THE ROLE OF VIOLENCE AND DEATH IN CHILDREN'S ADAPTATIONS OF *BEOWULF* FROM 1908-1968

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ABSTRACT

The role of Violence and Death in Children's Adaptations of *Beowulf* from 1908-1968

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This thesis explores the portrayal of death and violence in children's adaptations of *Beowulf* through the progression and trends of death and violence in children's *Beowulf* adaptations from 1908-1968. The texts chosen from these times are considered well known and were published in both the United States and United Kingdom. Extensive study has been done on death and violence in children's literature, however the study of death and violence in children's literature has not yet discussed the adaptations of Beowulf from 1908-1968. This study is interested in the socialization of children regarding death, the cultural values communicated concerning death and dying, and the virtues portrayed through the deaths and violence in *Beowulf*. I am fascinated in analyzing the violence of these texts surrounding the multiple deaths of *Beowulf* and contrasting and comparing the deaths of major characters such as Grendel, Grendel's Mother, and Beowulf with the deaths of fringe characters such as Aeschere, Honscio/Hondscio, and the thirty thanes. Death and violence are classified as *deemphasized* as in the purposeful downplaying of existing violence and death in *Beowulf* in the text or images, and *emphasized* in reference to the existing violence and death in *Beowulf* being highlighted explicitly through text and images. When reasons are given for why the emphasized violence or death is fitting, this will be called *legitimization* and will be especially noted.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this study to my family. Your continual support and encouragement has been a strong motivation as I have pursued a four-year degree in English and this thesis represents the culmination of all your prayers as I have worked, studied, and persevered for my degree. The Lord has certainly been my strength and song throughout my time here at A&M and he has provided in so many ways, but the greatest provision he has made for me is having you all for my parents and siblings. Most importantly, I would like to thank my Lord Jesus for his strength and for his amazing love. Psalm 143:10

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NOMENCLATURE

Emphasized: The deliberate highlighting of violence that draws attention to the violence found in the original *Beowulf* translation with graphic descriptions and images that detail the specifics of the violence in question.

Deemphasized: The purposeful softening of the existing violence and that quickly glosses over the violence in *Beowulf* or eliminates the specific details of the violence acted out. Images that characterize violence in a nongraphic manner are considered deemphasized depictions of violence.

Legitimized: When violence and death are emphasized and justified as right or fitting because of cultural or moral reasons through text and images.

Paratext: Elements such as titles, prefaces, and illustrations, which are not a part of the text proper but shape the narrative as a co-narrative adding or detracting from the main narrative

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A brief overview of death in children's literature

There is little critical analysis of violence and death in children's adaptations of *Beowulf*. This void allows me to explore the ideas of death and violence in children's *Beowulf* adaptations. In comparison, there is a plethora of scholarship on death and violence in children's literature in general. Depictions of violence can be educational.[1] Additionally, violence can be an indication of morality as explained by Jackie Stallcup who noted the "long tradition in children's literature in which young characters meet with violent punishments and even death because they transgress social boundaries and challenge adult authority."[2]

Children's versions of *Beowulf* are full of numerous grisly deaths. Death comes to the unnamed citizens of Hrothgar's kingdom, to the companions Honscio and Aeschere, the monsters, and finally the death of a hero, Beowulf. Daniel Pinti notes that

> The poem famously begins and ends with a funeral; the poem's very last words in the original recount the lamentations of the fallen king's surviving comrades. Thus, it is worth considering in what ways the elegiac dimension of the poem may explain some of its continued presence in children's literature, especially among recent writers when representations of death have become even more prevalent in children's literature.[3]

Beowulf can be studied as a case study in presenting ethics to children through literature. The purposeful adaptation of this Old English tale communicates what makes a death worth mentioning and highlights the significance of major versus minor character death. According to Colin McGeorge who studied death and violence in Victorian schoolbooks, "Attitudes toward

[1] (Stallcup, 130).
[2] Ibid 125
[3] (Pinti 2016)

death and the management of death and dying have changed markedly over the century. Victorians had a fascination with death and dying. Later in the 20th century, 'death became sanitized within hospitals and nursing homes."[4]

Colin also notes that a great deal of literature, even children's literature, has addressed death in the last two decades. However, the portrayal of death has altered: "While Victorian era books frequently incorporated death, death was rarely a central theme in 'children's literature."[5] Death and violence are impacted by social and cultural norms and, in the case of *Beowulf* the adherence to death and violence may simply be the adaptors' attempt to respect the original poem and retell the story instead of creating a new story.

The inclusion and exclusion of death for educational, social, and adaptor purposes in children's literature

Several authors have expressed that the portrayal of death can be educational. James Cross Giblin, editor of children's books, gives a definition of violence in children's literature, expressing that depictions of violence in children's literature can be positive, contrary to the connotations given to violence and that literature that includes violence can help young people deal with the violence within themselves.[6] Educator, Rose Blue, also comments on the concept of violence as a tool of expression. She explains since violence is part of life, and literature is a reflection of life that we ought not to be surprised to find violent themes in children's literature.[7]

[4] (McGeorge, 109-117).

[5] Ibid

[6] (Giblin, 61-3).

[7] (Blue 1979).

Ethical socialization is another purpose of the inclusion of death and violence in children's books. Colin McGeorge observed that including death in schoolbooks was a way for children to be "socialized in death."[8] On the other hand, death in literature can otherwise indicate concepts of right and wrong as explained by Sonja Loidl when she said that "The portrayal of death likewise acts as a key marker of personhood by using the motivations and circumstances under which a character kills—or—dies as a feature distinguishing between 'good' and 'evil.'"[9]

There is also the possibility that with an original and revered tale such as *Beowulf* in which violence and death are the main themes, leaving out death and violence would be a huge deviation. The entire story would bear little resemblance to the original. And such a change would change from an adaptation to an original story telling. There are also factors of national pride, which could influence the adherence to violence, and death in *Beowulf*, as a British adaptor changing the fundamentals of *Beowulf* would be on par with changing history. It is especially interesting to observe how adaptors incorporate the violence and death of the original poem into their adaptations. It is a study of adaptor choice when they are backed into the corner of legacy and tradition.

Children's adaptations of *Beowulf* and theoretical approaches

This study will examine the depiction of violence and death of major versus minor characters in the children's adaptations of *Beowulf* authored by H.E. Marshall (1908), M.I. Ebbutt (1910), Dorothy Hosford (1947), Ian Serraillier (1954), Rosemary Sutcliff (1961), and Robert Nye (1968). These texts were chosen for their popularity in their respective time periods and because

[8] (McGeorge, 116).
[9] (Loidl, 176).

they were each published in both the United States and the United Kingdom. Violence is particularly demonstrated in the characters Beowulf, Grendel, and Grendel's Mother. Specific focus will be directed to the illustrations and descriptions supplied through paratext, which literary theorist, Gérard Genette defines as "titles, prefaces, postfaces, epigraphs, dedications, illustrations, and even book jackets and signed autographs."[10] These additional annotations are overlooked places of meaning and can function as co-narratives either supporting or providing another subtext to the violence and death represented to children. Finally, through studying the text and paratext, this study hopes to assess whether significance or special treatment is given to deaths of major versus minor characters as an attempt to understand what makes each death worth mentioning and how the adaptor addresses those deaths with the child audience in mind. Overall, this study hopes to uncover what common beliefs about violence and death are taught to children from the years 1908-1968, keeping in mind that the country of origin, war context, and cultural beliefs of good and evil might influence the portrayal of death and violence in children's adaptations of *Beowulf*.

Significance and/or special treatments of death will be noted. I have developed three terms by which I categorize the depictions of violence. The first term is *legitimized*, the justification of violence through graphic pictorial examples, or illustrative depictions, which explain the violence as necessary, or fitting in the situation. Second, is *emphasized*, the deliberate highlighting of violence through illustrations, descriptions, and paratext. Since *Beowulf* is already a violence tale, the inclusion of violence is expected in an adaptation. What makes violence emphasized is the deliberate focusing on moments of death or gore. Third, is the term *deemphasized,* the purposeful softening of existing violence including the omission of violent

[10] (Stam, 28)

details or even entire violent moments. No one story can be neatly categorized into one term. Every story features a mixture of *legitimization*, *emphasis*, and *de-emphasis*. The real point of interest is how each adaptor chooses to handle the existing violence of *Beowulf*. Without death and violence, *Beowulf* ceases to be *Beowulf*. Each adaptor chooses to focus on certain deaths over others, or on different scenes of violence. Every instance of the adaptor's authorial choice affects the reader's perception of violence and death.

CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS OF BEOWULF AND BEOWULF VERSIONS FOR CHILDREN

Death in literature from 1908-1947: Three deaths and victories

Each book has been divided into its own section as each one has a unique focus on death and violence. In all three adaptations by Marshall, Ebbutt, and Hosford, when Grendel enters the hall and comes across the "sleeping" Geats, he quickly selects a sleeping warrior while Beowulf watches on. Unknown to Grendel, Beowulf is watching everything. To the modern reader, Beowulf watching the death of his companion is unthinkable, but to Beowulf this unnamed Geat has counted the cost of being involved in the expedition and has died a hero's death, sacrificing himself to save others. This man knew that he could die. Strategically, this also offers Beowulf the opportunity to watch how Grendel attacks and develop a plan of attack himself. This may seem cold, however, to a culture that values legacy and views death as a natural part of life, this mindset is justified. What differs slightly are the details of the companion's death and the details of Grendel and Beowulf's fight. In all three adaptations, after watching the death of his fellow Geat, Beowulf engages Grendel in battle and succeeds in tearing his arm off.

Each adaptation gives a different level of gory detail some accompanied by illustrations. In all three adaptations when Grendel flees to die in his lair, the Danes and Geats celebrate. This is significant because this solidifies Grendel as an evil being deserving death. In these chapters death is accepted when a man dies "well" by either serving as a sacrifice for the safety of his companions, or by dying in battle. However, death is celebrated with the death of a "bad guy."

Although, Beowulf is successful in killing the Grendelkin, he does not live "happily ever after" in the original version of the poem and the adaptations are no different. A different kind of monster will deal the deathblow to Beowulf. The Dragon enters into the story the same way in all three versions: a slave runs away from his master and steals a cup from the Dragon's lair. The Dragon takes vengeance in the village and Beowulf must defend his people and so prepare to slay the Dragon and take the gold.

H.E. Marshall

The earliest book that I selected is from 1908 titled adaptation *Stories of Beowulf told to Children* by H.E. Marshall, an author known for her literary works for children. Her adaptation highlights the national history of England, and is illustrated by Joseph Skelton. Marshall explicitly promotes her adaptation for children with both the title and with her foreword in which she explains her motivation for adapting *Beowulf:*

> *Beowulf* is known to everyone.' Some months ago, I read these words and doubted if they were true. Then the thought came to me that I would help to make them true, for *Beowulf* is a fine story finely told, and it is a pity that there should be any who do not know it. So here it is 'told to the children.[11]

As an author of children's history specifically, British history, Marshall focuses on utilizing her adaptation for the promotion of British culture. Because Marshall views *Beowulf* as an important piece of cultural history, she keeps closely to the original depictions of violence and death, yet inserts themes of overcoming the enemy, especially victory in battle, the sacrifices of a hero, and the ideals of justice and vengeance. The best example of the depiction of these themes is found in the table of contents that use parallelism, which emphasizes war and victory: parallel titles such

[11] (Marshall, 1).

as “How Grendel the Ogre Warred against the Danes”, “How Beowulf Warred against Grendel the Ogre”, or “How the Water Witch Warred against the Dane folk” show a continuum of battle and war. After each title is another set of parallel titles all using, the keywords “overcame” and “warred.” All the main characters overcome an enemy, whether that is the Danes for Grendel or Beowulf defeating Grendel and Grendel’s Mother. Clearly, the focus of this children’s adaptation is a victory in war. On the other hand, attacks upon individuals are scarcely grounds to use the word war. This raises the question what does “war” mean before the Great War? Historically the closest British military skirmish around the time of this book’s publishing is the British expedition to Tibet (1903-1904) in which the British won. It would be six years later that the Great War would begin. Until the Great War, Britain was always the aggressor. It seems unlikely that Marshall’s use of the words “war” and “overcometh” would reflect a pro-military British consciousness.

Violence in Marshall’s Adaptation

The Marshall account of the first encounter between Grendel and Beowulf is titled “How Beowulf Overcame Grendel the Ogre” and quickly describes the companion’s death: “greedily Grendel drank his blood, crushed his bones, and swallowed his horrid feast.”[12] The Marshall account of the gore in the Grendel versus Beowulf fight is quite straightforward, “But at length, the fight came to an end. The sinews in Grendel’s shoulder burst, the bones cracked. Then the Ogre tore himself free, and fled…”[13] Marshall has described accurately but succinctly the gore involved in Grendel’s demise. No mention of blood is included. Additionally, no illustration accompanies this pivotal point in the tale. Fascinatingly, there is no illustration of Grendel and

[12] (Ibid, 35)
[13] (Ibid, 51).

Beowulf fighting; this could be a method of reducing publication cost. Or an example of deemphasized violence which compared to an illustration depicting a scene from the battle between Grendel's Mother and Beowulf seems to point to an authorial/illustrator choice.[14131] For most people the battle between Beowulf and Grendel is what they remember, most likely because of the original wound that Beowulf inflicts on Grendel. So it is unusual that the main illustration would focus on Grendel's Mother and Beowulf. Even the moment and caption of the scene are interesting in that they show the vulnerability of Beowulf. Grendel's Mother is in the position of the aggressor. She is portrayed as green and muscular, her knee in his armored chest. Clearly, the illustrator is emphasizing the violence inflicted by Grendel's Mother.

In comparison to the illustration, the violence of the scene is written so that the violence and death of the fight between Grendel's Mother and Beowulf are quite tame. Beowulf swims down and "was grasped by long and skinny fingers. The fingers crushed him and tore at him…"[15] The struggle is truly a wrestling match "back and forth the two swayed, the strong warrior in armor and the direful Water Witch. So strong was she that at last she bore him to the ground and kneeled upon his breast. She drew her dagger. Now she would avenge her son."[16] Vengeance is the motivation of the Water Witch in the Marshall version. This is theme which will continue to reappear in other adaptations, as well as the maternal love Grendel's Mother has. Finally, Beowulf overcomes her, seizes a giant sword, and "smites with fury." The only allusion to blood is the mention of the "red-dyed" sword Beowulf holds. The violence that Beowulf acts out is deemphasized and legitimized as demonstrated by the tame description of his decapitation of

[14] Ibid, 59
[15] Ibid 55
[16] Ibid 57

Grendel's Mother. He must kill Grendel's Mother for the sake and safety of others making his motive pure. Instead, Grendel's Mother is the one painted as strong, violent, and vengeful.

The chapter in the Marshall version titled "How Beowulf overcame the Dragon" emphasizes Beowulf's victory over the dreaded beast. The account begins with Beowulf calling out to the Dragon, the Dragon emerges from his lair and the battle begins between the two with Beowulf at the disadvantage; his sword isn't biting the Dragon's scales nor is his shield providing sufficient protection.[17] At the same time, Beowulf is losing confidence that he can win this fight, "Beowulf no longer hoped for glorious victory this sword had failed him. The edge was turned and blunted upon the scaly foe. He had never thought the famous steel would so ill serve him. Yet he fought on ready to lose his life in such good contest."[18] Opposite an illustration shows the dramatic fight between Beowulf and the Dragon. In the foreground, the Dragon spits fire; closest to the reader we see Beowulf with his shield upraised and sword in hand; his back is turned to the reader.[19] With his back turned toward the audience, Beowulf appears small and vulnerable, preparing us for his defeat. Again the emphasis rests upon victory in battle. With a reminder of past victories by Wiglaf, Beowulf takes heart and with hate strikes the Dragon; with all his strength, sadly, the sword snaps; it was not his fate to conquer with weapons.[20] Marshall clearly notes the Beowulf is enraged when he strikes the Dragon, the reader could surmise that his motivation is not as noble as before and perhaps this is a cause of his death. Interpreted this way, the text would read as emphasizing violence and death enacted by the upright against the evil to be justifiable, whereas, impure motive such as hate and vengeance would not guarantee one victory in battle. The classic trope of "good" winning against "evil" would be enacted here. At last, together Wiglaf and

[17] (Ibid, 89)
[18] Ibid 91-2.
[19] Ibid 95
[20] Ibid 95-6

Beowulf are able to kill the Dragon with a stab at the throat and belly of the beast.[21] Beowulf knows he will die from the wound he received from the Dragon and expresses in his last words that he is glad that he has broken no promises or betrayed anyone in his life.[22] This sentiment emphasizes the idea of a "noble" death, or "dying well. "Beowulf is dying a man of honor and has died a death of a hero defending his people.

Death

Death features heavily in this version, perhaps because the author has a commitment to staying true to the original poem. The treatment of the major and minor character's deaths are in such stark contrast, it seems that Marshall is creating a message of death value, or the concept that some deaths are "worth" more than others, while others are merely sad casualties. The exception to this is the death of Grendel's Mother. Even Grendel's death is mourned or rather avenged by his mother, while no mourning takes place for his mother. From the very start, death is recognized as a great possibility. When Beowulf first meets Hrothgar in the Marshall adaptation, he acknowledges he might die but also points out the destruction of others that would follow.[23] Marshall illustrates the grip on reality these thanes have: "all around him his warriors lay down to take their rest. None among them thought ever again to see his own land. For they had heard the terrible death that had carried off so many of the Dane folk."[24] These men are willing to lay down their own lives if it saves others.

[21] Ibid 96-7
[22] Ibid 98
[23] Ibid, 20

[24] Ibid, 20

Mourning

The mourning of Beowulf contrasts with the deaths and the mourning over the deaths of the minor characters. This seems to point to the idea that some deaths are more important than others, depending on how much was accomplished by the one who dies. The deaths of the major characters are the main focal points in the adaptation. No reference is made to the name of Beowulf's companion Honscio, who dies in the epic encounter between Beowulf and Grendel. Nor is the name Aeschere mentioned when Hrothgar's friend dies. Indeed, Marshall deviates from the original poem and never mentions the name of the king's friend. Clearly, Marshall is deemphasizing the death of a minor character, which could be speculated as a prioritized view of death. Death is only mourned when someone dies unprepared, defenseless, or is a "someone." Although, Aeschere is never named, Marshall emphasizes the idea of justice for his death: "'Sorrow not, O king,' replied Beowulf, 'it is ever better to avenge than to grieve for one's friend. To each of us must death come, and well for him then who hath done justice while he yet lived…"[26] Beowulf's philosophy explains why he does not grieve the unnamed Geat: death is natural. While waiting for Beowulf to return, the red-tinged waters make sad the older warriors of Hrothgar: it seems that Beowulf has died while the Geats sadly watch and wait.[27] Extensively covered is the death and mourning over Beowulf. The Geats commemorate Beowulf's death by first erecting a funeral pyre and burning his body and then burying him in a "high cairn" filled with the Dragon's treasure; the death is mourned with the dirge of an old woman and twelve warriors circling his burial tower as they speak and sing his praises.[28]

[26] (Ibid, 51).
[27] (Ibid, 59-60).
[28] Ibid 112-3

Ebbutt

In 1910, another adaptation of *Beowulf* by M.I. Ebbutt and illustrated by J.H.F Bacon, was published. Structured with a system of paratext, Ebbutt begins her book with a preface, an introduction to the book itself, and an introduction to the *Beowulf* adaptation. Titled *Hero-Myths and Legends of the British Race*, M.I. Ebbutt's *Beowulf* adaptation is condensed as a chapter in her book. With *Beowulf* is introduced as the "ideal of English heroism" in the preface. The fact that Ebbutt includes *Beowulf* as a chapter signifies that she is categorizing and comparing the character and story of *Beowulf* with the other heroes of Britain in her book. Ebbutt writes in her preface:

> I feel some explanation of my choice is necessary. Men's conceptions of the heroic change with changing years, and vary with each individual mind; hence it often happens that one person sees in a legend only the central heroism, while another sees only the inartistic details of the medieval life which tends to disguise and warp the heroic quality.[29]

It seems that Ebbutt is seeking to use the tropes found in *Beowulf* to educate children on "true heroism". What she focuses on are the companion's deaths, Beowulf's death, and the battles.

Paratext continues to play a huge role in Ebbutt's adaptation. In addition to a preface, Ebbutt uses her introduction to her book to give a history of the British race. Ebbutt explains that each nationality that eventually aggregated into the British race had its own definition of heroism.[30] Finally, a specific introduction to *Beowulf* is given before Ebbutt's adaptation of the tale. In the introduction to her *Beowulf* adaptation, Ebbutt emphasizes the cultural importance of *Beowulf* by making it clear that the origins of the poem can be interpreted differently yet the character Beowulf; "is the one hero in whose legend we may see the ideals of our English forefathers

[29] (Ebbutt, ix)
[30] (Ibid, xxviii)

before they left their Continental home to settle this land."[31] It is in this introduction that Ebbutt spells out the themes that she will emphasize:

> *Beowulf* stands for all that is best in manhood in the age of strife. It is fitting that our first British hero should be physically and mentally strong, brave to seek danger and brave to look on death and Fate undaunted, one whose life is a struggle against evil forces, and whose death comes in glorious victory over the power of evil, a victory gained for the sake of others to whom Beowulf feels he owes protection and devotion.[32]

The inescapability of death

Death and how it is addressed is major focal point for Ebbutt, and this focus affects her portrayal of the deaths of both major and minor characters. Ebbutt's adaptation of Beowulf represents death as inevitable and part of the natural progression of life. When discussing with Hrothgar the danger of fighting Grendel, Beowulf demonstrates neither naivety nor overconfidence.[33] Beowulf is seeking to live a life in which he does not fear death, telling Hrothgar once he is dead that concerns for his welfare will no longer matter. The importance of fighting the "bad guys" like Grendel and Grendel's Mother are a focus, but also the fight against dying without a sword in one's hand is an important concern for the thanes of Beowulf and Beowulf himself. The Geats are seeking a "hero's death." To Beowulf, sacrificing his life and those of his men, who have willingly joined him, is a hero's duty.[34] Beowulf and his thanes all want to be "brave to seek danger and brave to look on death and Fate undaunted…"[32]

The first death mentioned in the book is of the unnamed companion of Beowulf, titled simply "Beowulf and Grendel". Ebbutt's description of the companion's death is quite detailed and emphasizes the violence of Grendel: "Grendel hastily put forth his terrible scaly hand and seized one hapless sleeper. Tearing him limb from limb, so swiftly that his cry of agony was unheard,

[31] (Ibid,1)
[32] (Ibid)
[33] (Ibid,11)

[34] Ibid,16

he drank the warm blood and devoured the flesh; then, excited by the hideous food, he reached forth again."[35] The companion goes unnamed, significant because he is not remembered for any action, and sadly is cheated a "hero's death." In contrast, Ebbutt does mention the king's friend whom Grendel's Mother kills, as Aeschere. Ebbutt interprets this scene with an emphasis on gaining fame while in life and avenging the death of one's friends through Beowulf's speech to King Hrothgar: "'Grieve not, O prudent King! Better, it is for each that he avenge his friend than that he mourn him much. Each man must undergo death at the end of life. Let him win while he may warlike fame in the world! That is best after death for the slain warrior."[35]

The death of Aeschere is illustrated as the Geats finding his decapitated head while searching for Grendel's Mother's laird, the main motivation of discovering Grendel's Mother is to "avenge" the death of Aeschere. Clearly, these men are not men of mourning but battle. In the deaths of the minor characters, Ebbutt emphasizes not really their deaths but the inevitability of their deaths. These characters must die because it is their fate to die. What is fascinating here is that Aeschere is mentioned by name presumably because he "won fame in the world" and so his death is preferable as an old warrior. Yet, the young companion of Beowulf, who died a graphically violent death is never mentioned past the occurrence of his death: it could be supposed that his life was one without deeds to remember and so his death goes forgotten for his life was not marked with conquest or victory.

[35] (Ibid,16)

Violence and Death in Three Major Characters

After vividly depicting the young companion's death, in which Ebbutt emphasizes the violence that Grendel acts out, Ebbutt summarizes the struggle between Grendel and Beowulf and portrays the final victory with riveting detail and focus on the wounding that Grendel experiences. "Suddenly, with a great cry, Grendel wrenched himself free, and staggered to the door, leaving behind a terrible blood trail for his arm and shoulder were torn off and left in the victor's grasp."[36] Although, Ebbutt gives the reader the image of a trail of blood, she also deemphasizes the wounding of Grendel by not describing the sounds his arm makes while it is being pulled off. This may seem a small adaptation, yet both Marshall and Hosford describe the bones or sinews as "cracking." Further complicating the message being communicated is the accompanying illustration, which is quite graphic; one can see Beowulf tearing off Grendel's arm; bones and tendons flying out. Beowulf stands above a crouching Grendel in the position of a victor.[37][132] Here the reader is confronted with conflicting messages. The text deemphasizes the violence that accompanies Grendel's death with a short description of atrial of blood and lacking description of the auditory effects produced by the wounding, while the illustration emphasizes the violence that Beowulf acts out so that the reader can see the bones, sinews, and tendons, ripping and flying out as Beowulf tears off the arm of Grendel.

When Beowulf prepares to enter the swamp to fight Grendel's Mother, he voices that he is not afraid of death; instead he asks on the behalf of those left behind that they are protected and rewarded.[38] As a character in all three adaptations, Beowulf is content with winning fame, even if it means dying. Beowulf defines an honorable death as one in the pursuit of victory or in the

[36] (Ebbutt, Ibid, 17).
[37] Ibid, 16
[38] (Ibid, 24).

attempt to avenge another's death, which is an element of selflessness. Although, the Danes are sure that Beowulf has died in the swamp and have begun to grieve, the Geats hold to hope and wait for their leader. In the Ebbutt version, the Danes surmise that such a length of time underwater would kill a man and assume that Beowulf has given up the ghost.[39] The Geats watch as the mere begins to boil with blood and Beowulf swims to the shore. This portrayal is both dramatic and indicates the bloody struggle that Beowulf has overcome. The Ebbutt version of the Grendel's Mother's death is much like the Marshall account. The "sea-woman" flings Beowulf down and attempts to stab him but his chain mail protects him. During the struggle, he sees a giant sword. Quickly grabbing the sword he strikes at her neck angrily, "The blow fell with crushing force on the neck of the sea-woman, the dread wolf of the abyss and broke the bones."[40] Interestingly, although the sea-woman's bones are broken they are spoken of not as "*her* bones broke" but as "*the* bones broke" in the abstract. Clearly, Grendel's Mother is devoid of personhood. She is the enemy only. The violence of her death is slightly acknowledged but not in an emphasized manner. The illustration that accompanies this section is an image of Beowulf cutting off Grendel's head as a trophy of victory.

Two distinct points mark Beowulf's death: the description of Beowulf's death and who is mourning him. The description of Beowulf's death is emphasized through graphic details.

> They [Beowulf and Wiglaf] fought on manfully, and Beowulf, gathering up his strength, struck the dragon such a blow on the head that his ancient sword was shivered to fragments, the dragon, enraged, now flew at Beowulf and seized him by the neck with his poisonous fangs, so that the blood gushed out in streams, and ran down his corslet.[41]

Even to the end, Beowulf is resigned to the fate of death for a warrior. Beowulf expresses his last words in verse that he is grateful to have secured treasure for his people and freed them from the

[39] (Ibid, 26)
[40] (Ibid)
[41] (Ibid, 37).

fear of a dragon in the last moments of his life and that fate has guided him to the very end, "Wyrd has swept all my kin, all the brave chiefs away! Now I must follow them!"[42]
No women mourn Beowulf, in fact, the twelve warriors who march around his pyre, show up in the last few verses.

Hosford

By His Own Might: The Battles of Beowulf published first in 1947 and authored by Dorothy Hosford and illustrated by Laszlo Matulay, falls at a fascinating time in both Britain and the United States, the book was published two years after World War II. Interestingly, this adaptation is the least violent of the three analyzed in this section. It could be proposed that after the mass death and destruction of World War II, Hosford had little desire to treat the existing violence of *Beowulf* with emphasis. The book is dedicated to Hosford's sons but has no preface which would explain why she chose to adapt *Beowulf*. However, a postface gives a short history of the origins of *Beowulf* and assures the reader that

> This adaptation of the epic follows the original closely. A few passages, not directly connected with the main story, have been omitted; but nothing has been added, in the way of either incident or description. The author has tried to tell the story in simple and direct language and to preserve, in as far as possible, the atmosphere and quality of the epic.[43]

The violence and deaths in this version are deemphasized for the most part; the death of Beowulf differs, as more violent compared to how she handles the deaths of Grendel, Grendel's Mother, or even the minor characters. It seems that the death of one's hero is the hardest and perhaps the most vivid for an onlooker. Yet the existing violence and death featured are legitimized.

[42] Ibid 39.
[43] (Hosford, 66)

From the book title, emphasis can be seen on self-sufficiency and strength, and prepares the reader for the multiple battles of Beowulf. The title, *By His Own Might*, is pregnant with meaning. Is Beowulf to be commended for his self-sufficiency or is this an indication of overconfidence? From Hosford's adaptation, both can be claimed: the same self-sufficiency that aids Beowulf in his battle with Grendel is his downfall with the last battle with the dragon. Beowulf's greatest strength is also his greatest weakness. Through it all, Beowulf commits his fate to the hands of the "Almighty Father" and in the chance that he loses against Grendel tells Hrothgar that burial rites will be unnecessary because Grendel will carry his body off.[44] Beowulf might die trying to kill Grendel but at least, he would die of noble causes.

Death of the Grendelkin and minor characters

In the deaths of minor characters, namely the companion's death found in the chapter titled "Of Beowulf's Encounter with Grendel" the description is the most succinctly summarized and devoid of gory adjectives. Even the chapter title ambiguously identifies the famous fight between Beowulf and Grendel, as an "encounter." "Straightaway he seized a sleeping warrior and destroyed him, devouring his blood and body."[45] The least violent depiction of Grendel's mortal wounding is definitely Dorothy Hosford's adaptation. Hosford mentions Grendel's arm being pulled off as "a fearful hurt" and "a great wound showed on his shoulder" until finally the reader learns "his sinews cracked and the bones broke. Now was the victory given to Beowulf, and Grendel, sick unto death, fled to his den."[46] No blood here and the description of the violence is almost an afterthought. The image accompanying this description depicts Beowulf holding

[44] (Ibid, 9)
[45] (Ibid, 16)

[46] (Ibid, 26).

Grendel, a bearlike figure, by his waist and pulling on an arm. The illustration is very clearly depicted in black and white, no sinews, bones, or blood, are included in the picture.[133]

When Grendel's Mother comes to avenge her son's death, in the chapter titled "How the mother of Grendel avenges his death"[47], she drags off the king's advisor and friend. At first, Hosford does not identify Hrothgar's companion by name, but eventually we discover his name is Aeschere. From the start, the motive of the mother is made clear; she will have vengeance on the death of her son. King Hrothgar mourns deeply "this of all sorrows the hardest to bear. Gone is he who was ever ready and worthy to serve"[48] and even Beowulf is touched, yet he reminds the king "it befits us better to avenge our friends than to mourn them…be you patient and endure your woes today."[49] Like the Ebbut version, Hosford accentuates winning glory and avenging the deaths of friends.[50] These adaptations emphasize a viewpoint to children that focuses on the naturalness of death in a warring society. Casualties are a reality.

Lastly, in the Hosford version the fight between Grendel's Mother and Beowulf is much like the Marshall and Ebbutt version, with Beowulf struggling against Grendel's Mother who tries to stab him. Then he finds the giant sword and decapitates the mother of Grendel:

> Reckless of his life, he brandished the sword and smote his enemy with such wrath that the hard edge gripped her neck and the bones broke. The blade pierced her flesh and she sank lifeless to the floor. Beowulf was proud of his deed as he looked on the sword dripping with the monster's blood.[51]

This adaptation focuses on the violence that Beowulf enacts on Grendel's Mother, drawing blood, his sword dripping. There is pride in this deed too. Fascinatingly, the theme of vengeance

[47] (Ibid, 23)
[48] (Ibid, 25)
[49] (Ibid, 26)
[50] (Ibid)

[51] (Ibid, 30)

reappears: “The warrior went toward that wall with his weapon raised high, wrathful and intent of purpose. He could now pay Grendel back for the many raids.”[52] This moment is significant because in the other versions, the smiting of Grendel’s head is framed as a trophy to prove the death of the Grendel-kind.

Hosford frames Beowulf’s battle with the dragon with Beowulf remembering his successes in Hrothgar’s hall,

> He did not fear single combat, nor did he think over much of the dragon’s strengths and skills in battle. Beowulf had passed through many perils of war and desperate ventures…he had cleansed the hall of Hrothgar and in hand-to-hand struggle killed Grendel and his kin.[53]

Remarkably in this version of *Beowulf,* Beowulf chooses to enter the dragon’s lair with only a shield and breastplate—no sword. Instead of his men deserting him, he tells them that this fight with the dragon is his alone.[54] Self-sufficient Beowulf fights alone; it is the signature of his battle craft. Some pages later, Beowulf suddenly has a sword and this sword fails against the dragon, as in the Marshall version it is explained that Beowulf was not meant to use an edge of steel in battle, for his strength was too much for the weapon.[55] Beowulf’s death is the most graphic in this version: “Then for the third time, the fiery dragon rushed on the hero. It's bitter fangs sank in his neck, and the waves of blood gushed over Beowulf’s breast.”[56] Hosford’s choice to make the most graphic death in her adaptation that of the hero is quite curious, as she has steered away from providing gory details in the monster’s deaths. However, given the time-period her adaptation is written, after World War II, this interpretation makes sense. Many soldiers had died and it seems the Hosford is driving home the reality that the most brutal deaths to witness are

[52] (Ibid 30)
[53] (Ibid, 47).

[54] (Ibid 49)
[55] (Ibid 52)
[56] (Ibid 53)

those of your heroes. Violence seems worse when it is acted out on your heroes. Indeed as the thanes bury Beowulf's body in a barrow to commemorate his great rule and life, the narrator reminds the readers that "thus should thanes love their lord, thus praise him in words, when the day comes that he must fare forth from this life."[57] Thus Hosford both communicates the impact that a hero's death has on a people and how that death should be handled in the community. These messages provided children with direction on the proper response to a hero's death.

Death in literature from 1954-1968: Three deaths and two victories

With the two World Wars still fresh in the collective minds, these adaptations begin to deviate from the motivation of preserving cultural history or memorializing the British hero. Instead these versions by Serraillier, Sutcliff, and Nye, are interested in the results of violence on the community, morality, and focusing a bit more on death and dying. Two of these authors, Serraillier and Nye, are conscientious-objectors, which brings an extra level of interest to their adaptations of a naturally violent tale. Serraillier and Sutcliff are both well-known children's authors who focused on rewriting historical and mythical stories for children, and are therefore more accustomed to writing for children. Rosemary Sutcliff focuses mainly on how experiences of grief and mourning ought to be handled as well as teaching to the younger generation, who in this version is Wiglaf, how to live and die.

Serraillier

Beowulf: The Warrior was written by Ian Serraillier and was first published in England in 1954 and in 1961 in the United States. From the beginning, there is emphasis on the traditional three battles and deaths, as seen in the title of the book and the chapter titles "Grendel", "Grendel's

[57] (Ibid, 63)

Mother", and "The Fire Dragon." The significance of Serraillier's emphasis on the violence and death in his adaptation contrasts with his personal beliefs. As a Quaker, Serraillier was granted conscientious-objector status in World War II and was a member of the controversial pacifist community of the Peace Pledge Union which opposed war or the funding of war.[58] Yet his characterization of Beowulf from the start is as a man of war, there is not condemnation attributed to this description but rather a statement of fact. From a conscientious-objector, a children's book which features a celebrated warrior seems incongruous. However, the violence of this book could be legitimized because it occurs between a human defending other human's from the evils of mythical monsters. Serraillier is also known for writing books which subtly illustrate the effects of war without explicitly preaching against violence or war, such as his famous children's story *The Silver Sword*.[59] Serraillier also shows Beowulf's change of attitude towards death. Another unique feature of Ian Serraillier's adaptation is his adaptation of the verse; he has rewritten the narrative in his own verse. In this way he has tried to stay true to the original poem which was written in verse. Perhaps his dedication to the original poem explains why he also has retained the violence and death of the poem without trying to insert any sort of agenda except illustrating the effects of violence on the community.

Grendel's enacted violence

In the first chapter of *Beowulf: The Warrior* the reader is quickly introduced to Hrothgar's problem: Grendel. Soon the grisly scene of Grendel's entrance into the hall while the Geats sleep unfolds:

> As he scanned the warriors, deep-drugged in sleep/Loud, loud he laughed, and pouncing on the nearest/Tore him limb from limb and swallowed him whole,/Sucking the blood in

[58] (St Edmund Hall n.d.)
[59] (Loverance 2011)

> streams, crunching the bones./Half gorged, his gross appetite still unslaked,/Greedily he reached his hand for the next—little reckoning/For Beowulf. The youth clutched it and firmly grappled.[60]

Grendel is depicted grimly as a sadistic monster, who laughs as he savors human flesh. This creates a depiction of violence, which is emphasized for the sake of illustrating Grendel's monstrosity. The unlucky warrior who is eaten is unnamed and unmourned; this is in keeping with the theory that his death is unimportant regarding his individuality yet his death allows Beowulf to "grapple" with Grendel. Despite the fact that this warrior goes unnamed and unmourned, his death is focused on and the details of his death are emphasized. It seems that Serraillier might be illustrating the gross waste of life and violence in battles. In comparison to the focused details of the companion's death, Grendel's mortal wound is quickly described.

> Then Grendel wailed from his wound, his shriek of pain…Alone, Beowulf/Tore Grendel's arm from his shoulder asunder/ Wrenched it from the root while the tough sinews cracked./ And the monster roared in anguish, well knowing/That deadly was the wound and his mortal days ended…But the hero rejoiced in his triumph and wildly waved/In the air his blood-soaked trophy.[61]

The description of Grendel's deadly wound could well describe the uprooting of a tree; the only difference is Beowulf waving the bloody arm of Grendel after tearing it off. Much like the Marshall and Hosford adaptations, Serraillier does not have an accompanying illustration of the Grendel and Beowulf fight. Clearly, the Grendel and Beowulf fight is not the central point of interest for Serraillier. Although, there is little gore in the actual fight between Grendel and Beowulf, there is an emphasis on the after effects of violence:

> The grisly trophy—Grendel's giant arm/ Nailed to the wall, the fingertips outspread/ With nails of sharpened steel and murderous spikes/ Clawing the roof/Having drunk their fill of wonder,/Eagerly they followed his track to the lake, and there/ Spellbound they stared at the water welling with blood,/ Still smoking hot where down to the joyless deep/He had dived, downward to death.[62]

[60] (Serraillier, 13)
[61] (Ibid)
[62] (Ibid, 14)

As a pacifist, one would think Serraillier may be making a point about the destructive results of war in the microcosm of the Beowulf and Grendel fight. Yet, there is little sympathy evident in the text for Grendel, but rather the delirious joy of the people at Grendel's death is focused on. The effect of his death is clearly important to Serraillier; no other book so far has explored the effects of Grendel's death on the Danes or Geats in such vivid detail. Up till now they have stated that the people rejoice at the death of Grendel, but here the people relish in the bloody graphic death of Grendel. Why should Serraillier take such pains to describe the effect of Grendel's death? I suspect that although Serraillier did not support violence he is not blind to the reality of violence or to the traditional violence of *Beowulf* and by including the violence inherent in *Beowulf*, Serraillier can better illustrate the after-effects of violence and the destruction that follows.

Grendel's Mother and her emphasized violence

Instead of the Grendel and Beowulf fight being focused on as the central battle, it is the battle between Grendel's Mother and Beowulf that is emphasized and features the most illustrations of battle scenes in the book. The illustrator is Mark Severin, a prolific Belgian engraver who illustrated only two children's books, both by Ian Serraillier, one being *Beowulf: The Warrior.* A distinct feature of Severin's illustrations is the flat quality which they possess. The flatness negates the violent element of the struggle between Beowulf and Grendel's Mother. These illustrations do not have flying tendons or gushing blood. Instead the violence is emphasized textually and in terms of the after-effects of violence. The opening illustration to the chapter features Grendel's arm hanging down with two men sleeping under it; a strange juxtaposition that conveys a message of peace in the midst of monstrous violence.[134] Other messages that could

be drawn from this chapter are the themes of revenge and grief. These motivations make Grendel's Mother a more fearful opponent as they instill a quality of personhood to Grendel's Mother.

> Brooding on her grief, greedy for revenge,/To Heorot she came and broke down the door/And mightily burst the bars asunder/… Fiercely she tore it [Grendel's arm] from the nail and, snatching a warrior his couch, in surly triumph/Shouldered him and swiftly with double spoil, sneaked over the hills to her lair.[63]

At first Aeschere, the friend of Hrothgar, is not referred to by name; in fact his death is deemphasized through the restrained mourning of Hrothgar. Unlike the previous children's adaptations so far analyzed Hrothgar's speech mourns very little his companion but instead is an appeal for Beowulf's help. In fact, Hrothgar spends more time describing the mere where the Grendelkin live than he does lamenting his friend. The emphasized characteristic of Aeschere's death is the fact that he was killed in his sleep, which could be an indication of Grendel's Mother's dastardliness. The remainder of Hrothgar's lament describes the mere and appeals to Beowulf. Beowulf's response explains his view of danger and death: "Proud youth of valiance abounding, spoke out:/'I am not afraid, O King I snap my fingers/In the face of death, for fame is worth the seeking."[64] Life ought to be spent chasing fame even at the expense of one's life. Although Aeschere's death is little mourned, the violence of his death is emphasized again when the Danes and Geats pursuing Grendel's Mother find his head "Trailing roots. There, fixed on the cliff, they beheld/A grisly sight—the head of noble Aeschere, Their counsellor and friend, his white face channeled/with tracery of red, his hair clotted and damp…"[65] While Serraillier does not use words of violence in the description of Aeschere's death, he still conjures the imagery of the after effects of violence.

[63] (Ibid, 19-20)
[64] (Ibid, 22)
[65] (Ibid)

A second area of emphasis is battle. Beowulf is fixated on fighting Grendel's Mother and the ensuing battle between them. The categorization of their fight as a battle is significant, because it seems incongruous to Serraillier's personal beliefs:

> Then in a loud voice Beowulf cried, 'Where is Grendel's Mother? Ho there, she-devil, were-wolf of the lake,/Quit your hiding!...No answer yielded the deep, But the water trembled and the wave shuddered for fear. Again he cried, 'Coward, do you shrink from battle? Must I plunge in the mere and seek you out myself?[66]

Before Beowulf plunges into the mere, he turns to Hrothgar and asks him to care for his companions in the event of his death and communicates his readiness to die if Fate determines it.[67] Later, Beowulf shows a more complex attitude towards death when he begins to fight the Dragon. Once Beowulf dives into the murky waters of the mere, Grendel's Mother instantly seizes him and drags him down into her lair, where Beowulf draws his sword:

> With clash upon clash it dinned/ it's greedy battle-cry into her skull—yet failed him,/Crumpling like a reed, seized her by the hair./ Wrestling, swung her heavily this way and that/Buffeting and bruising the walls with her crude bulk,/Then bent her to the ground. In a trice, up she reared/Her shaggy frame, and grappling, squashed him down.[68]

Here the portrayal of Beowulf is one of a skillful warrior as he throws the monstrous "she-wolf" against walls, although Grendel's Mother traps him under her bulk she still struggles to contain him. The illustrations do not focus on portraying the blood and guts of the scene; instead the vivid black and white illustrations focus on the difference of size between Beowulf and Grendel's Mother. Beowulf is one-sixth the size of Grendel's Mother and in every picture of the battle it is Grendel's Mother that seems to be winning as she bears upon him, devilish in her half woman, half wolf ferocity. There seems to be tension between the author's portrayal and the artist's depiction of the fight between Beowulf and Grendel's Mother. The violence of Grendel's Mother is almost maternal until she pulls out a knife. At first, she "hugs" Beowulf "smothering-

[66] (Ibid, 25)
[67] (Ibid)
[68] (Ibid, 26)

close" and "clutches" him. As she holds him down she "softly keening" grieves Grendel and remembers "Her son—her only son—whom long ago/By the lapping water tenderly herself had suckled;/Whom as a babe she had fended from battle assault/And loved more than her own life; whom Beowulf/Had slain"[69] Ironically, the very thing which she feared, her son dying in battle, has occurred. A warrior has struck him down. Also noteworthy is the parallel that Serraillier could be making that women often suffer when their sons die in battle. This allusion is made again when Beowulf dies and his wife and nation mourn him.

When Grendel's Mother strikes Beowulf with a knife which grazes off, Beowulf strikes back with the giant sword lying nearby."So cumbrous—huge only a hero could wield it. He grabbed the golden hilt and, wheeling mightily,/Smote with all his strength. Splintering her bone-rings, /The blade hacked through her neck and felled her at his feet, Stone-dead."[70]This grim detailing of her death is followed by Beowulf chopping off Grendel's head for a trophy.

> "Grim reminder of old griefs…Stung by the memory, he raised the magic sword/And struck off the ghastly head…But the blood cascaded upward, curdling the waters, /And the poisoned wave broke red on the brink, at the feet/Of the weary watchers. Then whitebeards shook their heads/…And Hrothgar, his mind clouded with a great gloom…/gathering his followers…slowly led them home. Only the comrades of Beowulf lingered on, /Sick at heart, with deep longing and despair/Scanning the troubled water."[71]

There is an element of anger in Beowulf's decapitation of the (already dead) Grendel and again a focus on the frightening aftereffects of violence and their influence on the survivors or bystanders of violence. The majority of mourning and grief displayed in this adaptation is for Beowulf at his apparent death and eventual death from the Dragon. But at the point Beowulf has not been selected by Fate to die to the joy of his warriors who drag him onto land and take him to the grieving Hrothgar and Beowulf gives the trophies of the magic sword hilt and Grendel's

[69] (Ibid, 28)
[70] (Ibid)
[71] (Ibid, 29)

head.[72] An accompanying illustration shows the head of Grendel carried by four strong men, the eyes and mouth open in a grotesque fashion.[73] Grendel's death is just as monstrous as his appearance and is corpse. This is the after effect of his death.

Beowulf dies in a "grim bargain"

In Serraillier's adaptation of *Beowulf*, a stranger steals a cup from the Dragon's cave of treasure. Upon awaking, the Dragon sweeps the country-side and king's palace with fierce flame. Beowulf becomes enraged and commands a iron shield by made for his last battle. He encourages bravery in himself by remembering his past victories against the Grendelkin.[74] Here Beowulf displays a different view of death from the one he presented when he "snapped his fingers at death"[75] in response to Hrothgar's plea. Instead Beowulf shows sadness at the evident death he will die.

> Death in the shape of dragon in the mound bestirring, /Pressing relentless upon him, in clouds of fire/Dissolving all the dreams of his life/Unafraid he waited, /Yet as never before—with no blaze of battle/in his soul, nor blood-yearning, nor champing of stead, /Nor delirious charge of chariot wheels—only/A deep brooding sadness as he pondered upon death.[76]

Death is personified as a dragon, and Serraillier illustrates the inevitability of death, persistent and untimely. As before, Beowulf does not show fear in death, yet Serraillier has given him a matured view of death. Beowulf does not think overly long on his imminent death but instead focuses on killing the dragon and winning the dragon's treasure "My courage/Surely shall kill and win the treasure, unless Fate—Whose word is final, to whom in obedience unquestioned/Even kings must bow—shall deal me death."[77] Beowulf has fully accepted death, but there is an edge of hope that he will win for his people treasure and kill a treasure of an

[72] (Ibid, 30)
[73] (Ibid, 31)
[74] (Ibid, 38)
[75] (Ibid, 22)
[76] (Ibid, 38)
[77] (Ibid, 39)

opponent, a dragon. An illustration of the dragon as a giant serpent breathing fire with Beowulf and his thane Wiglaf standing small at the tail of the serpent is found on the facing page. Severin has kept his convention of making the human protagonists significantly smaller than the monster; here Beowulf and Wiglaf are approximately one-twelfth the size of the Dragon. The dragon symbolizes the concept of death which "rushes upon Beowulf" as an "Old twilight foe, in whirlwind conflagration…/Deep into his neck he plunged/His spiked teeth—the life-blood spurted, welled/Red over his armor."[78] This is the most violence seen at the wounding of a character in Serraillier's adaptation, and here Serraillier chooses to focus on Beowulf *dying* and his last thoughts as he dies. "Twas the last victory…/As, faint from fighting, he sank down by the wall, /His wound began to swelter and swell, the pestilent poison/climbed to the heart."[79] Beowulf comforts himself that he has served his people well and no opponent has made him "quake with fear" in fact "Blameless my life has been; no blood of kinsman/Have I shed, nor sworn falsely nor played the traitor—The Ruler of Men can charge me with no crime…"[80] Much like Hosford, Serraillier has chosen to focus on the death of the great hero and his sentiments as he dies to illustrate how one should die.

Serraillier has made an interesting speech for Beowulf, more interesting because the adaptor is a conscientious-objector. The speech is characteristic of a man of war and yet is juxtaposed with his open wound and the pain of dying. Having lived by the sword, he now dies by it. Also, the effect of Beowulf's death on his kingdom is heavily focused upon; although Beowulf feels his death in exchange for the Dragon's treasure is a fair bargain, his thane Wiglaf feels the death of Beowulf for the treasure to be a "grim-bargain." Here it could be surmised that Wiglaf could be

[78] (Ibid,42)
[79] (Ibid)
[80] (Ibid, 43)

expressing a Serraillier point of view of death in battle, as a "grim-bargain" and destructive to the community as seen in the profuse mourning of the Geats. "All heaven was roaring flame—ravenous lips/Licking, loudly devouring the body of Beowulf,/Hot to the heart/But louder was the noise of weeping--/A nation lamenting her leader, an aged wife/In deep anguish and dread of lonely days/Bewailing her loss."[81] It is uncertain whether Serraillier is characterizing the nation of the Geats as a wife or whether Beowulf has a wife and nation which mourn him. Either way, the loss of Beowulf is profound for the nation. As twelve warriors ride around Beowulf's burial mound, which includes the treasure Beowulf hoped to distribute to his people and which the people deemed cursed and buried with Beowulf, Serraillier gives these parting words "O, it is fitting that a man/Should praise his dead master and lock him in his heart! /So did these warriors…"[82] Although it seems to be a conflict of his personal beliefs, it seems that Serraillier wants to communicate that respect should be shown towards heroes and even warriors and finally towards the epic poem of *Beowulf*..

Sutcliff

Rosemary Sutcliff is probably one of the most famous authors featured in this study. Well known for her historical fiction and adaptations of myths for children, Sutcliff is known for her theme of reconciliation featured in her children's books, which in case of her adaptation of *Beowulf* does not hold true for Beowulf and his opponents.[83] Yet, she does focus on reconciling death and dying for children and using her adaption to communicate how one can handle loss and grief. What makes Rosemary Sutcliff unique as an author is best explained by Margaret Meeks who wrote an article titled "Of the Minstrel Kind":

[81] (Ibid, 47)
[82] (Ibid, 48)
[83] (Birch, 965)

> Rosemary Sutcliff's skill is in recreating spots of time when change is both dramatic and threatening... Sometimes we help the young to confront these problems directly. At others we encourage them to understand how our forebears dealt with comparable if not similar ones. At all times there are common and shared as well as individual views of what is the light, what is the dark.[84]

As in her other works for children, Sutcliff's *Beowulf: Dragon Slayer*, published in 1961, displays a character confronting difficult circumstances and yet rising above them to victory. Rosemary Sutcliff has created an adaptation to help children confront the problems of death by illustrating how the characters handle death. Illustrated by Charles Keeping, a renowned illustrator, who became well-known for his illustrations used by Sutcliff in her other books. Keeping also illustrated a translation of *Beowulf* translated by Kevin Crossley Holland in which he depicts Grendel sympathetically. The majority of Sutcliff's adaptation focuses on Beowulf's violence, which is legitimized, and his evolving view of death. Sutcliff also is the first of the books analyzed here to emphasize and acknowledge the deaths of Hondscio and Aschere as well as the grief at their deaths. Sutcliff divides her book into nine chapters, three of which are dedicated to the fights of Beowulf.

When the insignificant die

In the chapter titled "Hrothgar's Hall", the scene is set with Hrothgar twice asking Beowulf if he persists in attempting to rid Heorot of Grendel. At the second query, Beowulf establishes his resoluteness and that of his companions "'I am not want to change my purpose without cause,' Beowulf said, 'and those with me are of a like mind, or they would not have taken ship with me from Geatland in the first place.'"[85] This quote stresses the motivations and resolve that Beowulf

[84] (Meeks 1990)
[85] (Sutcliff, 36)

and his fellow Geats have to help Hrothgar. It isn't until the fourth chapter, titled "Grendel", that the reader encounters the Beowulf and Grendel fight. Once Grendel enters the hall,

> Laughing in his throat, he reached out and grabbed young Hondscio who lay nearest him, and almost before his victim had time to cry out, tore him limb from limb and drank the warm blood. Then, while the young warrior's dying shriek still hung upon the air, he reached for another. But this time his had was met and seized in a grasp such as he had never felt before; a grasp that had in it the strength of thirty men.[86]

Several things are apparent in this scene between Beowulf and Grendel. First, Hondscio, for the first time, is acknowledged from the start by name. Second, Beowulf, as in the original epic poem, does not try to stop Grendel from killing Honscio. Thirdly, the strength that Beowulf displays is connected to the deaths of Hrothgar's thirty thanes; his motivation to avenge their deaths is giving him the strength to fight Grendel. Grendel, in contrast, is characterized as a wild animal struggling and screaming while Beowulf in comparison demonstrates control; the only sound is his breathing:

> And terror broke over Grendel in full force, the terror of a wild animal trapped; so that he thought no more of his hunting but only of breaking the terrible hold upon his arm and flying back into the night and the wilderness…all the while Grendel snarled and shrieked and Beowulf fought in silence save for his gasping breaths.[87]

A double page spread is devoted to illustrating Beowulf and Grendel's fight. Beowulf's clenched fist grasps Grendel's sinewy arm as he seems to pursue the skeletal Grendel on the second page whose back is turned to the reader as he flees. This is just a small way in which Charles Keeping depicts Grendel sympathetically, by showing Beowulf as an aggressor. The actual ripping off of Grendel's arm is characterized with de-emphasis.

> The Night Stalker gathered himself for one last despairing effort to break free. Beowulf's hold was as fierce as ever; yet none the less the two figures burst apart—and Grendel with a frightful shriek staggered to the door-way and through it, and fled wailing into the night, leaving his arm and shoulder torn from the roots in the hero's still unbroken gasp.[88]

[86] (Ibid, 41)
[87] (Ibid, 41-42)
[88] (Ibid)

Although this scene between the two combatants can be characterized as one of the most famous battles from the original tale of *Beowulf*, Sutcliff chooses to quickly address the ripping off of Grendel's arm and focus instead on the death of Hondscio and the importance of a battle trophy. For, once Beowulf has torn Grendel's arm off, he immediately focuses on his friend's death and displaying his victory: "'Hondscio is avenged, at all events,' said Beowulf. 'Let us hang up this thing for a trophy, and a proof that we do not boast idly as the wind blows over.'"[89] The mourning for Hondscio does not end here; Hrothgar gives a wergild of gold arm rings for the death of Hondscio, and Beowulf is deeply grieved at the death of his companion, a sentiment not yet revealed in this study until now. "But though the young warrior was avenged, his heart was sore as he laid the gold with his own gifts that he must go home with one lacking from the brotherhood."[90] Dissimilar from the books analyzed thus far, Hondscio's death deeply affects Beowulf. It is possible that Sutcliff is using *Beowulf* to model appropriate attitudes towards death for children. The emphasized element of the Grendel and Beowulf scene is not the violence but the death of Hondscio. It seems that Sutcliff is making a case that all deaths deserve acknowledgment no matter how "insignificant" a character is.

The power of love: Grendel's Mother strikes

In chapter five, titled "Terror Comes again", Sutcliff breaks down the motivations of Grendel's Mother. She is portrayed as crueler than Grendel because of her capability to love; she is able to have the motivation of revenge as she approaches the hall to avenge her son. Something she loved was taken from her and so she must take a valuable person: "Aschere, whom the King loved best of all his thanes and next instant was gone with him into the night."[91] The focus on the

[89] (Ibid, 43)
[90] (Ibid, 49)
[91] (Ibid, 55)

power of love is a focus on the primal maternal instinct that all mothers have for their offspring. although Sutcliff had no children, she portrays the violence of Grendel's Mother honestly and yet there is a certain understanding for her actions. In the morning, Hrothgar is not only bowed down with sorrow but despises his own dismissal of the stories of Grendel's Mother. Although he gives Beowulf permission to go after Grendel's Mother, his grief is inconsolable. Just like with Grendel's Mother, the reader can find a point of sympathy for Hrothgar's loss. Even Beowulf shows unanticipated compassion.

> Sorrow not so grievously,' Beowulf said quickly, 'It is better that a man should avenge his friend than mourn him overmuch. Each of us must wait the end of life, and if a man gain honour while he lives, as Aeschere gained it, that is best for a warrior when the time comes that Wyrd cut the web of his living from the loom. Abide but this one day and your friend shall not lie unavenged, though I cannot bring him back to you.[92]

Beowulf addressed the king's grief in a sympathetic manner, unique to Sutcliff's version. Beowulf reminds Hrothgar of Aschere's great deeds and promises to avenge his death while compassionately acknowledging he cannot bring Aschere back. The prolonged focus on Aschere's death is another example of Sutcliff's attention to the deaths of all characters, small or great. It seems apparent that Sutcliff is exploring the theme of loss and death through the tale of *Beowulf* to show that, despite differences people may have, all experience grief for the loss of those they love in similar ways. Beowulf, Hrothgar, and Grendel's Mother all approach their losses with sorrow and a desire to avenge the death of their beloved.

Later while Beowulf and his men search for Grendel's Mother, they encounter Aschere's head. Sutcliff chooses to not focus on blood or gore but instead on the senselessness violence of Grendel's Mother, as she too has left a trophy "like some fragment of a mouse that a great cat

[92] (Ibid, 56-7)

has dropped from its jaws, they found Aschere's head…"[93] to show the Geats her prowess. Hrothgar's sorrow is profound, and the warrior king shows a great deal of tenderness at seeing his friend's severed head: "Hrothgar in their midst knelt stiffly beside the last dreadful relic of his dead sword brother, and put back the tangle of blood-soaked hair with hands as gentle as a woman's; but he spoke no word—there was no word to speak."[94] Sutcliff gives the impression that she wants her child readers to know that sometimes there are no words that will soothe a deep grief.

In chapter six, "The Sea-Hag", the story picks up when Beowulf dives down into the mere, and Grendel's Mother seizes him and swims up into a cave. The one illustration that illustrates Beowulf and the Sea-Hag's skirmish shows a sinewy Sea-Hag with long hair, a great dagger in her hand; this same hand is snatched by Beowulf. The reader can see only Beowulf's cool countenance.[95]135 The two immediately engage in battle. Beowulf's sword fails to bite the hide of Grendel's mother while Grendel's Mother "stabbing again and again at his breast with her saex, a broad-bladed dagger" and then "clawing and worrying at him as though she were wolf indeed" holds him down.[96] Beowulf then tries to grapple with the Sea-Hag with his bare hands, "but there was strength in the Sea-Hag that had not been in her son, and Beowulf could not overcome it."[97] The strength of the Sea-Hag is her ability to love and her fury at the death of her son; he is her cause for which she fights Beowulf. Whereas Grendel was in a sense weak because of his lack of love for anyone or anything, the Sea-Hag is empowered by her love, a mother's love, which cannot be conquered without a magical weapon. In this case, the weapon which Beowulf kills her with is the huge sword, gigantic in proportions. In fact only a man like Beowulf could wield

[93] (Ibid, 59)
[94] (Ibid, 60)
[95] (Ibid, 69)
[96] (Ibid, 67)
[97] (Ibid, 68)

a sword like it. Swiftly he dodges her and, grabbing the sword, cuts off her head and seeing Grendel in the corner cuts his head off also.[98] The violence in these scenes is illustrated best by the "murky crimson flood" that occurs after Beowulf cuts off the heads of the Grendelkin.[99] Other than the bloody water, the violence in this this section is de-emphasized. In comparison, the sorrows of the Geats and Danes at Beowulf's apparent death are described in greater length. Hrothgar and the Danes leave sadly, but the Geats remain waiting despite the fact that the waters "itself were vomiting blood."[100] Beowulf is gladdened, not only to see his companions, but that they were faithful even at the possibility of his death, and with that they take the head of Grendel back on four spears.[101] Sutcliff has clearly focused on the importance of companionship and solidarity even at the event of death.

Dragon's Hoard

Chapter eight, "The Fire-Drake's Hoard", finds Beowulf preparing to fight the dragon which has razed the town and country in vengeful anger at the robbery of a golden dish.

> Beowulf was old now, a grey warrior who had once been golden, but a warrior still. Also he was the king; and for him the last resort was the duty and the privilege of dying for the life of his people. And so, as he had done so many times before, had made himself ready for battle.

It is in this section that Sutcliff portrays a new view of Beowulf; he has no desire to die but is willing to for the sake of his people. Beowulf comes to muse upon his life, almost feeling the touch of death; he shows a great resignation to his imminent death and gladness that he remembers the deeds of old.

> Sitting there…felt Wyrd touch him, like a shadow passing across the sun. He had been young and confident, glorying in his own strength when he fought his battle with Grendel, but now he was old and he knew that this would be his last fight. And suddenly

[98] (Ibid, 70)
[99] (Ibid)
[100] (Ibid, 71)
[101] (Ibid, 72,74)

> lifting his head he began as the wild swans are said to do to sing his own death song. 'I have lived a long life, and all since before I was seven summer old, I remember.[102]

It appears from this portion of text that Sutcliff is illustrating the naturalness of death at the end of one's life and how to prepare for death, by remembering one's life. This self-honesty is unique to Sutcliff's adaptation; death has never been so addressed.

The final chapter, "The Death of Beowulf", chronicles the battle between the dragon and Beowulf and Beowulf's eventual death. The battle is short with Beowulf striking and wounding the dragon, yet not mortally. Beowulf's sword breaks in the combat and before he can draw his knife, the dragon slashes his throat. "In the same instant, while the king's life blood burst out in a red wave" Wiglaf stabs the dragon and Beowulf "with the last of his battle strength, tore the saex from his belt and hurling himself forward, hacked the great brute almost in two."[103] Sutcliff spends the majority of the chapter detailing Beowulf's slow death as he tries to communicate his wishes to Wiglaf, who begins weeping at his king's suffering death.

> Na, Na, here is no cause for weeping. I am an old man and have lived my life and fought my battles…I have not sought out feuds, nor sworn many oaths and lightly broken them; and when my life goes out from my body I shall not have to answer to the All-Father for slain kinsfolk or unjust rule.[104]

The significance of these lines resides in the fact that Beowulf, as an older man, is teaching Wiglaf the proper way to die through example. Sutcliff is using this scene to communicate values that surround death, namely living well so one might die "well" and without regret or fear of judgement. Essentially, one who lives a good life need not mourn because they have simply come to the end of a life of accomplishment and victory. Beowulf's death is a long and painful one, "his wounds began to burn and swell, the venom from the monster's talons boiled in his

[102] (Ibid, 91-92)
[103] (Ibid, 99)
[104] (Ibid, 99-100)

breast and all his limbs seemed on fire."[105] At last, his people bury him in his barrow which overlooks the sea and twelve chiefs ride around his grave singing a "death song that the harpers had made for him"[106] Beowulf is memorialized for his great feats and remembered in song, just as he is remembered in Sutcliff's adaptation and used to communicate how to handle death.

Nye

As a British poet, Robert Nye is better known for his poetry; however, his children's adaptation of *Beowulf* is a significant piece of work because Nye has infused the classic tale with his own worldview so that the story differs hugely from the original *Beowulf* lines. Like Serraillier, Nye is a conscientious objector, and that much is evident in his reworking of the struggles between Beowulf and his opponents. His title for the adaptation, *Bee-Hunter: Adventures of Beowulf*, seeks to give a clue to the fate of one of his opponents and perhaps explain the name of "Beowulf" as well as characterize Beowulf as an adventurer, and not a warrior or a hero as he has been characterized previously. Significant is his dedication to his son Jack; it seems that Nye is retelling *Beowulf* as a vehicle for moral education surrounding violence and death for his son. Finally, the time in which this book was first published, 1968, is noteworthy as there was much worldwide unrest.

Blood and the power of light

The tale begins with the great hall of Heorot being completed and Grendel crashing through the hall and killing the thirty thanes in their sleep. Nye focuses little on the minor deaths of the thanes from the beginning and that sets the stage for his depiction of death for the minor

[105] (Ibid)
[106] (Ibid, 108)

characters. Yet, the violence that Grendel acts out is strongly emphasized and his method of killing the men is graphically described "…The hall was a confusion of swords and blood, the brave lords hurling themselves at Grendel and the fiend snatching them up in his claws and snapping their backs as though were no more than toys."[107] The accompanying illustration by Aileen Campbell, Nye's wife, depicts Grendel as a giant worm licking the blood of a man's cut-off hand.[136] Grendel's arms are miniscule compared to his body. The fact that Grendel's arms resemble those of a Tyrannosaurus Rex makes his skirmish with Beowulf less about his arm being torn off and more about the values that Beowulf and Grendel stand for.

In the sixth chapter, titled "Beowulf against Grendel", Beowulf hears Grendel against the door and cries out fearlessly, "Grendel, child of Cain, come down into Heorot. I am Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, I am Beowulf, not afraid of you. I am Beowulf come to kill you!"[108] Beowulf's assertion of identity is at the core of his combat technique. Beowulf further demonstrates his strength of identity and strength of character which gains him victory over Grendel. But before Beowulf can fight Grendel, Grendel takes the life of one of his companion warriors "before Beowulf could move, those claws snatched up one of the warriors stirring out of sleep."[109] Nye feels that it is necessary to explain why the companion known as Honscio/Hondscio in the other adaptations here, dies while Beowulf looks on. In fact, Nye is obligated to explain that Beowulf could not prevent the death due to the quickness of Grendel, because he is portraying Beowulf as a morally good character, and watching one's companion die does not fit into this characterization without explanation. Still, the companion is never mentioned again and never by name as in other versions. In spite of that, Grendel's ferocity is emphasized greatly as he "tore

[107] (Nye, 24)
[108] (Ibid, 44)
[109] (Ibid, 46)

his victim limb from limb, picking off arms and legs, lapping up blood with a greedy tongue, taking big bites to crunch up bones and swallow gory mouthfuls of flesh." Contrariwise, Beowulf's "violence" is characterized as a force of "light"[110], and the reader is given the perspective of Grendel as he undergoes Beowulf's strength.

> The creature gave a dreadful squeal as Beowulf touched him. Ten strong fingers locked about his hairy wrist. To Grendel it was if the sun itself had caught him in its clutch. Made of wickedness as he was, the good in this man burned him. The mortal fingers were like ten red-hot nails driven in his skin. Grendel had never known strength like this. He roared and shook to be free, to crawl away, to escape into the ruins of the night. But Beowulf would not let him go.[111]

This perspective from Grendel gives a distinct sense of the repulsion that evil and darkness (which is traditionally associated with evil) has towards good and light (which is associated with goodness). The battle between Grendel and Beowulf is a violent collision of good and evil in an ideological sense and full of metaphorical language that raises the battle from one of myth and legend to a discussion on the forces of good and evil as seen in this quote from Beowulf to Grendel.

> Light holds you Grendel. Light has you in its power. You, who have shunned the sun, meet me, once stung by bees that drank the sun …I do not fear you, Grendel. I do not fear, therefore, I do not fight. I only hold you, child of Cain. I only fix you fast in your own evil, so you cannot turn it out on any other. It is your own evil, Grendel, that undoes you. You must die, creature of night, because the light has got you in a last embrace.[112]

In the end, Beowulf claims that it is not his grip which will undo Grendel but Grendel's own evilness meeting with the light in Beowulf; a philosophical statement for a children's book. Beowulf mentions that he was once stung by bees that drank from the sun and that he now has honey in his veins. This is a complicated way of telling Grendel that he has had a trial by fire experience and his heart has been purified because of it. Grendel cannot stand up to the moral

[110] (Ibid)
[111] (Ibid)
[112] (Ibid, 46-7)

strength of Beowulf. Beowulf even refers to the physical aspect of the battle when he refers to his fingers; however, even the physical nature of the fight has a philosophical significance. Nye emphasizes the ripping of Grendel's arm by mentioning the physical and psychological consequences. First, he describes the physical impact of Grendel's arm being pulled off: "There was a fearful snapping of bones and tearing of sinews and muscles. Then hot stinking blood fountained everywhere. Beowulf had pulled Grendel's arm out of its socket!"[113] And then "the monster howled. It was a pandemonium of pain, as though all the men he had eaten cried out too. He dragged himself along the ivory floor, blood pumping from his wound with each fierce beat of his angry heart. He knew he must die from loss of blood."[114] Grendel possesses a consciousness of the brutalities he has committed and connects them with his death; it seems that Nye is emphasizing violence here to draw attention to the end result that evilness yields. Grendel's violence is finally ended with a mixture of moral assertions and physical violence. Beowulf still tears off Grendel's arm in this version but not without suffering personal injury, namely bruises, and is bloodied and slimy from fighting Grendel.[115] This inclusion clarifies that Beowulf is not immune to bodily harm and makes his endeavor to rid Heorot of Grendel more heroic. Beowulf is not praised by everyone, but is criticized by one specific character. Unferth, in chapter eight titled "Revenge", views Grendel as a "beautiful" creature and calls Beowulf a "murderer" even though "he, Unferth, knew better, knew that good and evil were locked in such an endless contest that the death of just one of the powers of darkness was of no significant whatsoever."[116] Nye is making a pretty explicit claim that the forces of good and evil are constantly warring with each other, not an uncommon theme in children's literature; however, what differs is that Grendel is just "one" of the manifestations of evil; there will always be

[113] (Ibid, 48)
[114] (Ibid, 49)
[115] (Ibid)
[116] (Ibid, 60)

another force of evil to fight against goodness. Therefore, the death of an evil being does not lessen the force of evil. Nye may be trying to communicate to children that when one overcomes an evil thing, the metaphorical battle is not over, as it is not yet over for Beowulf either.

Maternal tentacles and a resurrected son

Indeed, the battle against good and evil is far from won for Beowulf. He wakes the next day to the laments of Hrothgar: "Aeschere! My best friend, dearer to me than my own right hand. We were boys together. We went to war together. A splendid man—his mind as sharp as his sword. I loved him. He is dead." This statement is important because of the statement "friend" associated with Aeschere. Aeschere was more than a warrior to Hrothgar, and because of their friendship, his death is a painful experience. Again, there is an emphasis on which deaths matter; clearly, those of your friends matter. In a surprise turn of events, Beowulf pulls Unferth's dagger out of Aeschere's back. Clearly, they have a traitor for the forces of light and goodness in their midst. He did not work alone as evidenced by Grendel's missing arm. Grendel's Mother has been in the hall too. Hrothgar, in his grief and anger at the murder of his friend, eagerly hopes that Grendel's Mother has killed Unferth because "he deserved it."[117] This is yet another value statement on who "deserves" to die, by Nye; Unferth is seeking to join the forces of evil and reaps the consequences. As the men ride into the swamp to find Grendel's Mother, they stumble upon Unferth's head. Beowulf, as a representation of goodness, pities him and sees that despite his alliance with evil, Unferth is a person: "bury Unferth's head…he was a person to be pitied."[118] It seems that Nye is differentiating between fighting or opposing people and fighting and opposing ideologies of evil. A fellow human, Nye seems to communicate, deserves pity and mercy, while

[117] (Ibid, 64)
[118] (Ibid, 67)

malevolent ideologies should be slain metaphorically. The ruinous effects of adopting base ideologies are further emphasized by the violent end Unferth meets. An illustration depicts Unferth's head, his hair caught in a tree and eyes and mouth gaped open as a crow and rat stare at him, depict his death as horrific, just as his treachery is and unlike Beowulf, Unferth dies a violent death.[119]

After finding and burying Unferth's head, Beowulf approaches the mere where the mother of Grendel lives, and instead of entrusting his companions to Hrothgar at the event of his death, instead asks that they "wait here for me for two days and two nights. If I do not come back to you before that time has passed, then I shall be dead and lost forever and do not risk your lives in coming to look for me."[120] At last in chapter ten, "Beowulf against Grendel's Mother", Beowulf dives into the pool where he is met with the gentle violence of Grendel's Mother.

> She was waiting. She made no noise. Her tentacle arms were a part of the sucking, obsequious water. Beowulf fell into them, as into a seaweed trap. They closed about him tenderly. For a moment, he succumbed, seduced by gentleness. Then struggling to free himself, he found he could not. He kicked. Her grip tightened she dragged him down. Beowulf experienced a few seconds of sheer panic. There was no escaping, none, from these spongy intangible fingers that pulled him on, on, on, irresistibly insistent, coaxing, maternal. He could drown this way. She could choke him. She could squeeze the life from him.[121]

This excerpt exemplifies the subtlety of ideology, and how some violence sneaks up on the individual. Also notable is that Beowulf experiences panic; this hero is fully human and prone to human responses. It's his human response that saves him in the end, "Beowulf screamed with fright…and the scream saved him. It brought him to his senses."[122] What follows is a similar declaration of identity and goodness that he made to Grendel; however this speech's high point

[119] (Ibid)
[120] (Ibid, 69)
[121] (Ibid, 71)
[122] (Ibid, 72)

could well be said to be the thesis of Nye's adaptation. "It is because I hold a Cain in me, but do not let him out. That man is truly brave who, feeling fear, yet puts his fear to use and plucks new courage from the fear itself. That man is truly good who knows his own dark places."[123] This seems to be Nye's overarching statement; the quote that sums up his interpretation of *Beowulf*. All humanity is capable of evil but it is the choices one makes at their lowest points which define a person as good or bad. As Beowulf says this, Grendel's mother begins to lose her strength until she is finally paralyzed and Beowulf "gently, carefully, with a stroking softness that was nearly pity" strangles her and "she did not fight…She was dead."[124] At this point, Beowulf seems to have a moment to catch his breath after slaying the Grendelkin, while wandering the cave of Grendel's mother, he finds a magnificent sword and picking it up examines it. however the sword is full of magic and resurrects Grendel's body in the corner. Beowulf swiftly uses the magic sword to shear the resurrected Grendel's head off his shoulders, black blood melting the blade.[125] Again, it seems that Nye is warning against a dwindling awareness of the forces of evil; evil can and will raise its head again given the opportunity.

The final battle and bees

In a series of chapters, the encounter between the Firedrake and Beowulf unfolds. Within chapter fifteen titled, "Beowulf against the Firedrake", the Firedrake attacks the villages and kingdom of the Geats because an item of gold was stolen from him. Nye continues to portray Beowulf as merciful through his treatment of the slave who has brought the wrath of the Firedrake on the kingdom. "Let him eat honey" Beowulf says to the derision of his counselors. Wiglaf adds, "by saying the slave should eat honey…he means that we should find a little pity in our hearts for

[123] (Ibid, 74)
[124] (Ibid, 75)
[125] (Ibid, 77)

one who was driven by despair to do something he will always regret."[126] Just as Beowulf showed mercy and humanity towards Unferth, he continues to show the same to the slave. Beowulf selects twelve companions and takes the young thane, Wiglaf, with him to the Firedrake's cave. As they walk, Beowulf explains that his inspiration for the plan of attack against the Firedrake comes from a story he heard long ago in the hall of Heorot: "they used their wits, you see. If you can't beat evil by strength alone, then a little cunning is called for."[127] This quote begs the question why Beowulf had to give philosophical and moralizing speeches while fighting the Grendelkin when he was physically strong, and now that he is old and bowed with age he resorts to cunning. Why has the battle transformed into one of cunning instead of good versus evil? Perhaps this change of viewpoint is because the Geats, specifically the slave, are in the wrong and therefore cannot fight a battle against "evil" since it is one of their own who has violated the norms. Or maybe this change is representative of Beowulf's age, no longer a youthful zealot perhaps he has adopted a more lenient view towards things which he previously viewed as right or wrong, black or white.

In chapter sixteen, "Bees", Beowulf executes his plan with the help of Wiglaf. Instead of Wiglaf rushing in to help defend Beowulf from the flames of the Firedrake, as seen in previous versions, Wiglaf creeps into the Firedrake's lair with a giant glove and six-foot stake. Beowulf then begins to shout insults to the Firedrake, causing the Firedrake to open his mouth to spit out furious fire. In an instant, Wiglaf throws the stake into the Firedrake's mouth, wedging it open and throws the glove into his mouth, while Beowulf releases the twelve hives of bees—turns out the glove had the queen bee in it all that time.[128] Effectively, the Firedrake dies of bee stings and Beowulf

[126] (Ibid, 98)
[127] (Ibid, 101)
[128] (Ibid, 105)

lives. Beowulf and Wiglaf determine this cunning is better left as a secret. As Beowulf tells Wiglaf, "when I was young I'd never would have done a thing like that. I'd have thought it was dishonourable, or something. Well, the dragon lies dead and the treasure is there for the good of our people, who was right? Old Beowulf or young Beowulf?"[129] This is truly a question for the reader to answer: was the use of bees to kill the dragon really dishonourable? Or just smart? In the end, Beowulf asks that Wiglaf wait to tell people the truth about what happened. "Perhaps it's better that nobody should [know] just now…tell them what you like, the ones out there, but remember the world needs to be a little older before it understands this last exploit of Beowulf…Meanwhile, it must have an ordinary kind of hero to believe in."[130] Nye recognizes socially that individuals may not want to want to know the truth that their heroes have to say but believe whatever makes them comfortable or makes sense to their worldview. Nye seemed to foresee that people push away many truths and, instead of facing their heroes face to face, distance themselves from them, unable to confront their flawed heroes. Perhaps modern society became a bit squeamish about war after the massive destruction and death after the World Wars. But for Nye, *Beowulf* isn't about death and violence; it is about a man who is essentially good because he fights the demons within and sometimes he isn't always "heroic" but very human. After all, Beowulf dies an old man loved and buried on a cliff, his secret of the bees never exposed. The lack of violence in the death of the dragon and lack of focus on the death of Beowulf differs greatly from any other children's adaptation of *Beowulf*. It is explicit about the inner workings of the characters, their ideologies, and the struggle between good and evil, as well as the flawed nature of humanity.

[129] (Ibid, 106)
[130] (Ibid)

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the start of this study, each book has a blend of emphasized and deemphasized violence. The analysis of major versus minor character deaths has revealed some prioritization of death, such as in Marshall who focuses on the major character's deaths or Hosford who skims over all the deaths with the exception of Beowulf's. On the other hand, some adaptations, such as Sutcliff's, focus on each death carefully and equally. The reasons for adapting *Beowulf* range from maintaining a cultural history and passing it on to children to communicating values that should be associated with dying and death and the struggle between good and evil. However, in this project, it was found that four of the six authors had the bottom-line of communicating how to deal with death. These authors did not always agree in how they handled the multiple deaths, but they all have the underlying message that death ought to be handled a certain way. The two conscientious-objector authors had the point of communicating the societal effects of violence and death, and yet differ in their presentation.

Teaching children how to deal with death

Four of the books analyzed in this work (Marshall, Ebbutt, Hosford, and Sutcliff) focus on how death should be handled. All four of these books communicate messages of cultural history, heroism, and the value concepts of death. These four books are focused on the "right" way to die as a hero. For Marshall, the primary struggle focused on is Grendel's Mother, but she focuses on the death of Beowulf as the most important. Like Nye, Marshall inserts a subtle message that violence enacted by upright characters is legitimized if they are fighting against an "evil"

character. Marshall from the beginning established that Beowulf symbolizes British tradition and history and so Beowulf's death is the most important because without him there is no story. Hosford also makes the death of Beowulf the main focus and his death receives the most detail and mourning emphasized in stark contrast to the lack of detail for the deaths of the other characters. Hosford's approach is emphasizing the deep sorrow and pain that comes from watching your hero die. On the other hand, Ebbutt focuses on Beowulf's death but also emphasizes the violent details of the companions' deaths and seems to be trying to communicate the message that these deaths are important too. Ebbutt is also invested in communicating that death is inevitable and should not be feared if in the pursuit of victory. Like Ebbutt, Sutcliff emphasizes the deaths of the "little people." All four of these authors retain the plot points of *Beowulf*, but also steer the message of their adaptations toward the treatment of death and appropriate responses that these deaths require. For Marshall and Ebbutt, this emphasis points to the importance of a hero's death. While Hosford and Sutcliff focus on the mourning and grieving of Beowulf's death and how he teaches his companions how to die and live. These adaptations teach children how death should be processed and coped with for both the heroes and ordinary people in their lives.

Teaching children about the effects of violence and death on society

The two conscientious-objectors, Serraillier and Nye, both focus on the effects that violence and death has, but the way they handle violence is completely different. For Serraillier, he emphasizes the violence in order to point to the destructive effects it has on the community; this continues in his emphasis on the effect that Beowulf's death has on the kingdom of the Geats and Beowulf's musings upon dying. Nye focuses little on the companion's deaths, though he does

explain their deaths. All the violence included is deemphasized and instead Nye centers his adaptation on the repulsion of good and evil, such as when Beowulf weakens Grendel and Grendel's Mother with his declarations of goodness and the psychological effects of violence as when Grendel is stricken by fear at Beowulf's grip and the "light" which originates from him, as well as the tension between "goodness" and "cunning" when Beowulf uses his "goodness" to defeat the Grendelkin and yet asks for confirmation after killing the Dragon with his cunning and not with his goodness. Overall, these versions do not portray a perfect hero or society, but seek to illustrate to their young audience how violence and death affect society and oneself.

Coming to the end

The literature chosen reflects adaptor choices from the 20th century; further study could reveal trends of death and violence found in children's adaptations of *Beowulf* from the 21st century. The impact of my research adds to the study of *Beowulf* adaptations and to the study of death and violence in children's literature. The adaptors, which I have focused on, are British and their adaptations reveal insight into their perception of cultural heritage, heroism, sacrifice, death, and violence. This thesis could help start a conversation on why *Beowulf* is adapted for children and begin further study into adaptations of *Beowulf*, especially adaptations written by non-British authors who are removed from the ideal of continuing a cultural trope.

This thesis has discovered that the *Beowulf* adaptations of the 20th century are overwhelmingly concerned with educating children on how death and dying by violent means should be addressed, mourned, and observed, while staying true to *Beowulf* the epic poem and to the British heritage these authors have in common. These adaptations are also concerned with teaching children about the violence prevalent in the world and the struggle against good and evil

that one day their young audience will face. In the end, Beowulf becomes a symbol of what children can become, heroes fighting evil, unafraid of death, and living lives of honor.

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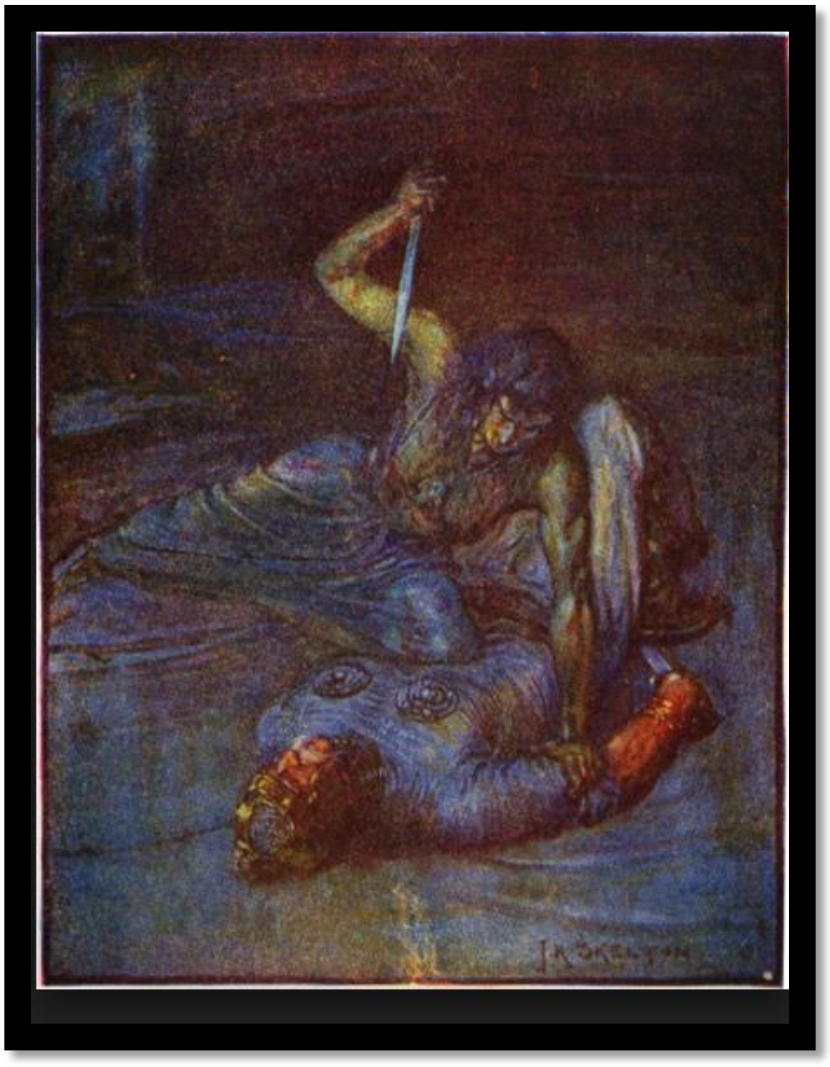
APPENDIX



"She bore him to the ground and kneeled upon his breast"[131]

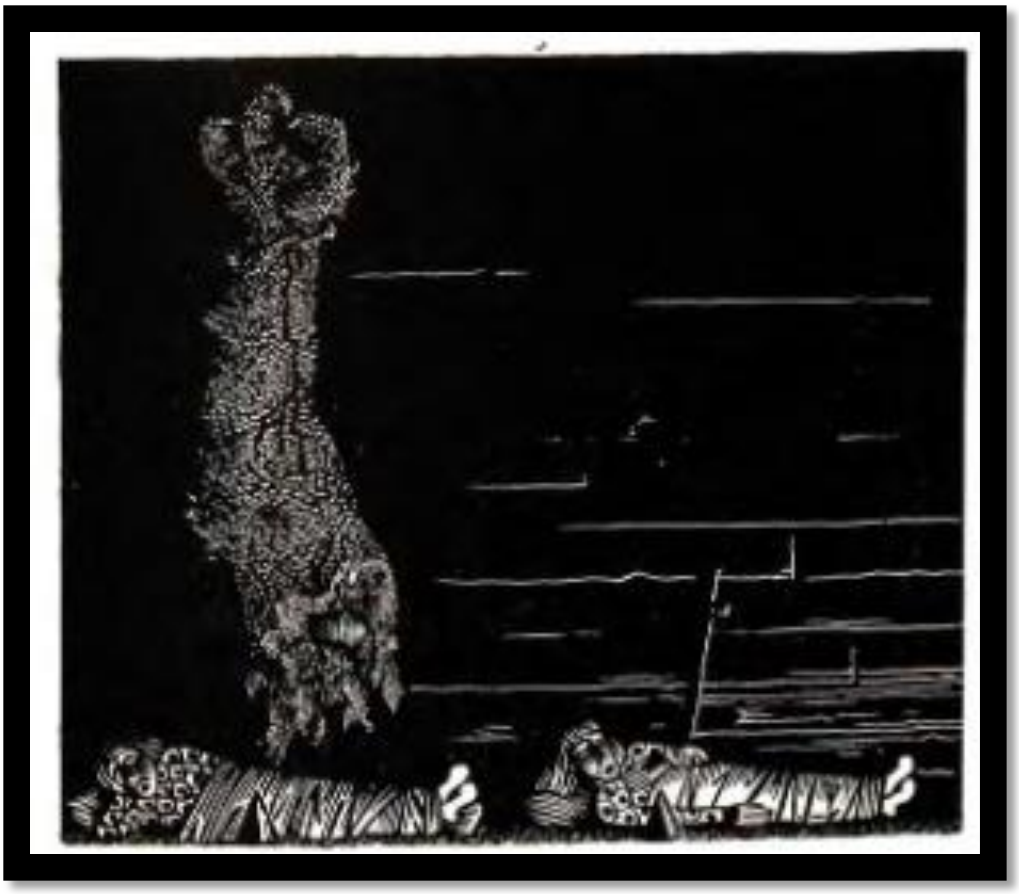
[131] Marshall 1908

"Beowulf tears off the arm and shoulder of Grendel." [132]

[132] Ebbutt, 1910

Beowulf struggling with a Bear-like Grendel[133]

[133] Hosford 1947



Two Danes sleep under Grendel's arm[134]

[134] Serraillier, 1961

Beowulf fighting with Grendel's Mother[135]

[135] Sutcliff, 1961

Grendel attacks the Danes in Heorot[136]

[136] Nye, 1968