

**SHAPESHIFTER AND CHAMELEON: GRENDEL AS AN INDICATOR OF
CULTURAL FEARS AND ANXIETIES**

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ABSTRACT

Shapeshifter and Chameleon: Grendel as an Indicator of Cultural Fears and Anxieties

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The Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*, has seen many revivals and revisals. It has been employed within contemporary society primarily as a form of entertainment, but has also been evoked in the name of political reform and used as evidence of national character and cultural identity. Over time, the familiar characters of the poem have transcended verse and worked their way into music, visual arts, fantasy, sci-fi and steampunk novels, cinema, television, children's and young adult's comic books, and even board games. *Beowulf* falls in and out of vogue, but more often than not, after lying dormant for a duration of time, the poem resurfaces with renewed cultural cachet during particularly traumatic periods. This is especially true when examining the poem's entanglement with war in Western culture and society. This research will focus on how the terrorist attacks that took place on September 11, 2001 influenced translations and adaptations of the Old English poem *Beowulf*, specifically the lines, illustrations, and scenes concerning Grendel. In order to establish previous wartime trends I will examine the treatment of Grendel during World War I, World War II, and the Vietnam War. This background analysis creates an accurate and unified vision of how the lethal force of Grendel has been handled by Western translators during wartime, or after culturally traumatic events. These trends will then be

compared to several multi-media portrayals of Grendel that surfaced during the years following the destruction of the World Trade Center. I will examine multiple translations from each time period, images of Grendel from children's and young adult adaptations of the Anglo-Saxon poem, and scenes from Beowulf films and comic books. Dipping into different genres and mediums allows one to draw more accurate conclusions about the figure of Grendel as an entity that lives within various art forms and the American cultural subconscious. Monsters that function as destructive forces of nature in cinema and literature can be indicative of how a culture deals with trauma brought on by warfare, and this project will yield a cohesive image of the ways in which Western mourning practices, coping mechanisms for trauma, and attitudes towards armed conflict have evolved during a timespan of 95 years.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this research to Margaret and David Owens, and Carlos Orellana.

Without their continuous encouragement and support this project would never have come to fruition.

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CHAPTER I

THE PRE-9/11 GRENDEL

The word ‘monster’ is most often employed to describe entities that are either hideous to behold or are frightful in nature or action. These two qualities frequently walk hand-in-hand, and can be generally thought of as the distinguishing characteristics of any type of monster. While the categorization of monstrosity is generally based upon an entity displaying some degree of physical disfigurement, or having a grotesque appearance combined with a dangerous reputation, there are several well established monster archetypes that persist within Western popular culture that challenge, or in some cases, break this mold altogether. Silver screen icons like Frankenstein’s monster and King Kong are perhaps the two most easily recognizable figures that complicate a clear definition of monstrosity due to their arguably misunderstood motives and sympathetic natures. However, there are other classic monsters that exist outside the realm of film that fit the misunderstood creature archetype. Beowulf’s adversary, Grendel, has been adapted and molded by numerous hands, and cultural trauma is usually the driving force behind these transformations. The continuous process of reshaping and retelling the original poem rendered *Beowulf* an effective vehicle for expressing social and cultural commentary. More often than not, the cultural trauma that acts as a catalyst usually arises from a nation’s engagement in large-scale warfare or its involvement in a prolonged armed conflict. The now iconic figure of Grendel has changed drastically over the course of this century alone, and one can trace variations in the characterization of the famous mere-monster back to these points of divergence brought on by shifting cultural ideals and anxieties. These rough points of departure often

coincide with periods of mass casualties, and when a nation is engaged in warfare the definition of monstrosity often changes to reflect the nature of that conflict, or the prevailing views of the belligerents involved. This can foster changes in the depictions of literal monsters as well, and often creates or destroys the possibility of humanizing, rationalizing, or empathizing with entities otherwise definitively labeled “Other”.

The image of Grendel can also be employed as an indicator of shifts in Western cultural fears and anxieties, and this paper aims to accurately document changes in the ways that Western society deals with trauma brought on by warfare. The primary goal of this thesis is to analyze treatment of the figure of Grendel after culturally traumatic events, and to subsequently use this analysis to reflect upon current trends in American culture. The research centers on the post 9/11 Grendel as a particularly meaningful ‘after-image’ that carries a great deal of cultural weight simply because of the size of the population directly affected by the destruction of the World Trade Center. This national trauma, and the coping mechanisms used to deal with its effects, surfaced most visibly within cinema, literature, and other creative outlets. I intend to focus on *Beowulf* as one type of story being refashioned and retold after 9/11, and to look specifically at why this poem saw an unprecedented surge in popularity following the year 2001.

I will look at moments where Grendel is ‘Othered’, humanized, or sympathized with within selected translations from each time period, and this analysis of text and image will center around four main events in the Grendel episode: his introduction and first attack on Heorot, Grendel’s final journey to the mead-hall, the monster’s fatal battle with Beowulf, and his death

after fleeing to the mere. These four moments mark the rise and fall of Grendel within the narrative, and also provide excellent vantage points from which to view the monster's motivation, actions, and in some rare cases, his mental and emotional states.

In addition to analyzing wartime texts, examining Beowulf translations and adaptations published during the decades preceding the events of 9/11 will help create a "before image" of Grendel's role in American culture. This before image will then act as a control as I examine Beowulf translations and adaptations published between the years 2004 and 2008. By this time, post 9/11 sentiments congealed within the United States' public consciousness would allow one to gauge cultural responses and attitudes toward a monstrous figure targeting a structure that symbolizes the very center of community. The information gleaned from this research will be employed to draw conclusions about current methods for coping with large scale losses of life, and American fears and anxieties concerning hostile foreign entities today.

Introduction

To what extent can the figure of Grendel be used as a tool to gauge, and track shifts in cultural anxieties and ideals? Focusing on depictions of Grendel as a type of emotional or social thumbprint unique to their respective historical climates can yield a wealth of information about the culture that created them. Collecting a substantial amount of data on the shifting nature of the figure of Grendel warrants a way to categorize or code the specific alterations in character that take place from decade to decade. I would argue that a continuum with humanized depictions of Grendel clustered at one extreme, and demonized depictions on the other, would best illustrate

the character's evolution. Each depiction of Grendel falls somewhere on this Humanized-Demonized continuum, but it is increasingly difficult to riddle out where to place "villain" on this spectrum. Depictions of Grendel as the epitome of monstrosity cluster at the demonized end of the continuum, but a villain could arguably exist at either extreme, or any point inbetween. For example, the potential for empathy that John Gardner's *Grendel* wields, accompanied by illustrations that place the character anatomically closer to human than beast, create an entirely different type of monster for Beowulf to vanquish. A number of *Beowulf* adaptations also provide a psychological cross-section for Grendel, and attempt to furnish the monster with a more sophisticated form of consciousness, something that the original poem does not do. Gardner's novel, more so than any other previous adaptation, further complicates easily classifying Grendel, as many genres have emulated the shift in Grendel's character away from his original status as mindless monster towards a villainous adversary. A villain, I would argue, is cognizant of their actions and continues to pursue them not out of blind rage or fury, not because they are inherently evil, but in order to achieve some desired result. In this way a villain is a logical being, not a destructive force of nature. This is a reflection of changing cultural fears: Currently, we fear the monstrous force driven by reason, ideology, or revenge, and not necessarily the rampaging or mindless beast.

Within the present-day United States, foreign groups with radical ideologies are the groups that inspire varying degrees of fear within the population, and those fears are reflected within the art, literature, and films currently being produced. The same trend of cultural fears expressing themselves through art can be found in the past as well. For example, portrayals of Grendel

during World War I and World War II differ greatly from their Vietnam War counterparts, and arguably the best example of Grendel's malleable nature comes in 1971 with John Gardner's empathetic portrayal of the monster in his novel *Grendel*. Gardner's work marks a watershed in the characterization of Beowulf's famous foe, and also acted as a catalyst that sparked numerous scholarly discussions about the issues that arise when dealing with a sympathetic monster. It is for this reason that I propose a study in the figure of Grendel can best be used to answer the questions: What scares us now, and perhaps more importantly, *why* does it scare us?

After the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, a fear of the 'Other' resurfaced alongside potent xenophobia. Grendel attacked Heorot, the very heart of a nation, a structure that symbolized companionship, community, and safety for the Danes, and it is no wonder that *Beowulf* saw an unprecedented revival following 2001: The poem suddenly had a new level of cultural resonance. The most salient parallel between Heorot and the World Trade Center is the fact that both structures embodied or symbolized some vital aspect of their respective culture. The World Trade Center was a symbol of American capitalism and economic power. For many, the building embodied aspects of the American Dream like prosperity and fiscal security. Such a structure often becomes intertwined with national identity, and in the case of the World Trade Center, this is precisely why the building was targeted. Likewise, Grendel's transformation of Heorot into a battlefield and then a graveyard constitutes much more than the loss of a building for the Danes. Hrothgar maintained power and favor by conquering other groups of people and redistributing their land and wealth among his own loyal warriors. Grendel's warfare disrupted virtually every aspect of the Danes' lives on an individual and social level, and even threatened

the economic stability of Hrothgar's kingdom itself. Therefore, the destruction of these two buildings is not merely a physical event, but rather an emotional one capable of producing profound traumatic effects on a large scale. *Beowulf's* renewed popularity following the terrorist attacks raises one question in particular that demands an immediate answer: Is the Post-9/11 American cultural consciousness equating Grendel, an agent of chaos, directly with those responsible for the destruction of the Twin Towers, effectively categorizing both as dangerous entities that heroes must vanquish? Or is our notion of heroes and villains more complicated than the clearly demarcated and ostensibly mutually exclusive categories of good and evil?

Several scholars have pursued similar avenues of research in order to answer questions about Grendel's constantly shifting character, including Craig Stromme and Joseph Milosh who illuminate how Grendel has been employed as a entity that reflects changes in attitudes toward warfare and the nature of armed conflict, specifically within the context of John Gardner's novel *Grendel* and its relationship with the Vietnam War. Perhaps more relevant to this research is Alison Gulley, who looks at the nature of monstrosity, specifically as it is portrayed in Robert Zemeckis's 2007 film *Beowulf*. Gulley examines the ways in which a sympathetic monster and a flawed hero complicate an otherwise straightforward good versus evil narrative. In a similar manner, Robin Norris analyzes *Beowulf* within a modern context by looking at the poem's relationship with the Iraq War, but neither Norris nor Gulley gives the figure of Grendel much more than a sideways glance; their focus is primarily on the poem's hero, Beowulf. This paper will examine in-depth several different translations and adaptations of the poem that were published between 1910 and 2008 in order to fill in the gaps left by previous analyses of the

monster within the context of Western warfare.

Examining a handful of translations published during World War I and World War II as a unit, and then comparing that image of Grendel to the one forged during the Vietnam War will aid in illuminating precisely how Grendel's shift from inhuman force of nature to plotting villain took place. While it is true that John Gardner's *Grendel* served as a springboard from which many sympathetic portrayals of Grendel launched themselves into popular culture, it is important to note that Grendel's evolution from monster to villain is not ubiquitous. The shift did not take place everywhere, nor can one point to a specific point in time and say this is exactly when Western audiences preferred more complicated good vs. evil narratives. However, it is no coincidence that the first truly sympathetic depiction of Grendel emerges during the same time that peace movements and protests of the Vietnam War were socially prevalent, wide-spread events. The shift is gradual, and adaptations and novelizations of *Beowulf* still often depict Grendel as brutish, barbaric, and lacking the ability to command language or communicate effectively with any other living creatures, sometimes including even his own mother. Restoring or retaining the border between Hero and Villain also serves a very specific purpose, and for certain audiences and at certain time periods, morally righteous Herculean figures vanquishing reprehensible monsters devoid of a single redeeming quality are preferable to the more tangled notion of a flawed hero struggling to defeat a sympathetic, charismatic, or ostensibly misunderstood villain.

Grendel during World War I

The decade between 1910 and 1920 saw ten full translations of *Beowulf* published in the English language alone.¹ The poem was translated into both verse and prose for myriad reasons including several adaptations for use in schools. However, not every publication of the poem at this time was a close or line-by-line translation. Paraphrases of the poem were published separately by John Harrington Cox and Maud Isabel Ebbutt in 1910, and a translation by Alfred Wyatt appearing in 1919 featured a fully translated text alternating with summaries of the verse. Providing a summary of each major section of the poem also produced an opportunity to express social commentary via a gloss on the narrative at a time when very few adaptations of *Beowulf* were being published.

In addition to the ten aforementioned English translations, several French, Italian, and Danish translators also published versions of the text during this time period. Clearly, *Beowulf* and its characters had carved a substantial niche in which to reside in Western culture during the 1910s and 20s. At least one new translation was published almost every year during these decades, with the exception of 1916 and 1917. This could possibly be due to the fact that these two years coincide with a peak in violence during World War I. During this time, if only one portion of the poem was published, the translator more often than not selected the Finnsburg episode, a poem within the poem detailing a bloody conflict between the Danes and the Frisians. In fact, a sudden unprecedented burst of Finnsburg translations appeared between 1912 and 1929, numbering nine

¹ A complete detailed list of *Beowulf* texts published during this time period can be accessed via the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies website.

in all. The same thing happened again almost a decade later between the years 1936 and 1943, however this time there were only six translations in total. These two eruptions of Finnsburg episode translations coincide with and reflect the nature of the major conflicts of World War I and World War II.

During wartime there is often an increase in a somewhat contradictory desire for war-related texts accompanied by the need for a distraction from the war, or entertainment that involves some element of escapism. I would argue that *Beowulf* fulfills both of these needs, as the poem deals heavily with armed conflicts of varying nature and even full-scale warfare, but at the same time it is both temporally and geographically distant from the modern reader. This historic buffer lends itself to fortifying a narrative in which war-weary readers can lose themselves in a hero's tale that does not directly relate to, or conjure unpleasant images of modern warfare. A brief examination of some of the key elements and defining characteristics of World War I will aid in setting the stage for an analysis of the *Beowulf* translations published during and after this turbulent time period.

Triggered by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria by a Serbian nationalist, World War I began with the invocation of a tangled web of alliances and ended as the bloodiest recorded conflict in history until the advent of the Second World War in 1939. The First World War was not driven by conflicting national ideologies, nor was it simply a consequence of the complicated alliances made between countries prior to the Archduke's assassination. It was the result of various governments' desires to acquire territory; a family feud over power and the

influence that follows such an acquisition. A war fought for these reasons requires that a conscripted soldier be motivated to fight by their loyalty to a single powerful entity, and most often this driving force was a sense of patriotism. The very fact that soldiers had to be conscripted in large numbers into World War I is indicative of the nature of the war itself: the ideology of the conflict, or rather the lack thereof, left the draftee wanting some form of higher motivation. Taking up arms out of a sense of duty, or for the sole purpose of protecting one's homeland from invading forces was enough to sustain morale for a time, but maintaining the same level of morale during front-line service was an entirely different matter, especially due to the grueling nature of trench warfare where hundreds of soldiers could potentially die in order to advance just a few yards. Alongside chemical warfare and numerous technological advancements in weaponry and artillery, such as the invention of the tank, trench warfare greatly compounded an already alarmingly high casualty rate.

Faced with new technological horrors and the aforementioned skyrocketing casualty rates, soldiers, especially those routinely going "over the top" of trenches, were forced to find coping mechanisms in order to physically and psychologically survive the trauma inflicted by the reality of facing enemy fire or enduring heavy barrages of artillery. A large number of men were unable to cope with their experiences on the battlefield, and numerous World War I veterans were among the very first to be diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, or shell shock as it was then called. Aside from those that suffered mental and emotional damage, there were also deserters, though few in number, and several mutinies were recorded as well. However, these occurrences were by no means commonplace, and the majority of the men

involved in the conflict, whether conscripted or volunteer, were able to continue to follow orders despite any personal reservations they might have had about the war they were fighting. Letters home and field dairies kept by soldiers point toward an almost ubiquitous desire to fight for the primary group, as well as friends, family and country.² However, propaganda that type-casted or attempted to instill hatred for the enemy's entire nation was also just as common a motivator to continue fighting.

Among the English translations of *Beowulf* published during the aftermath of the First World War was Scottish writer Charles K. Scott Moncrieff's, published in 1921 during a peak in violence in the Irish War of Independence and featuring an introduction written by Viscount Northcliffe. Other translations include American poet William Ellery Leonard's, first published in 1918 and again in 1923, and also Australian born Archibald Strong and American fiction writer R. W. Chambers' in 1925. These are by no means the only translations published during the years following the end of World War I, but rather three very different forms of the poem selected to examine the lasting effects of the war on various nations, as well as the war's effects on both British and American literature. Examining the rise and fall of Grendel within these three translations yields some insight into the way monstrosity was being defined during the late 1910s and early 1920s after the events of World War I. The 'rise and fall' of Grendel within the narrative begins with his introduction and a description of his origins and also includes the monster's first attack on Heorot. It ends with Grendel's final descent to the mead-hall and fatal battle with Beowulf. As mentioned earlier, these moments provide a series of excellent vantage

² An extensive collection of letters written home by American soldiers during World War I was put together by the American Public Broadcasting Service and can be accessed via their website.

points from which to view Grendel's motives and actions, and also allow one to gauge any shifts in the creature's emotional state, no matter how subtle or insignificant they may at first appear.

The lines that introduce Grendel, as translated by Charles K. Scott Moncrieff in 1921, read as follows: "Hardly then / that ghost of horror / Bore the delay, / he that in darkness abode, / While he each day / their happiness heard Loud in the hall", and it is this characterization, this first moment of encountering the monster, that determines exactly how a reader will interpret his violent actions in Hrothgar's hall Heorot (Moncrieff 86-89). It appears as though a song of the Christian account of creation sung by the hall's scop is the catalyst that sparks Grendel's desire to attack the mead-hall and devour its thanes. The monster's genealogy is also provided, and as a creature descended from Cain, Grendel is said by the poet to be separated from God and His favor alike. However, it is also the Danes' seemingly incessant merrymaking that appears to have kindled within Grendel a fiery hatred, sometimes alternatively translated as jealousy, for the thanes resting in Heorot. Strong's translation offers a slightly more sympathetic note to this moment, by focusing on Grendel's capacity to suffer, "All too long and loathy were his suffering and affright" (Strong 5). However, this is about as sympathetic a light as the majority of the translations published during this time period are willing to shed on the Danes' tormentor.

Clearly, the post World War I Grendel is hardly designed to be a creature deserving of pity, as illustrated by the other phrases used by Moncrieff to describe the monster later in the poem including "Hell's bondman" and "foreign phantom". Other translations describe Grendel as an equally reprehensible being, and this is especially true during his first appearance in the poem.

For example, in a similar manner to Moncrieff, Leonard offers a description that introduces Beowulf's adversary as a "bold Hobgoblin", likewise Strong categorizes the monster as a "spirit of might and fear" who originates from the very gates of Hell. Many other translations also characterize Grendel alternatively as a spirit, phantom, ghost, or demon, but Moncrieff goes a step further and locates him within monster lore that his audience would be familiar with by citing etins, elves, orcs and giants as members of Grendel's kin. While etins, elves and giants are listed as kin within other translations, citing orcs as part of Cain's descendants is entirely unique to Moncrieff's translation. Orkney, an archipelago located off of the coast of Scotland, is home to various sea-monster legends, perhaps inspired by the unidentifiable animal carcasses that have been known to wash up on the shores. By incorporating local ghost stories from his native Scotland into this translation of *Beowulf*, Moncrieff effectively connected Grendel in the minds of his contemporary readers with more modern monster lore and legends. This rejuvenates Grendel's power to inspire fear, as each new generation fears their own monsters more so than those that populated older stories told to frighten their grandparents. The type of monster that struck fear in the hearts of the original Anglo-Saxon audience requires more than a little updating to retain its spine-chilling qualities and fearsome reputation as time passes by.

Moving on to Grendel's first descent and initial attack on Heorot, Moncrieff states that the creature's motivation was primarily curiosity, or rather a desire "to have knowledge" of the wine hall and the sleeping thanes within. However, upon seeing the drunk men happily sleeping, Grendel became "fierce and furious, / and took forth from their beds thirty thegns" (Moncrieff 122-123). The idea of a curious and misunderstood Grendel is later picked up and fully explored

by John Gardner during the Vietnam War, but at this point in time the phrases used to describe the monster indicate that he is an inherently evil being, and translators leave very little room for the possibility of sympathy to be felt for Grendel, effectively eliminating the option to justify the monster's actions. In addition to curiosity, Grendel's motivation for attacking Heorot has been interpreted in other translations as either hunger, blood-lust, or a combination of the two. These two desires are also often cited as some of the driving forces behind the mere-monster's violent feedings, and effectively cement his status as an incarnation of evil.

The idea of a creature feasting on the hall's feasters would have been particularly horrifying to an Anglo Saxon audience that understood Heorot as the very center of community, and a place to celebrate and honor loyal thanes with gifts, food and drink. Interestingly, in his 1923 translation Leonard even goes so far as to bestow the title "Cannibal" upon Grendel, which brings up the question of the monster's physical traits and whether or not he is something close to an anatomically human creature in appearance or not. I would argue that because cannibalism is defined as the act of a human consuming the flesh or organs of another human, the term when applied to Grendel signifies that he is not so much a ghostly or amorphous being for Leonard, but rather a creature that is not so far from humanity itself. The very few lines of the poem that do mention Grendel's physical characteristics focus on his arms and hands. Some translations replace mentions of anatomically human features, such as fingers, with clawed or hairy paws, illustrating the way in which certain translators at different time periods were uncomfortable with *too* human an adversary. This tendency to type-cast or demonize an enemy can be traced back to as recent examples as the propaganda circulated during World War I that ultimately sought to de-

humanize enemy troops and even entire nations of people in an attempt to ease or remove any reservations a soldier might have about killing his fellow man in combat.

In the same way that translators leave absolutely no room to sympathize with Grendel, anti-German propaganda posters circulated during the First World War ask American citizens to “Help Uncle Sam stamp out the Kaiser!”.³ British propaganda spread a similar message as illustrated by one such poster that read: “Lend your five shillings to your country and crush the Germans”.⁴ A large image of a dark and menacing figure being crushed under a coin compliments the poster’s message. War bond advertisements and posters warning against so called ‘careless talk’ circulated during World War II function in just the same manner, often featuring caricatures of Adolf Hitler or Japanese officers. The systematic process of demonizing and de-humanizing enemy forces bleeds through into other aspects of Western culture during this time period, and Grendel’s portrayal within *Beowulf* translations published after the First World War is exemplary of this practice.

The one-on-one combat between Beowulf and Grendel is sometimes visually portrayed as a struggle between a man and a beast, and at other times a battle between two men, as numerous illustrators took advantage of the text’s ambiguous physical description of the monster. However brief, the encounter does provide an important glimpse into Grendel’s thoughts and emotions upon feeling Beowulf’s mighty grip on his arm. Strong’s translation of this moment describes

³ The poster, entitled “Help Uncle Sam Stamp Out the Kaiser” was illustrated by American propaganda artist Harry S. Bressler, and can be digitally accessed and viewed through the University of Minnesota’s Online Media Archives.

⁴ This particular example of British World War I propaganda was illustrated by an unknown artist, but was published by the Parliamentary War Savings Committee. The poster currently exists as a physical copy housed in the British Library Archives in London.

Grendel shrieking like a thrall of hell as “in each of his limbs [he] felt the anguish of his fate” (Strong 25). This inhuman shriek or wail is at other times translated as a sort of weeping or crying, and in Thomas Meyer’s 2012 translation of *Beowulf* this moment is cleverly refashioned in order to create a pitiful and near childlike version of the fearsome mere-creature. However, it is once again important to note that a truly sympathetic Grendel does not emerge until well after the Second World War. This is due in part to the nature of translations, but also results from the way Western culture viewed foreign threats and other hostile entities at the time of these publications.

The circumstances surrounding Grendel’s death are also relevant to a post-war culture, as his severed arm is taken by Beowulf and subsequently displayed as a type of war trophy. Hung under the hall’s gabled roof, Grendel’s arm was held up as a symbol of victory, proof of a heroic deed, and might also have served as a reminder of those lives lost during the twelve year conflict. Grendel’s arm commemorates both the poem’s hero and his victory, but perhaps more interesting is the way the surviving Danes treat the trail of blood left behind by the dying creature as he fled back to the mere. The path is traveled in daylight by gleeful thanes on horseback, and the bloody pool at the end of the gore trail serves as much as a memorial of a battle victory as the severed arm does. Much like the desire to claim new territory that drove many nations to participate in the First World War, and the trench warfare that defined the Western Front, Grendel’s attacks on Heorot could be viewed as a struggle for territory and the power that comes with it. After forcing the Danes to seek refuge away from the mead-hall, Grendel spends twelve years conducting a series of raids and in so doing effectively usurps Hrothgar’s throne, and becomes the ruler of

Heorot after sundown: “So ruled he and so ravaged, in wrong the one ‘gainst all, / Till idle stood and empty that excelling hall” (Leonard 9). Even though Grendel held Heorot by night, the poet is careful to mention a single caveat: “Yet not his the power - God forbade him then! - / e’er to greet the gift-stool, e’er to come anear / Throne itself of Hrothgar, nor partake its cheer” (Leonard 10). These few lines serve to remind the audience of Grendel’s status as an inherently evil creature, and also show that despite his power Grendel could never occupy the same place of honor and reverence that the hall’s human warriors enjoyed.

Viscount Northcliffe draws several interesting comparisons between the poem and contemporary conflicts in his introduction to Moncrieff’s translation. Indeed, the introduction to Moncrieff’s translation of *Beowulf* also yields a wealth of information about the ways in which modern audiences were linking the poem’s events with conflicts taking place during their own lives. *Beowulf* appears to be primarily employed by Moncrieff and Northcliffe as a sort of rallying cry to support British troops, and although the translation was not published until 1921, it is important to look at the lasting after effects of the war on a collective social consciousness, as well as conflicts that are contemporary with its publication, like the Irish War of Independence. A black and white photograph of a man in military dress dominates the front cover, and this image lingers as the reader continues on to Viscount Northcliffe’s introduction and to the poem itself. Northcliffe begins his introduction by equating the poem’s hero with the modern English soldier, insisting that “the preservation of *Beowulf* as an English epic is justified by the embodiment in its hero of many traits of character which we are still proud to recognise among our fellow countrymen” (Moncrieff vii). Despite its age, the poem retained an extremely high

level of relevance for post World War I audiences, and this appears to be especially true for combat veterans. Northcliffe paints an image of a “young captain and his small company, facing unknown perils in a foreign country, and the renewed courage of the veteran” (Moncrieff vii). He goes on to draw a comparison between the circumstances surrounding Beowulf’s voyage and the beginning of the First World War, stating that, after more than a generation of peaceful government, “the hero armed himself to fight and die along in the defense of his people” (Moncrieff vii). The introduction ends with Northcliffe posing the question, “How many thousand Beowulfs have we not sent out in the last seven years from these islands to face subtleties of horror as incredible as Grendel, fire as scathing as the Worm’s, sea-monsters against which no armament was proof?” Not only does he directly equate Beowulf’s adversaries with those that Great Britain faced during the First World War, but Northcliffe also sets up his readers to use his comparison as a framework to analyze the entire poem. With such a preface it is nearly impossible to separate Moncrieff’s text from its historical and political climate.

Despite the popularity of the poem and the numerous paraphrases and prose translations that would have provided an opportunity to refashion, if only slightly, the character of Grendel, within this group of World War I texts, Grendel appears almost exclusively as a monstrous entity. Grendel, at this moment in history, is nearly completely isolated at the “Demonized” end of the adversary spectrum, and this is due in part to the straightforward nature of translations, but it also reflects certain cultural aspects of Western society during The Great War. Translators during this time period leave nearly no room for the possibility of sympathy to be felt for Heorot’s tormentor, and I would argue that this is a direct cause of engaging in warfare on an

unprecedented scale. The political and emotional climate of Europe and the United States simply would not lend itself to the creation of *too* relatable or human an adversary, and such a climate does not exist until after World War II at the close of the Vietnam War.

Grendel during World War II

Between the years 1939 and 1945 a total of 10 translations of *Beowulf* were published, all of which were into the English language with the exception of Martin Lehnert's translation of the first 1044 lines of the poem into German.⁴ In addition to the handful of translations published during this time period, one adaptation of the poem, an Italian weekly comic strip that combined *Beowulf* with elements of Arthurian romance, was published for only a short period of time between the years 1940 and 1941.⁵ However brief, this comic strip marks *Beowulf*'s first venture into a creative media other than literature. For the purpose of examining Grendel's treatment during and after the Second World War, four of the English translations, including their illustrations, will be analyzed to gauge the ways in which portrayals of the mere-monster changed over a period of ten years. Selected texts published during World War II include Charles W. Kennedy's translation of *Beowulf* into English alliterative meter, first published in 1940 and then republished three years later with the Finnsburg episode added, Gavin Bone's 1945 self-illustrated *Beowulf in Modern Verse*, and finally, to look at the long term effects of the Second World War, Scottish poet Edwin Morgan's 1952 translation of *Beowulf* into English verse. In

⁴ A complete detailed list of *Beowulf* texts published during and after World War II can be accessed via the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies website.

⁵ This information obtained from Marijane Osborn's Annotated List of Beowulf Translations, which attempts to list every *Beowulf* translation and adaptation published from 1800 to the present, and provides some small amount of information on obscure or difficult to obtain *Beowulf* texts.

addition to the three aforementioned wartime texts, I will examine William Ellery Leonard's translation that was republished with illustrations by Rockwell Kent in 1932, and again in 1939 with new illustrations by Lynd Ward. Due to the fact that the text is a re-publishing of Leonard's 1923 translation one can look at how both sets of illustrations change, enhance, and influence the reader's attitude toward the poem's central conflicts and characters, especially the Grendel episode.

One of the major differences between the First and Second World Wars involves the nature and methods of warfare, namely the use of nuclear weaponry. Similar to the way in which technological advancements in weaponry employed on the battlefield during World War I provided a fresh, new horror for soldiers on the front lines and greatly inflated the casualty rate when compared to previous wars, nuclear power became the new boogymen to fear after the United States deployed an atomic bomb over Hiroshima in 1945. Also toward the end of the Second World War in July of 1944, Soviet forces traveling through Lublin, Poland found Majdanek, an abandoned concentration camp that German forces set fire to in an attempt to hide its existence before retreating from the region. Allied troops also stumbled upon and liberated numerous other concentration camps as they moved throughout Germany, though some stood empty as the prisoners had been forcefully evacuated and sent out on death marches, their final destination being other camps located farther away from the rapidly approaching Allied forces. Many died along the way and their bodies were simply left where they fell.

In 1945 Soviet soldiers discovered Auschwitz, and while evacuating the remaining prisoners, troops stumbled upon some disturbing remnants left behind by the concentration camp's previous occupants. Items included massive mounds of women's hair weighing thousands of pounds, and over 900,000 women's and men's discarded clothing items, as well as several piles of dentures and eyeglasses. Large crematoriums and gas chambers, sometimes standing just outside of the main compound betrayed the camps' nightmarish purpose. Upon touring a concentration camp and interviewing three survivors, Dwight D. Eisenhower wrote in a letter to George C. Marshall that, "The visual evidence and the verbal testimony of starvation, cruelty and bestiality were so overpowering as to leave me a bit sick. In one room, where they [there] were piled up twenty or thirty naked men, killed by starvation, George Patton would not even enter. He said he would get sick if he did so. I made the visit deliberately, in order to be in position to give first-hand evidence of these things if ever, in the future, there develops a tendency to charge these allegations merely to 'propaganda'." ⁶ A few months later at a press conference Eisenhower remarked that witnessing the remains of the concentration camp first-hand "explains something of my attitude toward the German war criminal. I believe he must be punished, and I will hold out for that forever." ⁷

After experiencing such horrors as a part of reality, post World War II audiences happily turned their attention to the world of spectacle that was becoming the entertainment industry. Monster movies on the big screen were demoted to the B-Movie category as low budget creature feature

⁶ Letter, DDE to George C. Marshall, 4/15/45 [The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years IV, doc #2418]

⁷ Press conference, 6/18/45 [DDE's Pre-Presidential Papers, Principal File, Box 156, Press Statements and Releases, 1944-46 (1)]

films targeted teenage audiences that demanded very little production value and copious amounts of thrills. This allowed room for major studios to produce sprawling epics and spectacular musical films in full color. On the stage a similar transition took place as a string of ambitious musicals with infectious tunes further pulled veterans, widows, and a war-weary American public out of their recent past and into technicolor. However, *Beowulf* translations did not necessarily follow these same trends. As demonstrated by Viscount Northcliffe's equation of Grendel with invading, hostile foreign forces, the mere-monster's past portrayals rarely leave the Demonized end of the Adversary Spectrum for several reasons. Firstly, there appears to exist a potent fear of complicating an otherwise perfectly straightforward Good versus Evil narrative. Such narratives are historically popular during periods characterized by armed conflict. This trend continues today, and one can see it reflected in the post 9/11 surge of *Beowulf* translations and adaptations that began in 2007.

The notion of an infallible hero is an extremely powerful symbol for a nation engaged in warfare, and it is often necessary to create such a symbol to rally around. However, reviving and retelling stories that clearly demarcate the boundaries between Hero and Villain, or Good and Evil serves a second purpose: a nation in such a position identifies itself as the hero. So long as an adversarial group is concretely and routinely depicted as something sub-human, beastly, and definitively labeled "Other", engaging that enemy in mortal combat and killing members of the group in large numbers becomes a monumentally easier task, if only because it is carried out in the name of defending national borders, or in more extreme cases, eradicating evil. The choice to isolate Grendel completely from humanity provides some degree of comfort, but simultaneously

feeds a false sense of security. Because of his beastly characteristics and violent actions, Grendel is easily identifiable as a dangerous creature: his horrid appearance ostensibly betrays an evil nature. Problems only begin to arise when the enemy looks just like everyone else, with no distinguishing characteristics to signify them as a threat. When dangerous individuals or groups aren't easily identifiable the result is a lethal combination of paranoia and xenophobia, as illustrated by the countless propaganda posters used during World War II that implore soldiers and civilians to not speak carelessly about the war, as there was no way of knowing who could be listening. The tendency to staunchly adhere to black and white depictions of good versus evil is also visible in the tightly controlled wartime media, and post World War II films, musicals, and various other forms of entertainment.

Illustrated translations

In the wake of discoveries as horrifying as concentration camps, it is puzzling that Grendel, an entity that systematically and violently slaughtered and consumed Danish men, should be portrayed as an anatomically human adversary in an illustration by Lynd Ward included in the 1939 re-published Leonard translation. Ward's illustration provided to accompany Beowulf and Grendel's battle breaks this wartime tradition of portraying an enemy as physically separated as the "Other". There are absolutely no distinguishing characteristics that could be used to identify Grendel as a "Devil of Hell", as he is described in Gavin Bone's translation from this same time period. Ward's Grendel appears to be fairly hirsute, with large blank eyes, and a protruding jaw. He is shown holding the corpse of a man in his large hands and wears a fur loin cloth around his waist. In the illustration depicting Beowulf's battle with Grendel, it is particularly interesting that

the artist chose to portray Beowulf as nearly four times smaller than his adversary, as the poem does not specify the latter possessing such an excessive degree of giant size. It is equally interesting that the focus of the image is on the pain felt by Grendel as his arm is torn from his body, and not necessarily on Beowulf's grip. Beowulf's back is turned to the audience and Grendel's upturned face becomes the focal point. It is true that vanquishing an enemy of Grendel's enhanced stature and strength would enhance the glory to be won by Beowulf, but the fact that Ward chose to show Grendel's reaction to the wound; to draw attention to the idea that the creature Beowulf fights is not an unfeeling monster, but rather an entity that possesses the capacity to produce sympathy through physical suffering is particularly salient. Aside from his imposing stature, Ward's Grendel is grotesque, yet distinctly human, and such an illustration works perfectly in sync with the accompanying text's description of a "Cannibal Grendel".

Rockwell Kent's illustrations of *Beowulf*, published with the 1932 reissuing of Leonard's translation strangely do not directly depict Grendel at all, but the poem's hero appears in nearly every illustration, even his funeral pyre is depicted. The most that Kent is willing to show of Grendel is his arm, already severed from his body and held up by Beowulf in a victorious gesture. However, it is perhaps not so surprising that Kent's illustrations shift the focus of the Grendel episode away from the monster's devastation of the Danes' land and livelihood, and onto Beowulf's heroic feats and the endurance of the human spirit. The republishing of this translation coincided with the middle of the Great Depression and was part of a spike in escapist tendencies in entertainment and literature. The overall quality and arrangement of this translation is interesting and also warrants an examination. The text itself is printed in vibrant red and blue

ink, with ornate initial letters at the beginning of every section and hardbound in grey linen. This decorative edition of the poem indicates that *Beowulf* had won a lasting place within Western literature as a valuable, timeless narrative deserving of preservation, and this particular publication also constitutes yet another example of the Anglo-Saxon text's entanglement with periods of cultural trauma.

Gavin Bone's translation, when compared to its predecessors published during the previous war, takes on distinctly more sympathetic tones when discussing Grendel pre-attack on Heorot. For example, Grendel's introduction initially translated by Leonard over a decade earlier reads, "But now that bold Hobgoblin, who dwelt in fenways dark, / Ill bore the sullen grievance that he each day must hark / to revel loud at banquet" (Leonard 7). Bone's translation of these lines reads very differently: "In pain endured the Spirit strong, / Long and long - the one who was out in the dark - / every day to hear a happy song / from the hall - and the string, the twining of the harp / The clear song of the minstrel" (Bone 17). In fact, in Bone's translation Grendel is characterized as a forlorn spirit up until he carries out his first attack on Heorot. He is not introduced as an inherently evil being, but rather earns this status through his actions. It is only after Grendel kills thirty sleeping Danes that Bone restores to him his previous status as an evil creature descended from Cain. The way this particular translation is worded sheds an oddly innocent light on Grendel's intentions and his first trip to the mead-hall. The language used by Bone to describe Grendel's actions is reminiscent of the way one might describe a wicked child throwing a tantrum: "The bad creature was ready soon, / cruel and hungry, and of tired men that slept double / struck thirty and is away happy, home to the dune / with his fill of meat" (Bone 18).

Another feature unique to this translation of *Beowulf* is that Gavin Bone provided not only a translation of the original text, but also supplied a series of accompanying illustrations that are reminiscent of the type of colorful, visually arresting artwork usually found in children's literature. Three of Bone's hand drawn illustrations depict key moments in the Grendel episode including his first trip to Heorot, bursting the doors and entering the mead-hall, and his fatal battle with Beowulf. The images are entitled *Grendel Watching*, *Grendel Enters*, and *Beowulf's Grip* respectively. The overall effect of Bone's humbly drawn figures compliments the translation's slightly juvenile rendering of Grendel.

Each of the three images features a violet, amorphous being that is only recognizable as Grendel by the accompanying labels and placement within the narrative. All figures, including Beowulf and the Danes, are completely devoid of facial features and drawn very simply in colored pencil. The image entitled *Beowulf's Grip* simultaneously places an emphasis on Grendel's fatal wound and Beowulf's strength, producing an effect similar to Lynd Ward's illustration depicting the same moment. Here, the distinguishing factor is not Grendel's size, but rather his color. Amid a black and white background, Grendel's violet form draws the viewers eye directly to his contorted limb. However, the monster's face is not depicted. In fact, it is difficult to determine the exact positioning of his body due to Bone's illustrating style. This lack of facial features or even a visible head also prevents the audience from being forced to confront Grendel's capacity to feel pain.

Potentially sympathetic moments

If Bone can be viewed as taking one step closer to the ‘Humanized’ end of the adversary spectrum in the textual evolution of Grendel, then Charles W. Kennedy’s translation takes two steps back. The creature is introduced as something inherently evil from the start. The audience is told exactly what to think of Grendel, as the first words used to describe him within this particular translation are “evil spirit”. Throughout the remainder of the Grendel episode until the creature’s death, the mere-monster is most frequently referred to as a demon. Aside from this staunch categorization of Grendel as a morally bankrupt being, Kennedy removes him farther from humanity by providing an interesting description of Grendel’s physical characteristics. Both Bone and Morgan give their Grendels human characteristics within the text, such as hands and fingers, but Kennedy equips the mere-monster with a pair of clawed paws.

Within the original Anglo-Saxon text, there are only two moments that provide an opportunity for a translator to portray Grendel in a sympathetic light, though achieving this effect is very difficult as directly translating the poem doesn’t leave much room to manipulate Grendel’s image. The first opportunity comes with Grendel’s introduction, and the second moment arrives at the end of the Grendel episode during his fatal battle with Beowulf. Upon feeling the warrior’s grip, Grendel panics and after realizing that he could easily die, he desperately wishes to flee back to the safety of his home that he shares with his mother in the mere. Should the translator decide to describe Grendel’s panicked yelps as “weeping” or “crying” these words contribute, if only slightly, to a pitiful Grendel. However, should a translator treat this moment as an opportunity to draw attention to Grendel’s beastly nature, the opposite effect is achieved, and

Kennedy does just this: “A terror fell on the Danish folk / As they heard through the wall the horrible wailing, / the groans of Grendel, the foe of God / Howling his hideous hymn of pain, / The hell-thane shrieking in sore defeat” (Kennedy 27). Both of these moments served as platforms from which John Gardner’s sympathetic portrayal of Grendel sprang, and opened the door for other interpretations of the mere-monster’s motives to further populate *Beowulfiana*. However, aside from these two points in the narrative, there are no other moments within the original poem from which sympathy for Grendel could arise.

As previously mentioned, Edwin Morgan’s 1952 translation of *Beowulf* has much in common with Bone’s as far as sympathetic portrayals are concerned. For example, both of their Grendels have anatomically human features such as hands and fingers, and for a brief few lines in Morgan’s translation Grendel is even referred to as a man. While the choice to translate the lines in this manner is rare, it speaks volumes about the way in which adversarial categorizations can potentially influence conflict and vice versa. Grendel’s categorization as a man comes during the second so-called opportunity for sympathy. The line in its entirety appears as the following: “Uncouth, unceasing: terror unparalleled / Fell upon the danes, upon every soul of them / who listened by the ramparts to the noise of crying, / to the god-hated howling a lay of horror, / song of lost triumph, the hell fettered man / in lament for pain” (Morgan 783-788). Morgan also seizes upon the other lines that can be manipulated to elicit sympathy, and approaches Grendel’s introduction in a manner similar to Bone, allowing for a brief moment, the ability for pity to exist: “But the outcast spirit haunting darkness / Began to suffer bitter sorrow / When day after day he heard the happiness /of the hall resounding” (Morgan 86). The language employed by

Morgan to describe Grendel's existence is arguably more compassionate than even Bone's, and it is here that one begins to see a new characterization of Grendel emerging. Morgan also updates Grendel's list of kin to include more modern and culturally relevant types of monsters such as kobolds, gogmagogs, lemurs, and perhaps most importantly, zombies. B-list horror films featuring zombies were extremely popular during the 1940s, and continued to be so during the 1950s when Morgan's translation of *Beowulf* was published. This constitutes yet another example of the periodic maintenance of monster tales that takes place when a certain type of creature ceases to inspire fear within a particular generation or culture, and Grendel's constant updating is partly responsible for his continued relevance and substantial amount of cultural cachet.

While World War II depictions of Grendel do not differ too drastically from their World War I counterparts, yet there is a subtle shift away from his previous status as a mindless, monstrous killing-machine. This shift is mirrored elsewhere within Western culture at the time, and an examination of trends in monster films before and after the Second World War further aids in illustrating the ways in which monstrosity was beginning to be redefined within Hollywood and the United States. As previously mentioned, media and entertainment during the First and Second World Wars were tightly controlled in an effort to elevate and stabilize morale. The Office of War Information worked with the United States' film industry during the Second World War to censor content that shed a negative light on the war. For example, photographs of deceased soldiers and other potentially unsettling content were both strictly prohibited. This type of strict censorship typified the World War II era, and efforts to paint the war in a positive light

and persuade citizens to purchase war bonds and support the war effort were ubiquitous. Within the film industry one can mark a massive shift in the types of monster films being made before and after World War II.

During the previous silent era, relatively small, humanoid monsters populated the big screen. Examples include Frankenstein, vampires, werewolves and mummies. After the end of the war, larger monsters capable of copious amounts of destruction and carnage became much more popular, the most recognizable of these being Godzilla. One explanation for this drastic shift in monster films puts forth the idea that large antagonistic forces, like Godzilla, are a stand in for the type of destruction and casualties that nuclear weaponry, natural disasters, and long arduous warfare can inflict upon a population. The monsters that populate narratives communicated via film and literature reflect current cultural fears and anxieties. These trends within monster pop culture remained fairly steady until the United States' engagement in the Vietnam War in 1965, when the definition of monstrosity was once again shaped by shifting views of armed conflict.

CHAPTER II

GARDNER'S GRENDEL

The decade between 1965 and 1975 saw *Beowulf* break into mainstream popular culture in an entirely unprecedented manner. Over thirty translations and adaptations were published, including a screenplay, a five-issue comic book, several novels, a rock opera, and translations into Russian, Spanish, Japanese, German, Danish, Polish, and English.⁸ Perhaps the most influential adaptation of the poem to come out of this decade was John Gardner's *Grendel*, a novel that tailors, and retells the familiar story of *Beowulf* from the monster's point of view, exploring a previously marginalized and underutilized perspective. In addition to Gardner's text, two additional translations from this period, by Thomas Meyer and E. Talbot Donaldson, help create a clearer picture of Grendel's place within American literary and popular culture during the United State's engagement in the Vietnam War. It is clear that during this time period *Beowulf* no longer existed as a text employed to glorify warfare and applaud the conquering hero. Rather, the familiar narrative was used by many adaptors as a vehicle through which social commentary could be expressed.

Of the three selected texts for this time period, John Gardner's *Grendel* is the most salient, and will be used as a baseline to make comparisons between the way monstrosity is approached in Meyer's and Donaldson's translations. Gardner's novel functioned as a watershed in the evolution of Grendel, and ushered in copious amounts of new interpretations and variations on

⁸ A complete list with more detailed descriptions of these texts can be found on the Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies's website.

the original poem's narrative. However, as the monster slowly transformed into a more complex character, the poem's hero lost some of his depth and glamour as adaptations began to depict an increasingly flawed Beowulf. Both Gardner's and Meyer's texts aid in illustrating the way in which the mere-monster became more of a sympathetic villain and less of an incarnation of evil for Beowulf to prove himself against. The pair of texts also demonstrate how this change was fostered in part by the United States' involvement in the Vietnam War. E. Talbot Donaldson's translation of the poem also warrants an examination, as it was incorporated into *The Norton Anthology* after its publication in 1966, and subsequently served as the main version of the Anglo-Saxon poem that most students in the United States would have read and been familiar with during this time period. The nuances of Donaldson's translation influenced three decades of high-school aged students, as well as other individuals whose only contact with *Beowulf* might have been in a classroom or lecture hall setting. As the poem bleeds farther into popular culture, its characters embed themselves more firmly within the American social consciousness. The numerous adaptations published during and after this decade often deviate from the original narrative, and provide an indication as to how contemporary audiences viewed conflict, trauma, and warfare.

From monster to anti-hero

John Gardner's novel *Grendel*, as previously mentioned, tells the familiar story of *Beowulf*, but with a crucial twist: the entire narrative is recounted from the monster's perspective. Copies of *Grendel* have been reprinted a total of eight times, and while the content of each publication is exactly the same, the cover art changes drastically. The first edition of *Grendel*, published in

1971, marks a watershed in the characterization of Beowulf's famous foe, and also acted as the catalyst that sparked numerous scholarly discussions about issues that arise when dealing with a sympathetic monster. The novel has a curious relationship with the nature of armed conflict and the Vietnam War as well. For example, Grendel at a few points in the novel seems to espouse anti-war sentiments. While this initially seems odd coming from a terrifyingly violent creature, Gardner restructured the narrative in such a way as to create, at the very least, the possibility for empathy to exist between monster and reader, which is an opportunity that is arguably not present in the original Anglo Saxon poem. *Grendel* bears several historical, social and cultural thumbprints indicative of the 1970s. Salient features of Gardner's text include the inversion of the traditional hero-villain relationship and Grendel's status as anti-hero, the creature's struggle to find an identity and his choice to define himself as a villain, and also the text's espousal of anti-war sentiments.

An examination of the accompanying cover art for each of the eight different publications of *Grendel* constitutes an excellent visual record of the creature's evolution, and provides a way to trace the changes taking place within the characterization of the creature over time. The original 1971 cover art features an amorphous, abstract rendering of Grendel that complements Gardner's reshaping of the character into one that constantly questions and changes his identity. The most recent cover illustration depicts a half-man, half-animal Grendel that stands upright on both feet, and appears to be screaming up at the sky. Depictions of the mere-monster that surfaced inbetween these two points oscillate between an almost anatomically human creature that appears to be in anguish, and more monstrous, menacing, or even demonic illustrations of the

character. The cover of the 1972 Ballantine Books edition of Gardner's work depicts a clawed, fanged Grendel cradling a human skull. No small amount of detail went into rendering Grendel's eyes in this particular illustration, lending them a piercing quality. The humanoid Grendel that peers out from the cover greets potential readers with a pair of intelligent eyes, and confronts previous renderings that portray the monster as a mindless force rather than a thinking and feeling entity. The illustration does not separate Grendel from his violent nature, but rather embraces the creature's monstrosity by depicting him cradling a small human skull.

It is important to note that not every edition of *Grendel* that was published over the past three decades follows this tendency to portray Beowulf's adversary as an humanoid creature. The 1981 Penguin Books paperback publication of the novel features a dragon-esque image of Grendel, complete with horns and fins, grasping a small man in his menacing claws. This particular illustration directly conflicts with the Grendel that John Gardner created, and reminds us that it is important to consider the difficulty in separating Gardner's *Grendel* from our initial contact and interpretation of the poem. The influence is immediate, and one does not always pause and consider that they might be synthesizing their notional *Beowulf* from many separate sources. In the same way that one might unknowingly accept and incorporate some portion of Gardner's *Grendel* into their *Beowulf* canon, it is equally as difficult to erase the influence of previous depictions that portray Grendel as a monstrous force. This is why certain illustrations or translations of the poem seem to constitute a return to the type of monstrosity associated with Grendel during the first and second World Wars. It is difficult to break with an adversarial role reinforced by several centuries of translations, and a narrative as old as *Beowulf* does not often

receive the type of remodeling that transforms the story's previously irredeemable villain into a character that an audience can identify and sympathize with. John Gardner's *Grendel* carved out a place within literary history separate from previous depictions of the mere-creature, and with each new publication of Gardner's novel the sympathetic Grendel worked his way farther and farther into American popular culture. As new adaptations of the poem surface, the scope of Gardner's impact on the character of Grendel becomes clearer.

Grendel's cover art constitutes just one small taste of how the now iconic figure has changed drastically over the course of three decades, but other variations in the characterization of the famous mere-monster can be traced back to certain points of divergence brought on by shifting cultural ideals and anxieties. Most often, these points of departure coincide with armed conflict, such as Viscount Northcliffe's association of the mere-monster with the belligerents involved in World War I, the post-World War II tendency to reserve applying pejorative terms to Grendel until he earns them through violent actions, and especially Gardner's *Grendel* and its relationship with the circumstances surrounding the Vietnam War.

As support for the United States' involvement in the conflict quickly dwindled during the early 1970s, American public opinion of the war was reflected in various aspects of popular culture, including music, literature, theatre and other visual and performing arts. Many members of the groups that openly protested the United States' involvement in the war were also members of the anti-establishment counterculture, but more often than not the individuals protesting the war were young men concerned about being drafted into a war they didn't believe in ideologically

and opposed politically. A handful of songs from the 1967 off-Broadway musical *Hair* constitutes one such example of anti-war sentiments showcased via popular culture. The score grew in popularity among counterculture movements, and eventually became an anthem for growing peace and anti-war movements as well. Gardner's *Grendel* was influenced by the same social and cultural circumstances, and the novel engages some of the same issues that *Hair* does, albeit in an entirely different manner. Clearly, *Beowulf* no longer existed as a text exemplary of the glories of war and the spirit of a conquering hero, as it was utilized by Viscount Northcliffe following the First World War, but rather transformed into a vehicle through which social commentary could be expressed.

Past portrayals of the monster introduce him simultaneously as Grendel and Hellfiend, and with the lines detailing his initial onslaught following shortly thereafter, very little room for one to synthesize their own opinion of the creature is left. John Gardner begins to develop the character well before his first attack on Heorot, provides an internal dialogue for Grendel, and creates a chance for the troubled thoughts of an alienated soul to define the mere-creature several chapters before his violent actions render him little more than the obligatory faceless monster that exists for the sole purpose of being slain by a hero. Gardner not only explores the emotional and psychological effects of Grendel's isolation, but he allows the monster to justify his attacks on the Danes in his own words, and this narration in turn creates the possibility for an individual to identify and sympathize with a previously inaccessible character.

At this point, Grendel's introduction and his encounter with the scop's song of creation have

been examined ad nauseam. As one can see from previous analyses, numerous translations published during different time periods treat this moment of introduction in much the same way. However, subtle variations in the translator's word choice denote either a willingness to give Grendel a chance to prove himself worthy of Cain's legacy, or they display the much more common tendency to categorize the creature as a demon immediately. Gardner takes this same moment, and interjects Grendel's exact feelings toward both the scop, here called the Shaper, and the subject matter of his song: "He told of an ancient feud between two brothers which split all the world between darkness and light. And I, Grendel, was the dark side, he said in effect. The terrible race God cursed. I believed him. Such was the power of the Shaper's harp!" (Gardner 51). This marks the first point in *Beowulf's* history that Grendel's exact thoughts concerning the scop's song are directly related to the audience, and Gardner makes it explicitly clear that alienation plays a major role in Grendel's development throughout the remainder of the novel.

On his journey to Heorot, Grendel stepped on the corpse of a man who had his throat slit and his clothes stolen, presumably by some of the Danes at the hall. Grendel holds the corpse in his arms as he listens to the Shaper praise men and demonize his kin, appalled that the performer would so readily use his art to twist reality in order to please his hypocritical audience members.

Confused, and perhaps more than a little emotionally affected by the Shaper's words, Grendel begins to sob and approaches the people within the hall crying out "Mercy! Peace! Friend!" (Gardner 51). The Danes, however, acquiesce none of these requests and instead attack Grendel, forcing him to flee. Gardner humanizes Grendel immediately by illustrating the way in which the creature can both appreciate, and be deeply affected by the scop's poetry, and also

provides a long absent alternative side of the story of his first trip to Heorot. Gardner uses Grendel's tears, his overt desire to be included within the Dane's community, and his capacity to feel complex emotions to build up the creature as a strange combination of the misunderstood exile and a violent force of nature. It is the tension between the simultaneous feelings of sympathy and revulsion that renders Gardner's characterization of Grendel a particularly problematic portrayal of monstrosity.

Aside from his struggle with alienation, Grendel also wrestles with his identity throughout the novel. This identity crisis comes to a head after a particularly troubling night, and Grendel decides to visit a dragon, presumably with the goal of advice in mind. After a lengthy exchange about the nature of Grendel's existence, the dragon advises the creature to embrace his monstrous reality and the role he was born into: "You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which [the Danes] learn to define themselves. The exile, captivity, death they shrink from—the blunt facts of their mortality, their abandonment—that's what you make them recognize, embrace! You are mankind, or man's condition: inseparable as the mountain-climber and the mountain. If you withdraw, you'll instantly be replaced. Brute existents, you know, are a dime a dozen" (Gardner 73). At first Grendel flatly refuses to accept his newfound responsibility as "brute existent", but after a few more trips to the mead hall, he eventually accepts the title of monster because it provides him with an identity, as well as a sense of belonging within the community, even if he only occupies the role of local boogeyman.

Strangely, this acceptance of the title of monster thrust upon Grendel by both the Danes and the dragon transforms the character into a less monstrous version of himself, if only because the audience is allowed a glimpse into the creature's mind, and is provided with a chance to understand his logic, as well as his fatal choice to embrace his inner monstrosity: "I had become something, as if born again. I had hung between possibilities before, between the cold truths I knew and the heart-sucking conjuring tricks of the Shaper; now that was passed: I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings! (Gardner 80). For Gardner, Grendel's status as a monster is something chosen and achieved over a period of time through sustained violence, not simply a quality ascribed to the creature by his bloodline and genealogical descent from Cain.

Part of what makes past portrayals of Grendel so terrifying is his ability to invade and hold the symbolic center of community and power. He occupies Heorot virtually unopposed due to his ability to slaughter scores of Danes apparently without exerting himself, and Grendel's unmatched strength contributes to the glory and fame to be won by defeating him. However, Gardner strips away some of Grendel's terrifying power by depicting the creature's inner emotional and mental turmoil. At several points in the novel Grendel begins to cry, and Gardner even depicts the monster as helpless and calling out for his "Mama" when caught in a tree and attacked by a bull. This petulant, pitiful Grendel resists previous trends of concretely categorizing the character as nothing more than a blood-thirsty monster, and represents perhaps the first variation of Grendel's character that could be described as an entity that possesses more human-like qualities than monstrous. In the same manner, Gardner dulls Beowulf's dazzling

heroic record, and creates an arguably insane, bully-like hero in an effort to invert Grendel's and Beowulf's respective statuses of hero and villain.

Within Gardner's refashioning of *Beowulf*'s narrative, Grendel exists as a type of anti-hero, and this role change constitutes a massive leap from his previous status as obligatory 'bad-guy' in the original poem. As previously mentioned, Grendel's transformation does interesting things to the character of Beowulf as well, and this is perhaps most noticeable during Grendel's final battle with the ostensible hero at Heorot. After securing Grendel's arm, Beowulf begins to demoralize his opponent by forcing him to sing a song about walls, echoing the modus operandi of a schoolyard bully: "*Feel the wall: is it not hard? He smashes me against it, breaks open my forehead. Hard, yes! Observe the hardness, write it down in careful runes. Now sing of walls! Sing!*" (Gardner 171). In the same way that Grendel was isolated from an Anglo-Saxon audience in the original poem, so Beowulf is kept at a distance from the post-modern reader. Compared to Grendel, this Beowulf speaks very little and allows his violent actions to define him. Even his speech is marked as something distinctly alien, as it is the only spoken text in the novel written in all italic text. In this way John Gardner's *Grendel* turns the familiar story of *Beowulf* on its head, and subsequently forces one to consider the essence of heroics, villainy, and monstrosity in an entirely different light.

During his final moments of life, Grendel provides some insight on his fatal battle with Beowulf that completely transforms the heroic nature of the engagement altogether. Grendel observes Beowulf and comments that, "He's crazy. I understand him all right, make no mistake...it was by

accident that he got my arm behind me. He penetrated no mysteries. He was lucky. If I'd known he was awake, if I'd known there was blood on the floor when I gave him that kick..." (Gardner 172). Such an observation changes the way that one views the conflict, for if Beowulf was simply lucky, and superior strength and skill played no part in his victory, then he is reduced to a very hollow hero indeed. Aside from Grendel's claim that his foe was awarded victory by the hands of luck, there is one other moment during the battle that directly confronts modern Western notions of what it means to be heroic. In the original poem, and even in some contemporary translations and adaptations of *Beowulf*, one can see the way Grendel is fashioned as both reprehensible and irredeemable, and such a characterization almost demands that audience members cheer on Beowulf as he rids the Danes of their tormentor. This moment plays out differently in Gardner's version of the tale as Grendel narrates his final moments of consciousness: "My heart booms terror. Will the last of my life slide out if I let out breath? They watch with mindless, indifferent eyes, as calm as midnight black as the chasm below me...They watch on, evil, incredibly stupid, enjoying my destruction (Gardner 174). By providing Grendel's final conscious thoughts, Gardner forces the audience to confront their role as passive supporters of Beowulf's termination of another conscious, living creature. This moment marks the completion of Grendel's transformation into a misunderstood villain with logical motives; an entity capable of winning and commanding an audience's sympathy.

Aside from Gardner's revolutionary refashioning of the figure of Grendel, he also employs *Beowulf* as a way to engage and discuss anti-war sentiments. This choice constitutes an entirely new development in the poem's long history, as never before has the text been used to explicitly

portray armed conflict as something wholly negative. Contrasting the Anglo-Saxon view of war with the way that contemporary audiences felt about the United States' direct military involvement in Vietnam illustrates how Gardner's text is very much a product of the social and political climate of its time. The poem's inhabitants belonged to a warrior culture where lordship and kinship played crucial roles in social structure, and thegns served the king in both battle and at court. Loyal and successful thegns were rewarded with weaponry, treasure, and land. Therefore, the continued existence of a kingdom depended solely on a ruler's ability to conquer other groups of people and win battles in order to supply his victorious warriors with land and wealth. Armed conflict was integrated into every aspect of life for the original audience's ancestors and Grendel's treatment reflects this warrior's mindset. The fact that Gardner's text developed in an entirely different way is not a surprise. With the employment and subsequent human exposure to chemical defoliants such as Agent Orange, massacres of non-combatants, and disturbing images taken by photographers in Vietnam that depicted these and other numerous war-time horrors, *Beowulf*, a text concerned primarily with the nature of conflict, changed drastically in the hands of John Gardner during the wake of the Vietnam War.

Grendel's relationship with contemporary warfare has been extensively examined and discussed, and as Michael Livingston and John William Sutton express in *Reinventing the Hero: Gardner's Grendel and the Shifting Face of Beowulf in Popular Culture*, "Gardner presents a decidedly unfavorable view of Germanic warrior culture, which is epitomized by a cruel, inscrutable, anti-heroic Beowulf" (3). However, I would argue that the text's anti-war sentiments can be better illustrated by Grendel's views on the Dane's relationship with warfare. Grendel mentions that it

wasn't because Hrothgar threw a battle-axe at him that he turned on the king, but rather this decision was made after watching the Danes squabble and kill other men for petty reasons: "When two hunters from different bands came together in the woods, they would fight until the snow was slushy with blood, then crawl back, gasping and crying, to their separate camps to tell wild tales of what happened" (Gardner 31). Grendel remarks that he would overhear what the bands were planning to do to one another, and that "It was slightly ominous because of its strangeness - no wolf was so vicious to other wolves - but I half believed they weren't serious" (Gardner 32). It is interesting that Grendel, a creature historically associated with beasts and demons, should draw a comparison between the Danes and vicious animals. Even though Grendel himself sustains a twelve year war with Hrothgar, he appears to abhor the type of mindless, or politically driven violence that the Danes indulge themselves in.

Gardner's examination of *Beowulf's* unplumbed interiority, and his development of the character of Grendel adds depth and a strong sense of tragedy to the previously ephemeral monster by tracing the steps and events that lead Grendel to embrace monstrosity. Many of the qualities that Gardner bestows upon his Grendel, like his status as an outsider and his capacity to suffer, are strongly reflected in post 9/11 translations and adaptations of the poem. Understanding their point of origin helps one to better understand why these specific qualities were amplified, or in some cases downplayed, after the destruction of the World Trade Center in 2001.

Thomas Meyer, innocence, and monstrosity

It is important to note that Thomas Meyer initially created his belletristic translation of *Beowulf* during the 1970s, however it was not published until much later in 2012, and is grouped with other Vietnam texts due to the unique historic, political and social circumstances from which it originally arose. In the same vein as Gavin Bone, Thomas Meyer offers a translation that features a childlike Grendel that further complicates the traditional hero-villain relationship, as there is very little glory in killing a purportedly misunderstood, alienated child, even one as monstrous as Grendel. Meyer's translation also mirrors John Gardner's portrayal of Beowulf as an individual who is perhaps less heroic than one is lead to believe. It is at this point in time that one begins to see a clear shift in the way that Beowulf and Grendel were being portrayed in translations and adaptations alike.

The textual organization of Thomas Meyer's *Beowulf* is equally as important as the content itself. The visual effect of the non-traditional layout is similar to the way in which an illustration influences and enhances the accompanying text, but it also wields the power to control a reader's pace and rhythm with lengthy spaces between lines and awkwardly placed text. Meyer's choice to arrange the lines of the poem in this fashion adds yet another layer to this particular translation of *Beowulf* to be considered. For example, one whole page is devoted simply to Beowulf's name printed in all capital characters, and the rest of the page in its entirety is left blank. Such an arrangement might be interpreted as a sly comment about the size of the hero's ego, or his ostensible lack of substance beyond a braggart's inflated reputation.

The creative placement and spacing of text is also utilized at key points in the poem to convey emotion, such as the moment when Beowulf violently grasps Grendel's arm and the monster begins to panic: "nogoodnokillno / gonopainopain / armburnpainono" (Meyer 90). The same technique is employed at the exact moment Beowulf begins to tear off Grendel's arm:

"footstephandclawfiendreachmanbedquicktrickbeastarpainclampnewnotknownheartrunfleshofe argeatawaygonorunrun". Once again the thoughts are tangled and somewhat difficult to decipher at first glance, but they reflect perfectly the childlike nature that Meyer has imbued his Grendel with. This quick burst of unseparated and confused text communicates the rushed, frantic nature of Grendel's thoughts at this point in the narrative, and simultaneously provides a glimpse into who the mere-monster is aside from his prescribed role as adversary. At this point in the original poem, the audience is simply told that Grendel feared for his life and desperately desired to flee back to the safety of his mere, but Meyer capitalizes on this moment and expands on those frantic feelings, effectively rendering the character much more accessible to the post-modern reader.

The language and imagery employed by Grendel just before his death are equally as child-like and ironically, or perhaps horrifically, just as innocent: "Beowulf stood up straight, beast in his grip, his knuckles popped. Ent bent on escape runwideflatopenswampholessafebadfingermanssqueezeletgowantnotcomesadgobadhallrunrun" (Meyer 89). Grendel's categorization of Beowulf as the "bad finger man", and his grade school vocabulary both serve to enhance the image of a juvenile monster, and also contribute no small

amount of pathos to the scenes concerning Grendel's mother, and her desire to avenge her slain son. Aside from highlighting and developing a strange and chilling sense of innocence at the time of Grendel's death, Meyer's translation also applies this same type of language and imagery elsewhere within the poem, but only to those lines concerning or directly spoken by Grendel.

For example, during the monster's first raid on Heorot, another explicitly violent act, Meyer relates that Grendel found the thanes "snoozing like fat, well / fed babies safe from boogies. / BANG! like a flash / that hard hearted, grim, greedy, / sick thing snatched 30 sleeping / Danes & /jiggetyjig ran home again, / fists full of blood candy (Meyer 47). The use of a child's lexicon once again lends an uncomfortably innocent tone to Grendel's violent actions in Heorot, and nearly transforms the monster's raid into a toddler's tantrum. Meyer's Grendel is clearly simple as far as cognitive ability is concerned, but he still possesses the capacity to command language in an effective manner. While this depiction of the mere-monster is a step towards the "Humanized" end of the spectrum, Meyer's Grendel leaves much to be desired in the way of examining the creature's emotional and mental states. At this point in time, only Gardner's novel features a fully articulate Grendel capable of understanding, explaining, and exploring his own sense of alienation and penchant for violence.

While Meyer does not fully develop Grendel's struggle with living in isolation in the same way that Gardner does, his introduction of the monster is studded with words that communicate at least a sense of alienation: "Hrothgar's men / enjoyed happy lives / at Heorot & then / the Hellfiend's raids began... / That grim ghostbeast called Grendel / dwelled on doomed ground in

demonrealms & / made swamp & moor his stronghold. He stalked those borderlands one of the banished kin of outcast Cain (Meyer 46). Such an introduction locates Grendel firmly outside the realm of human companionship and community, and it is important to look at which is given first, Grendel's name or his status as an outsider or demon. Is the audience allowed to connect to the character via a name before that name is irrevocably linked with monstrosity? Beowulf's name is virtually inseparable from his extensive and impressive résumé of ostensibly heroic feats, but no mention of Grendel's reputation is given to accompany his genealogy, and this leaves one wondering if the monster has committed any offense prior to his attack on Heorot.

Upon Grendel's death, Meyer mentions, "that ghost from another world / would start upon his / wretched journey back into / distant demonrealms" (Meyer 91). This further illustrates the monster's separation from the other characters in the poem, including his mother, who receives very little attention when compared with her son; she is barely a footnote tacked onto the Grendel episode in many pop-culture adaptations of the poem. In addition to highlighting Grendel's alienation, Meyer also amplifies the text's subtle notes of jealousy that can be attributed as either a side-effect of Grendel's separation from God and His favor, or his spurned desire to participate in a comitatus: "Singlehanded / Hell's fiend held Heorot, / made its cold hearth his home. / Night's dark. Scylding's grief. / That beast knelt before no Lord's / throne. / His deeds went unrewarded" (Meyer 49). Should Grendel have belonged to a group like that of Hrothgar's thanes, then his warcraft and strength in battle would have been legitimized and rewarded with gifts, honor, mead, and celebration at Heorot. However, his proclivity for cannibalism combined with less than savory origins prevent Grendel from participating within

any such community, thus cementing the creature's status as an outsider and forever branding him as "Other" within this particular text.

The lasting influence of Donaldson's *Beowulf*

E. Talbot Donaldson's 1966 prose translation of *Beowulf* lends itself to manipulation more readily than a direct verse translation, as paraphrasing the poem provides an opportunity to refashion and refocus certain elements of the narrative without necessarily changing the story or overarching themes. However, Donaldson does not take the same type of liberties with the poem that Thomas Meyer and John Gardner do. Even after replacing Donaldson's translation in newer editions of *The Norton Anthology*, W.W. Norton & Company still advertise this particular text on their website as "Accurate and literally faithful, the Donaldson translation conveys the full meaning and spirit of the original". While Donaldson does not introduce foreign lines to the original poem like Meyer does by providing Grendel with an internal dialogue, his treatment of the mere-monster is still decidedly more tolerant than previous World War I and II translations.

As is the case with any direct translation, Grendel's introductory lines are an excellent indicator as to how the translator's culture viewed conflict and hostile foreign entities. Does Grendel's bloodline automatically render him an evil being, or does the monster have to earn his title through action? The question can be answered by looking at the poem's first description of Grendel: "Then the fierce spirit painfully endured hardship for a time, he who dwelt in the darkness, for every day he heard loud mirth in the hall; there was the sound of the harp, the clear song of the scop. (Donaldson 3). Donaldson reserves concretely pejorative terms like evil and

hellfiend until Grendel deserves them, and instead replaces them with grim, unhappy, and fierce. This indicates a cultural atmosphere that is willing to consider the Other's motivation and perspective, resisting post World War I and II tendencies to generalize and assign negative qualities to entire groups of people in an effort to efface reservations soldiers might have about engaging other men in mortal combat.

Donaldson continues to shy away from concretely categorizing Grendel as evil, even when the monster approaches Heorot with ill intent: "Then, after night came, Grendel went to survey the tall house - how, after their beer-drinking, the Ring-Danes had disposed themselves in it" (Donaldson 3). Once again it is only after killing thirty men that Grendel is called evil, savage and cruel. His particular act of cruelty is often called "Grendel's war-strength" or alternatively Grendel's war craft, and the Danes treat his attacks as they would any other man's: "Grendel had fought a long time with Hrothgar, for many half-years maintained mortal spite, feud, and enmity - constant war. He wanted no peace with any of the men of the Danish host, would not withdraw his deadly rancor, or pay compensation: no counselor there had any reason to expect splendid repayment at the hands of the slayer" (Donaldson 4) For Donaldson's Danes, Grendel's status as monster arises from his blatant disregard for the rules of engagement, and not necessarily his physical appearance or genealogy. Grendel's actions within this translation are referred to as crimes, not atrocities, and the use of language to describe Grendel as an outsider or alien spirit contributes to this image of Grendel as a spurned, humanoid creature: "There came gliding in the black night the walker in darkness (Donaldson 13). Clearly, Grendel's place is outside of the Danish community, but not necessarily outside of the realm of humanity.

Donaldson's depiction of Grendel as an outsider shrouded in darkness, Meyer's chillingly innocent Grendel, and Gardner's revolutionary sympathetic portrayal of the mere-creature all constitute drastic shifts away from the type of monstrosity described in the texts published during World War I and II. Once again, prolonged engagement in armed conflict transformed the character of Grendel to reflect the nature of the war being fought. Previously, Grendel was isolated at the "Demonized" end of the adversary spectrum and effectively functioned as a stand-in for enemy troops for translators like Moncrieff, but during the Vietnam War Grendel moved much closer to the "Humanized" end of the spectrum. After the event of 9/11, portrayals of the creature oscillate between the two points and reflect tension between those that responded to the terrorist attacks by creating an 'us versus them' narrative, and others who held that the situation was much more complicated than the prevailing black and white viewpoint would suggest.

CHAPTER III

GRENDEL AFTER 9/11

Before discussing the post 9/11 Grendel, an examination of selected texts published before 2001 will aid in creating a clear sense of the way in which Grendel functioned within American popular culture before the fall of the Twin Towers. This, in conjunction with the previous wartime analyses will provide a standard against which one can compare post 9/11 depictions of the monster to gauge the ways in which Grendel changed after the destruction of the World Trade Center and the attacks on the Pentagon. Selected readings for pre-9/11 texts include Marc Hudson's *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*, Frederick Rebsamen's *Beowulf: A Verse Translation*, Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, Welwyn Wilton Katz's illustrated children's adaptation of the poem, and Gareth Hinds' graphic novel, *The Collected Beowulf*. This batch of *Beowulf* related texts includes both translations and illustrated adaptations in order to examine Grendel's textual handling as well as the way he is visually portrayed in various genres.

Grendel's role in American culture before 2001

In contrast to some of the previously examined texts that translate the lines concerning Grendel's motive for attacking Heorot rather ambiguously, Marc Hudson's 1990 translation of the poem, provides a very specific reason for Grendel's twelve year war: "then the bold demon who went by darkness / listened against his will and was steeped in pain / each day he heard the revel of men / ring out in the hall" (Hudson 86-89). Hudson's justification for Grendel's raids anticipates

Zemeckis' Grendel, who appears to be aurally plagued by the Danes' incessant merry making. While Hudson's portrayal of the creature is violent and lacks the same type of sympathetic aura that Gardner's Grendel casts, the choice to provide the monster with any type of logical reason for violently attacking the Danes, besides asserting that his genealogy renders him inherently evil, is a salient one. Hudson's portrayal of the mere-creature shares virtually all of the same reprehensible characteristics that defined World War I and II depictions of Grendel, but the inclusion of an arguably justifiable motive marks this translation as something distinctly post-modern. While one might argue that Hudson's depiction of Grendel constitutes a return to inherent monstrosity, the image of a creature steeped in pain prevents this portrayal from being grouped with previous World War I and II translations that preferred clear lines between hero and villain, and uncomplicated portrayals of monstrosity.

Frederick Rebsamen's translation published just one year after Hudson's, constitutes yet another example of a text where Grendel's introduction is the easiest way to gauge how he will be treated in the lines to follow: "Then an alien creature cold wanderer / could no longer endure from his dark exile / bright bench-laughter borne to the rafters / each night in that hall" (Rebsamen 86-89). Once again, Grendel is not mentioned explicitly within the text as an evil creature or a Hellfiend, and the pain inflicted upon him by the loud feasting in the hall is the spark that ignites a twelve year conflict between the creature and the Danes. The introduction also bears a striking resemblance to Gardner's *Grendel*, especially because it mentions that, "The Shaper banished him unshriven away / with the kin of Cain killer of his blood" (Rebsamen 106-107). While Hudson's translation is exemplary of modern audiences' preference for villainous adversaries

over one dimensional monsters, Rebsamen's translation illustrates just how potent and lasting the effects of John Gardner's 1971 novel were. A large number of current translations share these two characteristics, and the post-Gardner, pre-9/11 Grendel often combines sympathy and monstrosity in unequal parts which can result in brief returns to inherent monstrosity.

Characteristic of the way in which depictions of Grendel often make this return to the "Demonized" end of the Adversary Spectrum, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* by Seamus Heaney was first published in 2000, and then again in 2001 as a paperback. This particular translation of the poem is often employed by schools to teach *Beowulf*, and for this reason it is comparable to E. Talbot Donaldson's 1966 translation as a text that influenced an entire generation's perception of *Beowulf*. Continuing to use Grendel's introduction as a baseline to compare pre-9/11 texts, one notices that Heaney, like many others, emphasizes that the mere-creature is a descendent of Cain, but the phrasing he uses is slightly different: "he had dwelt for a time / in misery among the banished monsters, / Cain's clan (Heaney 104-106). Here, as in other translations, ogres, elves, phantoms and giants can all claim to be part of Cain's bloodline, but Heaney's portrayal of this group as a unified clan that stands firmly outside of humanity inflates the already palpable tension between the Danes and their monstrous tormentor. Indeed, upon his final journey to Heorot, Heaney refers to Grendel as "The bane of the race of men" (712 Heaney). With this categorization in mind, one might think of humanity and monstrosity as two warring forces, and for this reason monstrosity is not a quality associated with any of the human characters, as it has been in adaptations like Gardner's *Grendel* or Robert Zemeckis' *Beowulf*. In

this way, Heaney redraws clear boundaries between Good and Evil, and returns Grendel to the ‘Demonized’ end of the adversary spectrum.

The sturdy division between humanity and monstrosity is mirrored elsewhere in the text as well, and is especially palpable during Grendel and Beowulf’s battle: “Fingers were bursting, / the monster back-tracking, the man overpowering” (759-760 Heaney). Beowulf’s triumph over Grendel constitutes Good’s triumph over Evil, and also humanity’s banishment of monstrosity. Heaney is careful to mention that Grendel was “Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse” (Heaney 137). No reason is provided to justify Grendel’s attacks on Heorot, and his evil deeds are attributed to his nature. All of this constitutes a return to inherent monstrosity, and because of Grendel’s adversarial relationship with Beowulf, the latter is automatically rendered a force of pure good.

One can find instances of Beowulf portrayed as a force of pure good in other adaptations as well, such as Welwyn Wilton Katz’s children’s adaptation of Beowulf that was published in 1999 with illustrations by Laszlo Gal. The story is recounted from Wiglaf’s point of view, and features a Grendel somewhat similar to Heaney’s. In the same way that pre-9/11 portrayals of Grendel seem to exist at all points on the adversary spectrum, Gal’s portrayal of Grendel appears to shift in form from illustration to illustration. For example, the first depiction of Grendel appears to be almost human; he is bi-pedal with long messy hair. However, when one turns the page, Grendel takes on the appearance of an alligator complete with a scaled tail and an un-hinged jaw, even though he is described within the accompanying text as a troll. This discontinuity might just be

an oversight as the focus of the text is not on Grendel but rather the poem's hero, and Katz's retelling of the story marginalizes Grendel to an even greater extent than even World War I and II translations do.

Katz's adaptation includes all three episodes present within the original poem, and spends very little time on Grendel as a consequence. During the creature's battle with Beowulf, Grendel remains mostly in shadow and flees the mead hall, somewhat comically, missing one arm. Grendel disappears rather abruptly from the illustrations and apparently does not warrant another mention after the end of the battle. However, there is one oddly domestic image featured before the start of the Grendel episode that depicts the mere-creature bringing home a satchel of slain Danes to his mother waiting in their cave. The image mirrors that of a son bringing home dinner for his mother to prepare, and it is at odds with the other illustrations of the creature that depict Grendel as a stock monster.

Continuing *Beowulf's* ongoing relationship with the comic book genre, Gareth Hinds' *The Collected Beowulf* was published in 2000, and portrays Grendel as distinctly monstrous. He is constructed as the antithesis of the comic's hero, and first appears in media res, slaughtering a handful of Danes. However, during this first appearance the mere-creature's face is obscured by his extended arm and a gratuitous splatter of blood. Even after this bloody introduction, Hinds' Grendel is kept in shadow as he approaches Heorot, and the details of his face are only revealed frame by frame. At first, the glimpses of the mere-creature are brief and the view is severely limited to one or two body parts, or a silhouette of a hulking frame. However, during Grendel's

fight with Beowulf, more and more detail is given to the monster's expressions and facial features. The choice to obscure Grendel's eyes for the first portion of the comic only allows one to see Grendel's body and the violent actions that it performs, and the audience is not permitted to look into his eyes to analyze or examine emotions or a lack thereof. Due to the fact that Grendel is kept partially obscured until he engages Beowulf in combat, the final moments of the mere-monster's life are the most detailed. Hinds simultaneously emphasizes the creature's capacity to inflict pain and suffer from it, and in this way he creates a Grendel that is close to the "Demonized" end of the adversary spectrum, but still retains certain qualities that prevent one from categorizing this depiction of the mere-creature as a mindless killing machine.

Hinds' Grendel is large, with an unnaturally bulbous musculature, and in the final frames where his face is shown one can see a pair of yellow, snake-like eyes and a mouth full of sharp teeth. While Hinds' depiction of Grendel is certainly frightening and constitutes one of the most graphic depictions of the monster's violence thus-far, he oddly still bestows upon Grendel the capacity to suffer. This is best demonstrated by the frantic look in the creature's eyes as he glances toward the open door of the hall for a way to escape his fate. At one point in the comic, Grendel is shown to be several times Beowulf's size, but as the pair continue their battle, more and more visual similarities between the hero and his adversary arise. Both appear as unspeaking, unyielding forces of nature, and Beowulf's physical might appears to match Grendel's inhuman strength. The combatants destroy several of the hall's supporting beams, and in the frame that depicts Beowulf ripping Grendel's arm off, the two have morphed to be exactly the same size. The similarities between hero and villain serve two purposes. Firstly this shows

that Beowulf is Grendel's equal, but it also sets Beowulf apart from the other human characters in the story. This treatment of Beowulf mirrors the way that Grendel is portrayed as an entity separate from the rest of humanity. The idea of a monstrous Beowulf is explored elsewhere as well, including previously discussed texts like John Gardner's *Grendel*, and also in Graham Baker's 1999 film, *Beowulf*. Such portrayals constitute a breach in the previous tendency to create black and white depictions of heroics and monster slaying, and resonate with modern audiences that exhibit a preference for more "realistic" or nuanced depictions of heroics and monstrosity.

This set of translations and adaptations illustrates the varied and oscillating nature of the figure of Grendel, and also demonstrates tension between two conflicting ways of viewing armed conflict. The first way of viewing conflict within *Beowulf* prevailed during World War I and II, and it often casts one group as the "good guys" and the other as the "bad guys". This leaves very little room for sympathy to be felt for the national enemy, and actively discourages and prevents attempts at humanizing such a group. The other way of approaching conflict within the poem was typified by the texts published during the Vietnam War, and constitutes a much more complicated, multifaceted view of warfare where it is difficult to perpetuate violence and actively deny similarities shared with the "Other". Hudson, Rebsamen, and Katz all created Grendels that one can comfortably categorize as monstrous, yet each has at least one redeeming quality. Hudson's monster was provided with a logical reason for attacking the Danes, Rebsamen also provides his Grendel with a justifiable motive and concedes that monstrous actions do not necessarily denote an inherent evil nature, and even Katz's portrayal of the monster includes an

illustration that places Grendel within a domestic setting and implies that the creature has a existence outside of the realm of monstrosity. Heaney's Grendel lacks sympathetic qualities, and his translation emphasizes Beowulf's role as a powerful, unfaltering hero. Hinds' Grendel shares some of the same monstrous characteristics that Heaney's displays, however the type of monstrosity featured in *The Collected Beowulf* is much more nuanced. This restoration of the border between humanity and monstrosity is sometimes necessary, and can serve a therapeutic purpose for the war weary culture, as we shall see in post 9/11 translations and adaptations of *Beowulf*.

The post 9/11 Grendel

Currently, we fear the monstrous force driven by reason, ideology, or revenge, and not necessarily the rampaging or mindless beast, and this is reflected in the *Beowulf* adaptations and translations published after 2001. Post 9/11 texts and films to be analyzed include Eric A. Kimmel's children's adaptation entitled *The Hero Beowulf*, Nicky Raven and John Howe's *Beowulf: A Tale of Blood, Heat, and Ashes*, David Kaufman's *Beowulf, A Current English Version*, Amy Hager's *A Modern Scop Tells Beowulf*, the 2005 film *Beowulf & Grendel* directed by Sturla Gunnarsson, and Robert Zemeckis' 2007 film, *Beowulf*. In addition to these selected texts and films, it is important to note that other post 9/11 translations and adaptations of the poem include a total of seven films and one television series, three comic books, several novels, a self-help book, a children's coloring book, an action-adventure video game developed for PC, PS3, Xbox 360 and PSP, and a board game designed by Reiner Knizia with artwork by John

Howe. Video and board games mark new developments within the long history of *Beowulf* adaptations crossing into new mediums. In this case, animated films and various forms of games target younger audiences, and also demonstrate how Zemeckis' film reignited a nation-wide interest in an ancient text that only a Hollywood blockbuster could. However, the mass of *Beowulf* related texts published during the years following the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were not simply a result of translators and adapters attempting to ride on the coattails of the 2007 release of Zemeckis' much hyped film, but, as we shall see, rather illustrate how the post-9/11 American cultural climate favored the commercial success of a narrative like *Beowulf*. While the event of 9/11 is not necessarily a catalyst that sparked particular changes in adaptations of the poem published after 2001, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon did shape the environment in which *Beowulf* was being interpreted. Americans after 9/11 were conditioned by those events to think of foreign (i.e., "not us") adversaries, and groups in certain ways, and this in turn influenced the way that the American public viewed and discussed conflict and violence. This cultural shift might have influenced the making of *Beowulf* adaptations, but certainly influenced their reception and interpretation.

Published in 2005 by Eric A. Kimmel, *The Hero Beowulf* pulls no punches when it comes to depicting Grendel outright as an inherently monstrous and irredeemable entity, and as is indicated by the title, the main focus of this adaptation is on Beowulf and his heroic triumph over Grendel. This illustrated adaptation of the poem appears to have the intended function of introducing a young audience to the timeless concept of Good's struggle against Evil, and is therefore an excellent example of the way that *Beowulf* has been employed for teaching purposes. Kimmel's

adaptation features an uncomplicated depiction of a good hero, Beowulf, slaying evil, obviously embodied in the form of Grendel.

From the very beginning of the text, Kimmel deliberately separates his audience from Grendel, and this is mainly accomplished via the accompanying illustrations. For example, the first glimpse of Grendel is merely his arm and clawed hand, both of which are partially obscured by shadow. Keeping Beowulf's adversary in the literal shadows prevents a reader from identifying with or learning anything about Grendel, and enforces a young reader's comprehension of the mere-creature's role as an obligatory, disposable villain. This choice leaves Beowulf as the only viable character to identify with, as the other Geats, Danes and even Hrothgar himself play an extremely limited role within Kimmel's refashioning of the narrative. It is only after establishing Beowulf as the central force within the adaptation that Kimmel allows his reader to behold Grendel's entire figure. The image is an entire page devoted to Grendel's face: troll-like and menacing. It is interesting to note that Grendel is a sickly shade of green not used anywhere else in the illustrations. The creature is set apart textually within the narrative as an evil being, but his alienation also carries over visually as his coloring separates him from every other character that appears in *The Hero Beowulf*.

An examination of Grendel's facial expressions also sheds some light on the way Kimmel wants the character to function within his re-telling of *Beowulf*. Grendel's expressions are always frightful, menacing, and demonstrative of his evil nature and ill-intent toward the Danes. In fact, during his battle with Beowulf, the only opportunity an illustrator might have at depicting

Grendel in a somewhat sympathetic light due to his being in immense physical pain, we only see incomplete glimpses of the monster: a view from behind his shoulder, a close up of his arm, the back of his head, and finally Beowulf grasping the creature's limb. However, just before Beowulf rips the arm off, Kimmel's Grendel attempts to bargain with the hero: "If you let me go, I will leave Heorot Hall and never return" (Kimmel 24). The artist's rendering of Grendel as he says these words betrays some intended trickery on the monster's part, as the creature wears a sly and wicked look in his eyes. Kimmel's addition of these few lines spoken by Grendel furthers his goal of cementing the creature's despicable status, as the attempted double-dealing and overt insincerity communicated via facial expressions is intended to leave little room to doubt Grendel's status as evil incarnate. The last image we see is Beowulf holding the severed arm in the foreground, and on the horizon a small bloodied Grendel flees back to his mere. Beowulf's victory is highlighted and a sense of triumph eclipses the final moments of Grendel's life. Kimmel's adaptation of *Beowulf* ends here, excluding the episode with Grendel's mother and Beowulf's final fight with the dragon. This choice might have been made for the sake of brevity, and if imparting knowledge of the concept of Good and Evil was Kimmel's main goal, then the Grendel episode alone is enough to satisfy this purpose, and the choice to exclude the other monsters simultaneously places significantly more emphasis on Grendel as the sole adversary.

Beowulf: A Tale of Blood, Heat, and Ashes was written by Nicky Raven, illustrated by John Howe, and published in 2007. The availability of this book in a decorative, hardback edition, that one can easily imagine displayed atop a coffee table, illustrates the way in which *Beowulf* moved

from an academic text to a household name in the wake of Zemeckis' film, similar to the way in which a decorative, collectible version of William Ellery Leonard's translations of the poem was published with illustrations by Lynd Ward during the Great Depression. John Howe's illustrations of Grendel are similar to Gareth Hinds' in that the creature is anatomically human except for an extremely expressive skeletal face. The Grendel episode passes rather quickly in Raven's adaptation, but a single illustration showing Grendel's brows furrowed in pain is enough to elicit some sort of sympathy for the monster, even if it is short lived.

The set of pre and post-9/11 illustrations examined thus far is an excellent example of Gardner's continued influence on *Beowulf* adaptations. For example, several of the texts depict Grendel as something inherently evil, but their rendering of the mere-creature still bears certain sympathetic marks that show Gardner's influence on the character has been internalized by many Western translators and adaptors. Such marks include Grendel's ability to command language effectively, and the mental capacity to slyly formulate and employ a scheme to save his life. Likewise, Katz's adaptation, previously discussed as a pre-9/11 text, features an image of Grendel bringing home a satchel of slain Danes to his mother in their cave. The oddly domestic rendering of the monster's life and the depiction of his cave as a home, not an inhospitable lair, is one that conveys a sense of Grendel as more than a mindless force of destruction. In fact, because this is the first image of Grendel that we see within Katz's adaptation, one is left wondering why the mere-creature appears to lose some of his humanity in the following illustrations where he is depicted alongside the Danes.

Comic book adaptations of the poem, like Gareth Hinds' *The Collected Beowulf*, appear to have a desire to keep in line with traditional depictions of heroes and villains. This is a well established convention within the genre, illustrated by countless narratives that revolve around superheroes defeating villains, saving the world, and resting for a few frames until they encounter the next threat looming on the horizon. Hinds' super-human Beowulf functions in this way: the focus is on battle and the action of a hero defeating his adversary. In a similar manner, the illustrations for children's versions of the poem fall in line with other didactic tales designed to develop a black and white sense of morality. It is for this reason that depictions of good and evil within Kimmel's *The Hero Beowulf* are left fairly straightforward and uncomplicated. Kimmel's Grendel is also given a voice, and while Raven's and Hinds' respective Grendels do not speak, they are at least allowed to display emotion via facial expressions that provide some sense of interiority. Katz's depiction of the mere monster is decidedly the least humanized, but the introductory image of Grendel's domestic life is enough to demonstrate that Gardner's work influences, sometimes subtly, even the most monstrous modern depictions of the character. A complete, ubiquitous return to the type of monstrosity commonly found in World War I and II texts is not made within contemporary adaptations, instead they retain small traces of the humanized, sympathetic portrayals of Grendel that populated the Vietnam Era. From these selected examples one can see that post-9/11 illustrations of Grendel lean towards the villainous rather than the monstrous. This is a reflection of changing cultural fears, as we fear the monstrous force driven by reason, ideology, or revenge, and not necessarily the rampaging or mindless beast.

David Kaufman's translation of the poem, *Beowulf, A Current English Version*, was published during a spike of *Beowulf* adaptations in 2007, and features a Grendel that appears to walk the previously discussed line between the "Humanized" and "Demonized" extremes on the adversary spectrum. This is best illustrated by Kaufman's introduction of the creature: "Then an evil demon endured distress; / He suffered sorrow in darkness, / As day after day he heard the rejoicing / That was loud in the hall" (Kaufman 86-89). This villainous Grendel is formed from a strange mixture of qualities bestowed via Kaufman's selection of sympathy eliciting words such as "distress" and "suffered", and also staunchly negative terms like "demon" and "evil". I would argue that this particular combination of sympathetic, human qualities like the capacity to feel pain, or the employment of a reason that drives Grendel to attack Heorot, combined with his prescribed role as adversary is what constitutes a villain, as contrasted with a monster that functions more as a body that preforms violent or horrifying actions and lacks a sense of interiority.

Once again Grendel is set up as the antithesis of goodness, and by extension, of Beowulf as well. The pair's relationship illustrates one way of dealing with trauma inflicted by a violent conflict. Creating and maintaining clear distinctions between the "good guys" and "bad guys" allows one to fashion a narrative that makes sense of violence and opposition. Kaufman applies this technique when he notes that Grendel "took glee / In his loathsome hostility -- he loved his deeds" (Kaufman 136-137). Kaufman denies the possibility for there to exist within Grendel any sort of morally redeeming characteristics, and this sentiment is echoed elsewhere within the original poem, most notably by Beowulf: "The protector of heroes would not for anything /

Abandon the murderous visitor while he yet breathed, / Nor did he think that the demon might be of use / To anything that lived” (Kaufman 91-94). Beowulf is wrong and this mistake costs him, as Grendel’s mother comes to avenge her son’s death, but maintaining the boundary between Grendel and his mother, and the Danes and Geats allows Beowulf to exterminate a family without any remorse. In fact, the Danes, celebrate the death of Grendel and the end of the conflict between the mere-creature and their community: “No man / Who examined the footprints of the vanquished one, / Saw how he, disheartened, overcome in battle, / Doomed, was driven off -- and gazed at the blood trail / He left as he fled to the lake of the water-things, / Could ever think sad his parting from life” (Kaufman 840-846). Translated in this way, Kaufman provides a reasoning for the Danes’ refusal to acknowledge Grendel as another living creature with consciousness and the capacity to suffer because of the damage he inflicted upon their community. This mindset is mirrored in post 9/11 media portrayals of al-Qaeda, the group that orchestrated the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. The survivors of such an event, not surprisingly, do not value the lives of those individuals responsible, and this constitutes yet another reason why the narrative of *Beowulf* speaks particularly loudly to the post 9/11 American public.

Another post 9/11 translation of *Beowulf*, Amy Hager’s *A Modern Scop Tells Beowulf* is a loose prose translation published in 2007, and warrants examination due to the fact that not a single negative term is applied to Grendel during his introduction: “When night fell, Grendel set out from the misty moors to find out what the Danes did at the end of the feasting and drinking” (Hager 5). Even though he had “set his mind to murder” Hager does not concretely

categorize Grendel as an antagonist by employing any of the commonly used pejoratives to describe him. Nor is Hager's Grendel portrayed as a beast completely separated from humanity either: "In all those years, Grendel could not be persuaded to stop his murdering rages. No gold or silver was enough to buy peace for the people" (Hager 6). Hager's phrasing implies that the Danes tried to bargain with the creature and purchase their peace, but Grendel refused. However, without insisting upon Grendel's evil nature until his final trip to the mead-hall, and lacking any other motivating factor, one is left to wonder why the creature is so insistent on attacking Heorot. Hager's translation is simplified, and the omission of certain details betrays the assumption that audience members were already familiar enough with the story to fill in gaps for themselves. Hager's publication is part of the burst of *Beowulf* adaptations and translations that surfaced after 9/11 and during the release of Robert Zemeckis' much anticipated film. While the explosion of *Beowulf* texts might be explained as an attempt to cash-in on the blockbuster's projected success, there is another reason that *Beowulf* returned to center stage within American pop-culture: the story had unprecedented cultural relevance, and, as we shall see, this cultural cachet was utilized by Zemeckis to explore different ways of coping with conflict.

In Robert Zemeckis' 2007 animated film, *Beowulf*, Grendel first appears as a large, obscured figure hunched over crying and clawing at its exposed eardrums. In the background one can hear the source of Grendel's distress: the pounding of mead cups on tables and a chorus of Danish men repetitiously chanting "Hrothgar! Hrothgar!". Clearly, Zemeckis' Grendel is motivated to attack the Danes not out of bloodlust, not because of his ancestry and association with Cain, but because he seeks a way to end his suffering. Assigning this particular type of motivation, as

opposed to bloodlust or an inherently evil nature, greatly enhances Zemeckis' portrayal of Grendel as a sympathetic, albeit pitiful figure. In addition to clarifying the motivation behind the creature's first attack on Heorot, Zemeckis also prevents his Grendel from killing indiscriminately. For example, during his first raid, he only attacks sources of noise, such as a screaming Danish woman, or the groups of armed men attempting to flank him. There even appears to be a rule set in place by his mother that prevents him from harming Hrothgar. During the attack, which resembles a toddler's tantrum, Grendel wails in pain and commits explicitly violent acts like throwing Danes against the walls, impaling them, and ripping off their limbs to drink their blood, but when Hrothgar drunkenly demands that Grendel fight him, the monster stops. He appears to struggle with the challenge and perhaps considers accepting it, but he is suddenly pulled backwards into the hall's last remaining fire before he has a chance to act. It is later revealed that Grendel is Hrothgar's son, and his very existence is both a curse and a reminder of the king's mistakes and shortcomings. Clearly, Zemeckis' Grendel is governed by a set of rules, is descended from both man and monster, and wields the power to blur the lines between humanity and monstrosity. Later in the film, this potential is exploited to illustrate that the boundaries between Hero and Villain are not as absolute as one would like to believe during times of national crisis.

Even though Grendel is deformed, missing patches of skin, and stands two or three times taller than the Danish men, he is still anatomically human, and the scenes that depict him interacting with his mother serve to underscore the sympathetic qualities present in both characters. When Grendel returns home after his first attack on the Danes, his mother scolds him for killing men

and firmly reminds her son that he is not to approach Heorot: “fish, wolf, bear, sheep or two but none men”. This encounter transforms Grendel from the rampaging violent creature that the Danes believe him to be, into a disobedient child. The mother demonstrates concern for her son’s safety when she says, “Men, Grendel. They have slain so many of our kind”. However, it is her son’s retort that is most interesting: “The men screamed! The men bellowed and screamed! The men hurt me, hurt my ear”. The pitifully delivered justification, combined with the simple vocabulary and sentence structure, is reminiscent of the way toddlers speak when attempting to squirm their way out of trouble, and the sympathy produced by this dialogue is quite potent. This humanizing moment is further enhanced by Grendel falling asleep while his mother hums a lullaby. The scene asks audience members to see the human qualities in entities they might otherwise consider monstrous. In a similar manner, later scenes force the viewer to confront the fact that individuals held up by society as heroes, like Beowulf, are potentially more flawed than one would like to admit. The formation and subsequent maintenance of a spotless reputation makes hero figures particularly powerful for nations engaged in large scale warfare. Heroes frequently relinquish their status as a fallible individual in order to become a much needed symbol of hope. Zemeckis takes the idea of a stalwart warrior and peels back layers of glamor and glory to reveal a more realistic notion of heroism, just as he places Grendel in a domestic setting to illustrate the creature’s capacity for compassion.

For the Danes, Beowulf slowly transforms from an outsider into a symbol of hope and physical might. After Grendel’s attack, Hrothgar states that, “The gods will do nothing for us that we will do not for ourselves. What we need is a hero”. The scene then immediately shifts to show

Beowulf out at sea, implying that such a hero is on his way. It is clear that the Geats have their hearts set on glory and gold, but for Beowulf, glory is clearly the greater of the two prizes to be won. After disembarking and being welcomed into the mead-hall by the Danish warriors, Beowulf tells the story of his swimming match against Brecca, and a series of flashbacks show the ostensible hero to be a liar. He exaggerates tales of his conquests and leaves out details that might cast a less than heroic light on his actions.

After nightfall Grendel returns to the hall, provoked by the noise made by the warriors at the behest of the overly confident Beowulf. During the battle, Grendel appears to shrink in size after Beowulf breaks open his ear drum, and it is at this point in time that Zemeckis deviates from the original poem's narrative and alters certain aspects of the battle that serve to detract from Beowulf's image as a glorious, glamorous hero. For example, the Geat is only able to gain the upper hand over this smaller, weakened Grendel as he carelessly makes his way for the door. Beowulf does not use superhuman strength to detach the creature's arm, but rather luckily catches the limb in a chain and uses the door to break it off. In the same way that Zemeckis provided glimpses into Grendel's domestic life to furnish the creature with a more complex existence outside of the realm of monstrosity, he chips away at Beowulf's reputation as a flawless hero to reveal a softer, more human figure.

At the close of the battle Beowulf taunts his dying enemy, stating, "Your bloodletting days are finished, demon". To this the wounded Grendel replies that he is no demon, and Beowulf and the remaining Geats appear astonished that the creature can speak. Their view of Grendel as a

mindless force of destruction prevented them from considering that he might have an existence as complex as their own. Before fleeing, Grendel asks of Beowulf, “What are you?”, and the Geat’s reply is particularly interesting as Beowulf asserts that he is “ripper, tearer, slasher, gouger”, all words that could very easily be applied to Grendel within the original Anglo-Saxon poem. Grendel then returns to his mother and dies in her arms, holding his wound and saying, “Mother. They hurt me, Mother... He murdered me”. The creature is given a brief funeral by his mother. She sings and holds him, his body now shrunken down to the size of a new born. She cries through part of her lullaby and leaves her cave screaming in pain, apparently on her way to avenge her son’s death. The introduction and exploration of the witch’s maternal role, and the illustration of the pain felt by a parent after losing their child humanizes both mother and son. In this way, Zemeckis’ film expands on ideas present within the original poem, like Grendel’s mother avenging her son, and allows them to become complete scenes, not merely impressions.

By allowing Grendel and his mother the opportunity to share a series of intimate domestic moments, audience members are provided with an opportunity to feel sympathy for the pair of monsters. At the same time that he shines a humanizing light on Beowulf’s monstrous adversaries, Zemeckis reveals Beowulf himself to be a braggart, a liar, and a womanizer. The film attempts to transform the hero from a symbol back into a man with as many flaws and shortcomings as any other human being. Zemeckis’ retelling of *Beowulf*, much like John Gardner’s *Grendel*, explores contemporary notions of what it means to be monstrous, or what it means to be a hero. The film’s presentation of a flawed hero vanquishing a sympathetic antagonist can be employed to better understand American culture after the fall of the Twin

Towers. Throughout the film, comparisons are drawn between Beowulf and Grendel that seem to suggest that monstrosity and heroism are not mutually exclusive. In this way, Zemeckis' *Beowulf* can be seen as reacting to the the post 9/11 American media that played a central role in the creation of heroic symbols, and the weaving of black and white narratives that reinforced feelings of xenophobia and a potent fear of the "Other". This particular *Beowulf* adaptation asks audience members to cultivate a more nuanced understanding of monstrosity and conflict.

The introduction of Sturla Gunnarsson's 2005 film *Beowulf & Grendel* is particularly relevant to this discussion of xenophobia and the varied ways that a fear of the "Other" can manifest within a culture after traumatic events. In this film, Grendel is physically indistinguishable from his Danish counterparts save for his size. He is referred to as a troll, and does not engage in cannibalistic acts. The first scene of the film is aptly entitled *Prologue: A Hate is Born*, and shows Hrothgar killing Grendel's father without provocation, leaving the young Grendel to grow up alone nursing a grudge against the Danish king. Grendel's giant-like father, perhaps two or three heads taller than the Danish men, but otherwise identical to his human assailants, is chased to a cliff and sacrifices his life to protect his son. The father is brought down by a hail of arrows and set aflame. While the Danes cheer and laugh, a small Grendel looks on in fear and anger. Interestingly, Grendel's father never directly attacks the Danes, his only objective appears to be stalling for time in order to allow his son a chance to escape. This particular adaptation portrays Hrothgar as the monstrous entity, and this idea is reinforced by a series of juxtaposing shots of the green, peaceful environment that Grendel plays in with his father, and the grey, barren landscape that the Danes viciously cross on horseback amidst a cloud of smoke and fire. The

choice to recast Grendel as an avenging force modernizes the text and transforms the narrative to better suit a post-modern audience that prefers more complicated portrayals of Good's struggle against Evil. This particular alteration to the narrative also provides the antagonist with an arguably more justifiable motive, and in doing so brings Grendel much closer to the "Humanized" end of the spectrum.

Grendel's first attack on Heorot is not directly shown, and the viewer is only allowed to see the aftermath of the raid veiled by a thin layer of smoke. The opening scene that depicts the death of Grendel's father is more explicitly violent than this first attack on the mead hall, and Gunnarsson associates the type of senseless violence that characterized previous portrayals of Grendel exclusively with the Danish warriors. Grendel kills to avenge his family, and is partially vindicated by his righteous motivation, but the Danes, on the other hand, kill indiscriminately and bear many of the characteristics previous adaptors and translators linked with monstrosity, such as bloodlust or the lack of justification for their violence other than an apparent malicious nature. Gunnarsson makes other alterations to the poem's narrative as well, and perhaps the most salient of these is the introduction of Selma, a seer and an outcast who acts as a mediator between Beowulf and Grendel. Through Selma, audience members already familiar with the poem who might expect to cheer on Beowulf as he vanquishes an ostensibly reprehensible Grendel are provided with a new vantage point from which to view the conflict between the troll and the Danes. Selma constantly forces Beowulf to put himself in Grendel's position, and demands that the hero refrain from dismissing the troll as something less than human simply because he is viewed as the "Other".

Gunnarsson's Grendel does not kill women or children, and as expressed by Selma, "He fights with a clean heart, he kills the strongest first". However, this view is not compatible with the narrative that the Danes created in response to the troll's attacks, and it takes Beowulf some time to riddle out that Grendel's mission is that of vengeance, not a series of mindless killing sprees. Gunnarsson makes his Beowulf willing to buy into the Dane's uncomplicated Good versus Evil narrative to prove a point: When Selma tells the hero that Grendel's name means "grinder", Beowulf automatically assumes that the troll is a "grinder of bones". Selma corrects his assumption and explains that Grendel is a grinder of teeth, as he has bad dreams due to witnessing his father's death. The seer constantly fights Beowulf's tendency to categorize Grendel as a mindless monster, and does the same for audience members viewing the film. Gunnarsson's Grendel is revealed to be intelligent, reasonable, merciful, and compassionate. He sets traps around his home, refuses to harm the Geats until they smash his father's skull, and protects Selma from Danish men that wander into the forest to beat or take advantage of her. The troll only turns his attention to the Geats in order to avenge his father's second death. During his final trip to the mead hall Grendel kills Hondshew, the warrior responsible for crushing his father's skull. He does not attempt to fight any of the other Geats, but upon fleeing the hall Beowulf strings Grendel up by his arm, and in order to escape the troll cuts off the limb.

Beowulf notes that Grendel only killed the man he held in blame, and one can certainly assert that the Danes and the Geats created their own monster due to a blatant refusal to recognize Grendel's intelligence and his emotional capacity. Hrothgar later explains to Beowulf that he killed Grendel's father because he crossed their path and stole some fish from them. For

Gunnarsson, Hrothgar's actions are monstrous, and as Beowulf comes to realize this, his view of the conflict is drastically altered. He demands from one of his men the definition of a troll, and the warrior replies, "They say there are lizards that can grow back limbs, they say there are worms that can grow back heads". The man's answer betrays his desire to link Grendel with all things beastly and alien, however, Beowulf replies that, "This thing is no more worm than you or I". The hero now seems visibly frustrated that his men insist on dismissing Grendel as a subhuman entity, and attempts to combat the prevailing, over-simplified, "us versus them" way of approaching conflict. At the end of the film, Hondshew's brother compares Grendel to Cain in an attempt to weave a comforting narrative that lays the blame for his brother's death at Grendel's feet, and obscures the role Hondshew played in bringing about his own demise. However, as another Geat observes, "The tale is shit. We're all killers". For Gunnarsson the cessation of remodeling events to fit into a black and white mold is key to approaching conflict from a more rational, less emotional standpoint.

During World War I and II the black and white way of viewing conflict prevailed, as it was heavily reinforced and encouraged by the propaganda that circulated during both wars. Later, the World War II media that was controlled in part by the United States' government with the goal of suppressing images and news that could potentially portray the Second World War in a bad light helped to perpetuate this particular way of viewing conflict. *Beowulf* was employed primarily by translators during this time period as a text that glorified war and applauded the conquering hero. As shown by Viscount Northcliffe's introduction to Charles K. Scott Moncrieff's translation of

Beowulf published in 1921, the events and characters featured in the poem were being equated with modern wars and the soldiers fighting them, however as time passed and the prevailing view on the nature of warfare and conflict changed within the Western cultural consciousness, a shift in how the poem was handled by translators and adaptors slowly took place. This gradual shift becomes more palpable when one examines the poem's monsters, especially the figure of Grendel, who is in many adaptations the sole adversary that the hero must vanquish. Grendel's role as Beowulf's first, and arguably most memorable adversary, has transformed the mere-monster into a much more visible and important figure of monstrosity within Western culture, especially when one compares Grendel's prominent place within the narrative to the positions that his mother and the dragon occupy.

In the hands of John Gardner during the Vietnam War the Anglo-Saxon poem, and the figure of Grendel, changed once again. The poem was employed during the 1970s as a vehicle for expressing social commentary, and Grendel became less of an inherently evil, inaccessible creature, and more of a sympathetic individual with an existence that could be described as something that is both complex and meaningful. Gardner effectively added several layers to the character of Grendel, and created an alluring and intriguing form of villainy that strongly suggests to readers that those entities that we might otherwise label "Other" or "monster", share many of the thoughts, fears, and anxieties that we ourselves do, and the tradition of weaving "us versus them" narratives to justify violence does not constitute a viable way of approaching conflict or the trauma that it inflicts.

After 2001, the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon created a driving force that reshaped the role *Beowulf* played within Western culture once more by altering the environment in which the poem was being interpreted. Films and video game adaptations suggest that the poem found a younger audience, and also illustrate just how deeply *Beowulf's* narrative and characters embedded themselves within popular culture and the American cultural consciousness. In the 2000s the text is not simply used as an aid to glorify warfare as it was during the first and second world wars, nor is it solely employed as a means to challenge prevailing ideas or express social commentary. The post 9/11 *Beowulf* has become a teaching tool, as each film, novelization, translation and adaptation seems to ask something slightly different of its audience members. Perhaps the restructuring of the narrative provokes one to consider the similarities that Beowulf and Grendel share, or, as Zemeckis' and Gunnarsson's respective films imply, current conceptions of what it means to be monstrous or heroic are oversimplified and need to include a more nuanced understanding of how monstrosity and heroism function within the modern world. Depictions of evil have also more complicated because post 9/11 audiences seem to harbor a conflicting desires. There is tension between the pull to nationally weave another comforting narrative that casts the belligerents as "us" and "them", or "good" and "bad", and the desire to resist the urge to lay a blanket of blame across an entire group or nation. This tension is reflected in *Beowulf* adaptations and translations, and the Grendel episode itself can often provide the clearest glimpse into a nation's deepest fears and anxieties concerning hostile foreign entities.

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