christian morality, Beowulf is relentlessly good and approaches the character of a saint or unfallen Adam (Kaske "Sapientia" 455). Beowulf's perfection is alien to his world and cannot last. Is his separation from his iniquitous world enough to give him salvation? The poet says only:

him of hræðre gewat
sawol secean soðfæstra dom (2819b-2820).

The reader must interpret as he pleases, and the fate of the hero seems positive without being explicitly Christian. Only a sure interpretation of *soðfæstra dom* could decide the issue. Brodeur says: "In the figure of Beowulf the heroic ideals of Germanic paganism and of

Anglo-Saxon Christendom have been reconciled and fused, so that the hero exemplifies the best of both" (183). He is, rather, a perfect creation of the Germanic world only, and while good and bright enough for Christian reward, Beowulf lacks the absolute signs which would make heaven inevitable. The poet equivocates. This stand is starkly original for its time. "Seeking" the judgement of the "righteous ones" or "those fast in truth" means only that Beowulf will be judged by those who, like himself, have lived for the truth and have never strayed, have never broken their promises (2738-2739). The assessment relies on worldly standards, like the eulogistic passage at the very end of the poem. "Heaven swallowed the smoke" (3155) of Beowulf's funeral pyre, which indicates perhaps that his soul goes to God, but the poet does not interpret the image. The writer resorts to "mystery" (Irving "Nature" 21) at Beowulf's death because he finds that the world of Christianity must diverge from the world of heroic society, and he employs indirect statement in his last three lines to distance the testimony of the mourners from his own. He makes no comment within the narrative frame about the Geatish warriors' judgement of his hero. As in a tragedy, the ending raises questions about life's purpose, and about life after death, but the poet declines to give readers solid comfort. At the end of the poem, he refines his commentary out of his careful creation, and leaves the reader wondering what the poet ultimately thinks of Beowulf.

Beowulf's fate is uncertain while a saint's salvation is sure. The hero is a creature of the earth, and a saint is a traveller beyond it, yet these two characters compare on several levels. Beowulf is entirely worldly. The pressures of life within his social milieu cause his self-sacrifice (Kahrl 193; Hume 19). His skills are worldly ones (Kaske "Sapientia" 429). Despite his marvellous strength and his saint-like actions, Beowulf remains a man. Except in one essential, a saint's life is equally worldly. A saint knows about the life beyond, but he or she does not live in it. Knowledge alone separates the epic hero from the saintly one. With the exception of miracles, and there are miracles in *Beowulf*, the saint's biography involves the hero's life on

earth. Earthly actions, for both kinds of hero, will have consequences in heaven, and “the saint has to manifest the glory of God through his triumph over the adversaries he faces” (Boyer 33). In the mere, Beowulf fights to the same glory.

Beowulf is God’s unwitting agent: “chosen instrument” (Bloomfield “Judgement” 546), “champion” (Brodeur 217); “[he] fights on God’s side, if not on his behalf” (Georgianna 847). Beowulf does God’s good works and therefore contributes to His plan and order, like any saint.

A hagiographer usually makes his saint abstract and impersonal. Beowulf’s endurance and miraculous deeds recall the typical martyr, who suffers vivid torture and performs miracles, but shows little individuality. Beowulf reveals his personality through extraordinary achievement, not through psychological revelation. Both he and the saint have a single elevating attribute. The hero in hagiography has exceptional piety; the epic hero has exceptional strength. As most actions of Juliana prove her love of God, most of Beowulf’s deeds prove his outstanding physical power. Chambers notices that even in dubious, not marvellous, battle, Beowulf’s deeds do not stray into the ordinary:

When, in the midst of the strictly historical account of Hygelac’s overthrow, we are told that Beowulf swam home bearing thirty suits of armour, this is as fantastic as the account of him swimming home from Grendel’s lair with Grendel’s head and the magic swordhilt (12; Greenfield “Monstrous” 295-300).

The poet magnifies the revenge upon Dæghrefn by having Beowulf finish him off with his bare hands. Beyond performance, the writer reveals little of Beowulf’s nature (Hume 2).

Rogers identifies *mægen* as the word which defines Beowulf’s superhuman attribute (343). This power is God’s special gift (*Beowulf* 670). It might be “a transposition of something

Germanic and pagan into Christian terms" (Smithers 73), as there are accounts of old Norse magical strength (72). But *mægen* certainly relates to the saint's ability to perform miracles, or to Juliana's ability to grasp the demon. Other characters identify Beowulf by his talent, and he uses it for them, to try to save the only world which he can see. God's gift to the saints is different in kind from the hero's, but not in its singularity, and not in the gift's embodiment of a whole way of life. *Mægen* is the summation of what the poet thinks the old heroic days have to offer.

Beowulf's undeniable gift of prophecy is at a more elementary stage than Polycarp's: "Although Beowulf has no clear knowledge that he is to perish, Fate touches him with feyness, a kind of instinctive apprehension of death" (Brodeur 246; *Beowulf* 2331-2332); "Even though Beowulf has not met Grendel, he seems to have a clear understanding of him" (Irving Reading 99; cf. *Beowulf* 683-685). Like a saint, he can see beyond his present activity, but he sees only monsters and the end of life.

Beowulf is like a saint in that he suffers: "The penitential life has affinities with that of the warrior, who also must suffer privation that he may win triumph and glory; only the definition of what constitutes glory is changed" (Huppé 30). Beowulf imitates the trials of the martyr and the ascete, as he endures the ordeals of water, fire, and poison from the dragon's mouth.

Saints divorce themselves from the world. Separation of the hero from the world of battle is the point of epic poetry. Achilles does not fight until the very end of *The Iliad*, and then he not only fights Hector, but rivers and gods. Beowulf's acts tower over the actions of the other characters in the poem. He carries warrior-skill into the miraculous. The epic hero is characteristically greater than the fighting which is his characteristic activity. Beowulf's strength destroys his own sword:

wæs sio hond to strong,
 se ðe meca gehwane mine gefræge
 swenge ofersohte, þonne he to sækce bær
 wæpen wund[r]um heard; næs him wihte ðe sel. (2684b-2687).

His reach must always exceed his grasp. Beowulf does not have enough knowledge with his power.

The Geatish king's transcendent strength justifies the extreme mourning of his people. The funeral despair suggests their expectation that Beowulf would prove greater than death. The feeling of consolation and hope which ends most saints' lives is absent from the end of *Beowulf*. Epic heroes are the embodiment of the life and life-after-death conflict in man, which has no conclusion and no hope in itself. It is more difficult to understand the miraculous deeds of heroes than the actions of saints because one can point to the source of saints' power: faith and knowledge of God. The cause of Beowulf's morality is hard to fathom, outside of his actions. His motives are too many: gold, pride, kinship, and God all come into play, as well as greatness of heart, the code of the warrior, and a king's responsibility for his people; but all of these nevertheless leave Beowulf's true nature as difficult to sound as Iago's. The cacaphony of motives drowns out any intelligible one, and the understanding of Beowulf's virtue begins in comparing it to a saint's. For instance, love in *Beowulf* is very much like the love in hagiography. The saint's charity, or patient love of all mankind, stems from a knowledge of the gospels, the next world, and God's love. Kinship, parenting, and companionship express love in *Beowulf*. The hero returns all love which may be given to him. He adopts Hrothgar's children, as Hrothgar adopted him (1836-1839). But the saint has a pattern (Christ), and Beowulf has only his own experience. He contributes to God's order, as Hrothgar does by creating Heorot, but Beowulf's motion towards good seems intuitive, not plotted by the Word. The audience and narrator, aware of the path of the saints, can give Beowulf's goodness its proper origin.

Beowulf is the intercessor of this poem. He is a messenger between the Danes and the Geats in the first part of it, and he is his people's representative to the dragon in the second. "He mediates between the two worlds", the real and the monstrous (Higley 346), as nobody else can. His actions maintain his status as intercessor, especially when he becomes king. This status has its origin in tradition. The sacral Germanic monarch was an intercessor between his people and the gods (Chaney 42, 55-56). All the action of the poem passes through Beowulf. He is the mediator of history to his own people: after the catastrophe of Hygelac's raid, Beowulf swims home with a symbol for the hollowness of an army recklessly led:

þonan Biowulf com
sylfes cræfte, sundnytte dreah;
hæfde him on earme (ana) þritig
hildegeatwa, 1a he to holme (st)ag (2359b-2362).

This trenchantly expresses the message of disaster to the Geatish people. His formal gifts to Hygelac embody the proper interaction between king and thane. Like the poem itself and the magic sword hilt (Hanning 95), the hero is a piece of history, and mediates between present and past. Equally, all the action in a saint's life passes through the hero into the beyond.

Even after death, saints continue to communicate between their people and God, but Beowulf's intercession comes to an abrupt finish at his passing. The king's leadership and power end, so his people fall into despair. Quite appropriately, they give the hoard of treasure to the winner of it, by putting it into the ground—he has always known what to do with it before. But now the prime-mover of the poem is lost; the king who receives gold and passes it out again is dead, and the prayers of this race, unlike the prayers of a society which has saints as intercessors, literally go up in smoke:

Ongunnan þa on beorge bælfyra mæst
 wigend weccan; wud(u)rec astah
 swearst ofer swioðole, swogende leg
 wope bewunden —windblond gelæg—,
 oð þæt he ða banhus gebrocen hæfde
 hat on hreðre. Higum unrote
 modceare mændon, mondryhtnes cw(e)alm;
 swylce giomorgyd (s)io g(eo)meowle
 (æfter Biowulfe b)undenheorde
 (song) sorgcearig, sæde geneahhe,
 þæt hio hyre (hearmda)gas hearde (ondre)de,
 wælfylla worn, (wigen)des egesan,
 hy[n]ðo (ond) h(aeftny)d. Heofon rece swe(a)lg (3143-3155).

The burial of the treasure shows that one cannot do anything for one's people after death. Only Christ's sacrifice can work. A hero's responsibility always ends. Beowulf hopes to be a lasting help, buys the dragon's treasure with the poison in his body, and asks that his barrow be constructed as a guide for sailors, but responsibility passes to the Geats, who decide to re-bury the treasure in contradiction to his wishes. For the Geats, the *laf* or legacy comes to an end. These hollow riches are in direct opposition to a saint's relics which provide for the saint's society after death. In fact, the saint's death produces relics, which lead to miracles, conversions, healings, and churches (Wilson 3-5). Unable to divorce the objects from the man (Christian graves have few grave-goods in them), the society puts its hope into the ground. Their despair shows the ultimate futility of mediating between man and man, man and monster, man and dragon, man and king, man and history. Communication between man and God is crucial.

One may read *Beowulf* as a lesson in how to make the right offering, and Beowulf makes the correct one, always. He offers his skill, body, hand-grip, armour, sword, hope, strength, treasure, wisdom, kingdom, experience and life. He gives and performs all he can. The totality of the offering is impressive. In return, the Geats offer the treasure back to him, but it is too late for this gift to be appropriate. One may judge characters by their offerings. Unferth's

offerings compare unfavourably with Beowulf's (501, 1456-1457), and, significantly, the hero does not explicitly offer Grendel's arm or head. Grendel cannot approach the *gifstol* because he has nothing appropriate to offer (168-169). But a saint gives his life to God, while Beowulf cannot place his right and complete offering within any "father's embrace".

The Beowulf-saint comparison helps the reader to understand the hero of the poem, and gives insight into the unusual religious structure of *Beowulf*. The comparison heightens the contrast between the main character and his society. Likely, both the reader and the audience would not see themselves as saints, and would find the feelings of a saint difficult to conceive. Nevertheless, the individuals in the audience of *Beowulf* might think that they were trying to be saints, as Beowulf tries, to the best of his knowledge. The hero's predicament, that of a man given awkward and brittle tools and intermittent instruction to unlock the secrets of this world, remains a moving one.

Some critics, prompted by the poem's emphasis on armour and the marvellous level of the battles, come close to making a Beowulf-saint comparison:

Had he access to the armor of Paul, one feels that he would have used it well, better in his last fight than he uses the iron shield and Nægling, and would have vanquished his adversary with as much grace as Guthlac overcame his (Finnegan 53; Tolkien 24).

The equipment and treasure in the poem, besides their antithesis to the armour of Paul, are like the saints' relics of hagiography. Hanning says: "In Germanic society, treasure bore a heavy weight of symbolism, representing heroic worth, heroic continuity, and the socially cohesive power of the ring-giving king" (94). Saints' relics also represent this "social power." Michael Cherniss relates treasure to the essence of man, much the way the relic relates to the essence of the saint: "a tangible, material symbol of the intangible, abstract qualities of virtue

in a warrior" (475-476). Personified swords and armour appear throughout the poem (1441b-1464). The associations between object and man may reveal negative characteristics. Greenfield suggests that the decaying hoard stands for Beowulf's craven bodyguard, "their honour gone to rust" ("Gifstol" 113). Another metaphor, which illustrates an important theme of *Guthlac B* (Rosier "Death" 82-85), describes the soul as a treasure. Two critics find this idea in *Beowulf*: "death (*wyrd*) is moving to attack the old man's life, seeking the treasury of the soul" (Goldsmith 88); "a son is a treasure; a treasure is a begotten life" (P.B. Taylor 192). This metaphor links treasure and man more concretely.

A relic is a symbol of the death of the saint. The hero's armour is a symbol of the life of the wearer, and of the death of its previous owners. Just like the character of the hero in *Beowulf*, treasure and armour are only as good as the environment allows, and, like the relic inside the reliquary, objects are trapped inside the thinking of the society which uses them. The worth of the treasure, like the worth of the hero, is difficult to establish. The characters do not know it, but the hoard is "heathen gold". Yet, for the approximately 2000 lines previous to this judgement, the poet presents the trappings of ancient society with much love. Treasure is evil, or at least tainted (Lee 216; Horowitz 507), and it is difficult to work one's way around the poet's ultimate judgement: the hoard, despite its monetary value and former glory, and despite its potential which Beowulf can see, is useless:

forleton eorla gestreon eorðan healdan,
gold on greate, þær hit nu gen lifað
eldum swa unnyt, swa hi(t æro)r wæs (3166-3168).

The poet wishes to leave this final pronouncement with his audience. His conception of treasure progresses through the poem to this final ambiguity (Leyerle 13; *Beowulf* 452-455). The Christian point of view demands a final turning away from treasure: "a Christian audience

knows that gold, buried with the dead man, will do him no good in the after-life" (Whitelock *Audience* 82).

Beowulf and the hoard are strongly connected. He gets the riches when he cannot use them, and his subjects receive the hoard and choose not to use it. They recognize its uselessness now that the goodness of their society has flown. The community action at the funeral is appropriate and pathetic, as useless as the gold itself; a memorial and a suicide by the Geats. The funeral rites are both a tribute and a relinquishing; they ritualize a refusal to accept Beowulf as an example. Since the Geats can put him, and all that he stands for, into the ground, they can localize their grief, and then leave it behind. The Geats cannot imagine that Beowulf, and the equipment he used to the best of his exceptional ability, might continue beyond his human life. No Geat takes a keepsake; Wiglaf's despair is overwhelming (2890-2891). As the treasure and their leader go into the grave, the Geats' resign themselves to the disappearance of their number, and to the ending of their way of life. Each item in a hoard has been taken in war, as the life of Scyld proves, and a heap of objects is a stack of old scores to settle, an army of enemies waiting in the wings. The Geats accept the inevitability of extermination. They bury the treasure, which represents Beowulf's hopes, against the wishes of their king. He tries to make a community out of his people. He succeeds in showing how great a light he is compared to them. Yet several facts prove the despair of the Geats wrong: the charity of Beowulf's sacrifice, which gives the Geats a chance to continue; the charity of God, which gives good works; and the charity of the poet, which gives Beowulf and the Geats immortality in art.

The Geats only want Beowulf back. They do not know how to accomplish this through relics, the means of a saint's return to his people. The objects in the hoard do not become relics, as *brandea* placed in a saint's tomb would become (Wilson 4). The Geats wait by the graveside for a miracle which can no longer occur. They lack the knowledge of the Christian

witness. Nor does Beowulf have knowledge to give life to a dead society. The Geats expect Beowulf to hold the treasure, when now the earth holds it, as the audience knows by hearing the lay of the last survivor (2231b-2277). The hoard belongs now to the earth which will destroy it through time. This fate contrasts with the fate of relics, which continue to be vessels of the saint's saving power. The hoard ends as a heap of empty vessels. The society and its riches are interlocked in their uselessness and hopelessness, which are the results of their heathen taint (Tolkien 22).

Relics and treasure are compatible in a fundamental sense. The idea of Christian relics comes from ancient grave goods (H.O. Taylor 275). Correspondences between relics and treasure exist in Anglo-Saxon culture (Lee 71; *Christ and Satan* 579-597). Quite simply, Beowulf's armour is like a saint's relic because it aids the veneration of him, it is an image of him. The venerating crowd demands a piece of the saint's flesh. A relic is public property. Equally, treasure in *Beowulf* becomes part of a man, and is owned, ultimately, by the community. A man values an object like a friend and helper, as a warrior trusts his sword like a retainer. Life, spirit, and body enter the relic, and exit in turn as miraculous powers, but, confirming its humanity, the relic often undergoes sufferings like its antecedent martyr (Earl "Typology" 42; Delehaye *Cinq* 116). The relic represents the miracle in man.

The relic belongs to two worlds. It exists in the real world, yet declares the existence of heaven. It is like the church itself. It represents community because it can heal anybody, and it gives rise to miracles and miracle-stories which help to solidify the social unit of the saint's cult. The saint's relic, with its memorials, rites, stories, and pictures builds a church around its emotional core, and uses its powers to gather, shelter, and teach the community. Ideally, the objects in *Beowulf* construct a community. Beowulf holds this dream:

"Ic ðara frætwa Frean ealles ðanc,
 Wuldurcyninge wordum secge,
 ecum Dryhtne, ƿe ic her on starie,
 þas ðe ic moste minum leodum
 ær swyltdæge swyld gestrynan.
 Nu ic on maðma hord mine bebohte
 frode feorhlege, fremmað gena
 leoda ƿearfe; ne mæg ic her leng wesan" (2794-2801).

The king in his hall deals out the social arrangements which keep his community organized. This structure fails at Beowulf's funeral, as the Geats decide that the plan of buying cooperation is futile, and put the gold back into the ground.

Relics do not manifest themselves to the society of the poem. The field of battle dominates instead, shining with pseudo-relics. The wearing of armour and sword expresses one's intention. The two help to organize the relationship upon the battlefield: your sword does battle with my byrnies and vice versa. Neither weapon nor protection accompany Beowulf to his stark contest with Grendel. This first battle is a struggle between the two magical powers of Beowulf's strength of thirty men, and Grendel's protection from swords. The hero's gift is essentially a magic sword (it is in his hand-grip) and the monster's is a magic shield.

The character of the second fight is different. The armed man contrasts with the ascete in every way. And, with his sword drawn in the mere, Beowulf distances himself from his first fight and from his enemy, unlike the previous close contact in the Grendel contest. It is the sword that is naked in battle: *Hæfdon swurd nacod* (539a), not the man, and the weapon takes on some of the risk and some of the blame. But it is a weapon that severs like Grendel, and pierces as Grendel's mother tries to pierce to Beowulf through his mail. A sword, by its existence, provokes challenge upon being seen. But to include the sword in one's acts, to assign some of the blame to the weapon, is a delusion. One who says "My sword and I did it", makes only a rationalization. The sword, by purpose and association, is evil (Clark 411;

Beowulf 1557-1562, 2047-2069a). In contrast, a saint vanquishes demons verbally (Felix 110). In a life of St. Samson, a serpent, at the approach of the hero singing a psalm, “with a horrid hissing scream as though struck with a sword. . . . whips itself trembling into a ball and madly bites its own tail”, and eventually “spews all its venom out, and dies” (A. K. Brown 443). Alan K. Brown clarifies these events:

the invisible sword which seems to smite the dragon at the clear sound of the psalm must be an allegorical realization of St. Paul’s famous figurative language at Ephesians 6: 17, about the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (444-445).

Only God’s swords will work against the monsters. Saints have spiritual reinforcements to bring to the battle; Beowulf has the handgrip of thirty men. At the mere, he needs something put into his hand, for his words cannot banish his enemies. They lack the miraculous. His words, shot through with the traditional language and customs of his society, are bound to fail. Beowulf contributes to God’s order with deeds, as the saint contributes with words, but Beowulf’s success is fleeting. He accepts the kingly responsibility from Hygelac in the shape of a sword (2190-2199). By wearing and using a sword, as he must as king, he buckles himself to the war-like acts, boasts, and justifications of his society, in the very act of binding himself closer to his people by his courage and moral leadership. The sword is a medium, and war is its message. A sword-nurturing society nurtures war.

A sword, having the shape of a man or a cross, and carried at one’s side like a companion, symbolizes the man that uses it. In the mere scene, sword, man, and God coalesce. God singles out the sword, as He singles out the hero, for glorious work:

Geseah ða on searwum sigeedig bil,
ealdswéord eotenisc ecgum þyhtig,

wigena weorðmynd; þat [wæs] wæpna cyst,—
 buton hit wæs mare donne ænig mon oðer
 to beadulace ætberan meahte,
 god and geatolic, giganta geweorc (1557-1562).

Equal to Beowulf in power and favour from God, the giant sword represents the hero as he fights Grendel's mother (*secg weorce gefeh* 1569). He is the only warrior strong enough to wield it. As Beowulf is God's agent, so is the sword. It must undergo trials, like Beowulf and the saint. The hero dives into the bloody mere with fire on its surface, and the sword is immersed in the liquid fire of the *heatoswate* (1606). The wound-dealing part of the sword wanes completely, leaving only a relic of the weapon itself. Since the sword contributes to an act of cleansing, it represents the potential good in man, and its disintegration demonstrates the shortness of man's life, and God's ownership of victory, time, and the soul.

The burning of the sword is like the burning of a body on a pyre, followed by a memorial. The memorial of the sword is its hilt. A relic contains the event of the saint's death, and the hilt now contains the events it has just witnessed. A victory is implicit in any spoil from the battle. A relic contains Christ's victory; the hilt is only Beowulf's. The two parts of the *ealdswæord* also demonstrate separation between body and soul at death. The sword symbolizes the duality of man in victory.

The golden hilt is the ideal of the poem's other relics. It underlines the joy of Beowulf's triumph: "Beowulf restores to the world of man a magical sword-hilt from Grendel's cave, just as Elene restores to use the Holy Rood" (P.B. Taylor 203; Olsen "Genre" 424). The hilt represents God's contribution to the victory (mentioned by Beowulf 1661), the hero's cleansing of the mere, and all that is positive in Beowulf's success. But the poet makes it clear that the Danish court does not completely understand God's actions:

Ða wæs gylden hilt gamelum rince,
harum hildfruman on hand gyfen,
enta ærgeweorc; (1677-1679a).

Hroðgar maðelode— hylt sceawode,
ealde lafe, on ðæm wæs or writen
fyrngewinnes, syððan flod ofsloh,
gifen geotende giganta cyn,
frecne geferdon; þæt wæs fremde ƿeod
ecean Dryhtne; him þæs endelean
þurh wæteres wylm Waldend sealde.
Swa wæs on ðæm scennum sciran goldes
þurh runstafas rihte gemearcod,
geseted ond gesæd, hwam þæt swoord geworht,
irena cyst ærest wäre,
wreoðenhilt ond wyrmfah. Ða se wisa spræc
sunu Healfdenes —swigedon ealle—: (1687-1699).

Hrothgar's sermon seems to have no connection with the inscriptions on the hilt. The moral injunctions to Beowulf might relate to the wrong-headedness of the giants. But, as Osborn says, the Old Testament events appear on the hilt so that the reader will give scriptural support to Hrothgar's speech. The hilt makes the oration a sermon (978), and the object "assumes the character of a symbol of God's justice" (Brodeur 212). Hanning comes closest to my own perception of the hilt: "Now, as it changes hands, it is a relic (*ealde laf*, l. 1688) given to Hrothgar as a souvenir of the fact that Grendel challenged the Danes and was defeated" (95). Hanning defines it further:

the hilt *is* history, metaphorically. Because it is bladeless, it can no longer make history; it is useful only as a work of art, *wreoðenhilt* and *wyrmfah* (with twisted hilt and serpentine etching, l.1698), and as a tool of exegesis for those who understand it. In this respect it differs from other swords in *Beowulf* which both represent and make history, in the Finn and Ingeld episodes (cf. ll. 1138-1145, 2032-2062), by prompting remembrance of past evil and offering a means of revenge. The hilt is a metaphor for the heroic poem itself: a beautifully wrought testimony to the past and its deeds, sundered

from its cutting edge, and thus recalling the break in time and outlook between the heroic age and its audience. Hrothgar's imperviousness to the hilt's message exemplifies the ignorance of providence which separates the pre-Christian past from the Christian present (96).

The hilt "prompts remembrance of past evil" because it leads Hrothgar to speak of Heremod (1709-1724), and because it is a relic of the Grendel fights, and of the ancient war with the giants. But the hilt is not just history. It is a potential Christian relic, as the poet demonstrates in a comparison between the melting sword and God's gift of spring, and in the biblical origin of one of the stories inscribed upon the old heirloom.

Hrothgar does not quite see the relic's capacity. There are two kinds of language on the hilt, yet he does not reveal the contents of either text. He draws lessons from his own stock of history. The story of the giants' revolt, which gives the traditional origin for all war, might inspire his thoughts, perhaps unconsciously. He correctly blames man for war-like actions, and warns him against violence (1711-1712). But he cannot trace man's relationship with God, which also forms part of the inscription he stares at. Ironically, the poet stresses Hrothgar's wisdom before he speaks: *Ða se wisa spræc* (1698). The wisdom he offers in his sermon is appropriate, "excellently designed" (Brodeur 213), and "reaches to the edges of Christian truth" (Huppé 38). But the old king only knows that evil comes; the origin beyond man is not clear. Hrothgar's knowledge cannot divulge the complete truth, still, the hilt sets his thought upon its limited, progressive journey. The revelation is a near-religious experience of admirable proportions, but unrealized vision. The tragedy is right before the old man's eyes: the relic's inscription describes a race foreign to God. Alienation is the doom of Hrothgar's heroic society.

The hilt is like the poem, Hanning says (96). It is a story, and a highly wrought work of art. Earl also links literature with the object, and finds that this connection is important to the understanding of saints' lives:

a hagiographic document [is] preserved as a relic—a literary relic, as it were; and a literary icon as well, for the miraculous deliverance of this written relic resembles nothing more than the traditional production of images “by the hand of God” (“Typology” 26).

The hilt is God's property. He singles it out. It is capable of miracle and it is forged in a miracle. This relic brings together many of *Beowulf*'s themes: action, history, knowledge, and art. But Hrothgar cannot see “the Word”. The truth of this relic is lost on the society, and the society is therefore lost.

Beowulf's trophies are all relics. After the first combat, Grendel's severed arm draws all the attention of the people gathered in the hall (926-927, 983-990). It is a horrible object of evil origin. As a body part, it links with saints' relics, but its steel tips recall the claw used to cut the martyr, and its composition is sword-like. Grendel's agent, not God's, shows up to retrieve this ambiguous trophy.

The *lafs* of the second battle are the head and the hilt. The presentation of Grendel's head announces the completion of the first battle. It shows the death and identity of Grendel absolutely. Beowulf and the court can now look into Grendel's eyes, which are bereft of *leohrtunfæger* (727). In the mere, Beowulf found he could use a sword against the monster, whose magical shield was broken. The head is a relic which everyone may now understand, and the society has solved Grendel through Beowulf. Hrothgar rightly chooses to base his thoughts

upon the more Godly object, the hilt, and, ironically, this is the relic the people do not comprehend.

The Finnsburg episode exists within this pattern of relics as a reminder that, in the heroic world, despite the enjoyment of treasure, the more important relics are the men placed on a funeral pyre after a battle (1114-1122).

The *lafs* of the final battle increase in number and in complexity (Calder “Setting” 30-32). The entire body of the dragon, rightly called “the stranger thing”, occupies the attention of the society right after Beowulf’s death:

Ær hi þær gesegan syllicran wiht,
wyrm on wonge wiðerræthes þær
laðne licgean; wæs se legdraca
grimlic gry(refah) gledum beswæled;
se wæs fiftiges fotgemearces
lang on legere; (3038-3043a).

With no hall to place the trophy in, the people give the dragon to the sea, a natural, renewing element (3132). The hoard is another huge relic, almost innumerable. The third relic is Beowulf’s own body, large in consideration of all he represents. The third fight produces all of the kinds of relics which have previously appeared in the poem. The Geats gain no consolation from any of these relics. The hero himself asks that his body be used after death:

“Hatað headomære hlæw gewyrcean
beorhtne æfter bæle æt brimes nosan;
se scel to gemyndum minum leodum
heah hlifian on Hronesnæsse,
þæt hit sæliðend syððan hatan
Biowulfes biorh, ða ðe bretingas
ofer floda genipu feorran drifað” (2802-2808).

The treatment of the treasure shows the futility of trying to lead a society from beyond the grave. Only the saint is successful in this leadership, speaking through the relics he or she leaves behind.

The last relics of the poem are living ones. The cowardly retainers are battle-leavings indeed, but Wiglaf, as his name suggests, plays the part of the communicating relic in the final scene:

The *Beowulf* poet plays . . . with the word's semantic reaches when he describes Wiglaf's entry into battle against the dragon: *Ne gemealt him se modsefa, ne his mæges laf/ gewac æt wige* (ll. 2628-29). The poetic lines both embed and define the young hero's name. Wiglaf, as well as his sword, is a *mæges laf* (or *mægenes laf*, if the manuscript form is preferred) and neither sword nor courage fail him. *Laf* here compounds all those traits of character which Wiglaf could be expected to inherit from his family—skill, daring, strength—as well as the tool with which he exercises them. Wiglaf's name both shapes his career as a survivor of battle and signals his fame achieved in battle. Wiglaf is, then, a battle-gift, or battle-treasure, for his lord (197).

Taylor stresses Wiglaf's positive and individual attributes too much. Beowulf initiates the fight with the dragon, and it remains his battle, while Wiglaf is a remainder of it. Wiglaf bears Beowulf's equipment from the field, relates the news of the hero's death, and, while helping to save the kingdom in helping to slay the dragon, witnesses the kingdom's destruction in the death of its king. He might have entered the battle earlier. All of the relics at the end of the poem are hopeless ones, including Wiglaf's sword, likely the seed of future conflict (Finnegan 52; cf. *Beowulf* 2611-2619). The last battle results in the end of the hero, his people, their civilization, and their wealth, with no future provided by the communicating power of any relic.

Conclusion

A fresh reading of the poem arises from a comparison between *Beowulf* and hagiography. The undeniably close relationship between the two produces an engaging list of useful parallels: general ones, philosophical ones, and technical ones. These associations secure *Beowulf* within its early medieval time period. Critics will find more correspondences. A number of words and phrases which describe fire show specific correlatives between *Beowulf* and hagiography. A comparison of the monsters in the poem to the demons and other enemies in saints' lives, would reveal corresponding characters, and similar ideas, behind the nature and origins of evil. The peculiar God of *Beowulf* becomes clearer with a fuller understanding of medieval hagiography. New investigation will continue the necessary process of comparing *Beowulf* with other aspects of saints' lives, and with other works. One may certainly compare the death of Beowulf to the death of a saint, and find many connections. The idea of sin in a saint's life could illuminate some of the characters' behaviour in *Beowulf*. The philosophy of relics could define the role of specific objects in the poem, such as the Brosning necklace. Miraculous events in *Beowulf* could be similar to certain miracles in saints' lives. A search for images of fire in both genres might make more sense out of doctrinal interpretations. There is much unsearched material that would, when brought to light, increase one's understanding of *Beowulf* and medieval literature. These investigations will have to proceed in another place, although they help to clarify the *Beowulf*-poet's habit of contrasting the knowledge of hagiography with the knowledge of the characters in his epic.

Analogies to the harrowing of hell and baptism work well within the general spirit of the poem's message, but the mere-fight is easier to follow if one interprets Beowulf as a pseudo-saint in his struggles with Grendel's mother. Beowulf seems more human when he is linked with a saint, and God's activity in the poem, and in the mere-scene especially, becomes more comprehensible. The poet demonstrates, through miracles, why his hero has more trouble with

Grendel than with his weaker mother. But miracles touch the audience more than they can touch the characters, and these marvels demonstrate Beowulf's tragic position before God, whom he cannot really know.

I do not give a narrow perception of *Beowulf*. The comparisons in this thesis form a reading of the poem. Beowulf represents a past way of life which remains a powerful influence upon the poet's audience. The audience must examine Beowulf's every move within the context of the new religion. The listeners acknowledge the greatness of heroes within the traditional art-form of verse, while they bow to Christianity's new ideas. The familiar figure of a saint haunts Beowulf's actions with moral judgement. This yardstick is only available to a society which knows the bible and hagiography. The sacrifice and goodness of the epic hero drive home the limit of human judgement, as Beowulf's excellence fills the poem, yet his mysterious *dom* reminds the audience that true appraisal rests with the "Measurer". The eclipsing figure of a saint, grasping the miracle, looms over the whole heroic conception of *Beowulf*, with its *manna mildust*, who lacks only spiritual foresight.

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Appendix: Translations

Chapter One

p. 5

There was the sound of the harp; the scop sang out clearly. He said that he knew how to relate the beginning of men far back in time, he said that the Almighty made the earth, the victory-bright plain that the water surrounds; set the light of the sun and moon to shine for the land-dwellers, and decked the fields of the earth with sprays and leaves, created life for each kind of living thing which moves about.—So the lordly men lived in joys and happiness until one began to perform a wicked deed, an enemy in hell.

p. 6

Such was their custom, the hope of heathens; they kept hell in their minds, knew not the Lord, the Judge of deeds, nor did they know the Lord God, nor indeed did they know to praise the protector of the heavens, the Lord of glory. Woeful are they who through terrible trouble will thrust their souls into the fire's embrace, never to change to comfort or hope! Blessed will be those who are allowed to find the Lord after their death-day and find safety in the father's embrace!

Chapter Two

p. 14

Generalities concerning the persecution, the introduction of the hero, his arrest and interrogation, his refusal to sacrifice, his tortures, his return to prison, heavenly vision, further interrogation, more torments, more time in prison, and so on until the execution—this is the design which the hagiographer will try in vain to modify by repeating certain scenes, introducing a few incidents, and assigning different places to the miracles.

There the emperor Datianus urged the bishop Valerius and the same deacon Vicentius [*sic*] to become heathens (Herzfeld 29).

p. 16

Then he ordered her to be thrown into a burning oven, and it cooled down at once (Herzfeld 7).

some pagan prefect ordered them both to be locked up in a heated bath (Herzfeld 25).

p. 17

the king's hall burnt down with all his treasures, his son went mad, and he himself became a leper, and wounds burst out on him from head to foot, and he turned his sword upwards and stabbed himself (Herzfeld 175).

and told him that hell was opened and its punishments ready for him, and bade him hurry to them; immediately afterwards the emperor died (Herzfeld 121).

The man who beheaded them told all the people that he had seen their souls when they left the bodies, as if they were adorned with gems and attired in garments shining with gold, and that angels had joyfully borne them to heaven on their hands (Herzfeld 93).

Chapter Three

p. 28

"Now I have bought the treasure's hoard with my old life, performed further for the needs of the people; nor may I be here long."

p. 32

and speak about the man; they considered his nobility and works of courage, judged him in glory . . . said that he was the mildest and kindest of the world-kings of men, the most gentle with people, and the most eager for praise.

p. 34

Then there was weeping and wailing; sad was the youth's soul, mournful his mind, when he heard that the holy one was about to depart. He felt grief heavy in his heart for his lord because of the dread tidings. Gloom filled his breast: his mind was troubled, because he saw his lord about to leave. He could not refrain, but, suffering affliction, he let hot tears gush forth, drops well out. Fate could keep life, the dear treasure, in the doomed one no longer than had been decreed for him (Gordon 273).

That one was sad of mind, restless and ready for slaughter; fate was exceedingly near, which had to salute the old one, to seek his soul-hoard; to sunder and divide life from body; the life of the prince was then not long to be wound in flesh.

p. 36

He gazed around the building; Hygelac's thane then moved by the wall, raised up the weapon hardily by the hilt, angry and resolute,—nor was that edge useless to the warrior, for he quickly would repay Grendel for those many attacks he performed on the West-Danes.

To say the truth, men did not know, the hall counsellors, heroes under heaven, who received that burden.

p. 39

"I did not seek hostile intrigues, nor did I swear oaths wrongly. Sick with mortal wounds, for this I have joy above all [things]: the Wielder of Men need not blame me for murder of kinsmen in battle."

p. 41

"Guard yourself, then [from] troublesome deeds, Beowulf dear, best warrior, and choose the better [course], eternal helps."

Chapter Four

p. 46

Then the cruel man ordered that the earthen jar be filled with lead; and then commanded the greatest of pyres to be kindled, the funeral pile to be lighted. On all sides it was girt with fires; the bath boiled hotly. Then hastily, enraged with anger, he commanded her, void of sins, guiltless, to be thrust into the seething lead. Then the flame was parted and dispersed; the lead leaped out far, hot, devouring (Gordon 175).

"That is not far from here, measured in miles, that the mere stands; frost-covered groves overhang it; woods with fast roots overshadow the water. Each night there may be seen a fearful wonder: fire on the water. There is nobody old and wise who lives among the children of men, who knows the bottom [of it]. Although the heath-stepper, the hart with strong horns harried by the hounds, put to far flight, seeks the woods, he would rather give up his life on the shore, than go in to save his head; that is not a pleasant place! From it the surging wave goes up black to the skies, when the wind stirs the hostile weather, until the sky becomes gloomy, and the heavens weep."

p. 47

The people saw it, the waters welled with blood, with hot gore. The horn sounded the ready war song again and again. The war band all sat down. They saw then over the water many of the kin of worms, strong sea dragons, some swimming to explore, many lying on the slopes of the shore, that often attend a sorrowful journey upon the sail-road in the morning time, worms and wild beasts. They rushed on bitter and enraged; they had perceived the noise, the sound of the battle horn.

p. 49

She fell on the floor, the sword was bloody, the man rejoiced in his deed. The light brightened, gleaming stood inside, even as the sky's candle clearly shines out of heaven.

p. 50

Then the sword, the battle-blade, began to diminish from the battle-sweat, the battle-icicle; that was a wonderful event, that it melted completely just like ice, as when the Father releases frost's bonds, unwinds the water-fetters. He has control of times and occasions; that is truly God.

The wide mail-shirt, interlocked by hand and artfully decorated, had to go swimming and explore; it knew how to preserve the body, so that the grip of battle, the angry grasp of trouble, could not injure life; but the white helm, embellished with treasure, surrounded with beautiful chains, which had to mingle with the mere-bottom, and seek moving water, protected the head; thus it long ago had been worked by the weapons-smith, made wonderfully, beset with swine-decorations, so that afterwards neither sword, nor battle-blades could bite into it.

p. 51

"I vow this to you: go where she will, in earth's bosom, into the mountain wood, down to the bottom of the ocean, she will not be lost in protection."

p. 52

"It is better for any man to avenge his friend, rather than to much mourn."

[She] groped towards him then, and grabbed the warrior with terrible grips; though that could not injure the sound body within; the rings outside protected round-about, so that she might not pierce through the war-clothing, the interlocked mail-coat, with evil fingers.

When she got to the bottom, the water-wolf bore the prince of rings to her house so he could not wield weapons, no matter how brave he was.

Then the guest discovered that the battle-light would not bite, not injure life; yet that blade failed the prince at need.

p. 53

sat upon the hall-guest, and drew her dagger, broad and bright-edged; she would avenge her son, her only offspring.

The attack was as much less as is a woman's skill, a wife's attack in battle, in comparison to an armed man.

A glorious voice answered her from the clouds, uttered a speech: "Seize that proud one and hold him fast, till he tell his whole errand truthfully, from the beginning, what his lineage is." (Gordon 170).

Then the glorious maiden's soul was rejoiced; she laid hold on the devil . . . (Gordon 170). [There is a gap in the manuscript. When it resumes, the demon is speaking] "so that thou has bound me thus firmly, wholly helpless with fetters" (Gordon 172).

p. 54

"I have never seen a mightier earl over the earth, a well-equipped warrior, than this one of you is; that hall-companion is peerless in form, worthy of his weapons, or his appearance belies him."

p. 55

"Then the sailors said, those who carried gifts to the Geats for satisfaction, that he [Beowulf], famed in battle, had the strength of thirty men in his hand-grip. Holy God sent him to us on account of favours."

"Are you the Beowulf who fought with Breca on the broad sea, competed at swimming? There you explored the depth in deep water, and for foolish boasting and pride ventured your lives."

p. 56

"though you became a slayer to your brother and to kin; therefore you will suffer damnation in hell."

had seen the hand, the fiend's fingers; at the end of each one was one of the strong nails, each most like steel.

Chapter Five

p. 60

"I protected the people fifty winters; nor was there any king among the neighbouring nations, not one, that would dare meet me in battle or threaten me with fears. I waited on my land a length of time, held my own well, did not seek hostile intrigues, nor did I swear oaths wrongly."

p. 61

That to the good man was a blow to his heart, the greatest torture to the soul; the wise-one thought he had the Wielder, the eternal Lord, made bitterly angry against old law; his breast inside welled with gloomy thoughts, as with him was not usually the case.

The soul left out of him from the breast to seek the judgement of those fast in truth.

p. 64

I have heard the hand was too strong which taxed each sword with [its] swing, when he bore to battle the weapon wondrously-hard; he was not in any way better for that.

p. 66

Beowulf came from there under his own power, he accomplished an act of strength while swimming; he had thirty battle-armours in his arms alone, when he went on the sea.

Then the Geatish man began to awaken the greatest of pyre-fires on the barrow; the wood-smoke rose dark over the fire. The roaring flame was wound up in weeping (the wind had dropped) until, hot in the heart, it had broken the bone-house. Sick at heart, the ones sad-in-mind mourned the lord's death; so the wavy-haired old woman wept over Beowulf, sang her sorrowful woe, said again and again that she herself dreaded hard, fearful days full of much slaughter, the terror of armies and humiliation and captivity. Heaven swallowed the smoke.

p. 69

let the earth hold the earl's treasure, the gold in the ground, where it lies now, as useless to men as it was before.

p. 71

"I thank with words the Lord of all, king of glory, eternal Lord, for all this treasure, that I stare upon here, these things such as I had to acquire for my people before my death-day. Now I have bought the treasure's hoard with my old life; I accomplish further needs of my people, nor may I long be here."

p. 73

He saw then among the fashioned war-gear a victory-blessed blade, an old sword of giants exalted by battle-men, with strong edges; that was the best of weapons, but it was larger than any other man could bear to battle, good and decorated, the work of giants.

p. 74

Then the golden hilt was given into the hand of the old man, the hoary battle-leader, the old work of giants; it, wonder-smith's work, came into the possession of the Danish lord after the fall of the devils. . . . Hrothgar spoke—he looked at the hilt, the old heirloom, on it was written of the beginning of feud-battle, after the flood carried off and killed the kin of giants, the sea-pouring brought this about terribly; that was a people foreign to the eternal Lord; the Wielder gave them final reward through the waters' welling. The sword guard shining with gold had upon it for whom the sword, banded-hafted and worm-decorated, was first made of choicest iron, through rune-staves rightly marked out, set down and stated. Then the wise one spoke, son of Half-Dane. All were hushed.

p. 78

First they looked at the stranger thing, the hateful worm lying in a place opposite; the fire-dragon was grimly horrible, burnt with fire; it lay fifty feet long.

"Command the one-famous-in-battle to build a great hill at the sea's cape; it shall tower high over Hronesnæse, to remind my people, so that when they drive ships far over the flood's darkness, the seafarers will call it Beowulf's hill."