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Celtic Water Hags, Violent Children, and Wild Men: Reexamining the Syncretic Nature of Beowulf

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Celtic Water Hags, Violent Children, and Wild Men: Reexamining the Syncretic Nature of *Beowulf*

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ABSTRACT

Celtic Water Hags, Violent Children, and Wild Men: Reexamining the Syncretic Nature of *Beowulf*

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This thesis reaffirms the Celtic influence on *Beowulf*. The first chapter reevaluates past attempts to demonstrate a Celtic connection with particular emphasis on the work of Martin Puhvel and R. Mark Scowcroft. The second chapter compares Grendel's Mother to the Lady of the Lake, from the *Prose Lancelot*, using the Celtic water hag motif. The third chapter analyzes how Grendel exemplifies the Celtic motifs of the violent child and the wild man by comparing him with Cu Chulainn, from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, Lancelot, from the *Prose Lancelot*, and the Celtic wild man tales surrounding Suibhne, Myrddin, and Lailoken. The final chapter uses Michael D. C. Drout's Lexomic analysis and a network analysis by Pádraig Mac Carron and Ralph Kenna to problematize the assumed unity of the text. Therefore, this thesis provides both narrative and textual evidence to validate the Celtic influence on *Beowulf*.

DEDICATION

For the Baughers and the Sheltons, and most especially for my wife:
without your love and support this would not be possible.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Although both sides of the "Celtic Question" within *Beowulf* studies are very passionately debated, the question has received extraordinarily little attention from the field as a whole. Many modern scholars accept Fredrich Panzer's theory concerning the folklore elements behind *Beowulf* without demonstrating much critical analysis of his arguments, or those opposing him. *Beowulf*, the most prominent Anglo-Saxon text, and perhaps the one whose origins are the most elusive, is still portrayed as entirely Germanic in origin by most scholars. This view, however, is far too simplistic for a text written at such a uniquely transitional period for English identity.

In order to construct an argument in favor of the Celtic influence on *Beowulf*, I have arranged my contentions in order to deliver important background information to the argument first. This thesis reintroduces and questions previous arguments suggesting that the Celtic "Hand and the Child" tale influenced *Beowulf*. Next, a narrative rationale for Celtic influence is provided by proposing two original analyses of the Grendelkin episodes of *Beowulf* alongside Celtic motifs, demonstrating commonalities and a high degree of similarity. Finally, a modern critical framework for the argument is provided by establishing the impact that contemporary approaches have on the "Celtic Question." Through this process, this thesis revalidates the Celtic influence on the narrative and text of *Beowulf*.

The second chapter, "Celticity and the study of *Beowulf*," explores the ongoing conversation within Celtic studies regarding the definitions of 'Celtic,' 'Celticity,' and 'Celtism' in an effort to determine the appropriateness of a study which examines Irish, Welsh, Scottish,

and Continental literatures together. As Dimitra Fimi notes, "in recent decades this entire construct of a homogenous Celtic people has begun to crumble" (4). This redefinition of Celtic literature problematizes Martin Puhvel's previous attempt at an analysis of the Celtic elements in *Beowulf* because it represents a more diverse and nuanced conception of the folktales, myths, and legends which influence the poem. Indeed, without diligent work to demonstrate a connection between Welsh and Irish medieval texts, which Patrick Sims-Williams has industriously undertaken,[1] the influence of Irish and Welsh tales on *Beowulf* would possibly have to be treated as separate investigations. Therefore, it is of vital importance to a study of this nature to provide a justification for treating these various corpora that have traditionally been viewed as Celtic as influential on *Beowulf*.

Additionally, the second chapter gives a quick history of the "Celtic Question" within *Beowulf* scholarship, which serves to contextualize the current thesis. This brief overview provides a cursory glance at most of the major scholars and works that have shaped the current arguments surrounding the "Celtic Question." It also contends that a further investigation is warranted, since few modern scholars have addressed the question. This context presents a fruitful area in which the discussion of Celtic literatures and *Beowulf* is both important and necessary.

My third chapter, "Echoes of the Celtic Water Hag Motif in The Lady of The Lake and Grendel's Mother," examines several Celtic folktales, predominantly Irish, in order to demonstrate a consistent water hag motif. This motif is then used as a basis for comparing Grendel's Mother and the Lady of the Lake. This examination crystallizes the similarities between the two characters by illuminating the elements of the archetype on which both of these

[1] See: Patrick Sims-Williams. *The Irish Influence on Medieval Welsh Literature*, Oxford UP, 2011.

characters are based. These elements are consistently cross-referenced with the water hag trope of the Celtic folktales. By revealing the underlying commonalities between these two characters and the motif from which they come, a new avenue of exploration between the two traditions becomes possible and necessary. This chapter serves as an exemplar for the way that cross-cultural explorations serve to deepen the cultural significance of a syncretic text like *Beowulf*.

Using the previous chapter as a model, my fourth chapter, "Grendel and the Celtic Feral Child and Wild Man Motifs," compares Grendel with several characters using Celtic motifs. Initially, Grendel is compared to Lancelot, from the *Prose Lancelot*, and Cú Chulainn,[2] from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, using the violent child motif. The similarities demonstrated create a firm basis for contending that Grendel's character is influenced by the Celtic folklore tradition. Furthermore, a second Celtic motif, that of the wild man, is used to compare Grendel to Suibne, Myrddin, and Lailoken. Once again there is a high degree of correspondence among these figures, which argues for a shared tradition.

While my third and fourth chapters focus on providing a narrative rationale for affirming a Celtic influence on *Beowulf*, my final chapter, "The Contribution of Modern Analysis to the Case for Celtic Influence on *Beowulf*," steps back from the primary texts to look at two modern analyses of *Beowulf* in order to provide a textual rationale to the same end. Michael D. C. Drout's Lexomic analysis and Pádraig Mac Carron and Ralph Kenna's social network analysis both cast a shadow over the long-held tradition concerning the unity of the text. They also indicate specific areas in which sources differ or are lacking. Then I incorporate these two analyses with past observations made by notable *Beowulf* scholars, including T. A. Shippey,

[2] All Celtic names presented in this thesis have been standardized using: John T. Koch, editor. *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia*. ABC-CLIO, 2006.

J.R.R. Tolkien, and John D. Niles, which have been frequently ignored, to demonstrate how these new investigations answer the buried questions of *Beowulf* scholarship.

This thesis reaffirms the Celtic influence on *Beowulf* that is overlooked far too often. By demonstrating that Celtic folklore has influenced the characters of Grendel and Grendel's Mother to a large extent and demonstrating how traditional approaches to the text itself are becoming untenable in light of new research methodology, it problematizes the conception of the epic as a transmission of Germanic tradition and ideals. These Celtic elements show the text to be a syncretic work that addresses a unique period of transition for the English identity.

CHAPTER 2

CELTICITY AND THE STUDY OF *BEOWULF*

Beowulf, the most prominent Anglo-Saxon text, has primarily been viewed as a transmission of the Germanic tradition since scholarship on the manuscript began. Over the past century, however, there have been a few dissenting voices which have proposed that there is also a Celtic influence on the text. While the "Celtic Question" has never received much attention from most *Beowulf* scholars, it has consistently presented explanations for cruxes left unexplained by a Germanic perspective, and has greatly problematized reading the text from a single folk tradition. This thesis reaffirms the Celtic influence on the text of *Beowulf* by providing a context for the validity of such a study of Celtic elements and revisiting previous arguments which consider the impact of the "Hand and the Child" tale on the narrative.

Scholars have used the term 'Celtic' to describe the Irish and Welsh peoples and languages since Ernest Renan's *La Poésie des Races Celtiques* (1854) popularized the term. Recently, this term has become problematic for researchers because it often gives the sense of a large, homogenous group which shared a monolithic culture. As such a group never existed, and since neither the Welsh, nor Irish ever called themselves 'Celtic,' scholars have become increasingly hesitant to use this label. Patrick Sims-Williams notes that modern scholars abstain from using the term Celtic "except in relation to people who are known to have called themselves 'Celts,'" which does not include the Irish and Welsh (4).[3] Sims-Williams concludes that the term is used almost exclusively "in relation to language, where it remains the only

[3] Sims-Williams goes on to state that Irish and Welsh cultures only became associated with the term Celtic after the discovery of the "original affinity between the Gaelic and Britonic languages on the one hand and, on the other, of the linguistic and cultural similarities between the early Britons and the Continental peoples known to the ancient world as the Celts" (4).

available term for the well-defined group of Indo-European languages that includes Irish and Welsh" (5).

Therefore, the Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and Continental tales that are compared to *Beowulf* throughout this thesis are written in Celtic languages, but they do not reflect a unified 'Celtic' culture. This is because, as Dimitra Fimi observes, "in recent decades this entire construct of a homogenous Celtic people has begun to crumble" (7).[4] In the first chapter of her forthcoming book, Fimi argues instead that scholars need to be aware of the history, largely political in nature, surrounding the label 'Celtic' and should focus research on the traits and characteristics that have been labeled as Celtic at various times. To this end, Fimi produces a useful system using the terms 'Celticity' and 'Celticism' that modern scholars use to help navigate this complex bit of theoretical background: "Celticity is defined as 'the quality of being Celtic' (Löffler, 2006, p.387) and Celticism is the study of the 'reputation of [the Celts] and of the meanings and connotations ascribed to the term "Celtic"' (Leerssen, 1996, p. 3)" (Fimi 11). This framework is helpful when discussing *Beowulf* vis-à-vis Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and Continental folktales because it establishes a vocabulary essential to the diagnostic process of identifying patterns and motifs.

Therefore, the Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and Continental stories discussed in this thesis are not Celtic in custom, but have long been the characterized as containing Celticism. As such, a long line of scholars has been concerned with pointing to the Celticity of these stories in an effort to prop up a unified vision of Irish and Welsh literature. Perhaps an important side-effect of studies like this is the problematization of this unified vision, since Irish and Welsh literatures

[4] My most sincere gratitude to Dimitra Fimi for sending me copies of the first two chapters of her monograph *Celtic Myth in Contemporary Children's Fantasy: Idealization, Identity, Ideology* prior to its publication so that it could be referenced here.

contribute in unique ways to the literary *zeitgeist* surrounding *Beowulf*. This brings about an important question, and one which Fimi succinctly asks: "Is it still legitimate to study these two corpora of medieval texts together, as if they belong to the same whole?" and our answer is much the same as hers: "Though the field of Celtic studies is still debating such questions, for the purposes of this study Irish and Welsh mythological texts naturally belong together because academic convention and the majority of decades of scholarship has considered them together as 'Celtic'" (Fimi 12). Since researchers have bound these literary traditions together for decades because of their shared linguistic group, it is both difficult and unnecessary to disentangle them all at once. Instead, the current study seeks to look at the unique contributions of these various literary traditions and how they may interact with *Beowulf* in a way that wholly recognizes the individuality of each tradition, but also with an understanding of their heritage of shared criticism and scholarship.

The modern concept that *Beowulf* is built on folktales was most notably proposed by Fredrich Panzer in his text *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte: I, Beowulf* published in 1910.[5] Here Panzer claims that *Beowulf* is a *Märchenepos* or, as *Beowulf: The Critical Heritage* translates it, "an epic derived from a fairy-tale" (65). Panzer further contends that *Beowulf* is based on a fairy-tale known as the "Bear's Son" tale which he uses to explain several cruxes within *Beowulf*. In the final section of his monograph, Panzer gathers his conclusions into a number of clauses, two of which are especially relevant for this investigation.

The first important clause is that "the Beowulf-legend consists of two parts of different origin. The folktale of the Bear's Son, as we have called it above, lies at the bottom of the first part – Beowulf's fight with Grendel" (translated in *Critical Heritage* 518). This clause

[5] For an older approach to *Beowulf* as a poem containing both history and myth, see J. M. Kemble's pamphlet *Über die Stammtafel der Westsachsen*, 1836.

summarizes not only Panzer's contention that *Beowulf* is based on folktales, but also his assertion that the primary tale for the Grendelkin episodes of the text is that of the "Bear's Son." As Michael J. Stitt explains in *Beowulf and the Bear's Son*: *Epic, Saga, and Fairytale in Northern Germanic Tradition*, Panzer arrives at this argument by comparing *Beowulf* to nineteenth-century fairytales and to "several Scandinavian saga texts that are clearly similar to the Grendel episode, the modern Märchen, or both" (11). Important for a modern argument is Stitt's note that the "Bear's Son" tale is today "often called AT301, 'The Three Stolen Princesses,' which is its designation in the Aarne-Thompson tale type index" (11). In the most recent incarnation of the Aarne-Thompson index, *The Types of International Folktales A Classification and Bibliography* by Hans-Jörg Uther, the tale would fall under the classification UAT301. This index number also indicates the motif of *The Three Stolen Princesses* which usually denotes an introduction episode followed by a main component.[6]

The introductory episode usually entails a king who shuns his daughters and sends them to the underworld and a monster stealing something precious from the king. Then a young hero wounds the monster and, with his companions, follows the monster back to the underworld, sometimes with the help of a guide. The main part of this tale usually consists of the hero being lowered into the underworld by his companions where he defeats the monster in battle and rescues the princesses; however, his "treacherous companions" take the princesses and leave him in the underworld so that they can take responsibility for the brave feat. Ultimately, the hero is able to return to the kingdom, be recognized by society, and the companions are punished.

Also, important to modern scholars is Stitt's discussion on how comparative folktale studies have changed since the time of Panzer. He indicates that "recent folk narrative studies

[6] The summary which follows is a loose synopsis of the one provided by Uther Hans-Jörg in *The Types of International Folktales A Classification and Bibliography*. Folklore Fellows Communication, 2004.

have expanded our view of the Märchen beyond the range of content analysis. The emphasis has shifted from abstract constructs to actual texts; a given text now is perceived simultaneously as a sequence of motifs, and is the product of an entire culture or subculture, and as the product of a particular individual, and is the product of a particular context of narration" (21). In other words, the context of the writing is now as significant in understanding narrative background as the content itself.

Panzer's second important clause for the current study is that "Folktale and folk-legend were made into heroic legend by being made into the object of his poetry by a *skop*" (Panzer translated in *Critical Heritage* 518). This section explains how the fairy-tale basis for the poem is transformed into a quasi-historical text by incorporating or overlaying historical or factual elements. This recognition even in Panzer's own analysis indicates the awareness that the *Beowulf* poet has a tendency to meld diverse source material in an effort to create a new, composite work.

Prior to Panzer's observation about the underlying folktale element, many studies of the Celtic impact on *Beowulf* were limited to simple observations that did not seek a larger conclusion.[7] In the decades leading up to Panzer's work, however, several scholars started noting the similarities between *Beowulf* and the Celtic "Hand and the Child" motif[8] and Max Deutschbein published "the first significant suggestion of indebtedness of the Anglo-Saxon epic to Celtic literary and mythic tradition" just a year before Panzer's text (Puhvel 2).

[7] Accoding to Martin Puhvel, examples of this include Sophus Bugge "Studien über das Beowulfepos" (1887) and W. P. Ker's *Epic and Romance* (1897).

[8] Martin Puhvel particularly notes Ludwig Laistner's *Das Rätsel der Sphinx. Grundzüge einer Mythengeschichte* (1889), Stopford Brooke's *History of Early English Literature* (1892), and Albert Cook's "An Irish Parallel to the Beowulf Story" in *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* (1899) in *Beowulf and the Celtic Tradition*. R. W. Chambers also notes these scholars in *Beowulf: An Introduction* but mentions Kittredge's "Arthur and Gorlagon" from *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* (1903) and Alois Brandl's "Englische Literatur" from *Grundiss der germanischen Philologie* (1908) as well.

At the time of its publication, Panzer's analysis represented a return to the conception of *Beowulf* as an essentially Germanic text. Since its publication, Panzer's "central opinion about the poem's genre, repeating as it did the vaguer intuition of [Abraham Jacob] Penzel almost one hundred years before, was repeated and defended by [J.R.R.] Tolkien in 1936, and has remained largely accepted ever since" (*Critical Heritage* 66). While this perspective has been maintained by the vast majority of scholars in *Beowulf* studies, a number of critics have challenged this basic assumption. These scholars assert that Celtic tales provide important explanations for some of the apparent contradictions within *Beowulf* and that there are too many idiomatic similarities to dismiss the influence of these sources.

Some of the most noteworthy attempts to make this connection, however, were in response to Panzer's theory. C. W. von Sydow disputed Panzer's conclusion, arguing that it failed to fully explain many of the apparent contradictions in the text and that *Beowulf* had "central indebtedness to the widespread Celtic folk tale of the demonic arm that reaches into a dwelling to seize humans" as well as several other commonalities with Celtic literature (Puhvel 3).[9] His arguments had a wide influence; even R. W. Chambers confesses in his *Beowulf: An Introduction* that von Sydow swayed his opinion in more than one regard.[10] However, these arguments were not enough to overcome the momentum garnered by Panzer.

A decade would pass before another convincing attempt to argue for a Celtic influence on *Beowulf*. Heinz Dehmer's "Die Grendelkämpfe Beowulf sim Lichte moderner Märchenforschung" would take up the arguments in favor of a Celtic inspiration behind

[9] Perhaps most vehemently argued in "Irisches in Beowulf," *Versammlung deutscher Philologen und Schulmänner* (1913).

[10] For example, in his third edition a note comments that "I once thought that the action of Stein in deserting the rope might point back to a prototype of the *Beowulf-Grettir* story in which the companions are deliberately treacherous. For arguments against this, see von Sydow, *Beowulf och Bjarke,* p. 27. I now see that von Sydow is right here. In none of the "water-fall-cave" stories that the episode of the *treacherous* companions occur" (454).

Beowulf's fight with Grendel. Dehmer contends that "the demonic arm which reaches out to seize humans but is seized by the superior hero and after a struggle is torn off or cut off" is a key element in Irish "Hand and the Child" tales (qtd. in Puhvel 5). He gives more than a dozen examples to support this claim. While these examples are certainly fewer in number than Panzer's copious amount, scholars have too often considered the quantity more than the quality when comparing the two arguments. Dehmer's analysis indicates flaws in the assumption that the Grendelkin episodes come from the "Bear's Son" tales, and demonstrates how the "Hand and the Child" tales do not have such shortcomings. Perhaps one could contend that Dehmer did not need to use so many analogues to *Beowulf* because his claim was more apparent and did not have to be cajoled into place or beaten into submission by over one hundred comparisons.

The "Celtic Question" would not be seriously analyzed again until two scholars addressed the issue around the midcentury. The first scholar to revisit the question, Gerard Murphy takes up von Sydow's arguments in 1953 and attempts to shift more scholarly focus onto the study of Celtic parallels and elements for *Beowulf*. He does not add much to the argument except an attempt to discredit the idea of a common Teutonic ancestor for both tales.[11] James Carney also expands on the "Celtic Question" during this decade. He attempts to make "the farthest-reaching claims yet" in terms of the influence that Celtic literature had on *Beowulf* (Puhvel 10). He claimed that *Beowulf* was based on and "had an intimate connection with," *Táin Bó Fraích*" (Carney 86). While several of Carney's claims are overwrought, which made many in the field of *Beowulf* studies dismiss all of his work, he does make some persuasive arguments which suggest that the depiction of the Grendelkin as descendants of Cain is probably derived

[11] See Gerard Murphy. *Duanaire Finn III: Irish Texts Society*. Educational Company of Ireland, 1953.

from Irish ecclesiastical writing,[12] and contextualizes "the cultural, including literary, contacts between the Irish and the Northern English around the year 700 A.D." (Puhvel 11). Between Murphy and Carney, three new important arguments are provided around the mid-century: there is not a Teutonic ancestor between *Beowulf* and the Celtic "Hand and the Child" tales, there is evidence of borrowing from Irish ecclesiastical writings to *Beowulf*, and there has been documented historical contact between the Irish and Northern English in the eighth century.

Since Fredrich Panzer's *Studien zur germanischen Sagengeschichte: I, Beowulf* few modern scholars have argued that *Beowulf* shows Celtic influence in addition to the German heritage of the text. Those that have done so usually use one of two approaches to make their case: one is a *quantitative* approach and the other *qualitative*. The quantitative approach tries to demonstrate how the wealth of Celtic literature available helps to solve a large number of cruxes in the *Beowulf* text, thereby making a relationship more likely; while the qualitative approach uses very restricted and in-depth analyses of specific Celtic myths, legends, or tales in an attempt to demonstrate how their similarities to *Beowulf* are too close to be coincidental. The quantitative method, that Celtic literature explains many conflicting elements of *Beowulf*, is characteristic of Martin Puhvel's approach to analyzing the text. The second method, that the elements of some Celtic tales are too similar and idiomatically consistent with *Beowulf* to be dismissed, is characteristic of R. Mark Scowcroft's discussion of the similarities between the Grendelkin episodes and the "Hand and the Child" narrative from early Irish tales.

The recently-deceased Puhvel penned the seminal work comparing *Beowulf* to Celtic tales with his monograph *Beowulf and the Celtic Tradition*, published in 1979. In his

[12]Carney notes, as other scholars have, that the manuscript has some "confusion between Cain, son of Adam, and Ham, son of Noah, as the progenitor of monsters" (102); however, he pushes this observation beyond mere scribal error and notes that "in the first place, it occurs on both occasions where the doctrine is mentioned [in *Beowulf*], and that, in the second place, there is similar confusion in Irish ecclesiastical literature and elsewhere" (Carney 102).

introduction, he notes that there are several elements within *Beowulf* that are more readily explained by a Celtic influence than by the traditional Germanic explanations of the narrative's background. He states that many of his observations "relat[e] mainly to seemingly preternatural elements such as the hero's superhuman, physiologically impossible swimming and diving exploits" (Puhvel vii). Puhvel's work is a watershed for the modern study of the intersection between Celtic literature and *Beowulf* studies because it is one of the first, and certainly the lengthiest, modern work in which the ambition is "to take a long, close look at evidence of Celtic content and influence in the epic, the extent of which may well remain in dispute for some time but about whose presence there can now hardly be any doubt" (vii). Following Puhvel's insights, this thesis seeks to reconsider his almost forty-year-old observations and analyses by incorporating new evidence from the fields of *Beowulf* studies and Celtic studies. The hope is to provide a strong foundation from which scholars can pursue studies comparing elements between *Beowulf* and the Celtic tradition. Ultimately, this thesis is concerned with demonstrating that these discreet points of Irish and Welsh influence on *Beowulf* create a mandate to approach *Beowulf* as a syncretic text, resulting from persistent Celtic influence.

Puhvel's first assertion provides an outline of the format he uses to support each of his contentions with evidence from Celtic tales. In his first argument, he discusses the changing nature of the strength of Grendel's Mother. He observes that "we are faced with a discrepancy of the first order – in her second appearance Grendel's Mother is represented as far more fearsome and dangerous than in the first" (Puhvel 15). He further explains how the role of Grendel's Mother during her attack on Heorot accords well with the "heroic tenor" of the poem, whereas her later appearance does not (Puhvel 15). This discrepancy leads Puhvel to ask if it could be that "some tradition of supernatural female creatures of superior might has influenced the story of

Beowulf's struggle with Grendel's mother" (Puhvel 17). To this question, he provides ample evidence to support his theory that "the demonic hag more dangerous in fight than her similarly evil son or sons, not manifest in Germanic literature and tradition (outside of *Beowulf*), turns up in a considerable number of instances in Celtic lore" (Puhvel 18). He cites five examples of Celtic stories that show a similar development to that of Grendel's Mother: *Acallam na Senórach,* an Irish tale in which Fear Dubh imprisons Finn, a story from *The Book of Leinster*, a Scottish tale in which Finn comes to the land of Big Men, and the Irish Folktale in which Wishing Gold goes to an island and kills three giants and their mother. Puhvel's systematic approach to providing examples to support his discussion makes his case for Celtic influence quite convincing.

Using the same technique, Puhvel goes on to claim Celtic influence in seven other aspects of the *Beowulf* narrative. His arguments specifically concentrating on the Grendelkin portions of the story focus on what he calls the "light-phenomenon" in the cave of Grendel's Mother and the melting of the giant sword. To a lesser extent, Puhvel's points concerning the "underwater adventures" that Beowulf undertakes, as well as his "swimming prowess" and "Irish battle rage" also pertain to these segments of the text. His other proposals have very little to do with these passages. However, taken as a whole, they provide a system of support for the concept of a Celtic influence on *Beowulf*.

Puhvel's arguments did not translate into a monograph which shifted perspectives in the field of *Beowulf* studies. Indeed, many scholars who reviewed Puhvel's work were too busy taking umbrage at his "dismissal" of Scandinavian influence to fully consider his arguments for Celtic influence. While it is true that Puhvel relies heavily on an early dating of *Beowulf* for some of his arguments, that does not mean that one can wholly dismiss the analogues which he

discusses. It is also important to point out that the publication of *The Dating of Beowulf: A Reassessment,* edited by Leonard Neidorf, significantly problematizes the late dating of the poem which most of Puhvel's detractors were proponents of. Furthermore, given Michael D. C. Drout's recent analysis which reveals the potential for source variance, discussed in detail in the final chapter of this thesis, modern readers can dismiss some of the claims made by reviewers, such as: there is "no tangible proof" (McTurk 295) or that "there is no compelling reason" (Shippey, "Beowulf and the Celtic Tradition by Martin Puhvel" 307) to seek Celtic influence in *Beowulf*.

Writing nearly two decades after Puhvel, R. Mark Scowcroft again makes a valiant attempt at the Celtic question. His perspective is that

> from the standpoint of folklore, there is no real debate here; because of Kittredge's once authoritative remarks, the 'Hand and the Child' has simply been neglected as a type (or distinctive subtype) of the folktale. Where the real debate lies is in the historical problem of how an Irish narrative cleaves to an Anglo-Scandinavian tradition. (Scowcroft 26)

In other words, while there is a firm foundation for the "Hand and the Child" as an attested tale, the greatest challenge to the claim that this tale influenced *Beowulf* is that no scholar has adequately argued the point nor explored how it could be historically possible. Unfortunately, the latter concern cannot be alleviated because of the challenge of dating the text; however, Scowcroft attempts to facilitate those who would look for Celtic influence on *Beowulf* by providing an in-depth analysis of several Celtic analogues to the text. Through this approach, he seeks to illuminate established motifs among Irish texts and to demonstrate how *Beowulf* fits within those pre-established narratives. He also does not completely despair about not being able

to provide historical evidence, claiming "Such normative criticism, as it were, though perforce ahistorical in nature, can supplement or replace historical criticism where no evidence survives to sustain it, and serves a similar purpose: to elucidate the relationship between a work of art in the tradition to which it belongs" (Scowcroft 27). In essence, Scowcroft is making an argument to the larger community of *Beowulf* studies that the literary community has been making to archaeologists for decades: the contents of the literature itself can be an accurate source of information regarding the dating, influences, and other sources for the text and does not necessitate outside validation.

In his article, Scowcroft demonstrates that the Irish "Hand and the Child" tale is the only one that consistently depicts both major aspects of the Grendel story. Scowcroft summarizes the claims of Heinz Dehmer to argue that this tale "uniquely juxtaposes…the Defense of the Hall (episode 1) and the Descent to the Monster's Lair (episode 2)" and this leads him to conclude that these similarities represent a "significant parallel between the folktale and the Grendel episode" (Scowcroft 25). Part of the support for this claim is that none of the Germanic analogues demonstrate so close a parallel to *Beowulf* as this, because they usually only incorporate one "episode" or the other. Since the Germanic analogues do not succeed in illuminating the overall structure for the Grendel passages of *Beowulf,* Scowcroft ends up with a contention that sounds very similar to Puhvel's investigatory question: "If the Norse analogues fail to suggest a coherent prototype for the Grendel episode – only a kind of motif index from which the archaic author made selections – we should not exclude analogues that do because they are ill-attested in Scandinavia" (Scowcroft 29). He proposes that Irish tales are not the only source for the *Beowulf* text, but they lend necessary materials in order to understand the development of the plot.

Panzer also recognizes the fact that the "Bear's Son" tale requires a plot to which it can be affixed. His explanation, though, turns to historical accounts rather than to other folktales. He claims that "Beowulf would accordingly be a historical personality on to whom the Bear's Son folktale has been transferred" (*Critical Heritage* 519). Since the scholar who instigated the theory of the "Bear's Son" tale recognized its shortcomings in explaining the narrative foundations of *Beowulf,* then there is certainly ample ground to propose additional source material.

Scowcroft dismisses arguments insisting that the "Bear's Son" tale is the only folktale underlying *Beowulf.* He claims that the "Bear's Son" tale "has the status of narrative archetype, with a vast array of variants and a descriptive analysis so broad as to accommodate almost any heroic exploits in a kind of matrix or narrative grammar" and that

> "the "Hand and the Child," properly a narrative pattern to which various motifs accrue, is represented only by motifs. Annexed to what is now a virtual encyclopedia of narrative possibilities, these motifs do help accommodate the *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* episodes under the Bear's Son rubric." (Scowcroft 28)

In other words, while the "Bear's Son" tale may explain characteristics and elements contained within these two stories, it cannot account for the plot structure or narrative action. It is therefore necessary, if an attempt to explain the entire composition of *Beowulf* in terms of folktales is to be successful, to find other tales which provide this narrative pattern.

To fully appreciate the complex composition of *Beowulf* and the varying, divergent influences on the narrative, one must seriously investigate the possibility of Celtic influence on the text. This brief overview of the "Celtic Question" in the field of *Beowulf* studies indicates

that very few scholars have undertaken such an investigation. Therefore, in the subsequent chapters I will attempt to find narrative parallels between the Grendelkin episodes of *Beowulf* and prominent motifs from Celtic folklore. Specifically, it is an attempt to highlight the commonalities that *Beowulf* shares with Celtic literature using comparisons between Grendel's Mother and the Lady of the Lake in the next chapter, and between Grendel and Lailoken, Suibne and Myrddin in the chapter following. Finally, an illustration of how modern critical approaches to *Beowulf* influence the discussion of the "Celtic Question" helps to consolidate this argument which disproves the exclusivity of Panzer's observations.

CHAPTER 3

ECHOES OF THE CELTIC WATER HAG MOTIF IN THE LADY OF THE LAKE AND GRENDEL'S MOTHER

In much the same way that Panzer detected the pattern of the "Bear's Son" tale in *Beowulf* and then compared this observation with analogues in order to establish a pattern, the same can be accomplished with other tales from oral tradition. This chapter focuses on the motif of the water hag. First, several examples from the nineteenth-century and present day are presented to create a conceptual framework for understanding the water hag motif. Then this motif is compared to the characters of the Lady of the Lake from the *Prose Lancelot* and Grendel's Mother from *Beowulf* in order to illuminate the multitude of similarities that they share, including the setting of each story, their behavior, and their hybridity.

Initially, the water hag motif still resonates in folktales throughout the United Kingdom, and comparing these tales provides a good indication of what constitutes a water hag. The water hag tale is typified by stories which are attested in the nineteenth century and persist to "within living memory" according to Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud's *A Dictionary of English Folklore* (2000). These tales center on a woman who lives in the water and abducts children. Most of them are attested in the areas covered by modern day counties of Lancashire, Merseyside, Cheshire, Shropshire, Durham, and Yorkshire (note that they seem to congregate along the north and west shires of England), and the names of these water hags differ from area to area, but two of the most popular are Peg Powler and Jenny Greenteeth.[13]

[13] While there are certainly Germanic water hags, such as rhinemaidens, Lorelei, and Undine, these seem to share less in common with Grendel's Mother and the Lady of the Lake than do the Celtic water hags. Often times these Germanic figures are attractive, skittish, or they sing to lure in their victim. None of these attributes apply to Grendel's Mother. The Lady of the Lake is also quite different from most of these Germanic figures. It is not

These water hags were said to live in stagnant water, usually around duckweed, algae, or moss. They became so much associated with duckweed that "for some children Jenny Greenteeth was simply a name for Duckweed" (Vickery 247). As a folklore character, however, Jenny Greenteeth is "a Nursery Bogey or Frightening Figure who is supposed to drag unwary children into the deepest parts of stagnant pools" and physical descriptions of her vary (Vickery 247). One account recalls her "great seductive beauty [which is] somewhat marred by [her] green teeth," essentially equating her with a "water spirit from Gothic mythology" or Greek siren (*Notes and Queries* qtd. in Vickery 248). Roy Vickery provides an account from a woman he interviewed in 1980 who claimed that "Jenny Greenteeth had pale green skin, green teeth, very long green locks of hair, long green fingers with long nails, and she was very thin with a pointed chin and very big eyes" (Ethel Kerry qtd. in Vickery 248). John Hutchings has described her as "a malevolent spirit" and "a bloodthirsty being with green hair" (60).

Peg Powler, the water hag whose territory stretches from the middle of Cumbria all the way across England to the North Sea, some eighty or so miles, receives the same kind of description: "the green-skinned, green-eyed, sharp-toothed demon of the Tees" (Amos 1). The exploits of Peg Powler, however, sometimes have a more jovial nature: for instance, there is a story about Royal Engineers who practiced building pontoon bridges on the river Tees during wartime. One day they awoke to find that Powler had moved their pontoon bridges away downstream after the night's rainfall; however, do not underestimate her. She maintains the convention of threatening the lives of unwary children or travelers along the Tees. Powler "would drag by the ankles to a watery grave any child who strayed too close to the river" (Amos

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necessary to wholly disprove any relation between the Celtic and German stories, because they are naturally both ultimately arrived from a similar tale or set of tales; however, it is important to point out that the flavoring of the stories found in *Beowulf* and *Lancelot* are distinctly Celtic in their feel, and so show a closer bond with the Celtic tales than those from the more distant Germanic tradition.

1). While the physical descriptions and names shift, the danger to human life is a constant threat in the water hag motif.

Perhaps these water hag tales are the modern remainder of an ancient Irish motif of the Morrígan, frequently cited as the progenitor of the Banshee, often represented by Bobd, Nemain, and Macha. These figures were often the harbingers of ill news or death, especially on the battlefield. There is no doubt that commerce and other forms of cultural overlap and transmission existed between Ireland, England, and Europe prior to the creation of either *Beowulf* or the *Prose Lancelot*,[14] so there is little complication in assuming that the tales of the Morrígan could have crossed into England very early on. From there the local people in each area would take this motif of a maiden associated with death and attach it to something unique and significant in their landscape, and thus the idea would take root as a folktale. Over time the motif would lose its battlefield association and become associated more generally with death and conflict. It is at this stage, perhaps, that echoes of it appear in *Beowulf* as Grendel's Mother and in the *Prose Lancelot* as the Lady of the Lake.

Therefore, there is ample ground to shift perspective and to focus on the ways in which this motif finds expression in *Beowulf* and the *Prose Lancelot*. The water hag tradition is rife with questions of identity, femininity, and monstrosity. Two of the most influential myths in the British literary tradition are recorded in *Beowulf* and in the Arthurian cycle. One of the major similarities between these narratives that has gone largely unobserved is the dependence on the water hag tradition. In *Beowulf*, the hag is represented in the form of Grendel's Mother, whereas this trope finds resonance in the Lady of the Lake, or Niniane, in the Arthurian tradition. In order

[14] This is often attested in medieval church documents, for a recent discovery specifically related to trade, see Christopher Standish et. al. "A Non-local Source of Irish Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Gold." *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*. vol. 81, no. 1, 2015, pp. 149-177.

to fully appreciate the resemblance between these two characters, the similar elements of their characters and stories must be enumerated using the background of the water hag motif.

Archetypally, both monstrous ladies are part of the Celtic literary tradition. Martin Puhvel indicates that the trope of the demon mother who is more powerful and ferocious than her warlike son finds its resonance in the Celtic rather than the Germanic tradition, and he goes on to describe how this motif is traced in several tales. While this type of analysis is necessary to validate the claim linking Grendel's Mother to a Celtic heritage, the acceptance of the Arthurian legend as Celtic in origin is much more pervasive among scholars. Clark Colahan covers a broad mythological context for Niniane in his 1991 article "Morgain the Fay and the Lady of the Lake in a Broader Mythological Context." Colahan addresses both the Celtic heritage of Niniane and looks at some of the classical influences as well.[15] While both Grendel's Mother and the Lady of the Lake are influenced by multiple traditions, they share core similarities which are far too often overlooked by scholars. Therefore, what follows is an attempt to understand the similarities between these very important characters using the water hag motif upon which they are, in part, based. This process illuminates their similarities of dwelling place, behavior, and hybridity most forcefully.

Perhaps the most obvious similarities at first present themselves in the dwelling places of the two water hags. Both infamous ladies make their abode in or next to a marshland and their living spaces appear to be magical or enchanted. In the *Prose Lancelot*,[16] Niniane's lake is located "half a league" from the marshland and the lake itself is renowned as the namesake of a female godhead (Corley 10). As the story explains, the lake

[15] Colahan mentions the work of Hilda Ellis Davidson in pointing to connections among Scandinavian, Germanic, and Celtic religion and folklore.
[16] Unless otherwise noted, all passages referencing the *Prose Lancelot* use the following translation: Corin Corley. *Lancelot of the Lake*, Oxford UP, 1989.

> had been called the lake of Diana, since pagan times. Diana was Queen of Sicily and reigned in the time of the good author Virgil, and the foolish pagan people of that time believed that she was a goddess. She loved the pleasures of the forest more than any woman in the world, and would go hunting all day long, for that reason the pagans called her the goddess of the woods. (Corley 22)

This lake, then, is associated with a female deity who is revered for her passion for hunting and her chastity. Initially, these associations foreshadow the passage in which Niniane finds her own prey, Lancelot himself, to abscond with. Furthermore, the fact that the pool is ascribed to Diana foreshadows that it is both the "place where marvelous things may be expected to happen" and the fact that "the virginity which Diana valued so highly will become the chastity of the nuns in the new Christian context" (Larrington 117). The figure of Diana portends other aspects of the story in addition to the water hag character who will arise from the pool. This mythic heritage is expected for a figure which follows along the water hag trope. As suggested in the *Notes & Queries* excerpt above, many believe that the Celtic water hag motif is a descendant of the Gothic water spirit or Greek sirens.

Likewise, the setting of Grendel's Mother's den in *Beowulf*[17] shares many of these characteristics. Her habitation is in a marshland, and it is called a "fenfreoðo" [fen-refuge] (l. 851). The body of water in which her den rests is referred to as "holm" [water] (l. 1592), "lagu" [water] (l. 1630), and "sæ" [sea/lake] (l. 1653). Most commonly, however, it is referred to as a "mere" [lake/ocean] (l. 1362, 1449, 1603, and 2100). It is a secluded body of water in the middle of perilous terrain. This mere also has supernatural significance. When the protagonist's band

[17] Unless otherwise noted, all passages for *Beowulf* are from Frederick Klaeber's *Beowulf*, 4th Ed. Translations are my own.

first comes to the banks of the mere, there is a lengthy description of the water's grotesque appearance:

> Gesawon ða æfter wætere wyrmcynnes fela,
> sellice sædracan sund cunnian,
> swylce on næshleoðum nicras licgean,
> ða on undernmæl oft bewitigað
> sorhfulne sið on seglrade,
> wyrmas ond wildeor. (ll. 1425-1430)
>
> [They saw in the water many serpent-kin, strange sea-dragons, swimming and searching. On the headland were sea-monsters lying down. Such snakes and wild beast as often are seen going on the sail-road in the sorrowful morning-time.]

The water is teeming with other-worldly creatures that Beowulf must get past in order to face Grendel's Mother. The fact that the mere, the portal through which Beowulf must pass, is guarded by supernatural beasts, indicates the extent of Grendel's Mother's otherworldliness. In a sense, these are the door-wards to the underworld which is ruled over by Grendel's Mother. The Lady of the Lake is also surrounded by underlings, but of a courtlier nature. The text describes how "she lives with knights and damsels in the lake" (Corley 25). While the Lady is surrounded by a plethora of subordinates, the reader is not allowed to forget that the entire court is "a magic illusion" (Corley 25). In each instance the hag is surrounded by minions who are imbued with magic, and who serve as her guards.

A further similarity is that, in each tale, there is a renowned building near the lake from which religious singing is heard. Each building impacts or is impacted by the marsh-dwellers. In the *Prose Lancelot*, Lancelot's family is out riding when his father falls from his horse. Lancelot's mother instructs the squire who is with them to set down Lancelot and check on her husband. The squire lets out such a cry at discovering his master dead that the queen "[leaves] her son on the ground in front of the horses' hooves" (Corley 20) to run to the hill where her husband lays. She discovers his lifeless body and is struck by grief. Eventually she remembers Lancelot through her grief, and runs to check on him. There she sees "her son unswaddled and out of the cot, and [sees] a damsel holding him stark naked in her lap" (Corley 21). She then watches helplessly as her son is abducted mere moments after losing her husband. Ultimately, Lancelot's mother begs an abbess to let her take the veil so that she can leave the world which has been so cold to her. With the help of this abbess, she erects a minster to commemorate the loss of her husband and child. At this minster, "every new day the Queen's custom was that, as soon as she had heard the mass that was sung for the king, she would go to the lake and, at the spot where she had lost her son, she would sometimes read her Psalter" and eventually "the Minster grew in size and importance" (Corley 24). The minster is established because of the tragic events culminating in Lancelot's abduction. It is a place of mourning for the remembered grievances of cruel fate and monstrous encounters.

In *Beowulf*, however, the singing from Hrothgar's hall is what serves as the impetus for the interaction between the human and the monstrous, and as the setting of those altercations. The narrator claims:

> Đa se ellen-gæst earfoðlice
>
> þrage geþolode, se þe in þystrum bad,

þæt he dogora gewham	dream gehyrde
hludne in healle.	Þǣr wæs hearpan swēġ,
swutol sang scopes.	Sæġde sē þe cūþe
frumsceaft fīra	feorran reċċan,
cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga	eorðan worh(te),
wlitebeorhtne wang,	swā wæter bebūgeð,
ġesette siġehrēþiġ	sunnan ond mōnan,
lēoman tō lēohte	landbūendum,
ond ġefrætwade	foldan scēatas
leomum ond lēafum,	līf ēac ġesceōp
cynna ġehwylcum	þára ðe cwice hwyrfaþ. (ll. 86-98)

[Then a strong demon of long suffering in an expectation of gloom, heard on each day those who had mirth loud in the hall. There was the harp, the clear singing of the scop. Then spoke the one who could clearly narrate that distant creation of man, saying that the Almighty wrought the earth, that field of shining-brightness, that water surrounds, He made victoriously the sun and moon, to brilliantly gleam for the inhabitants, and adorned the lap of the earth with limb and leaf, life also He made for each kind that lives and roams there.]

The mirth and joy that take place in the hall, especially the singing of the scop, is what enrages Grendel until he finally attacks. This mead hall will then be the setting for the fight between

Grendel and Beowulf, and the first fight between Beowulf and Grendel's Mother. While this hall certainly has a much more marked status in the story than the minster from the *Prose Lancelot,* it is not difficult to see how the latter demonstrates similarities with the former. Both sites become places of lamentation. Perhaps importantly, both are also the sites where a mother will seek remembrance of, or revenge for, the loss of a child. Finally, both songs are religious in nature. While Lancelot's mother sings to the heavens about the loss of her child, the scop from *Beowulf* sings of the creation story. Both are appeals to a higher authority which seek to invoke a blessing. While the scop is attempting to combine religious tropes in a time of mirth, and thereby praise the deity to gain more favor, Lancelot's mother turns to spirituality in grief. She too seeks religious intervention, but of a kind that will ease her suffering and help her deceased loved ones. While the tone is different in each case, the purpose of the religious singing is similar between the two.

Finally, the similarities between the water hag characters themselves are striking. Each is described as a devil-woman. Niniane is referred to as "a devil incarnate in the form of a damsel" by Lancelot's birthmother (Corley 23). Additionally, while it is clear that she is "not a supernatural being," in that she is not inhuman, but a human who has learned magic, Niniane clearly "assumes the traditional fairy role, abducting an apparently abandoned child who may be in danger" (Larrington 115). Grendel's Mother is described as an "aglæcwif" [monstrous lady] (l. 1259) by the *Beowulf* narrator. Both figures are given masculine attributes to make them seem unnatural and even mannish. Furthermore, both show, to the mind of the original audience, immodest pride and independence. These unfeminine depictions of the hags overlap with the otherworldly terminology used to describe them. Niniane is said to be "a fairy, by which is meant a woman with a knowledge of magic" (Corley 25). Like Niniane, Grendel's Mother is given

attributes not traditionally associated with women: heroic strength and the freedom to live alone without a lord.

Therefore, each of these hags demonstrates a unique hybridity; they are cultural hybrids because they do not conform to prescriptive gender roles, but they are also hybrids physically, being both human and non-human in their composition. While Niniane may appear human, she has certain traits and characteristics that set her apart from humanity. Grendel's Mother, on the other hand is physically marked by her hybridity, and thus is always identifiable as the other, even though she clearly retains some human characteristics. It is possible that these characters are portrayed as hybrids physically in order to highlight their cultural hybridity. The fact that they do not fulfill some of the prescriptive feminine roles, and yet they are compelled to conform to others, emphasizes their hybridity. While neither character is shown as docile, weak, or mutable, they are depicted in a compassionate role to their children. They take up the maternal mantle, but they reject the dependence often associated with it.

A further similarity within this concept of hybridity of gender is that each of these monstrous women pursue revenge at some point in their stories. Niniane's revenge is present from the introduction of her character. She is typically depicted as desirous to subdue Merlin, her tutor, in order to take her rightful place in the magical hierarchy. In the *Prose Lancelot*, the narrator claims that "She learned her magic from the prophet Merlin, who was the offspring of a woman and a devil, and then used the knowledge to imprison him forever" (Corley 25). Several stories depict Merlin's entrapment by a woman, and almost all of them involve a woman who deceives Merlin or others by dressing as a man, taking on the guise of masculinity.[18]

[18]See: S.E. Holbrook. "Nymue, the Chief Lady of the Lake, in Malory's Le Morte Darthur." *Speculum*, vol. 53, no. 4, 1978, pp. 761-777.

Grendel's Mother is also driven by revenge at the very introduction of her character. The revenge motif is, in fact, the crux of her involvement in the plot of *Beowulf*. The narrator reveals that "his modor þa gyt / gifre ond galgmod gegan wolde / sorhfulne sið, sunu deoð wrecan" [his mother, ravenous and sad, would go on a sorrowful journey, her son's death to revenge] (ll. 1276-1278). The motivation for Grendel's Mother to act is principally revenge for Grendel's death. Her rage consumes her, much as it does Grendel, in a strikingly physical, and thus masculine, way that is unchecked by the strictures of morals or cultural norms.[19] This compounds the unfeminine aspects about her characterization in order to make her appear more monstrous.

Finally, this monstrous play on femininity finds expression in some of the physical descriptions of each water hag. When Lancelot's birth-mother comes back to recover him, she finds Niniane holding him. The description reads "a damsel holding him stark naked in her lap, clasping and pressing him very gently to her bosom, and kissing his eyes and mouth repeatedly" (Corley 21). At first this seems to be a very nurturing scene; however, it quickly becomes horrific as the damsel then runs "straight to the lake and [jumps] in with her feet together" (Corley 21). While the remainder of the story explains how this is a magical event, the initial image, and the one that Lancelot's birth-mother is left with, is of a strange woman abducting her child and then committing suicide with him. It is a gripping and devastating image.

Grendel's Mother is also given a monstrous grip, which goes against both feminine expectations and what Beowulf is told about her prior to their meeting. In the altercation with Beowulf, Grendel's Mother "Heo him eft hraþe andlean forgeald / grimman grapum ond him togeans feng" [Then she quickly retaliated against him, embracing him in her savage grasp] (ll.

[19] Interestingly, Grendel's Mother's actions here mirror the protective instinct that Wealhtheow also exhibits when she feels her sons are threatened by Hrothgar's over-familiarity with Beowulf, albeit in a more destructive manner.

1541-2). Once again, there is the intermingling of the feminine and the monstrous. The play on embrace here takes on a sinister meaning, even though it is traditionally a loving gesture. Once again, the physically dominant traits of masculinity are imposed upon actions that are traditionally associated with the feminine, and the dichotomy caused by this overlap is what leads to a sense of the grotesque.

Both *Beowulf* and the Arthurian corpus rely in part on the water hag motif. Common elements between these two water hags are: revenge, 'mannish' characteristics, grappling, a child who views the hag as a mother, and a den located in a marshland which has an important neighboring building where religious singing occurs. The Celtic water hag motif provides a strong basis to compare essential characters in each of the mythological traditions. Tied up in the trope are important questions of femininity, identity, and monstrosity. The characters of Grendel's Mother and the Lady of the Lake embody character traits that are generally equated with masculinity, and this fact makes them seem monstrous to those characters who live by the prevailing code of ethics or morality in each narrative.

CHAPTER 4

GRENDEL AND THE CELTIC FERAL CHILD AND WILD MAN MOTIFS

Another set of similarities between *Beowulf* and the Celtic tradition are the feral child or wild man figures that appear in each. Scholars have compared characters from *Beowulf* and the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in the past; however, the focus of these investigations is almost always on comparing the heroes of the two texts and not delving into the many similarities presented by other characters.[20] While it is true that *Beowulf* presents a compelling analogue to several Celtic heroes, this chapter attempts to push the similarities in another direction to explore new and equally fertile ground for analysis. Grendel is often overlooked in these Celtic assessments, yet the monstrous foe exhibits striking similarities to Beowulf; therefore, an analysis of the parallels between Grendel and Celtic characters provides significant insight.

Grendel exhibits characteristics of two motifs frequently attested among the folktales and myths of the Celtic tradition: the violent child and the wild man. This chapter analyzes how Grendel exemplifies these two motifs throughout *Beowulf*, then demonstrates the prevalence of these motifs in Celtic narratives by comparing them with *Beowulf* using the motifs as a framework for the comparisons. The first motif examined is that of the violent child and it is identified and explained using Grendel and the Celtic figures of Cú Chulainn and Lancelot. Then the motif of the wild man is explored using Grendel and the Celtic folktales surrounding Suibne, Myrddin, and Lailoken. Ultimately, Grendel shows remarkable similarity to these Celtic figures and this observation justifies a fuller examination into the Celtic influence on *Beowulf*.

[20] See Máire Mc Hugh. "The Sheaf and The Hound: A Comparative Analysis of the Mythic Structure of *Beowulf* and *Táin Bó Cúailnge*." *La Narrazione: Temi E Tecniche Dal Medioevo Ai Nostri Giorni*, vol. 1, 1987, pp. 9-43, and J. Carney. *Studies in Irish Literature and History*. Institute for Advanced Studies, 1955.

While the motif of the feral child is not unique to Germanic or Celtic culture—indeed it can be traced all the way to *The Epic of Gilgamesh*—it is a useful vantage point to make assessments. This motif allows scholars to identify commonalities between the characters Grendel, Cú Chulainn, and Lancelot that do not conform to the violent child motif found in other literary traditions; this in turn suggests a closer analogue than otherwise might be suspected. The characterization of Grendel is very similar to many Celtic heroes when they are children. These heroes include Cú Chulainn from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* and Lancelot from the *Prose Lancelot*, and both of whom possess a bad temper and haughty thoughts when they are young. Furthermore, each of these characters undertakes deeds of strength that, while impressive, are morally questionable.

Cú Chulainn's transgressive childhood actions are described thoroughly in *Táin Bó Cúailnge*. One of his first impulses as a child is to disobey his mother and cultural norms in order to go and play with the other children. His actions result in a large fight in which several children are hurt because Cú Chulainn (here still called Sétantae) has not followed the societal expectations and come with a protector. After the fight, Cú Chulainn garners the protection of Conchobar, but he is still too rough with the other children until Conchobar castigates him a second time. While Cú Chulainn's physical prowess is remarkable, he does not understand how to use it wisely or in accordance with cultural norms. A second example of Cú Chulainn's reckless use of force is when he slays the hound of Culann. Cú Chulainn follows his uncle Conchobar to Culann's house and, when he encounters Culann's guard dog, he slays it. This action garners him the name Cú Chulainn ("the hound of Culann") and he must pay penance for the deed by acting as Culann's guard dog until a proper replacement can be trained. Both of these

instances show how the consequences that are enforced upon Cú Chulainn by the community have a taming effect on his unruly nature.

In *Lancelot*, one of the most notable episodes in which Lancelot behaves brashly is when he grows angry at his tutor and his companions while they are on a hunting trip. Lancelot becomes incensed when his tutor punishes him by striking him, which causes Lancelot to fall and break his bow. In retaliation, Lancelot

> gathered himself and struck [his tutor] again on the head and the arms and all over the body, until there was not enough left of the whole bow for him to strike a blow with, for it was completely shattered and in pieces. Then the other three ran to seize him; and since he had nothing with which to defend himself, he drew the arrows from his quiver and threw those at them, and tried to kill them all. (Corley 26)

Following this scene, there is a meeting in Niniane's court about the incident. Upon hearing Lancelot speak "fiercely" in his own defense, Niniane is "delighted, for she saw that he could not fail to be a man of valor" (Corley 37). Here she equates a bombastic temperament with attainment of virtue or position. She goes on to tell Lancelot that he is "the son of a man who, through prowess of heart and body, would have dared to challenge the noblest king in the world" (Corley 38). Again, she conflates brash nature and physical strength with great achievement.

This passionate and devastating nature is more explicit with Grendel. Early in the poem, after Grendel's first attack on Heorot, his bestial characteristics are emphasized; "Ða wæs on uhtan mid ærdæge / Grendeles *guðcræft* gumun undyrne" [Then was, in the half-light at dawn, Grendel's *war-strength* made manifest] (ll. 126-7, emphasis mine). He has the ability and desire

to harm others through his warlike nature. This is emphasized again when he is depicted as a doer of "morðbeala" [murder-crimes] (l. 136) and when the narrator relates that "no mearn fore, / fæhðe ond fyrene; wæs to fæst on þam" [and no sorrow had he, from enmity and fire, he was to fixed on it] (ll. 136-7). Grendel is malignant and vengeful in extremis. Interestingly, unlike the other two narratives, this text does not conflate valor or fame with this aggressive temperment.

While all three characters display violent and passionate tendencies, their magnitude varies and the real difference in their fates is that Cú Chulainn and Lancelot are given social guidence. Cú Chulainn is granted protection by Conchobar and ultimately becomes his foster son. Conchobar's guidance tames Cú Chulainn's actions with his fellow children and teaches him how to behave in a civilized manner. Their relationship also teaches Cú Chulainn the value of life and devotion, as he risks his own life to preserve that of Conchobar, rescuing him from the forces of Éogan.

Similarly, Niniane grants Lancelot a tutor early on (Corley 27). This tutor is charged with training Lancelot in the ways of respectable behavior. The tutor clearly has an impact on Lancelot's behavior and this is nowhere more evident than when the narrator compares Lancelot to Lionel, his cousin.[21] Lionel is abducted and brought to the Lady of the Lake's kingdom. Upon his arrival, the narrator details how "Lionel is the most headstrong child imaginable, very like Lancelot in temperament, but lacking his usual maturity of judgment" (Corley 40). The difference in maturity of judgment is clearly the influence of the tutor on Lancelot, since the reader assumes that Lionel has had plenty of socialization in the court, and from his own tutor. Therefore, Lancelot has learned how to behave more appropriately than when he was overly aggressive in the hunt.

[21] Technically, they are double cousins, being related through both their mother and father.

From this vantage point, the reader understands that Grendel represents what Lancelot or Cú Chulainn could have been had they not had a guiding figure. Without the cultivating influence of a respectable masculine figure to imitate, Grendel devolves until he loses control of his passions. This is significantly hinted at by the narrator of *Beowulf*: "Swa fela fyrena feond mancynnes, / atol angengea oft gefremede, / heardra hynða" [So many transgressions, harsh humiliations, that fiend of mankind did, the repulsive isolated one who is often estranged] (ll. 164-166). A major part of what causes Grendel to act the way he does is his isolation and loneliness. He is enraged by the fact that he must range far and wide over the fens with no peers, while those within the hall experience mirth and companionship. In this way, Lancelot and Cú Chulainn act as important analogues for Grendel, highlighting that the determining factor between growing into civility or apart from it is whether or not they have social or cultural education to help them control their passions.

A final similarity between these three characters is that, in each text, the children are fatherless. Cú Chulainn's birth story varies by manuscript, so his parentage always has the shadow of mystery in that it is uncertain if he is the offspring of a deity or of a mortal; however, Cú Chulainn's father is absent in all of the tales. This leaves Cú Chulainn to be raised primarily by his mother and uncle. Therefore, Cú Chulainn clings to his mother in infancy and the early part of his life until he is able to go out and play with the other children. It is not until this transition of his primary focus from self-care to being a desire for community that Cú Chulainn adopts a paternal figure, his uncle, as a parent.

In the Arthurian cycle, Lancelot's birthmother laments her loss when he is abducted and proclaims that he "has today become an orphan, and lost all joy, for his father has just now died, and he has lost his land" (Corley 21). Lancelot becomes an orphan before he is taken in by

Niniane and he is raised under a series of epithets, like "King's Son," which hint at his noble birth but his true parentage is never disclosed to him; although Niniane once tells him "whoever's son you are, you truly have the heart of the king's son" (Corley 38). The emphasis in the text is on the child's behavior, not his parentage. In a sense, Niniane is raising Lancelot to act like an aristocrat or feudal baron, without allowing him to expect any kind of inheritance. In the same manner as Cú Chulainn, Lancelot clings to his foster mother while in childhood, but increasingly assumes masculinity as he comes of age. As Carolyne Larrington observes, when Niniane sends Lancelot away she "urg[es] him to do his best in striving for renown, she surrenders him to the masculine world of honour with assurances of his noble birth" (118). She understands that Lancelot is not truly her child and that, as a man, he must operate in the world in a way which is different from her own.

Similarly, Grendel is a bastard and his father is not discernable in the text of *Beowulf*. Instead, a mythological genealogy is granted to him and any similar creatures, "no hie fæder cunnon, / hwæþer him ænig wæs ær acenned/dyrnra gasta" [knew not his father, or whether he had any parent, that is hidden in a past of breaths/spirits/demons] (ll. 1355-1357). Again, the fatherlessness of the child is compounded with a behavioral motif. Unlike Lancelot, however, Grendel is given a decidedly negative genealogy. Because Grendel has had no interaction with the society of the hall, he is outcast and othered. He is marked as evil and subhuman.

Interestingly, the absence of a father figure in both the *Prose Lancelot* and *Beowulf* makes the relationship between the child and the water hag similar. Each child relates to the water hag as if she were his mother, though this is always an assumption made within the text, and never wholly validated. The reader is told that Lancelot "thinks of [Niniane] as his mother" and he relates to her as such (Corley 25). This attitude, and her loving approach to him, leads the

surrounding culture to think they are related: "Anyone who saw them would have thought he was her son" (Corley 38). This cultural perception is precisely what is mirrored by the *Beowulf* narrator. Grendel's Mother is not known by name, but, like Lancelot, has only epithets: “modor” [mother] (l. 1258), “ides” [woman/queen] (l. 1259), and “aglæcwif” [female monster] (l. 1259) to name a few. The most frequent purpose of these epithets is to equate her with Grendel in a familial role. There is the assumption that she is his mother, partly arising from her quest for revenge after his demise. This familial connection, however, cannot be corroborated and is only surmised.

Additional connections tie Cú Chulainn and Grendel together. For instance, they are both associated with canine bestiality.[22] As was already noted for Cú Chulainn, this link is unforgettable because he earns his name by serving as the guard dog for Culann and his name forever brands him with the canine affiliation. As for Grendel, he is supposedly the offspring of a “brimwyl[f]” [sea-wolf] (l.1506) and together they live in “wulfhleoþu“ [wolf-slopes] (l. 1358). In fact, the Grendelkin are the only characters described by wolf compounds, other than the protagonist, whose name obviously carries the same canine reminder as Cú Chulainn . This branding with wolf-like labels is intriguing. It makes perfect sense in the case of Cú Chulainn, in that it indicates his strength, his masculinity, and his devotion to his people when they need him. While the first two aspects are true for Grendel, the last is strikingly absent. Perhaps this is why he is never directly described as a wolf, while his mother is. These labels serve to ironically show how Grendel’s mother is more masculine than he is. He certainly never demonstrates overt loyalty to a pack, but she does by seeking revenge for his death. Even though he lives in the

[22] Undoubtedly, Beowulf himself shares in this animalistic derivation, though most scholarship considers him to be more of a bear than a wolf.

wolf's dwelling, the dwelling seems to belong more to his mother, whereas he is shown to be neither family-minded, nor the strongest or most masculine of his brood.

A final similarity of the two is the path to their demise. As Ruth P.M. Lehmann points out, Cú Chulainn's death is preceded by three things, three *gessa*, which bring about his downfall:

> early in the tale he hears the magic music of Manannán. As an ocean God Manannán has much of the power of Poseidon, but is a harper besides. Moreover, Cú Chulainn sees his horses, the waves of the sea – and these too are *geis* to him. But his most stringent prohibition is against the eating of his namesake, the hound. (8)

All three of these elements contribute to the downfall of Cú Chulainn and they are necessary to his destruction. Interestingly, Grendel's death is preceded by these three things as well, and in the same order. Initially, it is Grendel's dislike of the *scop* in the hall that leads to his altercation with the Danes in Hrothgar's hall. The reputation of this altercation is what leads to the arrival of Beowulf. This hero arrives astride his bark over the waves of the sea carrying doom with him. Ultimately, when Grendel faces Beowulf, the Bee-wolf, his fate is sealed. This figure, whose name indicates not only a bearish nature, but a doggish one as well, is the final contributing factor to the death of Grendel.

A further motif which acts as a point of intersection between Grendel and the Celtic tradition is encapsulated in the idea of the wild man. While Grendel maintains his bestial nature until his death, the Celtic figures previously discussed all grow out of their aggressive tendencies

through exposure to society. As Grendel grows, he no longer fits into the established feral child motif, and instead evolves into a close parallel to the Celtic wild man figure. Richard Bernheimer, in his monograph *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology*, defines the wild man figure as

> A literary and artistic figure whose imaginary character is proved by its appearance: it is a hairy man curiously compounded of human and animal traits, without, however, sinking to the level of an ape. It exhibits upon its naked human anatomy a growth of fur, leaving bare only its face, feet, and hands, at times its knees and elbows, or the breasts of the female of the species. Frequently the creature is shown wielding a heavy club or mace, or the trunk of a tree; and, since its body is usually naked except for a shaggy covering, it may hide its nudity under a strand of twisted foliage worn around the loins… The creature itself may appear without its fur, its club, or its loin ornament. Any one of its characteristics may be said to designate the species. (1-2)

This is a very useful baseline from which a characteristically Celtic wild man can emerge. Neil Thomas provides a narrower outline for a unified Celtic wild man in his article "The Celtic Wild Man Tradition and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini*: Madness or *Contemptus Mundi*." He systematically compares Welsh, Scottish, and Irish texts in order to arrive at the conclusion that most of these traditions stem from the same, historical confrontation in "Dark Age Cumbria" (Thomas 29). He goes on to discuss the traits that make up a Celtic wild man by providing excerpts from several stories in an attempt to prove how this motif led to some of Merlin's more interesting traits. For this examination, however, his work in providing a background for the wild man motif is very useful.

The exiled nature of the wild man is what initially marks Grendel out for comparison to Celtic myths and legends of this motif. When he first appears, Grendel is described as an "ellengæst" [powerful demon] who "in þȳstrum bād" [lived in darkness] (ll. 86-7). He is cast out of society because he is cursed by the fact of his lineage. As noted above, he is the "oft gefremede" [often estranged] one (l. 165), whose loneliness and wide ranging are some of his characteristic features. This is why he is classified as a "mearcstapa" [wanderer of the border-land] in the text (l. 1348). In fact, Grendel explicitly "wraéclástas træd" [walks the path of the exile] on his way to Heorot (l. 1352).[23] The wild man in Celtic folktales traditionally lives away from society. In the twelfth century *Buile Suibhne*, although there are attestations of the name Suibne from at least the ninth century, Suibne's attack on a cleric, St. Ronan, causes him to be sent away from the society of men. He is cursed to "be one with the birds" and to suffer "in madness, without respite" (O'Keeffe 13).[24] The madness and fear of Suibne leads him to a life of solitude in the wilderness. The Celtic wild man can never be reintegrated into society unless some occurrence brings about his conversion or repentance. Perhaps it is part of the Germanic influence on *Beowulf* that Grendel is never given such an opportunity.

In addition to his outcast depiction, Grendel is also portrayed as a liminal figure, something in between human and animal. He is both *wer* (l. 105) and *wiht* (l. 120) in the poem, both man and wight. While this *feond* (l. 143) has magical powers, he still grapples when in combat, almost exactly as Beowulf does. J.R.R. Tolkien famously observes Grendel's double nature in the first appendix to his renowned lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*. Tolkien perceives that, while Grendel seems like "a *devil*, though he is not yet a true devil in

[23] This rather neatly creates a juxtaposition with Beowulf who comes to Heorot *nalles for wraécsíðum* (not from exile, l. 338).
[24] O'Keeffe, J.G, editor. *Buile Suibhne (The Frenzy of Suibhne): Being The Adventures of Subhne Geilt: a Middle Irish Romance*. The Irish Texts Society, 1913.

purpose" and that he has "relationship or similarity to bogies *(scinnum ond scuccum*), physical enough in form and power, but vaguely felt as belonging to a different order of being, one allied to the malevolent 'ghosts' of the dead" (34). Yet he also points out that Grendel and his mother have a "parody of human form (earmsceapen on weres wæstmum)" which "becomes symbolical, explicitly, of sin" (Tolkien, *Monsters* 34). Additionally, the "theory of descent from Cain (and so from Adam), and of the curse of God" means that "Grendel is not only under this inherited curse, but also himself sinful" (Tolkien, *Monsters* 34). Therefore, Grendel exhibits a dual nature in that "as an image of man estranged from God he is called not only by all names applicable to ordinary men, as *wer, rinc, guma, maga*, but he is conceived as having a spirit, other than his body, that will be punished" (34). Therefore Grendel occupies a liminal space between man and beast.

In the same way, the Celtic wild man characters are depicted as liminal characters. All of the Celtic wild man figures start as normal men, often well-regarded warriors in the service of a king. Then this man loses his mind in the midst of a battle and must seek refuge in the woods. Thomas Parry notes in his *A History of Welsh Literature*, "The story of Myrddin—a man driven mad in battle and escaping to a wood—is of wider than merely Welsh currency, for the same story is told of Suibne in Ireland and of Lailoken in Scotland" (27). Once they are outcast from society, the wild men become less human. They lose touch with reality and grow more savage as their isolation continues. While in Grendel this attribute is instilled physically, it is more common for the Celtic wild man to exhibit his otherness by gaining madness and powers of foresight or prophecy.

In the Lailoken texts, for example, Lailoken foretells his own demise in *Kentigern and Lailoken*, but no one believes him because of his madness. The bishop he seeks absolution from

will not grant it to him based on his prophesy because "he preserves no logic in any of his sayings" (Clarke 229). Even though the bishop does eventually grant him absolution, they never believe his prophesies until they come true in the next tale, *Afallennau*. This pattern of disbelief is repeated in *Afallennau* when Lailoken, in order to gain freedom, creates riddles for the king who has imprisoned him. When it turns out that the answers to the riddles reveal the infidelity of the queen, he is kicked out of the court and there is divided opinion about his truthfulness. Interestingly, the prophetic nature of Lailoken often sows disunion, similar to Grendel's more blunt attacks on Heorot.

In addition to this idea of a double nature, it is important to note that both Grendel and the Celtic wild man are placed in a liminal space because of a Christianized curse. In the case of Grendel, as just discussed, it is his association with the sin of Cain that marks both he and his mother as damned. As Philip Cardew expounds, Grendel and his mother are treated as "outcast[s], a hereditary penalty for the killing of Abel, after which Cain's kin…were condemned to the *fifelcynnes eard* [land of the monster-kin], *mancynne fram* [away from mankind]" (190). It is because of the sin attached to the biblical figure that these monsters exist, so they must be outcasts as part of their atonement. In the Irish *Buile Suibhne*, the curse is placed on Suibne by St. Ronan. He is cursed to live among the birds because he has broken Ronan's bell, and so it is fitting punishment to be cast among "the bell of saints before saints" (O'Keeffe 13). This curse makes Suibne flee from other men because he experiences great fear and cannot use his weapon. When the battle begins,

> turbulence, and darkness, and fury, and giddiness, and frenzy, and flight, unsteadiness, restlessness, and unquiet filled [Suibne], likewise disgust with every place in which he used to be and desire for every place which he had not reached.

> His fingers were palsied, his feet trembled, his heart beat quick, his senses were overcome, his sight was distorted, his weapons fell naked from his hands, so that through Ronan's curse he went, like any bird of the air, in madness and imbecility. (O' Keeffe 15)

Suibne is turned into a crazed creature, like a wild animal. He is unable to challenge his foes or wield a weapon. This leads him to flee the company of men and seek refuge in the wilderness.

Further characterization similarities arise from the depiction of the wild man in the Scottish *Lailoken* fragments, when the wild man takes guilt and responsibility upon himself. In the Clarke translation of *Kentigern and Lailoken*, Lailoken proclaims:

> I suffer much in this lonely place, and for my sins I'm unworthy to meet the punishment for my sins among men. For I was the cause of the slaughter of all the dead who fell in the battle – so well known to all citizens of this land… For [I] will be given over to the Angels of Satan, and until the day of [my] death [I] will have communion with the creatures of the wood. (227, qtd. in Thomas 31)

In this latter version of the Lailoken story, from the late fifteenth century, the wild man is certainly more verbose and self-aware than Grendel; however, the lonely situation of the character and his condemnation by the exterior world, which are demonstrated in earlier versions of the tale, are remarkably similar.[25] An initial similarity is the loneliness that accompanies each figure. As discussed earlier, an important motivation for Grendel's attacks is his isolation and loneliness. Since he is "oft gefremede" [often estranged] (ll. 164-66), he seeks retaliation or retribution. Additionally, Grendel is certainly responsible for the slaughter of many thanes in

[25] Lailoken is supposed to have lived during the sixth century. The twelfth century *Life of Kentigern* identifies a "Lalocen" who was a "foolish man" who lived near Pertnech during this time.

Hrothgar's hall, and much more directly to blame than Lailoken. The unique difference between these characters is that Grendel never repents of his deeds. Again, perhaps the Germanic influence on the text keeps Grendel's repentance from being a possibility; however, that does not mean that Grendel is not pitiable in exactly the same way as Lailoken.

Furthermore, the condemnation of the Celtic wild man for "the death of innocent persons" is also found in the Welsh Myrddin tradition (Thomas 32). The "composite" wild man from the Welsh tradition is evident in the Myrddin poems of the *Black Book of Carmarthen*, which, according to A. O. H. Jarman, represent "the earliest remnants of a lost group of Myrddin poems originally composed between 850 and 1050" (qtd. in Díaz 11). Myrddin laments that "death has taken everyone, why does it not call me...no lord honours me… no woman visits me" (Thomas 32). Both Myrddin and Grendel are blamed for the loss of life in the text. As with Grendel, the treacherous deeds of Myrddin and his outcast state lead him to strong emotions of self-pity. This echoes Grendel's lament at the mirth coming from Hrothgar's hall. Neither character is able to find community or society in which to live. Myrddin has many texts in which he demonstrates his prophetic capabilities interspersed among his protestations of loneliness. This is especially demonstrated in *Little Pigs* where the following stanza occurs

> Hail, little pig, with sharp claws,
>
> An unmannerly bed-mate when you went to rest,
>
> Little knows Rhydderch Hael tonight at his banquet
>
> What share of sleeplessness was mine last night:
>
> Snow the height of my hip with the wolves of the wilderness,

Ice in my hair, and my state was sorry.

It will come, that Tuesday, the day of fury,

Of battle between the Lord of Powys and the host of Gwynedd.

And Hiriell shall arise from his long resting

To fence from their foemen the bounds of Gwynedd. (Parry 30)

The stanza starts with a direct address to his bedfellow, a pig, to whom his grievances are directed. The complaints of his dissatisfactory evening spent in hardship give way to his rumination on the impending fate of Rhydderch Hael, the Lord of Powys, and the Lord of Gwynedd.

Since the work of Thomas and other Celticists establishes clear links between the Welsh, Scottish, and Irish traditions of the wild man motif, and reveals how they all originate from a battle which took place in the sixth century, it is clear that this motif was present throughout the British Isles before the composition of *Beowulf*. While this evidence does not necessarily demonstrate that Grendel is derived from this specific motif, it does illuminate how this idea of the wild man was in the Anglo-Saxon *zeitgeist* at the time and could easily have influenced the composition of *Beowulf*.

Ultimately, the Celtic violent child and wild man motifs illuminate the multitude of commonalities that exist between Grendel and the Celtic tradition. The violent child motif shows how closely the young lives of both Cú Chulainn , from the *Táin Bó Cúailnge*, and Lancelot, from the *Prose Lancelot*, mirror Grendel's recklessness. The wild man motif demonstrates how Suibne, Myrddin, and Lailoken all share essential traits with Grendel in their isolation. Just like

with Grendel's Mother, these parallels indicate how closely these tales are related and they indicate that there is a significant connection between the Celtic folktale tradition and *Beowulf*.

CHAPTER 5

THE CONTRIBUTION OF MODERN ANALYSIS TO THE CASE FOR CELTIC INFLUENCE ON *BEOWULF*

While the tendency among modern scholars is to accept the Germanic influence on *Beowulf* and not acknowledge the Celtic elements, a much more appropriate response would echo R.W. Chamber's conclusion of the argument in his *Beowulf: An Introduction*. Almost a century ago, Chambers claimed that "to this tale both the 'Bear's Son' story and the 'Hand and the Child' story show certain resemblances. I do not see that we can say more than that, in the present state of our knowledge… We may, then, stress the 'folk-tale' element in *Beowulf*, and see analogies between our poem and this or that among the mass of 'Kinder- und Hausmärchen'" (484). If there was no more evidence than the long history of narrative comparisons made by scholars, then this must still be the conclusion; however, recent developments in textual analysis allow for a more detailed examination of the text itself and thus shed more light on how these influences are dispersed throughout *Beowulf*.

Michael D. C. Drout's recently published *Beowulf Unlocked: New Evidence from Lexomic Analysis* takes an innovative approach to examining the poem and presents evidence which necessitates an attempt to disentangle the various narrative sources of B*eowulf*. As the abstract which opens Drout's second chapter summarizes, his method employs computers to perform statistical analysis on clusters, or passages, of text in order to diagnose whether each cluster has "distinctly different (or similar) vocabulary distributions" to each of the other segments selected (5). Then scholars attempt to find explanations for these similarities or differences. Using this kind of analysis, Drout is able to identify that the clusters containing the fights with Grendel (lines 662-836, also known as D1) and Grendel's Mother (lines 1492-1622,

also known as G1b), as well as Grendel's Mother's attack on Heorot (lines 1251-1306a, also known as G1a), most likely have a different source than the rest of the text. He also stipulates that the consistency in their shared vocabulary most likely denotes a stable source:

> The cluster analysis indicates that the material in D1 and G1 has a different distribution of vocabulary than the rest of the poem and, as noted above, previous research suggests that these sorts of differences in vocabulary distribution are diagnostic of differences in sources. Although cluster analysis itself cannot tell us if a source was written or oral, it is difficult to see how a consistent difference in vocabulary, divided over two segments that are separated from each other by dissimilar material, could be sustained if all the poet was using was the plot outline taken from a folktale. Consistency in vocabulary between segments implies the existence of a formally stable source, whether oral traditional or written. (Drout 67)

Since there is evidence that multiple sources were used by the creator of *Beowulf*, then it is necessary to determine whether any of those sources were Irish, Scottish, or Welsh in origin and to what extent these possible sources influenced the text of the manuscript.

Interestingly, all of the passages which Drout indicates should have an alternate source material are Grendelkin segments. Also of interest is how Scowcroft's argument provides the kind of "other evidence" that Drout says is necessary to discern whether or not "the author did rely upon a text or formally stable oral form" (69). By combining this indication of a probable source, with the textual considerations raised by Drout's Lexomic endeavor, the existence of Celtic influence on *Beowulf* is probable. This research sheds new light on the process by which the *Beowulf* text is influenced by various traditions. It also reveals that there are clearly defined

segments that demonstrate influence from different sources. Some of these segments clearly demonstrate a more Celtic influence while others demonstrate a more Germanic quality.

This is not a new observation. In his *Beowulf: Studies in English Literature*, Tom Shippey observes a crux in the text that he calls the "Yrmenlaf Problem." Namely, that the non-battle sequences of *Beowulf* introduce approximately seventy character names, while only three are presented during the fights themselves. This is particularly awkward when unnecessary names are given. His prime example is the name Yrmenlaf. Shippey has called Yrmenlaf "the most redundant character" in the poem (*Studies in English Literature* 24). He is only mentioned once, upon Æschere's death, and the only thing the reader learns about Yrmenlaf is that Æschere is his "yldra brōþor" [older brother] (l. 1324). Shippey pushes his argument further, observing, "Æschere himself functions only as a corpse, and it shows a certain conscientiousness on the part of the poet to award him six and a half lines of elegy, as he does. But why bring in his *younger brother*" (*Studies in English Literature* 24). The inclusion of this name is unnecessary as the character does not appear within the poem nor does the name itself contribute meaningfully to the plot. This leads Shippey to question the inclusion of this and other characters. As Shippey expounds:

> Our uncertainty over Yrmenlaf's very existence dramatizes a series of linked and vital questions of a much more general kind. Is the world of *Beowulf* a never-never land created by the poet? Did the original audience know a version of history into which *Beowulf* had to fit? Most important of all, did the poet *and* his original audience feel that the characters in the poem were in essence men like themselves, or did they see them as irrevocably different, fictional creatures of an imaginary society? (*Studies in English Literature* 25)

Since Shippey first made this observation, archeological finds and critical field observations, particularly those found at the dig site at Lejre, Zealand, have reassured scholars as to the historical accuracy of much of the hall descriptions.

In *Beowulf and Lejre*, John D. Niles discusses the significance of Lejre in the formation of *Beowulf*. He claims that there were two legends, which he characterizes as "a widespread legend cycle telling of the deeds of the Skjöldung line of kings" and "a local legend of the haunting of the Skjöldung's dwelling-place by some kind of savage creature" (221). Then he goes on to claim that "the point of geographical convergence of these traditions seems to have been the hall built at Fredshøjgård" (Niles 221-2). Niles goes so far as to claim that the depiction of events at Lejre is what makes *Beowulf* significant; "Most importantly, what the *Beowulf* poet does that is not done in any other early source is to dwell upon the haunting of the hall at Lejre by two creatures associated with darkness, damnation, and death" (Niles 214). In fact, some archaeologists are so persuaded that *Beowulf*'s depiction of hall life is accurate that they have long used the text to help them interpret findings. Tom Christensen notes that while "the principal motif, Beowulf's fights against monsters and dragons, is a collection of fables and tales without any historical basis…The action of the poem takes place in the land of the Danes" (239). This has led *Beowulf* to play "a central part in connection with early historiography" surrounding Lejre and Fredshøj (Christensen 239). Many scholars have commented on the deep connection between the artifacts and buildings unearthed at Lejre and the historical depictions in the mead hall scenes in *Beowulf*. These observations help to undergird the concept that the Germanic passages of the text have a particular historicity to them.

An additional modern approach that redefines the way scholars approach *Beowulf* is the network analysis performed by Pádraig Mac Carron and Ralph Kenna. Their analysis examines the social networks depicted in *The Iliad*, *Beowulf*, and *Táin Bó Cúailnge* in order to determine how realistic the networks are and, ultimately, whether this evidence supports the historicity of the text. One of the key features analyzed in these social networks is their assortativity. The authors explain that, "In real social networks, people tend to be friends with other people who are similar to themselves; popular people tended to be acquainted with other popular people, for example. Networks in which most nodes have this property are called *assortative*… And those without it are *disassortative*" (131). The more assortative the social network depicted in each text is, the more likely it becomes that the texts used historical models as the basis for the narrative.

Mac Carron and Kenna's findings show that *The Iliad* demonstrates the most realistic social network, and this corroborates archeological findings that there may be some historical precedent behind the epic. They also find that *Beowulf* and the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* have elements supporting historicity, but that there are aspects that cloud the analysis. In *Beowulf,* the only way to make the social network match the expectation of a natural network is to remove Beowulf himself. This omission changes the social network of the narrative from disassortative to assortative. This leads the scholars to note that "*Beowulf* (without the character Beowulf) has all the features of realistic social networks, corroborating archaeological evidence" (Mac Carron and Kenna 135). This indicates that the scenes in Hrothgar's hall and Hygelac's court are verisimilitudinous enough to be based on historical elements.

Similarly, the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* is disassortative when it is first analyzed; however, the scholars believe that the top six characters represent amalgams of multiple people. This assumption is reinforced by slightly manipulating the data in a way that would diversify the

connections of the major characters. They tested their hypothesis of amalgamation by removing the "weak links," or connections between characters who only meet once in the entire narrative, "associated with the six most connected characters. This has the effect of reducing their degrees but not of removing their characters themselves" (Mac Carron and Kenna 137). The end result is that "virtually all the data points [or characters] fall close to the best-fit line [or what would be expected from a natural social network], even for the high degree characters" (Mac Carron and Kenna 137). By altering this factor, the social network represented in the *Táin Bó Cúailnge* becomes assortative. Once again, a minor change in the data set shows how closely the social networks in these texts mirror natural social networks.

By combining the conclusions drawn from this network analysis with Drout's Lexomic analysis, the unified structure of *Beowulf* is beginning to show signs of weakness.[26] While the Lexomic analysis problematizes a singular source for the entire text, Mac Carron and Kenna demonstrate the historicity of the hall and court scenes which provides a sharp contrast to the overtly folkloric elements in the Grendelkin fights. These approaches help to illustrate that *Beowulf* is far less monolithic than many scholars would like to assume, and that it is a thoroughly syncretic text which relies on many different sources and influences.

What this new perspective demonstrates about the character Beowulf is particularly significant. By indicating that the social networks in Hrothgar's hall and the court of Hygelac follow natural structures if Beowulf is removed, this network-based analysis indicates how the historical element of the text, bound with the Germanic influence, is over-written by the epic protagonist. Similarly, this heroic figure also stands transcendent over the Grendelkin

[26] While this is not an argument which fully reopens the debate over *Liedertheorie*, it does suggest that there are small, Germanic vignettes that have been compiled with other stories. Therefore, it might not be amiss to revisit some of the scholars who proposed the idea and see if there is any merit to be found.

encounters. In a way, Beowulf is shown to surpass both the historical vignettes and the Celtic folktale monsters. What emerges is a true masterpiece of interlaced influences and motifs. Interestingly, this is not the first time that a character has been proposed as a bridge between two very divergent tale types in *Beowulf*.

Tolkien himself noted the combination of history and fantasy and, in his commentary in the recently published *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*, proposes a unique bridge between these two elements. He considers the character of Unferth to be "the actual link between" what he called "The Book of Kings" and the "Tales of Wonder" (208). He goes on to claim that "Unferth is a composite character—in this tale a figure produced by the contact of the two elements: courtly and fairy story. He is thus very similar to Beowulf himself, and like him is not (evidently) entirely fictitious" (Tolkien, *Translation and Commentary* 208-9). Tolkien's theory has not been widely addressed by scholars, but it certainly has some important implications. First, it concedes the complex and multi-leveled structure of the text, which is widely accepted by most scholars. Second, it is an effort to understand Unferth, a character whose origins and analogues are debated by many critics. Most importantly, though, it has the inkling that Beowulf himself serves as a kind of bridge between "The Book of Kings" and the "Tales of Wonder." This is a significant observation when incorporated with the network analysis. Just as Shippey's observation serves as a clue in the history of *Beowulf* scholarship that is answered by Drout's analysis, so Tolkien's insight is resolved by the work of Mac Carron and Kenna.

With the evidence provided in the present thesis, a re-conception of Panzer's idea of *Märchenepos* is in order. Undoubtedly Panzer intended the initial nominative in his compound—

Märchen—to be plural, as evidenced by his use of both the "Bear's Son" tale and the "Thor-type" tale in his own scholarship; however, his original analysis did not leave room for the Celtic tales which have influenced *Beowulf*. This leads to the assumption that Panzer had a kind of Germanic essentialism in his use of this term and that, as such, the term has become outdated since it cannot encompass the breadth and depth of influences on *Beowulf*. In a rejection of Panzer's term, I contend that *Beowulf* is, like many medieval texts before and after it, a kind of metaphysical palimpsest which manifests a number of different discourses and texts being interwoven into a narrative that is uniquely influenced by the context in which it is written.

By reexamining previous arguments proposing the "Hand and the Child" tale's influence on *Beowulf*, extolling two new analyses which use Celtic motifs to highlight commonalities with the Grendelkin episodes, and highlighting the impact that contemporary approaches have on the "Celtic Question," this thesis revalidates the Celtic influence on the narrative and text of *Beowulf*. As the most prominent Anglo-Saxon text, it has been portrayed as belonging entirely to the Germanic tradition for too long. Even though this debate over a Celtic influence has continued for decades, scholars are still complacent when it comes to seriously considering this important aspect of the text. Critics and scholars alike should not shirk from embracing the fact that the *Beowulf* manuscript is a diverse, syncretic narrative which pulls from several folktale traditions and from historic evidence in order to weave a heroic narrative that transcends all of the genres which comprise it. It is a testament to the skill which lies behind the creation of such a text that it can navigate these complexities. To the scholars who would off-handedly dismiss the influence of Celtic literature on the text, it is good to remember Tolkien's masterful admonition to the entire field of *Beowulf* studies, that "The lovers of poetry can safely study the art, but the seekers after history must beware lest the glamour of Poesis overcome them" (*Monsters* 7).

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