

BEOWULF, THE HELIAND, AND THE FORMATIVE EPIC

by

DREW CRAVER

(Under the Direction of Carolyn Jones Medine)

ABSTRACT

The contribution of this work is to suggest that *Beowulf* was written with the purpose of converting Vikings and their descendants, living in and ruling over the Danelaw region of northern England during the tenth century, to Christianity. In order to make such an argument I have shifted the discussion of *Beowulf*'s origin to the dating of the existing manuscript, in the 990s CE, which coincides with the English Benedictine Reformation. Also, in support of this contribution, I have suggested that when we read *Beowulf* in tandem with the early ninth-century Germanic epic *The Heliand*, we see a tradition of using epics in the conversion process of northern Europe. The second contribution presented here is the recognition that there are certain epics written with propagandistic intentions that are used to form and inform collective identities — I call them “formative epics.” In this work we will study both *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* through the lens of the “formative epic,” which we will simply define, at this point, as an epic written with propagandistic intentions, used to form and inform collective identities.

INDEX WORDS: *Beowulf*, *The Heliand*, Formative Epic, Epic, Medieval Christianity, Christianity, Norse Mythology, Vikings, Danelaw, Saxon, Anglo-Saxon, Pagan, Heathen, Conversion, Propaganda, Old English, Old Saxon, Old Norse, Memory, Identity, Germanic, Heroic, *Wyrð*, *Wurd*, *Urd*, *Urðr*, *Metod*

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DEDICATION

To my wife and children:

Our life together is greater than any epic ever written.

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many ways. He has helped me to improve my scholarly approach, prepare for the career that awaits, present myself on the job market, and has assisted me in getting my first job. By his own example I have seen what it means to make yourself available to all students, regardless of their research interests. His example is unparalleled, and I intend to follow it and continue his legacy with my future students.

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INTRODUCTION

“Pride, I suppose, is the most treacherous of virtues. The Christians call it sin, but no poet sings of men who have no pride.”

—Uhtred¹

The contribution of this work is to suggest that *Beowulf* was written with the purpose of converting Vikings and their descendants, living in and ruling over the Danelaw region of northern England during the tenth century, to Christianity. In order to make such an argument I have shifted the discussion of *Beowulf*'s origin to the dating of the existing manuscript, in the 990s CE, which coincides with the English Benedictine Reformation. Also, in support of this contribution, I have suggested that when we read *Beowulf* in tandem with the early ninth century Germanic epic *The Heliand*, we see a tradition of using epics in the conversion process of northern Europe. The second contribution presented here is the recognition that there are certain epics written with propagandistic intentions that are used to form and inform collective identities — I call them “formative epics.” In this work we will study both *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* through the lens of the “formative epic,” which we will simply define, at this point, as an epic written with propagandistic intentions, used to form and inform collective identities.

¹ Bernard Cornwell, *The Empty Throne* (New York: Harper Collins, 2015), 287.

For over a century now scholars have debated the origins of *Beowulf*. Some have insisted it is a Pagan story, Christianized and copied down by Christian authors. Others argue that it is a Christian creation of a piece of literature highlighting, even glorifying, a Pagan past. The decisive conclusion may never be rendered, but the debate is not over. In fact, this dissertation is intended to spark an entirely new debate. The thesis presented and defended here is that *Beowulf* was a piece of political and religious propaganda. It was written during the tenth century English Benedictine Reformation and was intended for a specific audience. The audience was located in the Danelaw, a region of northeast England ruled by Danish Viking settlers. Its audience was Christian, Pagan, Anglo-Saxon, Danish, and hybrid versions of religions and ethnicities that still elude historians. It was a true melting pot from which the foundations of an English Christian collective identity would emerge. And the epic *Beowulf* was one such tool used to construct that identity.

Examining the historical and religious contexts of two early Medieval Germanic epics, *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, I will argue that *Beowulf* was written to convert the Viking settlers in northern England and to form a new English identity which would encompass various ethnic backgrounds including, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Danes, and Northmen. The authors of both *The Heliand* and *Beowulf* accomplished this goal by purposefully utilizing polysemous words when discussing important religious ideas to influence their respective audiences. Epic, therefore, is a genre used with a formative intent utilizing overt and covert methods of achieving influence.

In “In search of vikings: the problems and the possibilities of interdisciplinary approaches” D. M. Hadley calls for an explanation of “[t]he process by which the settlers were

accommodated and assimilation was achieved.”² The settlers Hadley is referring to are the Danish Vikings who conquered northern England and established legal authority over the English, in a region which came to be known as the Danelaw. She points out that concentrating on how assimilating the Pagan Vikings into the Anglo-Saxon Christian culture was achieved will provide a “more useful focus for new interdisciplinary collaboration than do the tired old questions upon which discussion of the Scandinavian settlements has far too long foundered.”³ The foundered conversations Hadley mentions are the ongoing arguments about the size of the settlements and number of settlers. I will not be joining that conversation, but will instead be contributing to the interdisciplinary conversation on how English Christians accommodated and assimilated Pagan Vikings. My work posits a new reading of the *Beowulf* manuscript, arguing that it was one such tool used to achieve cultural assimilation. I intend to present this theory concerning the *Beowulf* manuscript using three different methodological approaches which at times overlap.

The first method is history. The historical method requires analysis of a plethora of sources in order, first, to validate an historical event and, second, to understand its nuances, such as actors’ political, economic, and religious motives. It is a critical method which challenges the often agreed upon narrative and demands solid evidence in whatever form it may arrive. Here we will examine only a fraction of the extant evidence, but there is much more. Archaeological and contemporary textual and legal sources have been crucial for attempting to paint a picture of the eighth through tenth century northern European world — texts such as sermons, historical

² D. M. Hadley, “In search of vikings: the problems and the possibilities of interdisciplinary approaches,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch, and David N. Parsons (Exeter: Oxbow, 2001), 26.

³ *Ibid.*, 26.

annals, epics, and short literary pieces. Those contemporary texts lead us to the explanation of our next method.

The second method is literary critical analysis, since *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* are two texts that are studied most often in literary disciplines. In conversation with scholars of those disciplines, I too will perform a close analysis of these texts. What strengthens this approach is reading each epic in its original language. A close reading of each of these epics in their original language, coupled with an historical approach yields an understanding of historically nuanced word meanings which can challenge many modern translations and understandings of these texts. The particular words and their nuances have religious implications that require our third approach, which will be discussed in detail shortly.

In the broadest sense, we will discuss the history and religion of northern Europe between the eighth and tenth centuries. In particular it focuses on the interactions, both militarily and religiously, between the Christian Carolingian Franks and the Saxon Pagans in the ninth century, as well as the diasporic Christian Anglo-Saxons and the Danish Viking Pagans in the tenth century. While the method is historical, the window chosen to examine the cultural and religious features of those encounters will be their contemporary literature. The literary arts have always stood as products, if not representatives, of their environment and we will look at two epics that are testimonies of these historic encounters.

The epic in focus is *Beowulf*. The *Beowulf* manuscript is agreed to have been written in the final decade of the first millennium, between 990 and 1000 CE. Similar to *The Heliand*, its composition places it during a period in English history when the Christian Anglo-Saxons of northeast England were conquered and ruled by Pagan Danish Vikings. With a shared ancestry

and a reversal of roles, the Pagans being the ones in power, *Beowulf's* context is in stark contrast to our second epic, *The Heliand*, which was written by Anglo-Saxon monks, commissioned by the Holy Roman Emperor Louis the Pious (778-840), for the conquered Saxon Pagans. It is a retelling of the Christian Gospel stories in one narrative, written in Old Saxon poetic verse. Considering its subject matter it is often referred to as “The Saxon Gospel.” Due to its length and poetic form, it has come to be classified as “epic,” but we will study it as more — a religious and political text with influential intentions.

The *Beowulf* manuscript has rarely been studied alongside *The Heliand*. Their historical contexts have not often been compared, yet such a comparison may be exactly what is needed to refresh a stagnant debate. Comparing *Beowulf* to *The Heliand* with an historical method and focusing on religious connotation, especially Norse Paganism, will open scholars up to the potential for a new discussion about one of the western world’s most exciting and mysterious epics, *Beowulf*.

In analyzing *Beowulf* we enter a longstanding discourse on the manuscript that was initiated by F. A. Blackburn. In “The Christian Coloring in *Beowulf*,” Blackburn claims that *Beowulf* is entirely Pagan and all that is necessary to restore its Paganism is “not to change a word but only assign to it its older meaning.”⁴ Larry D. Benson argues, in “The Pagan Coloring in *Beowulf*,” that the opposite is true and that the poem is entirely Christian with some exciting Pagan flavoring.⁵ I place my argument directly between the two alongside Mary C. Wilson Tietjen who in “God, Fate, and the Hero of *Beowulf*” argues that it is both Pagan and Christian.⁶

⁴ F. A. Blackburn, “The Christian Coloring in *Beowulf*,” in *PMLA*, vol.12, (1897), 217.

⁵ Larry D. Benson, “The Pagan Coloring in *Beowulf*,” in *The Beowulf Reader*, ed. Peter S. Baker (New York: Garland, 2000).

⁶ Mary C. Wilson Tietjen, “God, Fate, and the Hero of *Beowulf*,” in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 74 (1975).

I will go one step beyond Tietjen and argue that *Beowulf* was not only a hybrid epic, both Pagan and Christian, but that it was written with a clear purpose — to convert its audience and create a new English Christian identity.

The final method of study, the discipline of Religious Studies, will help us to understand this Christian identity. I am not interested, here, in whether or not the religious messages of the epics are true. I am interested in how the people writing and hearing these epics understood their identities, social locations, and obligations, and in what they did with their beliefs in culture. In the case of eighth- through tenth-century northern Europe, we will look at how the medieval Christians propagated their faith through these epics. Two theoretical tools will aid us in this analysis. First, we will need a solid understanding of the theoretical discussion of and function of propaganda. Second, I will apply Carolyn Jones Medine's notions of "de-storying" and "re-storying," adapted from Walter Davis. I am interested in situations wherein collective identities have been "de-storied" and "re-storied" throughout history. The historical contexts of these epics will demonstrate the "de-storying," and the propagandistic efforts of these epics will highlight how they were a small part of the greater "re-storying" of these populations. I call these epics "formative epics" and will articulate what exactly is meant by a "formative epic" in the first chapter. However we may begin by acknowledging that polysemous language is an identifiable tool of formative epics and by providing a brief introduction into how *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* did so.

Polysemous language has been a standard practice in missionary work throughout the ages. When indigenous populations are introduced to new concepts, religions, and cultures, there comes a need for appropriate words to describe and/or label these ideas. When the barrier

between these two cultures include differing languages, the task of choosing the preferred vocabulary becomes even more complicated. Generally what happens is that a word is chosen from the indigenous language as the “closest fit.” Inevitably that word carries with it a meaning that is often in tension with its proposed “new” meaning. Throughout this dissertation we will examine exactly that process. The most important word for our discussion is *wyrd*, in Old English, and its equivalent *wurd*, in Old Saxon. These words were chosen by Christian writers and missionaries to describe the Christian concept of fate. Fate, I am suggesting, is in the Christian sense the enactment of their god’s⁷ plan. What scholars now know, and the authors of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* also most likely knew, is that *wyrd* and *wurd* had in its historical context another meaning, which stood in stark contrast to the beliefs held by Christians. *Wyrd*, in *Beowulf*, and *Wurd*, in *The Heliand*, meant *Urd*. *Urd* (Urðr) was a divinity throughout Norse Paganism.⁸ She was considered the most powerful Norn, and carried with her more authority than even the gods. The Norns were believed to oversee the births and deaths of all humans and gods alike. It was the Norns who decided everyone’s fate. In that sense it is perfectly clear why a missionary would choose this word.

They chose to use *wyrd* and *wurd* with the ultimate aim of supplanting the Pagan Norn with the Christian concept of fate. Their efforts were so effective that modern scholars often translate these texts in such a way as to reject any possibility that these words at the time of the two epics’ composition still carried any Pagan meaning at all. To highlight my point I draw your attention to four of the most respected translations of *Beowulf*. The translators in chronological

⁷ I break from the convention of treating “god” as a proper noun and, instead, use it as a common noun joined with signifying words to avoid confusion.

⁸ I adhere to the request from *Pomegranate (The International Journal of Pagan Studies)* to capitalize the words Pagan and Paganism. However, there are instances throughout this work where quotations from other scholars will not capitalize the words.

order are J.R.R. Tolkien, Burton Raffel, R.M. Liuzza, and Stephen Mitchell. For now let us focus on their translations of line 455, the first use of the word *wyrd* in the entire epic — *Welandes geweorc. Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel.*⁹

J.R.R. Tolkien’s translation was only recently published, but is nevertheless potentially the oldest of the four. Tolkien, in his day, was one of the most respected scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature and is still esteemed as one of the greats. Tolkien’s translation is the most literal. His reads as follows, “the work of Wayland. Fate goeth ever as she must!”¹⁰ In his commentary he makes no mention of Wayland and dismisses the “she” pronoun as nothing more than poetic formula.

Burton Raffel translates it as “[f]rom Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!”¹¹ Unlike Tolkien, Raffel does mention Wayland in his glossary. However, he only credits him as a celebrated smith. Similar to Tolkien he dismisses the feminine personification of *Wyrd* as anything other than poetry and translates it with a neuter singular pronoun and a passive verb such as “unwind.” Raffel’s translation fits the perceived intention of *Beowulf*’s Christian author to a tee. His “fate” is nothing other than a passive concept obeying a presumably divine plan.

R.M. Liuzza’s translation reads, “the work of Weland. *Wyrd* always goes as it must!”¹² With the most accurate translation yet, Liuzza adds in his footnotes that Weland is a “legendary blacksmith of the Norse gods.”¹³ As scholarship on Norse Paganism has increased over the past

⁹ Frederik Klaeber, ed. *Klaeber’s Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Fourth Edition, eds. R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 17.

¹⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary together with Sellic Spell*, ed. Christopher Tolkien (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 25-6.

¹¹ Burton Raffel, *Beowulf: A New Translation with an Introduction by Burton Raffel* (New York: The New American Library, 1963), 37.

¹² R.M. Liuzza, *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000), 67.

¹³ See *Ibid.*, 37, footnote 1.

century Liuzza made sure to include the detail that Weland was an important part of the Norse cosmos, as is *Wyrd*. It is interesting that he does not translate *Wyrd* and keeps it in the original. A reader may expect his choosing to do that is an acknowledgement of the divine personification of *Wyrd*, but he does just the opposite. He describes *Wyrd* as an “it” and suggests that it is only “quasi-personified.”¹⁴

The fourth and most recent translator we examine is Stephen Mitchell. In his translation one reads, “forged by Wayland — Hrethel’s gift. Fate moves as it must.”¹⁵ In his notes Mitchell does acknowledge Wayland’s connection to Germanic mythology, but altogether avoids any discussion of *Wyrd* and fate.¹⁶ Note that his use of the word “must” implies an obedience to the concept of fate, which would be exactly what a Christian author would want future readers to see. But this dissertation is focused on the historical audience of *Beowulf* and the contextual meanings of polysemous words such as *wyrd*. Therefore I include in this dissertation my own translation of *Beowulf*.

Supported by historical evidence to follow and the illustration of incomplete translations of the past I recognize that there may be a need for certain students of *Beowulf* to see the publication of a new literal translation of the text. There is a need for a translation that highlights all of the possible interpretations from words and lines such as those found in line 455. Let us take a moment to look at my translation of this line and recognize how it may contribute to a larger, interdisciplinary discussion.

¹⁴ See *Ibid.*, 37, footnote 2.

¹⁵ Stephen Mitchell, trans. *Beowulf* (New Haven: Yale Press, 2017), 31.

¹⁶ See *Ibid.*, 216.

My translation reads as follows, “the work of Weland. *Wyrd* always goes as she shall.”¹⁷

The translation is as literal as it possibly could be and I include three footnotes to supplement one’s understanding of the line. The first footnote highlights how Weland was a descendant of giants, apprenticed to dwarves, and worked for the Norse gods. The second footnote acknowledges the polysemous implications of *wyrd* as both an attribute of the Christian god as well as the principal Norn, a Norse divinity. The third footnote directly addresses the pronoun *hio*. It is either a feminine singular to be translated as “she” or any of the three neuter plural endings translated as “they.” Both of these translations support only the Norse understanding of *Wyrd* and reject the modern translations which use “it” alongside a downplaying of *wyrd* as anything other than fate. In fact, there is an Old English word for the abstract concept of fate, it is *fæge*.

Why would the author use *wyrd* to mean *fæge*? Maybe because *fæge* is an adjective and *wyrd* is a noun, but it would not require much on the part of the poet to make *fæge* the preferred word. In line 455 it makes sense in the poetic formula as Tolkien suggested, but for the poem as a whole this line could have been omitted without losing any necessary information. Instead the author kept it, presumably for the sake of the audience. That audience, as this dissertation will demonstrate, appreciated and even revered the Norse Paganism of the Saxon and Viking ancestry. It was an audience that knew who Weland was without the assistance of a footnote. And an audience which knew Weland also knew *Wyrd* as the Norn and *fæge* as fate. Therefore I propose that there is cause for a new literal translation of *Beowulf* which highlights its polysemous language and complicated context that was not as Christian as some modern

¹⁷ See Chapter 6, line 455. Also, please note that all translations from here on, unless otherwise specified are my own.

scholars would suggest. We need a translation that can illustrate how the epic could have been used to help create a collective Christian identity out of the hodge podge of ethnic, political, and religious affiliations which made up the tenth-century Danelaw.

To understand why these epics are formative epics I will begin, in the first chapter, discussing the Germanic epic tradition and its utilization of the oral formulaic. Formulae are devices that function to disseminate information, but they are also devices for memory. Audiences holding these formulae in their memories would internalize the phrase, if not its full meaning, influencing cultural memories and reshaping collective identities. In that discussion, the foundation for the suggestion that *Beowulf* is a culturally formative text will be laid. We will examine how oral epics can be used for ideological propaganda and persuasion, and I will state the case for and define, in detail, a new subcategory of epic called the “formative epic.”

Chapters Two and Three focus on *The Heliand*. In Chapter Two we will begin our discussion of the historical context of *The Heliand*, and Chapter Three will focus on the text itself. *The Heliand* is a text that we know, with certainty, was written as a formative text to be used to reform the collective identity of a conquered people. By recognizing it as such and pointing out the literary tradition that spread to England in the following century, *Beowulf* should also be understood as a continuation of such identity-making texts.

Chapter Four will focus on the historical context of the *Beowulf* manuscript and how it contrasts with that of *The Heliand*. Understanding that contrast will make it easier to see why its subject matter seems so different from that of *The Heliand*. But, as we will argue in Chapter Five, it is only different on the surface, whereas its intentions as religious and political

propaganda are one and the same with *The Heliand* and do in fact follow in the same literary tradition.

Chapter Six is my literal translation of *Beowulf*, a translation in which readers, having come to understand the context and polysemous nature of word choice in that context, can see for themselves how it functions as a formative epic, an influential text, speaking to various cultures and religions, with the goal of forming them all into one English Christian identity. The translation is supplemented by footnotes to highlight moments of polysemous language and moments of formative intentions.

I would like to highlight one term that may be problematic to some readers: the use of the term “man” — in the Old English language, words for “man” (*secg*, *man*, or *he*) could be and often were used to describe women. For instance, in lines 1379a (*secg*), 1392b (*he*), and 1394b (*he*) Beowulf speaks of Grendel’s mother using such indefinite and polysemous word choices.¹⁸ Therefore, please keep in mind that when I make statements such as *Wyrd*’s control over men’s destinies, it is in reference to a literally translated work where “men” is understood to be a gender inclusive word.

Other terms to note include the following. The *Saxons* are a group of people that controlled what is now northern Germany from the fifth through the tenth century. They spoke Old Saxon. *Saxony* will be used to describe the region in which they lived in continental Europe. The *Anglo-Saxons* are a diasporic people that settled in Britain during the fifth century and ruled until the eleventh century. They spoke Old English, or Anglo-Saxon. The *Franks* lived in Frankish territory and came to be the rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, which encompassed

¹⁸ I point these ambiguities out in the footnotes of my translation in Chapter 6.

nearly all of modern western Europe beginning in the ninth century. The *Carolingians* were a particular family among the Franks which included emperors such as Charlemagne (742-814), Louis the Pious (778-840), and Charles the Bald (823-877). The *Danes* were inhabitants of Jutland, Sjælland, and the Danish isles and were the earliest Vikings to invade England. From the ninth through the eleventh centuries CE they ruled most of northeast England, a territory that came to be called *Danelaw*. Lastly, all dates unless otherwise specified refer to the Common Era.

CHAPTER 1

THE FORMATIVE EPIC

Our country is its history. The sum of all its stories. We are what our fathers made us.”

—King Alfred¹⁹

Labeling *Beowulf* as propaganda may cause unease in some circles, but suggesting the same about *The Heliand* should not. That is why it is necessary to study the two in tandem, as far as the question of intent is concerned. To call all epic propaganda would most assuredly cause a stir and, in order to avoid any confusion, I will limit the discussion here towards understanding the use of epic as propaganda. In no way am I attempting to make a generalization about every epic or the genre of epic. I am however attempting to demonstrate how the traditional epic style was used for the purpose of propaganda in the case of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*. Let me first define what is meant by propaganda.

Propaganda itself can be defined as “1. The systematic propagation of a doctrine or cause or of information reflecting the views and interests of its propagators. 2. Material disseminated by the advocates of a doctrine or cause.”²⁰ The use of the term “propaganda” originated with the Roman Catholic Church under the authority of Pope Gregory XIII (1502-1585) when he charged a committee of cardinals with the *propaganda de fide* in 1572. As part of the Church’s

¹⁹ *The Last Kingdom*. Season 2 Episode 8. Directed by Richard Senior. Written by Bernard Cornwell and Stephen Butchard. Netflix, May 4, 2017.

²⁰ *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3rd. Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), s.v. “Propaganda.”

Counter-Reformation, it instituted a committee of cardinals to oversee the propagation of the faith. Later, in 1622 under Pope Gregory XV the commission was expanded to become an official College of Cardinals known as *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*. The roots of propaganda — in the sense of monitoring and controlling the way the Church is presented — are well-grounded in the Catholic Church, were established during a time of reformation, and continue into our current times. As we will demonstrate later, the *Beowulf* manuscript was composed during the English Benedictine Reformation, and *The Heliand* was composed during the Carolingian Reformation. While the Vatican had not yet established the official college of propaganda, the practices were already well underway.

The spread of Christianity throughout Europe brought with it a certain *Romanitas* that completely restructured their societies.²¹ With Christianity came profound changes to economics, record keeping, aristocratic hierarchies, land ownership, and so on. While the institutions of these societies changed more readily, the participants themselves did not. They required more persuasion, which took many forms. We will look at some of the more violent forms in later chapters, but our main focus will remain on more non-violent instruments of influence. In this chapter we will discuss how epic theoretically can be used as an element of persuasion or propaganda, and in later chapters we will see how *The Heliand* and *Beowulf* were used as more localized means of ideological or doctrinal propagation.

As we will see, in the work of Clifford Geertz, the study of religion is interested in religious symbols and social structure. Bruce Lincoln theorizes in *Discourse and the Construction of Society* how memories can be constructed intentionally to achieve outcomes as

²¹ See Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997).

powerful as those of Benjamin Wilkomirski on larger, national scales. Wilkomirski is someone who claimed to have survived the Holocaust, when in actuality it was his adopted parents, the Dössekkers, who had experienced it first hand.²² Just having heard their stories throughout his lifetime was enough to convince him that they were his stories. While this is an extreme case study, there are other instances of individuals and communities adopting familiar stories as their own. Lincoln suggests that the repetition and adoption of constructed stories can lead to the construction of society. He argues that different forms of discourse, including musical and textual, have been “employed as effective instruments ... for the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of society itself.”²³ His theories provide a well articulated framework to support the argument that *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* were each, in their own place and time, used to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct the societies that heard them. Particularly helpful for the contextual discussion of *The Heliand* is his inclusion of “force,” which he acknowledges is “used by ruling elites to effect significant social change.”²⁴ Force alone cannot achieve the desired effect, and Lincoln suggests that “[d]iscourse supplements force in several important ways, among the most important of which is ideological persuasion.”²⁵

Recognizing *The Heliand* and *Beowulf* as supplements of force used to achieve “ideological persuasion” is exactly why I think they can be accurately described as propaganda, which is an element of the “formative epic.” Discussion about propaganda began in the early

²² See Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

²³ Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

twentieth century and found itself in many circles: corporate, religious, academic, and governmental.²⁶

Edward Bernays revolutionized the concepts and theories of propaganda. He worked with the Allied Forces during the World Wars, utilizing state-sponsored propaganda campaigns to garner public support for the war. After the wars ended he encouraged those in power to continue to harness propaganda's power of influence during peace-time as well. He also saw the problems attached to the word "propaganda" and its association with the Nazis, so he called it "public relations." With his help the modern industry of advertising was born. Speaking of the past, he suggested that "[p]ublic opinion was made or changed formerly by tribal chiefs, by kings, by religious leaders."²⁷ He added that "[i]n art as in politics the minority rules, but it can rule only by going out to meet the public on its own ground" and that is exactly what we will see the *Beowulf* poet doing.²⁸ In short, "[p]ropaganda is accustoming the public to change and process."²⁹ It is the ideological persuasion that follows forced change, the same use for which both *The Heliand* and *Beowulf* were intended. They are formative epics, unique pieces of literature, and as George Orwell would suggest, "literature is an attempt to influence the views of one's contemporaries."³⁰

In essence, Lincoln's theories can be viewed as a skillful academic conclusion drawn from the combined suggestions of Bernays and Orwell. Public opinion can be persuaded. Large

²⁶ For further reading on propaganda see also Jonathan Auerbach and Russ Castronovo, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Propaganda Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, eds., *Propaganda & Persuasion*, Seventh edition (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2019); and Garth Jowett and Victoria O'Donnell, eds., *Readings in Propaganda and Persuasion: New and Classic Essays* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2006).

²⁷ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Ig Publishing, 2005), 147.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁰ George Orwell, "The Prevention of Literature," in *All Art Is Propaganda*, compiled by George Packer (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2008), 261.

groups can choose their understandings, beliefs, and societal structurings based on the subtle suggestions of smaller groups. Those smaller groups, however must, have the means to reach large audiences with persuasive material. Orwell highlights that literature is an attempt to do just that — to have one person or a small group influence the thoughts of a large readership. In the ninth and tenth centuries, finding a large group of literate individuals and providing them with written copies of literature was unlikely. However, the ninth and tenth centuries did have a very effective means of information dissemination. We may refer to it now as the traditional oral epic.

Before reorienting this conversation towards epic it is impertinent to address the elephant in the room. The word propaganda is taboo. Since its use by the National Socialist Party of Germany (Nazis) in the 1930's and 40's, many have considered it a strictly negative term associated with the most malicious underhanded intentions. And religious scholars, maybe more than others, may fear the word and its association with the actions of missionaries and their counterparts. Therefore I now enlist the help of one famous and respected voice to alleviate the dismay of religious studies readers made apprehensive by my use of the word propaganda. In a sermon titled "Propagandizing Christianity," Martin Luther King Jr. said that even though "[p]ropaganda is considered something used by the demagogue to spread evil ideologies," we must "[r]emember that the term originated in the Catholic Church. Propaganda is simply an attempt to disseminate principles or ideas by organized effort."³¹ King recognized the Christian roots of the word "propaganda" in the realm of Christian evangelization and encouraged his

³¹ Martin Luther King Jr., "Propagandizing Christianity," Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, September 12, 1954 (Stanford University: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/propagandizing-christianity-sermon-dexter-avenue-baptist-church>, accessed September 6, 2019) This is a transcription from his handwritten notes.

congregation to “propagandize” the words of Jesus. This work will demonstrate how *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* were used in exactly the same light.

The study of *The Heliand* and *Beowulf* through the theoretical lens of propaganda is in line with Elisabeth Schüsler Fiorenza who points out that “the early Christian movement and its literature should be viewed as rooted in the attempt to attract and to convince persons.”³²

Fiorenza expresses her disappointment that “for various reasons religious propaganda, mission, and apologetics are not very fashionable topics” and observes that they have “been widely neglected.”³³ Therein lies another important contribution of this study — to join a broader academic conversation about religious propaganda, its tools and influences in medieval Europe, and its potential implications on the Christianities that were influenced by said tools and methods.

Influential tools such as *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* have been used throughout human history. Some of these were intended to be persuasive while others just coincidentally became influential. Many were imaginative fabrications, others were based in truth, and of course there were those that were undoubtedly truthful. Whatever the case may be, certain pieces of “discourse” have been preferred by societies and have shaped their futures. I suggest that *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* not only shaped their respective societies; they were composed for exactly that purpose. They were written to construct or form a collective consciousness, and the style of their composition was chosen as an instrument of dissemination. That instrument was the traditional oral epic.

³² Elisabeth Schüsler Fiorenza, “Miracles, Mission, and Apologetics: An Introduction,” in *Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Elisabeth Schüsler Fiorenza (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), 2.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1.

Thanks to Milman Parry's groundbreaking work with *Homeric Verse* and Serbo-Croatian oral poetry there is now a comprehensive definition and understanding of the traditional oral epic. Parry recognizes that there are oral formulas which poets, such as the Serbo-Croatians, can easily memorize and use to construct epic poetry at will and on demand. And as Parry himself notes, "no reader of the study, so far as I know, has failed to grant its main thesis."³⁴ Parry's study recognizes that the poet "must have for his use word-groups all made to fit his verse and tell what he has to tell."³⁵ The word groups he describes are similar to ones used in both *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, which will be discussed at length in the coming pages. He describes these word groups as "formulas," which, having already met certain metrical requirements, could be inserted anywhere in an epic poem.³⁶ Parry suggests that these traditional oral poets simply combine these formulas, one after another, in order to tell a greater story in a poetic style.³⁷ He added that the poet "can put his phrases together in an endless number of ways" and that these formulaic phrases were composed by the "long efforts of many poets who all sought the best and easiest way of telling the same kind of stories in the same verse-form."³⁸

Albert B. Lord helped to build on Parry's groundbreaking work on the oral tradition and carried its discourse into greater circles. He explains "oral epic song" as "narrative poetry composed in a manner evolved over many generations ... by means of formulas and formulaic expressions and of the building of songs by the use of themes."³⁹ Interestingly, he adds that the

³⁴ Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. Adam Parry (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 266.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁶ See *Ibid.*, 272.

³⁷ See *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 270 and 266.

³⁹ Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales*, Second Edition, eds. Stephen Mitchell and Gregory Nagy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000) 4.

length of a poem is not what makes it an epic.⁴⁰ For Lord its composition is more important, and “the moment of composition is the performance.”⁴¹ As will be discussed, our epics, *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, were performed after their composition, although *Beowulf* did belong to an oral tradition prior to its composition. Lord acknowledges that the moment of performance may render a slightly different epic, due to a different audience and the desire of the poet to keep their attention, which helps to explain the need for mythological ambiguities in *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*.⁴²

Lord points out that “the need for a particular phrase arises over and over again” and that “[t]he most stable formulas will be those for the most common ideas of the poetry ... the names of the actors, the main actions, time, and place.”⁴³ He points out, however, that as the stories and their themes evolve, new formulas are necessary and that the oral tradition is quite adept at matching the need with newly-created formulas capable of expressing new ideas.⁴⁴ That will be particularly helpful when trying to understand how foreign, Christian, ideas were woven into the Pagan Germanic oral tradition. Lord highlights that “[a] *literary* text will show a predominance of non-formulaic expressions, with some formulaic expressions, and very few clear formulas.”⁴⁵ And therein lies the defense that *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* are not entirely oral epics which were dictated to scribes, but instead were composed, even commissioned epics, utilizing pieces of oral traditional epic to create performative texts with identity-forming agendas. They were the beginning of the end of the Germanic oral tradition, a tradition that relied on the Pagan past and

⁴⁰ See *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴² See *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 43 and 34.

⁴⁴ See *Ibid.*, 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 130.

would be replaced by a Christian textual tradition. As Lord himself writes about the advent of European written epics, “[o]ral tradition did not become transferred or transmuted into a literary tradition of epic, but was only moved further and further into the background, literally into the back country, until it disappeared.”⁴⁶

In his article “Perspectives on Recent Work on Oral Literature” Lord explains that not all traditional poetry is oral. In fact, it may simply be written poetry composed using traditional oral styles. He states that the style is quite easy to imitate and manufacture and has been done so throughout history.⁴⁷ Speaking specifically about Anglo-Saxon poetry he wrote that “a new body of formulas to express the new ideas of the Christian poetry was beginning to be developed on the model of the oral traditional poetry.”⁴⁸ The new formulas and themes with their modified style, Lord suggests, should be called “transitional.”⁴⁹

William Witherle Lawrence worked extensively on the formulas of oral traditions of epic and elaborated on how the *Beowulf* manuscript is a product of that tradition.⁵⁰ He points out that “[t]he tale itself and the traditions encircling it have all the authority of centuries of story-telling.”⁵¹ While highlighting its origins in an oral culture that was centuries in the making, Lawrence acknowledges that a “gifted poet” gave it its “final epic form.”⁵² As I will demonstrate, this form was politically and religiously motivated and intended to inform a specifically targeted audience. The result of that motivation was a cultural memory and identity, an English identity.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁷ See Albert B. Lord, “Perspectives on Recent Work on Oral Literature,” in *Oral-Formulaic Theory: A Folklore Casebook*, ed. John Miles Foley (New York: Garland, 1990), 46.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁰ William Witherle Lawrence, *Beowulf And Epic Tradition* (New York: Hafner, 1961).

⁵¹ Ibid., vii.

⁵² Ibid., vii.

As Lawrence agrees, it is an English poem, speaking to English people, yet there is not one English character in it.⁵³ He sees *Beowulf* as a product of an oral tradition passed on for generations which informed cultural customs and ideals, and I will demonstrate how that may have been intended to inform a newly evolving English culture.⁵⁴ *Beowulf* “was deeply rooted in the traditions of professional singers, the main features of whose craft were shared by the poets of the other peoples of Germanic stock.”⁵⁵

While its use was to inform the English identity, its origins were of Germanic stock. The *Beowulf* manuscript was used to inform the elite. Lawrence suggests that “it is highly sophisticated and aristocratic, essentially a court epic ... elegant entertainment for a royal circle.”⁵⁶ The thesis of this dissertation will not only agree with Lawrence’s statement, it will build on it, arguing that it was used to influence the English aristocracy in the late tenth century. Rather than being hegemonic, that aristocracy was Danish and Pagan, Anglo-Saxon and Christian, and *Beowulf* was one of the means employed to shape the hegemonic English Christian identity that would soon emerge.

Beowulf is an archaeological meeting ground of Pagan and Christian influences in tenth-century England. The poet, Lawrence suggests, “constructed his epic” out of “pagan material” for “the introduction of Christianity.”⁵⁷ He points out that “the Christian elements in *Beowulf* ... would have been accessible to a man in contact with the new religion, but not interested in theological studies ... the convert rather than the cleric.”⁵⁸ Chapter four of this

⁵³ See *Ibid.*, vii-viii.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 and 7.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 282-3.

dissertation will add another element to Lawrence's understanding of the epic's audience. Its Paganism was also accessible to someone in contact with the old religion and possibly even back-sliding away from Christianity.

Turning back from focusing on the audience, John Miles Foley's *Traditional Oral Epic* helps us to orient how we think about the composition of a manuscript such as *Beowulf*. As Foley suggests, scholars should not settle "for the apparently simple but imprecise model of 'oral versus written' text."⁵⁹ Instead, it is possible to label a work such as *Beowulf* within the category of "oral-derived texts," which Foley describes as "manuscript or tablet works of finally uncertain provenance that nonetheless show oral traditional characteristics."⁶⁰ This argument was pioneered by Francis Peabody Magoun in his 1953 article "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry."⁶¹

While Foley attempts to critique Magoun's work by pointing out that he is unable to compare *Beowulf* with other Anglo-Saxon narrative poetry, this dissertation will highlight that there is a perfect piece to compare it with, *The Heliand*. Foley failed to look outside the immediate Old English corpus and ignored the Old Saxon epic, *The Heliand*, also written by Anglo-Saxons. He also contends that "the conventional contextualizing instruments of literary history are virtually useless because of lack of information."⁶² While there is an element of truth in Foley's claim, I suggest the solution is not to give up, but to use a wider range of appropriate methods. Utilizing archaeology and sermon studies can revitalize the contextual history of the

⁵⁹ John Miles Foley, *Traditional Oral Epic: The Odyssey, Beowulf, and the Serbo-Croatian Return Song* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶¹ Francis Peabody Magoun, "The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry," *Speculum* 28, no. 2 (April 1953).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 18.

Beowulf manuscript. Where Foley's work and this dissertation agree is with respect to the "undeniably oral traditional roots of the poem."⁶³ He describes "the creation" of *Beowulf* as more of a "process than an event."⁶⁴ While I agree, it is important to point out that *The Heliand* was more of an event than a process. *The Heliand* was a foreign story translated into an oral traditional formula. That formula consisted of formulaic phrases utilized by poets to memorize and describe the stories of old — phrases such as *manna cynnes* (*Beowulf* 712b) which shows up "nineteen times without variation in other Old English poems,"⁶⁵ or *sæmod ætgædere* (*Beowulf* 729b), which is "a common formula in the Old English tradition, occurring seventeen times in a variety of poems."⁶⁶

Robert P. Creed has worked extensively on Anglo-Saxon formulaic poetry and positioned it in the study of oral traditional poetry. He argues that all of it, or nearly all of it, was composed by singers, or "shapers" to be more precise. Whether the words were dictated to scribes or written by the composers themselves is not answered. What is addressed is the ability to use such formulas on the fly to compose new narratives. He points out that in *Beowulf* "[r]oughly every fifth verse is repeated intact at least once elsewhere in the poem."⁶⁷ To prove his point, he rewrites lines 356-359 using other formulas throughout the text. While Creed presents an interesting argument, I think Donald K. Fry more convincingly suggests that it was first written in the oral style so that it could be memorized and recited later.⁶⁸

⁶³ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 35.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 219.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 232.

⁶⁷ Robert P. Creed, "The Making of an Anglo-Saxon Poem," in *Oral-Formulaic Theory: A Folklore Casebook*, ed. John Miles Foley (New York: Garland, 1990), 58.

⁶⁸ Donald K. Fry, "The Memory of Cædmon," in *Oral-Formulaic Theory: A Folklore Casebook*, ed. John Miles Foley (New York: Garland, 1990).

In his article “The Memory of Cædmon,” Donald K. Fry proposes that “after about 680, the English Church used written poetry as an educational device, transmitted largely in memorized form. And Cædmon and his memory began the whole process.”⁶⁹ Disagreeing with Creed, he adds that scribes wrote down what was in Cædmon’s memory in order to use it as a tool to help them memorize the poems for themselves.⁷⁰ Building on his argument about Cædmon and accounting for later poems such as *Beowulf*, Fry states that “later Anglo-Saxon poets ... used the forms of the inherited oral poetry, simply because no other poetic existed for them” and because “formulaic poetry is easy to memorize.”⁷¹ What will be of extreme importance for our later discussion of collective memory and identity is that Fry includes the fact that the same easily memorized formulas can “aid the memory of the audience” that heard its performance in person.⁷²

According to Fry “memorized poetry formed a large part of the education of an essentially nonliterate populace,” easily “spreading by word of mouth to remote areas.”⁷³ Fry suggests that it was a tool used by churchmen to inject and disseminate doctrine by means of narrative.⁷⁴ Fry states that “Christian learning spread through an illiterate population by means of memory and recitation, all radiating from an author’s original manuscript.”⁷⁵ Indeed, he even adds that this is why there are so few Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and that scholars should cease to blame the Vikings and Henry VIII for it. He argues that the church wrote one, or very few manuscripts of each narrative (injected with Christian doctrine) and then copied it via memory.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 78.

⁷¹ Ibid., 79.

⁷² Ibid., 79.

⁷³ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 81.

Regardless of one's perception of Fry's thesis, he is correct about one thing — the mechanism of dispersal was an oral formulaic that was easy to memorize.

The memorized stories, such as *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, were then dispersed throughout England and Germany, respectively, in mead-hall style performances, where they began to inform new cultural identities and reshape older cultural memories. Joachim Wach has noted that groups are “united through the recitation of the myths of the tribe.”⁷⁶ As will be shown, these myths were not originally “myths of the tribe,” but they did become the “myths of the tribe.” As Jason Stanley would suggest, “it is religious social practices that maintain religious belief.”⁷⁷ The social practice of the mead-hall recitation was the means by which Christian teachings were spread and maintained. It is the means by which the foreign ideology of Christianity came to replace ancient Germanic cultural memories.

Through the lens of religious studies, cultural memory and memory studies are thoroughly discussed in Jan Assmann's book *Religion and Cultural Memory*.⁷⁸ Assmann begins with a reference to the work of Maurice Halbwach who referred to memory as a “social phenomenon” that “grows into us from outside,” citing the memoirs of Binjamin Wilkomirski and the Holocaust as an example, stating that “it is possible for someone to believe in all sincerity that he has experienced something which in reality he has only read or heard about and absorbed in the course of communicative processes.”⁷⁹ Remember, he is referring to Wilkomirski's claim that he survived the Holocaust, when in actuality it was his adopted parents, the Dössekkers, who experienced it first hand. Assmann adds that the “wish to belong” or the

⁷⁶ Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 290.

⁷⁷ Jason Stanley, *How Propaganda Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 183.

⁷⁸ Jan Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory: Ten Studies*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1 and 4.

“longing for attention” drives people to adopt the memories that surround us.⁸⁰ “Collective memory” is conceived and created, in this way, and Assmann adds that the “task of this memory, above all, is to transmit a collective identity.”⁸¹ Assmann argues that “[s]ociety inscribes itself in this memory with all its norms and values.”⁸² Moreover, he adds that “[c]ollective memory is particularly susceptible to politicized forms of remembering.”⁸³

In addition to and often at odds with “collective memory” is “cultural memory,” which bases itself on cultural traditions and within smaller, more ethnocentric communities and identities.⁸⁴ These cultural memories often contrast sharply with collective memories and history. For instance, the miraculous story of the first Christmas tree springing from the base of the Thor’s sacred oak in Hesse, immediately after Boniface cut it down, with military force and without permission. Catholic and Christian cultural memory accept that this is true whereas in the collective memory and in historical documents, there is no reference to this ever having taken place. But cultural tradition, i.e. Christmas, perpetuates the cultural memory regardless of whether or not they are aware. “Religious rituals,” Assmann adds, “are without doubt the oldest and most fundamental medium of bonding memory.”⁸⁵

He later calls this bonding memory “connective memory” and states that it is “designed to stabilize a common identity and a point of view that spans several generations.”⁸⁶ He continually refers to the Torah as performing these functions for the Jews, a powerful text that is able to create collective, cultural, and bonding memories supported by historical places and

⁸⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁸¹ Ibid., 6-7.

⁸² Ibid., 7.

⁸³ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁴ See Ibid., 6-8.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 11.

people, cultural traditions, and binding rituals. This supports Assmann's understanding of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals*, where he states that "[m]an needs a memory in order to live in a community."⁸⁷ And depending on the current state of that community you may not only be expected to remember, but sometimes you will even be called upon to forget. For instance, discussing "religions founded upon revelation" Assmann states that they "seek to replace older traditions, which they reject as lies, paganism, superstitions, and ignorance."⁸⁸ Rejection of older memory in order to pave the way for the newly-designated "connective memory" was often achieved through the tradition of writing.

Assmann participates in a quite interesting discussion of written memory as the dissemination of knowledge and how it can interrupt collective, cultural, and bonding memories. Speaking about religious ritual, tradition, and traditional religions, Assmann states that "living, embodied memory and communication find their death in tradition, and living, embodied tradition finds its death in the normative written word."⁸⁹ Now, to clarify, he does not see all writing as the enemy of memory. Instead, Assmann describes two types of writing, an idea he borrowed from Aleida Assmann, where one is used as the "storage" of memory and the other he calls "authoritative publication."⁹⁰ The "storage" type can actually be seen to enhance and extend memory. Two prime examples of such work would be the Torah and Snorri's *Edda*, which recorded the memory about the old religion as it was passed down by the grandmothers. Snorri's *Edda* and the older *Poetic Edda* have become the only large-scale remaining sources of Norse Pagan memory to which all other artifacts and literary references must be compared. They have

⁸⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 56.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 63.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 66.

come to be indispensable sources of memory “storage” for scholars of Norse mythology and Germanic peoples. At the opposite end of the spectrum is the “authoritative publication.”

Authoritative publications often include written laws, religious canons, and royal decrees. The Torah can fall under this umbrella as well. Later I will demonstrate how *The Heliand* can also be included in this category. *The Heliand* was used by the Holy Roman Empire “in its efforts at pacification” of the recently defeated Pagan Saxons.⁹¹ Adding to writing as an instrument utilized by the powerful and/or the majority, Assmann states that “[w]riting supports the memory and the purview of early rulers who use it to achieve a hitherto unprecedented degree of insight and control.”⁹² They use such writing for the “establishment of a prospective memory directed toward the future.”⁹³ In the case of the Saxon Pagans, that future was to be a Christian one. *Beowulf* on the other hand is written under a different set of circumstances, one where the Danish Pagans were in the position of power over the Christians, so their religion and culture could not be as easily dismissed by writers in the English territory known as Danelaw. In that case, Christian poets had to remain inclusive toward Pagan sentiments and its end result was in harmony with the ideas set forth by Halbwach that collective memory is “a collective reconstruction” of group identity through its “past togetherness.”⁹⁴

This togetherness is not only limited to the past, but can be seen in the present between speaker and listener, as well as lasting into and informing future generations. As Assmann puts it, “[i]n writing, a memory that is no longer opportune can survive.”⁹⁵ He adds that “*cultural texts*

⁹¹ Ibid., 84.

⁹² Ibid., 85.

⁹³ Ibid., 85.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 93 and 94.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 99.

... possess a special normative and formative authority for a society as whole.”⁹⁶ Thus the “past is a social construction,” which may have originated as memory, but definitely became written and through that medium was passed down to future generations.⁹⁷

Therefore, regardless of historical accuracy, memory is a social construct which is passed down through an indefinite number of generations. It can be used collectively, as an inclusionary type of memory overarching various ethnicities, religions, and cultures. It can be used culturally as an exclusionary type of memory that only allows participation by certain specific ethnicities, religions, and cultures. And it all is bonding, which links or binds people together, no matter what their more immediate relationship entails, according to shared memories of important histories, ideologies, and traditions. Memory is not just the possession of an individual, it is the construction of a group that can be so powerful it causes people, as we saw in the case of Benjamin Wilkomirski, to truly embody and claim participation in a past which they in fact may have had no direct interaction with.

Wilkomirski’s story is the perfect axis upon which we may pivot to highlight an actual descendant of the Germanic people who coincidentally helped initiate the scholarly discussion of the epic genre. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel stated that the *Nibelungenlied* is no longer relevant for Germany, that “[t]he story of Christ, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Roman law, even the Trojan war have far more present reality for us than the affairs of the Nibelungs.”⁹⁸ The

⁹⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 170. Cf., however, also Jens Schröter, *From Jesus to the New Testament*, trans. W. Coppins. BMSEC 1 (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 98n17: “it is ... not advisable to speak of the construction of the *past*, but rather of the construction of *history*, through which we appropriate the past. This terminological differentiation expresses the epistemologically relevant insight that past and history are not simply identical with each other, but rather history represents a perspectival, selective relation to the past. On this cf. now the important comments of Goertz 2001, 37: ‘Also, the past is not constructed as if it otherwise would not exist; what is constructed is history.’”

⁹⁸ G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art, volume II*, trans. T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1057.

Nibelungenlied is an epic written in Middle High German around the year 1200 and is no doubt the Germanic equivalent of the Icelandic *Saga of the Volsungs*, also written in the thirteenth century. Both stories reveal an archetypal Germanic Pagan hero. Thanks to both the *Nibelungenlied* and *The Saga of the Volsungs*, along with certain archaeological findings, including the *Beowulf* manuscript, their story can be confirmed to have an origin predating the Christianization of northern Europe. Arguably the hero Beowulf is based on the *Volsungs'* Sigurd and the *Nibelungenlied's* Siegfried. Did the Christianized form of the Germanic hero Beowulf supplant the possibility of a Pagan hero carrying any relevance for a modern German such as Hegel?

Before that question can be answered, if at all, it is important for us to look at the discussion about epic that Hegel so heavily weighed in on. Scholars of the past have laid the foundations of formative arguments and as a place of departure Hegel's definition of "epic" in *Aesthetics*, his early lectures on Fine Art, is a relevant place to start. According to Hegel there are three "chief characteristics naturally belonging to epic."⁹⁹

The first characteristic is the "*General World-Situation*" upon which the epic is set.¹⁰⁰ In other words, the story within the epic must be placed in a particular time and place during a specific circumstance or situation. For instance, the Homeric epic *The Iliad* finds its storyline placed, mostly, at the walls of Troy during the Trojan War. In Hegel's mind epics tell the story of a specific event.

The second characteristic of epic according to Hegel is the "*Individual Epic Action*."¹⁰¹ For Hegel the "particular epic event can only be given vitality in poetry if it can be fused in the

⁹⁹ Ibid., 1051.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 1051.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 1062.

closest way with a single individual,” the epic hero.¹⁰² Hegel’s hero is the vehicle utilized by poets of epic to allow their audience to experience “action” and “events,” whereby the seeming dichotomy which challenges any and all authors, internal and external struggles, can be harmonized and expressed.¹⁰³ While expressing the ability of a specific individual journeying through the epic, facing internal and external actions and events, Hegel adds that an epic is not simply a biography of that individual. Therefore, while his second characteristic of epic is that it concerns an individual, it is not a biography of that individual. He goes on to add that “what rules in epic ... is fate.”¹⁰⁴ In Hegel’s mind the power of fate creates, determines, and decides the circumstances that this individual must face. Thus the “nation is concentrated in them into a living individual person and so they fight for the national enterprise to its end, and suffer the fate that the events entail.”¹⁰⁵ The hero carries the fate of a nation on their shoulders, such as Hector and Achilles in *The Iliad*. His second characteristic is a fatalistic view of a people, embodied by one individual who will fight, regardless of choice, and win or lose according to the will of fate.

Hegel’s third characteristic is a “*Fully Unified Whole*.”¹⁰⁶ Arguably added this characteristic in response to a contemporary discussion at the time of his writing, in the early nineteenth century. F.A. Wolf stated that epics could begin or end anywhere; future generations could add to or rewrite classic epics simply by picking up where a given epic left off or starting somewhere in the middle, the possibilities are endless.¹⁰⁷ Hegel was vehemently against such a position, and we may argue that his antagonism toward that stance is the reason he included this

¹⁰² Ibid., 1065.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 1063.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 1070.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 1068.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 1077.

¹⁰⁷ See F. A. Wolf, *Prolegomena Ad Homerum, Sive de Operum Homericorum Prisca et Genuina Forma Variisque Mutationibus et Probabili Ratione Emendandi*, Homeri Opera Omnia, Tomus 1 (Libraria Orphanotropei, 1795).

third characteristic. At the other end of the spectrum, Hegel presents the thesis that epic has a planned out beginning and ending with a perfectly linked chain which stretches between them as well as systematically linking them. There is no room for playing with the plot in Hegel's description of epic.

The three characteristics of epic as presented by Hegel truly narrow the genre to what he calls "epic proper."¹⁰⁸ Of course, what he includes in "epic proper" is limited only to the Homeric epic poetry. He criticizes numerous "imperfect sorts of epics which have an epic tone but are not complete epics because they do not present either the whole situation of a people or a concrete event within such a whole."¹⁰⁹ In his brief discussion of "imperfect" epics he classifies different subsets within the epic genre including oriental epics, classical (Greek, and Roman imitations) epics, and romantically-epic poetry, which may include religious epics such as the Old Testament.

Hegel's discussion of the epic genre, though imperfect, is still an excellent place to begin a discussion of the genre and of my understanding of what I will call the "formative epic." Considering Hegel a springboard, we will now discuss some more recent scholarship, chronologically, on the matter of the epic genre and examine how the characteristics of the genre have shifted and evolved, often to include new discoveries that help us to read the significance of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, which Hegel did not mention in his *Aesthetics*.

W. P. Ker's *Epic and Romance* sheds light on epics, and their social functions, in comparison to romance. According to Ker, *Beowulf* belongs "to German heathendom."¹¹⁰ He sees epic as "heroic" and suggests that it was replaced by romance in the same way, and at the same

¹⁰⁸ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1090.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 1050.

¹¹⁰ W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance: Essays on Medieval Literature* (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1957), 4.

time, that the English were defeated/replaced by the Normans. For Ker, the writing of romance, like *Gawain*, signals a change in world structures in which the elite are becoming more learned, sedentary, and displaced from the commoners, a society that has become complex in class terms, one in which the separation between rich and poor was greater than ever before.¹¹¹ This dissertation presents a parallel argument, namely that the writing of certain Germanic epics signals another massively influential societal change — from Germanic Heathendom¹¹² to Germanic Christendom.

Therefore this dissertation will present the epics of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* as representatives of what remains of Germanic Heathendom. Utilizing *Beowulf* as a window we will see what epic heroic poetry implies about the heroic age. Ker would say that it implies “an age of pride and courage, in which no extreme organisation of politics hinders the individual talent and its achievements, nor on the other hand too much isolation.”¹¹³ He adds that the poet “is bound to the past ... to tell the stories of the great men of his own race.”¹¹⁴ This is a problem for *The Heliand*, which tells a foreign story. In fact, Ker addresses exactly that same problem stating that *The Heliand* “makes what use it can of the native associations, but with whatever perseverance the author may try to bend his story into harmony with the laws of his own country, there is an untranslatable residue of foreign ideas.”¹¹⁵ By contrast, he suggested that the characters in *Beowulf* “are not distressed by any such unsolved contradiction as in the Saxon *Héliand*.”¹¹⁶

¹¹¹ See *Ibid.*, 4.

¹¹² As they are used throughout this dissertation, the words Heathen and Pagan are entirely interchangeable and are chosen solely based on stylistic circumstances.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

Paul Merchant presents epic in a much broader fashion. He positions his question about the genre of epic not by attempting to say what it is, but by asking “what is it that these [*Iliad*, *The Prelude*, and *War and Peace*] and other epics have in common?”¹¹⁷ One answer he suggests is that which Ezra Pound wrote in his *ABC of Reading*: “[a]n epic is a poem including history.”¹¹⁸ While the answer given by Pound is simple, it is more complex than it may seem. First it must be a poem and second it must include history. Whose history? The author’s? The audience’s? There is room for interpretations of Pound’s description of epic which demonstrate it as inclusive, or open to any audience and histories which may not be their own. I think you can suggest here that the epic writer or poet is shaping a version of history — doing an interpretation. In other words, history is not neutral. Merchant argues that epic has been understood as “long narrative poems ... concentrating either on a hero ... or on a civilization.”¹¹⁹ Homer’s work would be an example of the first, and Vergil’s *Aeneid* would exemplify the second.¹²⁰ The genre, as generally understood, is concerned with the heroic.¹²¹ Yet, as Merchant argues, the epic poet and poem have a double relation — to history, on the one hand, and to everyday reality on the other. Building on this concept of relationship he discusses certain tools that are utilized by poets to bring history into the everyday.

Merchant, expanding on the work of Parry and Lord, discusses the poetic form as a formulaic one. In particular he discusses the formulae used by poets, bards, and shapers of oral cultures to memorize, recite, and perform the epic tales of their own histories. To add weight to

¹¹⁷ Paul Merchant, *The Epic* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1971), 1.

¹¹⁸ Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading*. (New York: J. Laughlin, 1960), 46.

¹¹⁹ Merchant, *The Epic*, vii.

¹²⁰ See *Ibid.*, vii.

¹²¹ See Merchant, *The Epic* and Robert Auty, *Traditions of Heroic and Epic Poetry*, Vol. 1 (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1980).

his point he cites specific passages from *The Odyssey* and *Beowulf* where readers get to see first hand, imaginatively at least, the poet of each respective oral culture at work.¹²² Artfully building on the foundation laid by Pound, Merchant continues to document the poetic history of epic, tracing the genre's roots into historical places and peoples who used the poetic form to better remember and recite the histories of their heroes. He goes on to add that the function of poetry, beyond that of memorization, is one where the "precision of its descriptions" can be quite elucidating while yet remaining brief and accurate.¹²³ In his words, epics have "great themes with simple frameworks" and because of that, something as complex as the fall of a civilization, which they often detail, can be artfully described in a few words, easily remembered by a trained poet.

The concept of a trained poet brings us to another point of Merchant's, which he himself does not spotlight, but instead points his readers in the direction of, allowing them to come to their own conclusions. Speaking in reference to Virgil's *Aeneid*, Merchant describes it as a "commissioned epic" written by a poet under contractual obligation to tell a chosen story.¹²⁴ The concept of commissioning entails a guaranteed payment upon completion, something most authors and poets will only dream about and which only the wealthiest patrons can promise. This brings us back to my earlier question of whose history? Potentially an epic can be a commissioned history, paid for by the wealthiest and most powerful people in that day. While I may not choose to be so controversial as to state that a defining characteristic of epic is commissioning, I do want to highlight the fact that some epics are commissioned — *The Heliand* is one, and I will present evidence that *Beowulf* may have been another.

¹²² See *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

The Heliand as a commissioned epic echoes Merchant's discussion of the *Aeneid* as a commissioned epic. He describes the great theme of falling civilizations by stating that in the *Aeneid* "[t]he fall of one civilization is paralleled in the poem by the rise of another."¹²⁵ While *The Heliand* makes no direct mention of any fallen civilization, its historical context is one in which an invading empire [Christian Carolingian Franks] conquers a smaller territory [Saxon Pagans] and commissions a new epic [*The Heliand*] to be written and presented to them [the Saxon Pagans] as their own poetic Christian history. Conquerors presenting their conquered with a new version of history is not new and corroborates René Le Bossu's discussion of epic. In his *Traité du Poème Epique*, Le Bossu describes epic as having a social and didactic purpose.¹²⁶ This is a particularly important insight, to which we shall return.

Merchant believes that new mediums such as movies [*Ben Hur*, *The Ten Commandments*, *Gone With The Wind*, etc.], novels [*Ulysses*, *Moby Dick*, etc.], and theater undertake new and innovative works of art that should be classified as epic. While Hegel would dismiss this idea, we must consider Merchant's statement in the final words of *The Epic*, "[t]he word 'epic' will perhaps never quite be defined; we began with formal hexameter poems and end with collage. The element which all these works have in common is a kind of expansiveness, the ability to open up."¹²⁷

Paul Innes would delightfully receive the idea of "the ability to open up." In *Epic*, Innes sees epics first and foremost as communal activities used for "cultural identity."¹²⁸ One of his most notable understandings of the genre is that it can be "considered to be a function rather than

¹²⁵ Ibid., 24.

¹²⁶ See René Le Bossu, *Traité du Poème Epique* (France: A Pralard, 1693).

¹²⁷ Merchant, *The Epic*, 93.

¹²⁸ Paul Innes, *Epic* (London: Routledge, 2013), 8.

a form.”¹²⁹ Using the lens of Modernity, Innes states that “As a sense of shared cultural identity begins to emerge, communal activities such as the production of epic can later be appropriated for nationalistic purposes.”¹³⁰ He adds that “[a] community can attempt to redefine itself in relation to the myths and legends of its own past through the medium of the epic.”¹³¹ As a case study he states that “it is possible to read the *Tora (Pentateuch)* as performing the same function for the Hebrews.”¹³² While I agree with Innes in some respects, I would argue that his scope is ultimately too limited and ignores the historical context. He negates the concept presented by Le Busso that recognizes the epic’s function as creating “shared cultural identity” in the past, at the time of its composition. We may assume that each epic had a purpose in its own day, and Innes’ understanding seems to rip it from its own past and appropriate it only for the needs of the modern world. Le Busso is right that in its own day it was social and didactic, whereas Innes is correct in pointing out that in the modern day it can become nationalistic as well.

That being said, Innes points to the work of Michael H. Barnes, who may best sum up what can be defined as epic: “[a]midst all the variation and innovation, we must recognize in the end that the meaning of epic is, finally, whatever the culture in which it is embedded decides that it is.”¹³³ At the end of the day, maybe epic is simply something which people can agree is an epic. That may be the case, but as Arshia Sattar suggests “[w]e must try and remember as we translate epics and traditional story literature that even at their times of composition, these were not obscure texts meant for scholarly elites. They were living, vibrant and were composed in a

¹²⁹ Ibid., 20.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹³¹ Ibid., 8.

¹³² Ibid., 9.

¹³³ Ibid., 55.

language accessible to all kinds of people.”¹³⁴ Recognizing that epics are “composed in a language accessible to all kinds of people” and that the idea and discussion of genre is composed of “scholarly elites” we must return our focus to the people of ninth-century Saxony and tenth-century Danelaw. These were the people who were presented with, or enjoyed the performances of, *The Heliand* and *Beowulf* respectively.

In a similar way, people in the modern era are enjoying narratives that by the strictest and most classical definition would not even be defined as epics. A very recent compilation of essays titled *Epic Performances from the Middle Ages into the Twenty-First Century* highlights this point extremely well.¹³⁵ This book covers topics ranging from epic in cinema, contemporary choreography, opera, and burlesque to name a few.¹³⁶ We have seen how the definition of epic has come from the most stern definitions as defined by Hegel and his contemporaries to ever more inclusive definitions as the scholarly conversation continues into the twenty-first century.

The debate about epic genre as it has developed has paved the way for a better reception of my suggested subcategory — formative epics. As we previously mentioned, this dissertation contends that *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* are formative epics. The definition and defining characteristics of formative epic set forth here is one that can be expanded upon.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 65. Arshia Sattar, trans. *Valmiki's Ramayana: Abridged Edition* (Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), xii.

¹³⁵ Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell, Stephen Harrison, and Claire Kenward, eds. *Epic Performances from the Middle Ages into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹³⁶ See for instance Pantelis Michelakis “The Future of Epic in Cinema: Tropes of Reproduction in Ridley Scott’s *Prometheus*”; Arabella Stanger “Choreographing Epic: The Ocean as Epic “Time-Space” in Homer, Joyce, and Cunningham”; Margaret Reynolds ““Of the rage, sing Goddess’: Epic Opera”; Rachel Bryant Davies “Fish, Firemen, and Prize Fighters: The Transformation of the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* on the London Burlesque Stage,” in *Epic Performances from the Middle Ages into the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Fiona Macintosh, Justine McConnell, Stephen Harrison, and Claire Kenward. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

First let us address the second word in this descriptive phrase: “epic.” While I do not wish to suggest a static definition of the genre, *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* fit relatively well into a more traditional understanding of it. They are lengthy poems, written in the oral tradition, containing both history and heroes. As expansive as the definition of epic has become, it seems unlikely that any modern scholar could deny *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* entry into the genre after accepting the previous four characteristics (lengthy poem, oral tradition, history, and hero) of each work. Therefore what is of greater importance for this discussion is the word “formative.”

The word “formative” is used here to mean a story, memory, or epic that is intended to “inform” and “shape” a specific population. The informers themselves could be members of that population or they could be outsiders. It may also be more complicated than a simple insider/outsider dichotomy. The author may be a geographic and ethnic insider, but an economic or ideological outsider. This problem of audience and author will need to be worked out on a case by case basis according to each scholar and their epic of choice. For our purposes we have conveniently narrowed the discussion down to two epics, each with different sets of circumstances.

The Heliand, whose origins we know more about and will discuss at length in the following chapters, does exhibit a fairly simple insider/outsider relationship between the audience and the author. The audience was a group of Saxon Pagans (located in modern day northern Germany) and its author was a Christian, most likely Anglo-Saxon. The text was used to “inform” the Pagan audience about the Christian story. (The specific contents of that story and how it “informed” its audience will be discussed here in detail in chapters two and three.) Its importance for our immediate purpose is to recognize that the Christian story was not yet known

by the Saxon Pagans, at least not to any great extent. The author's extensive knowledge of the story and its sources in the Christian Gospels is confirmation that he or she was not a Pagan. There is good cause, as we will see, to believe that the author was an Anglo-Saxon and was not a Saxon. Therefore, in the case of *The Heliand*, the author was neither geographically nor ideologically a Saxon Pagan, but an outsider writing a foreign story in a way that the Saxon Pagan insiders could understand it and be informed by it. These Pagans, as will be demonstrated, had no choice but to become Christians, and the process by which they were assimilated took many forms. One form was the traditional oral epic, which was utilized to spread the Christian story and inform a Pagan population about their new god and his life's adventures.

After years, even generations, of continued instruction and participation in this new Christian ideology, the region known as Saxony was entirely Christianized. Here we will see the next phase of what is meant by "formative." Formative epics do not solely "inform" a population about a given topic, they actually "form" or "shape" that population's collective identity. In the case of the Saxons we see how *The Heliand* was one tool used in a larger process of acculturation which not only "informed" the Pagans about the Christian story but also "formed" them into Christians. Hence the need for a new discussion in the category of epic. There are epics with propagandistic and didactic intentions which "inform" collective memories and actually "form" collective identities. They may come in all shapes and sizes and have been used knowingly and unknowingly at many points in human history, but I do not wish to limit their understanding. Formative epics have played a role in the development of human civilization and deserve to be studied in such a way as to highlight their intentions, outcomes, and repercussions.

I would argue that epics like *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* are formative epics with four particular characteristics. First, they signal a cultural shift. Doing so, these epics consciously re-interpret the culture story of the conquered people through a new cultural story and/or ideology. Second, doing so, formative epics reinterpret key figures, important symbols, and cultural events in a dialectical mode, knitting the culture's collective memory to the new cultural story in order either to create a hybrid or to destroy the original cultural myth. This process de-stories the cultural myth, re-storying it as familiar but new, as it retains familiar elements of the culture being colonized even as it changes them. Third, such epics are "formative" as they are a conversion tool, a form of evangelization, on the large scale. They may act for the conversion of individuals but also — and more strategically — as formative epics that change collective memory. As such, formative epic is a form of propaganda. Fourth, they reorganize daily life for the individual and open new cultural understandings for the group as a whole. In these changed patterns of thinking, the new, dominant culture is always present. Its persuasiveness is ongoing as it embeds in the consciousness and changes how cultural memory is told, narrated, remembered, and passed on. It creates, as Clifford Geertz argues, new symbol systems on which a culture's religion is based. Geertz argues that

a *religion* is: (1) religion is a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ed. Michael Banton (London: Tavistock, 1966), 4.

As we will see, this process benefited the noble classes first and most importantly. However, as Fouracre will argue, formative epic functions to build an empire upon a “dual process of conquest and acculturation.”¹³⁸

How does epic, as a genre, become “formative”? The elements of formulaic repetition that influence collective memory and the relationship between identity, literature, and history all make epic an ideal vehicle for conquest and acculturation.

The origins and intentions of *Beowulf* have been heavily debated since the publication of its first transcription in 1815 by Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin. When its origins and intentions are studied alongside *The Heliand*, as it will be here, the poem’s nature as a formative epic becomes strikingly apparent. Its historical author and audience are more complex than that of *The Heliand*, but some generalizations can be made. It was written around the year 1000 in the traditional oral style. Its author was most likely an Anglo-Saxon Christian, who knew much about the Danish and Scandinavian culture, history, and memory. The audience was made up of numerous ethnicities, mostly under the umbrella of Germanic. They too knew of the Danish and Scandinavian religion and culture. It seems they also knew something about Christianity and the practices of Christians. Subtly, *Beowulf* seems to favor the Christian god, but does not entirely reject the Pagan cosmos. It also admires heroes whose tendencies seem to demonstrate participation in both Christian and Pagan religious cultures. It is apparent that the author was trying to “inform” the audience about the futility of Paganism and the need to adopt Christianity as well as a new social structure — with only one king in England.

¹³⁸ Paul Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000), 177.

Coincidentally or not, within a century England had its first sole English Christian king. One glance at England's history since 1000 does reveal a complex society, with a collective identity, a reverence for their Pagan past, and loyalty to a sole monarchy. Of course many factors participated in this development, but the argument for *Beowulf* as being intended to assist in these developments is strong. In Chapters Four and Five we will look at evidence that supports the claim that *Beowulf* was a formative epic, participating in the "formation" of its audience's collective Christian identity. Enough cannot be said about the power of the oral epic to disseminate knowledge in the early medieval period. Consequently, one must acknowledge the power wielded by those who were able to create, memorize, and perform these epics. The performed stories and the information they spread demonstrate how in the past, just as in the present, an extremely small portion of the population can have a profound and lasting impact on society as a whole. Individual and collective identities can and have been shaped, formed, and informed. As I will demonstrate, the formative epic has been a powerful tool at moments in history and, as in the case of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, has produced lasting results.

Beowulf and *The Heliand* were formative epics, intended to play a supplemental role as instruments of "ideological persuasion." They were written in traditional oral epic style to make memorization easier. Through memory and performance they were then spread to disseminate foreign religious ideologies and to erase indigenous identities. While they were not the only instruments of persuasion, they were participants in a successful endeavor. So successful was the conversion of Europe that Christianity, a Middle Eastern religion, has come to be categorized as Western by the descendants of those who once heard these epics traditionally performed and would have at that time seen as foreign. We now see modern Westerners, who, similar to Hegel,

state that Germanic Paganism and the stories associated with it are irrelevant to their population.

Instead, the Christian Gospels tell a story which they believe binds them collectively.

CHAPTER 2

THE HELIAND: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

“History is but a fable agreed upon.”

—Helvetius¹³⁹

The context of *The Heliand* was early ninth-century Saxony, roughly the equivalent of modern day northern Germany. It was a land recently defeated by the Franks after nearly 100 years of fighting. Once they had taken hold of the land, the Franks forced the Saxons to renounce their Norse Paganism and to accept Carolingian Christianity. This historical process has been presented, by some, as an easy, even miraculous undertaking spearheaded in the early eighth century by the Christian missionary Boniface (672-754), the “Apostle to the Germans.” An article written by Steve Weidenkopf for *Catholic Answers*, a media ministry sanctioned by the Diocese of San Diego is indicative of one such agreed upon fable. His article, titled “St. Boniface and the Christmas Tree,” tells how Boniface’s actions in the early 720s not only converted the German Saxons, but also set a precedent for the Christian Christmas Tree. In it Weidenkopf states that “Boniface knew that in winter the inhabitants of the village of Geismar gathered around a huge old oak tree (known as the “Thunder Oak”) dedicated to the god Thor” and that “[t]his annual event of worship centered on sacrificing a human, usually a small child.”¹⁴⁰ According to Weidenkopf, Boniface arrived just in time to prevent the sacrifice from taking

¹³⁹ “l’histoire n’est qu’une fable convenue” - Claude Adrien Helvetius, “De L’Esprit” (1758).

¹⁴⁰ Steve Weidenkopf, “St. Boniface and the Christmas Tree,” *Catholic Answers*, June 5, 2014, <https://www.catholic.com/magazine/online-edition/st-boniface-and-the-christmas-tree>.

place.¹⁴¹ Continuing the tale he writes, “Boniface grabbed an axe and chopped down the Thunder Oak of mighty Thor. The Germans were astounded. The holy bishop preached the Gospel to the people and used a little fir tree that was behind the now felled oak tree as a tool of evangelization.”¹⁴² Finally, the Saxons in awe of Boniface accepted his message and voluntarily underwent a Christian baptism.¹⁴³

That is the fable of the Saxon conversion. According to this idealized picture it took one tree-felling and one sermon. What is left out is the next eighty years of Saxon resistance, culminating in the complete destruction of their land, their religion, and their freedom. Richard Fletcher described the conquest as “the first time in Christian history a state-sponsored mission used the faith quite unashamedly as an instrument for the subjugation of a conquered people.”¹⁴⁴ Following his long fight for victory over the Saxons and his subsequent crowning in Rome by Pope Leo III (750-816) on Christmas day in the year 800, the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne returned to subjugate the Saxons. One means by which this was achieved is recorded in a legal document referred to as *Leges Saxonum*. The eighth law read as follows:

*Si quis deinceps in gente Saxonorum inter eos latens non baptizatus se abscondere voluerit et ad baptismum venire contempserit paganusque permanere voluerit, morte moriatur.*¹⁴⁵

If anyone afterwards in the nation of the Saxons hidden among them not baptized wishes to conceal themselves and despises to come to baptism and wishes to remain a Pagan, he shall be put to death.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Richard Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion: From Paganism to Christianity* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997), 195. For further discussion of Charlemagne’s linking of the spiritual and military life see also Janet L. Nelson, “Religion in the Age of Charlemagne,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 496-8.

¹⁴⁵ Claudius Freiherr von Scwerin, ed., *Leges Saxonum und Lex Thuringorum* (Lexington: Leopold Classic Library, 2016), 38-9.

The Saxons were required, under penalty of death, to become Catholic. Even in the eighth century, the Catholic Church avoided telling that fact and shared only a story which became the basis for the one Weidenkopf published with the support of the modern Catholic Church. Willibald (700-787), the author of the *Vita Sancti Bonifatii* (Life of Saint Boniface), wrote a contemporary narrative of the events of that day. He stated that “the saint attempted, in the place called Gaesmere, while the servants of God stood by his side, to fell a certain oak of extraordinary size.”¹⁴⁶ At the time “there was present a great multitude of pagans, who in their souls were most earnestly cursing the enemy of their gods.”¹⁴⁷ Boniface cut into the oak and felled the tree with the assistance of a divine wind.¹⁴⁸ Then the great tree miraculously burst into four equal parts.¹⁴⁹ Willibald goes on to say that those Pagans then instantly believed in the Christian god and that Boniface then “built from the timber of the tree a wooden oratory, and dedicated it in honor of Saint Peter the apostle.”¹⁵⁰

At first glance, Weidenkopf’s tale seems true to Willibald, but one must look more closely. Willibald never mentioned a human sacrifice, or any kind of sacrifice for that matter. Willibald does mention that “servants of God stood by his side,” but avoids explaining who these servants are. One might speculate that these were soldiers of Charles Martel (? -741), the leader of the Franks, whose court Boniface had just left. It was customary for medieval bishops and missionaries to be accompanied by armed entourages.¹⁵¹ Boniface invaded a foreign country with a foreign escort and desecrated a sacred space where no sacrifice of any kind was taking place.

¹⁴⁶ Willibald, *The Life of Saint Boniface by Willibald*, trans. George W. Robinson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1916), 63.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁴⁸ See *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁴⁹ See *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁵¹ See Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 189-92.

This is simply the beginning of one of Europe's most horrific stories of Christian conversion and one must dig deep into the literary archaeology in order to dispel the fable, understand the historical context of *The Heliand*, and recognize its true purpose.

The Heliand's context begins a century after the actions of Boniface and was recorded by the contemporary ninth-century historian Einhard who wrote that “[n]o war ever undertaken by the Frank nation was carried on with such persistence and bitterness, or cost so much labor” as the one Charlemagne fought for 33 years (772-804) against the Saxons.¹⁵² Having learned from the historical encounter that the Romans had with the Germans in the first century, Charlemagne was not satisfied with just winning the war against the Saxons, he was determined to erase their entire way of life.¹⁵³ The Romans had marched Legions XVII, XVIII, and XIX into the Teutoburg Forest in 9 CE. They were totally annihilated and their embarrassment was so great that the Legion numbers XVII and XIX were never again used by the Romans. The Germanic barbarians were so fierce that they were left alone and paid, first by the Romans and second by the Merovingians, to destroy any eastern invaders. As the Roman historian Tacitus describes it, the Romans did not dare enter their forests, but held them in “honoured status ... [e]xempt from burdens and special contributions, and set apart exclusively for use in battle, they are reserved like spears and other weapons as instruments of war.”¹⁵⁴ Charles Martel and his grandson Charlemagne, however, were not Romans. They were Germans, born along the Rhine and willing to spend their resources in return for taking those of the Saxons. In Saxony there was a

¹⁵² Einhard, *The Life of Charlemagne*, trans. Sidney Painter (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 30.

¹⁵³ For more on the ferocity of the Saxons from the perspective of their enemies see Robert Flierman, *Saxon Identities, AD 150-900*. Studies in Early Medieval History. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.

¹⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Agricola and Germany*, trans. A.R. Birley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

vast expanse of untouched natural resources.¹⁵⁵ The Frankish nobles joined the Carolingian dynasty and their march east in search of new lands.

In *The Age of Charles Martel*, Paul Fouracre points out that, compared to their many enemies, the Saxons had proven themselves to be the most resilient and resistant.¹⁵⁶ As Fouracre explains it, Saxony “presented a strong contrast with Francia in terms of its religion and social organization, the one pagan and decentralised, the other Christian and with a single leader.”¹⁵⁷ By highlighting Saxon relations with Thuringians and Boructuarii and the success of the Anglo-Saxon language in England (despite its earliest use by a substantial minority) Fouracre demonstrates that the Saxons wielded a powerful fighting force and a resilient culture that was willingly adopted by those they conquered. In fact, many Thuringians chose Saxon rule and Paganism over Frankish Christianity when oppressed by the Heden¹⁵⁸ family.¹⁵⁹ In other words, the Saxons and their Paganism cared little for aristocratic authority and had the strength to back up their disdain. The Saxons in the time of Charlemagne were seemingly one and the same and would not accept foreign, Christian rule. Peace through paperwork was not an option. Earlier, by the “end of the seventh century the Saxons were continuing to expand, and would continue to press against Frankish territory until Charlemagne put in hand a systematic Frankish conquest of Saxony.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ For more on the financial motivation to conquer Saxony see Heiko Steuer, “The Beginnings of Urban Economies among the Saxons,” in *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, eds. Dennis H. Green and Frank Siegmund (San Marino: Boydell Press, 2003), 159.

¹⁵⁶ See Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, 117.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁵⁸ The Hedens were Christian nobles under the Merovingians.

¹⁵⁹ See Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, 117.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

Providing a short background on the Frankish territory, Fouracre describes the process of how nobility on the fringes of the Roman Empire maintained their wealth and authority despite Rome's collapse. He highlights how the Franks, a West Germanic people, first fought with the Romans in the third century and eventually gained control over north-east Gaul.¹⁶¹ After Rome's collapse, the Franks expanded their control south and west and "did little to disturb the power and privileges of the Gallo-Roman ruling elite" who "had secured their status through the control of land ... public offices ... and leading positions in the Catholic Church."¹⁶² In this way, the Roman bureaucratic traditions survived the fall of the Roman Empire and spread to other regions where monasteries were built and began to expand their influence in the eighth century.¹⁶³

A prime example of a newly-founded monastery bringing Roman institutions into foreign territories is well documented at the Abbey Fulda. After its founding by Boniface in 744, within the Saxon lands of modern Hesse, the monastery itself and local nobility began to document their property ownership and transactions through the use of charters, a legal genre, which originated in late Roman bureaucratic tradition.¹⁶⁴ Twenty years earlier Hesse did not exist. Instead, it was where Boniface cut down the tree sacred to Thor and used its boards to build St. Peter's church. The church stood as a symbol of the destruction of Saxon culture and the invasion of the Frankish theocratic regime. As H.R. Ellis Davidson explains, the cult of Thor "attracted those accustomed to make their own decisions and resentful of too much authority from above."¹⁶⁵ A

¹⁶¹ See *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 17 and 18.

¹⁶³ See *Ibid.*, 100-101. See also Giorgio Ausenda, "Jural Relations among the Saxons Before and After Christianization," in *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, eds. Dennis H. Green and Frank Siegmund (San Marino: Boydell Press, 2003).

¹⁶⁴ See *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁶⁵ H.R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 89.

symbol of such personal autonomy was not permitted by the Benedictine Christianity spreading under the Carolingian Dynasty.

The success at Fulda for the Franks served as proper motivation for the continued investment in Christian expansion through the founding and funding of missionary monasteries.¹⁶⁶ Through continued patronage of such monasteries, the Carolingians sponsored a church reform which catered to the preferences of rulers.¹⁶⁷ It is possible to see how they were able to wield such authority over the church when noting that churches were less organized in these areas and were subservient to Frankish nobles.¹⁶⁸ Fouracre terms this process “Frankification” and adds that it “was most dramatic, and traumatic, in Saxony ... where a fledgling Saxon nobility sheltered behind Frankish arms” violently subdued the local population and reorganized landholdings around the newly founded churches.¹⁶⁹

The foundation of these churches and monasteries spread the use of charters and private property throughout Saxony, accompanying an expansion of the church and a strengthening of local aristocratic authority.¹⁷⁰ It is no wonder that missionaries were welcomed by local nobility, and in particular, the Carolingians. As Patrick Geary points out “through their support of the missionary bishop, the Carolingians had gained control of a well-disciplined, effective instrument of central control.”¹⁷¹ Carolingian support for missionary efforts was a highly successful political strategy that gained them the support of the papacy. The papacy had

¹⁶⁶ For more on the motivation to invest in monastic development see Wendy Davies, “Monastic Landscapes and Society,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 133-6.

¹⁶⁷ See Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, 25.

¹⁶⁸ See *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁷⁰ See *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁷¹ Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 217.

previously backed the authority of Merovingian kings, and later replaced them, crowning the Carolingian emperors. The desire to convert their conquered lands was due to the need for solidarity between the Franks and the Saxons, and religion — here, the Christian god and monotheism — centralized and concentrated belief and practice. French sociologist Emile Durkheim claims that in order for there to be “bonds uniting them to one another, no matter what clan they belonged to” there needed to be “the conception of a supreme god, common to the tribe as a whole.”¹⁷² Even critics agree that religion is a powerful force of cultural unification. Joachim Wach, in *Sociology of Religion*, writes that “[t]here is no doubt that religion has proved itself to be one of the most effective and potent unifying forces in the life of all types of states.”¹⁷³ Theoretically, human beings are more likely to coexist peacefully, regardless of background, when they share religious and cultural aspects such as the same supreme deity. While it is only a theory that the Carolingians and their aristocratic and monastic allies believed Christianity could unite the Saxons and the Franks, it is a useful theory to consider.¹⁷⁴

Nevertheless, in order for the new European monasteries to succeed, for Roman Catholicism to grow, and for the noble class to reap all of the potential benefits that came with this, the Saxons had to be Christianized. For if the Saxons did not respect the authority of the monastic system, their continued uprisings would eventually destroy the newly-established definition of property and bankrupt the already struggling dynasty. The dynasty’s wealth came from land, estates, and slave/tenant workers on those estates. The estates were gifted from the king or emperor to their wealthy supporters, respected warriors, and the Church. Often the land

¹⁷² Emile Durkheim, “The Social as Sacred,” in *Introducing Religion*, edited by Daniel L. Pals (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124.

¹⁷³ Wach, *Sociology of Religion*, 290.

¹⁷⁴ For recent scholarship that has suggested as much see Sverre Bagge, “Christianizing Kingdoms,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 117.

was held in perpetuity by the Church, the wealthy families became patrons of that local church and/or monastery, and warriors were allowed estates on that land with the expectation that they would maintain order. For the upper class Franks to protect their wealth and power, Christianity had to succeed. As Fouracre elaborates “conversion marks the extension of core culture to the periphery” and was crucial to the integration of these regions into the Frankish kingdom.¹⁷⁵ The Frankish empire was built upon a “dual process of conquest and acculturation.”¹⁷⁶ The Franks had mastered the conquest, but the missionaries and monasteries surpassed them in the art of acculturation. The Carolingian Franks leaned on Anglo-Saxon missionaries to begin the Christianization and “cultural transformation” of the Germanic Saxons “beginning with the adoption of some outward signs of Christianity alongside existing ‘pagan’ customs.”¹⁷⁷

One such endeavor undertaken by the Anglo-Saxon missionaries was the composition of *The Heliand*, which is a commissioned text with didactic purposes. It is an epic-length poem written in the oral tradition. Plato distrusted the poets, for he thought art could be used to “manipulate audiences.”¹⁷⁸ In fact, in this instance, we know that *The Heliand* was written for just that purpose. As we have explained, its audience, the ninth-century Saxon Pagans, in what is now northern Germany, were recently conquered by their western neighbors, the Christian Carolingian Franks, under the leadership of Charlemagne. A priority for the Franks, under the terms of the surrender, was that the Saxons become Christian. Many of them were baptized en masse in chains. Those who resisted were killed. The rest were governed by the newly established Holy Roman Empire. Recognizing that forced baptisms needed follow up

¹⁷⁵ Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, 179.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 38.

catechetical instruction Charlemagne's son, Louis the Pious, commissioned *The Heliand* in the 830s.

The Heliand is a retelling of the Christian Gospels in one narrative in Old Saxon poetic half-lines. This type of poetry was used by Anglo-Saxon monks as an oral formulaic genre for performative purposes. Anglo-Saxon monks were housed in the Abbey Fulda, under the patronage of Louis, where *The Heliand* is believed to have been written. It was a performative piece used during mead-hall celebrations for the new Saxon nobility that had submitted to the yoke of the Franks. As we previously mentioned, submission required conversion and the abandonment of their older Pagan faith. *The Heliand* was used didactically to teach the new Christian myth.

The text itself tells the story of the Christian myth, but its purpose was formative by nature. From the perspective of memory studies, it would be what Jan Assmann calls a formative text, transmitting knowledge which shapes and secures identity.¹⁷⁹ In the Durkheimian sense, it intended to form a Christian identity that would submit more easily to the rule of the Franks and the Holy Roman Empire. Of course, the Franks probably thought they were just doing justice to their faith as well as to their alliance with Rome. They may not have been thinking in terms of Durkheim's "whole," but after generations of Christian conditioning their plan was successful. The Saxons were thoroughly acculturated and even proceeded to invade, conquer, and convert the Slavs, their eastern neighbor, during the twelfth century papal-approved Teutonic Crusade, in just the same manner that their ancestors had received the faith. What is alarming, but will not be

¹⁷⁹ See Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 104.

discussed in much depth here, is the level of antisemitism¹⁸⁰ that pervades the text of *The Heliand*.¹⁸¹ Confirmation of the antisemitism can be noted by the fact that it was used by German scholars during the Nazi years to help create the image of an Aryan Jesus at odds with the Jewish people.¹⁸² Is it possible that the formed identity given to the defeated Saxons played a part in contributing to the horrific developments that led to the Holocaust?

What is certain is that it played a part in the “re-storying” of the Saxon Pagans. Carolyn Jones Medine, using the work of Walter Davis, has developed a concept in the field of memory studies that consists of the “de-storying” and “re-storying” of a people.¹⁸³ She uses this concept in African American Studies but has recognized its application for the case of the Saxon Pagans. It is a brilliant word play on destroy and restore. In essence, the cultural memory was destroyed or “de-storied” by the conquering Franks. And it was restored, or at least there was an attempt to do so, by way of “re-storying” their memory to support the collective identity of a Christian community. Their new collective memory was forced upon them, and influences Church and German history to this day. *The Heliand* was used as a cultural text of didactic literature, a formative epic, with “universal normative and formative authority.”¹⁸⁴

The audience of *The Heliand* can be defined through the study of history as a new Saxon aristocracy who, after defeat, submitted to the authority of the Franks and their Christianity. They would have gathered at monasteries and palaces for mead-hall-like celebrations where their

¹⁸⁰ I have decided on this spelling based on the request made by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). See https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/sites/default/files/memo-on-spelling-of-antisemitism_final-1.pdf

¹⁸¹ There are certain antisemitic tones in the New Testament, but arguably, in *The Heliand* they are more pronounced.

¹⁸² See Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 27.

¹⁸³ Carolyn Jones Medine, Unpublished, 2015. Used with permission from the author. Walter T. Davis, *Shattered Dream: America's Search for Its Soul* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, International, 1994).

¹⁸⁴ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 113.

shapers, performative poets, would have recited works such as *The Heliand* in place of their earlier heroic legends and religious myths of their Pagan past. It would also have been used as entertainment among clerics and monks, in private religious feasts, for enjoyment and instruction. It informed the Christianity of those who were tasked with the job of teaching it. Our primary focus here is an audience that was only nominally Christian: i.e., a Saxon aristocracy that submitted, but not often by choice. In fact, to study the Christianization of Europe is to study the conversion of the European aristocracy. Unlike the missionary work of the apostles, early Christian missions in Europe focused almost exclusively on the aristocratic class.

The Christian mission since the beginning (i.e. the apostles), has always been to spread the teachings of the gospel, to spread over geographic spaces, and to spread/grow in numbers. Jesus, in what is called The Great Commission (Matthew 28:19) sends his disciples to convert and baptize “all nations.” Throughout history, many Christians have believed that, according to their scriptures, Jesus, their god and founder, instructed them to do so. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus is said to have sent “them out two by two, and gave them authority over unclean spirits.”¹⁸⁵ In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus “sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go ... like lambs into the midst of wolves.”¹⁸⁶ He admonished them saying, “[c]arry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road,” but while staying in friendly houses they should eat and drink “whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid.”¹⁸⁷ The Catholic Church, claiming a continuous tradition to and through the apostles one might expect them to have only sent out missionaries peacefully, without possessions, and accepting

¹⁸⁵ Mark 6:7 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

¹⁸⁶ Luke 10:1 and 3 (NRSV).

¹⁸⁷ Luke 10:4 and 7 (NRSV).

the payment of food and drink only. I highlight this out only because it is a nice point to compare the behaviors of some early medieval European missionaries.

The European mission can be argued to have begun under the papal administration of Gregory I (540-604), from 590 to 604. In 596 Gregory sent Augustine of Canterbury (?-604) to begin the formal mission of converting the Anglo-Saxons of Britain. The endeavor has come to be known as the Gregorian mission. Britain, or at least most of the areas controlled by the Roman Empire during the late fourth and early fifth centuries had converted, at least nominally, to the Catholic faith. After the conquest and settlement of the Anglo-Saxons, a conglomeration of Angles, from what is now central Denmark, Saxons, from what is now northern Germany, and Jutes, from what is now Denmark and southern Sweden, the Catholic faith was seemingly forgotten. Gregory sent Augustine with the mission to revive the Christian faith in Britain, to convert the Anglo-Saxons, and to reinvigorate the Britons.

Thanks to Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* we have certain insights into how they undertook the mission. A letter sent to a priest named Mellitus embodies the tactics of accommodation and appropriation utilized by the Gregorian mission. An especially relevant segment of the letter states:

the temples of the idols in that nation ought not be destroyed; but let the idols that are in them be destroyed; let holy water be made and sprinkled in the said temples, let altars be erected and relics placed ... seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may remove error from their hearts, and knowing and adoring the true God, may the more familiarly resort to the places to which they have been accustomed ... they may build themselves huts of the boughs of trees, about those churches which have been turned to that use from temples ... kill cattle to the praise of God ... whilst some gratifications are outwardly permitted them, they may the more easily consent to the inward consolations of the Grace of God.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, trans. Leo Shirley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 91-92. Little did he know, Germanic Pagans and Anglo-Saxons did not build temples. Gregory was assuming that all Pagan practices were identical to those of Roman Pagans.

Take note of Gregory's willingness to work with Pagans, in so much as they were to become part of the Catholic Church.¹⁸⁹ There was a tendency of leniency and accommodation as compared to what happened in the ninth century to the Saxons still residing in northern Germany. The forced participation in the Roman Catholic faith was systematic in nature.

In *Pagan Britain*, Ronald Hutton, gives a detailed history of the various religions on British soil throughout the millennia. He describes the efforts of the Gregorian mission and demonstrates how local aristocracies, following the acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith, were invited into economic and diplomatic alliances with Europe's most advanced and powerful kingdoms.¹⁹⁰ The Roman Catholic faith was, frankly, good for business. And, as Hutton notes, "the pagan English were almost surrounded by Christians ... the Franks to the south and east, the native British and Irish to the west and north, and the Scots of Argyll to the north."¹⁹¹ However, Hutton's key insight is that the systematic nature of the English mission was, similar to most of Europe, directed entirely at the king.¹⁹² Richard Fletcher in *The Barbarian Conversion* thoroughly discusses the Catholic missionary practice of targeting kings and aristocrats. Fletcher suggests that the effort to gain "[t]he acceptance of Christianity by the men and women of the barbarian aristocracies was critical in the making of Christendom because these were the people who had the local influence necessary to diffuse the faith among their dependants."¹⁹³ The strategy was simple, convert the king and/or the ruling class, teach/condition/instruct the

¹⁸⁹ For an account of how Gregory "changed course" and became accommodating see Sara Lipton, "Christianity and Its Others: Jews, Muslims, and Pagans," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) 425.

¹⁹⁰ See Ronald Hutton, *Pagan Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 318.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 317.

¹⁹² See *Ibid.*, 318.

¹⁹³ Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 130.

children, and know that everyone in between will conform. Everyone in between did conform as long as time remained on their side and the leadership remained Christian.

Hutton points out numerous instances in Britain where time was not on their side, and most of the smaller English kingdoms returned to the Paganism of their past after the royal convert died.¹⁹⁴ He added that monks were dismayed by the ease with which the Anglo-Saxons abandoned their Christianity when their kings or circumstances changed.¹⁹⁵ The Gregorian mission had an uphill battle which would take time, persistence, and powerful allegiances — hence Gregory’s willingness to be accommodative. Regardless of what his contemporary and later critics said about the lenient stance he took, it was successful in terms of creating a continental Christendom. Critics could argue that the Christianity spread throughout Europe was not in keeping with the message preached by Jesus’ earliest followers. Not only did the Christian missionaries in early medieval Europe realize the need to accommodate the Pagans, but their contemporary “Germanic and Celtic aristocracies quickly discovered that Christianity could be adapted to themselves.”¹⁹⁶ The Christianity adapted for the Germanic and Celtic ruling class has come to be identified by modern German historians as *Adelskirche* — a “church managed by and very largely for the aristocracy.”¹⁹⁷

The intention of the Gregorian mission was the spread of Roman Catholic Christianity; the outcome was an *Adelskirche* in which “secular imperialism and Christian evangelism went hand in hand.”¹⁹⁸ The most notable adherent to the *Adelskirche* was Charlemagne, who made

¹⁹⁴ See Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, 319.

¹⁹⁵ See *Ibid.*, 319.

¹⁹⁶ Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 192.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

“the link between secular and spiritual imperialism even closer.”¹⁹⁹ According to Fletcher, Charlemagne’s wealth and power allowed him to pursue secular and spiritual imperialism in Saxony on an unprecedented scale of brutality which brings us back to the historical setting leading up to the composition of *The Heliand*.²⁰⁰

The accommodative mission of Gregory I was replaced by the brutality of the Frankish *Adelskirche*, and *The Heliand* arguably represented a slight reversal of that reality and an attempt to find some middle ground between accommodation and subjugation. It was written by Anglo-Saxon monks, most likely at the Abbey Fulda, where Rabanus Maurus was the abbot. As G. Ronald Murphy describes him, Rabanus had “broadminded tendencies with regard to non-Christian religious expression,”²⁰¹ tendencies that James C. Russell describes as accommodating “Christianity to a heroic ... Germanic world-view” as presented in *The Heliand*.²⁰²

The language used to present the “Germanic world-view” in Anglo-Saxon Catholic terms is the question at hand. So much about Germanic and Saxon culture is simply the opposite of the earliest Christian cultures, at least the earlier pre-*Adelskirche* Catholic Christianity. As such, the task of re-writing the Christian Gospels in a manner that was compatible with Saxon culture must have been daunting. The Saxons were a war-like people, called Saxons because of the knife, known as a *seax*, which they were said to always carry. They literally lived by the sword. By contrast, in Matthew 26:42, Jesus says, “[p]ut your sword back into its place; for all who take

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 195.

²⁰⁰ See Ibid., 195.

²⁰¹ G. Ronald Murphy, *The Saxon Savior* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 12.

²⁰² James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 7.

the sword will perish by the sword.”²⁰³ Arguably there is little comparison between the two religions and their cultures. In Saxon Paganism, a warrior must live and die by and with his or her sword if he had any chance of making it to Valhalla, the glorious afterlife, whereas Christians in the Gospels were told to avoid the sword, and this teaching was to be included in *The Heliand*. The Christian message the Saxons received through *The Heliand* stood in opposition to their way of life.

The Saxons were resistant and resentful of Christianity and the Holy Roman Empire. They had been militarily and economically defeated. The choice to refuse baptism, tithing, and Christian participation was not an option. Yet they still resisted. They resisted for centuries, which is evidenced by the Franciscans in the thirteenth century who began sending missionaries to the Germans because they were considered not to be Christians. Even in the thirteenth century they were famously aggressive towards missionaries.

The Carolingians opted to fill their newly-established Saxon monasteries with Anglo-Saxon monks. The Anglo-Saxons were a natural choice. Their dialect was linguistically close to the Old Saxon used by the Saxons and they themselves were ethnically related. The Anglo-Saxons were the descendants of the Saxons who conquered Great Britain in the fifth century. The political tactic of enlisting the Saxons’ Christian cousins, the Anglo-Saxons, to spread the teachings of the Church was a sound decision. By and large, their mission was successful and can be highlighted by various texts including the formative epic, *The Heliand*.

The need for *The Heliand* was clear. The brutal methods of the Frankish *Adelskirche* were unsuccessful in encouraging voluntary conversions. However, the Frankish Carolingians were

²⁰³ Matthew 26:52 (NRSV).

far-sighted enough to see the need for instruction, and they chose wisely when deciding upon the Anglo-Saxon missionaries. Coming from a tradition of “accommodating” conversion tactics, they would know how to reach their distant cousins. They played their role well and strengthened the bonds between the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon Church is responsible for defeating one of the Church of Rome’s earliest competitors, the older Irish Church. Here, in the early ninth century they were responsible for the Christianization of the Saxon Pagans. They had the financial and military support of both Rome and the Carolingians, and the Saxons did not stand a chance. Their history was rewritten, and their religion was forbidden. They were going to learn the Christian myth through the formative Saxon Gospel, *The Heliand*.

CHAPTER 3

THE HELIAND: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

“You don’t defeat these people by fighting their warriors, you defeat them by fighting their gods.
It’s their gods you’ve got to kill.”

—Aulus Claudius²⁰⁴

Christianizing the Saxons proved a remarkably difficult task. Carole M. Cusack has documented the problems associated with such a task.²⁰⁵ James C. Russell has also written extensively about why converting the Germanic tribes proved such a uniquely challenging achievement for a religion that once spread like wildfire throughout the Roman Empire. As Russell explains the “urban social environment in which early Christianity flourished was one in which alienation and normlessness or anomie prevailed,” and its appeal to the anonymous inhabitants of the empire “was its fulfillment of the need for socialization and its promise of otherworldly salvation.”²⁰⁶ In stark contrast to that world, the environment of eighth-century Saxony was a rural, warrior society with a culture of solidarity.²⁰⁷ Their religion was “concerned with fundamental military, agricultural, and personal matters,” and any religion which did not give these adequate attention “could not hope to gain acceptance among the German peoples.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ *Britannia*. Season 1 Episode 3. Directed by Sue Tully. Directed by Jez Butterworth and Richard McBrien. Sky and Amazon Prime Video, February 1, 2018.

²⁰⁵ See Carole M. Cusack, “Pagan Saxon Resistance to Charlemagne’s Mission: ‘Indigenous’ Religion and ‘World’ Religion in the Early Middle Ages,” *The Pomegranate* 13, no. 1 (June 2011). See also Carole M. Cusack, *Conversion among the Germanic Peoples* (London: Cassell, 1998).

²⁰⁶ Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, 4.

²⁰⁷ See *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

The bottom line is that the Germanic peoples had each other, shared their land, and were concerned about this life, whereas many Romans who became Christians had nothing in this life and were attracted by the promise of gifts in the next one. The Germans can be said to have had no need for Christianity. One example is the story of the Frisian prince Radbod (679-719) who, when considering baptism, asked if his ancestors would be in heaven. When he was told no, he said that he would rather go to hell with his ancestors than live in heaven with a small group of beggars.²⁰⁹ The missionary monks who accompanied the Carolingians into this frontier were quick to realize this was a prevailing attitude and accepted that Christianity had to be reinterpreted in order to appeal to a heroic military culture with agricultural concerns.²¹⁰ They set forth a missionary policy which permitted temporary accommodations of Christianity with the goal of initiating a gradual acceptance of Christian beliefs and behaviors.²¹¹

The Heliand is a retelling of the four Gospels into a Saxon heroic formative epic, commissioned in the year 830 by the then Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne's son and successor, Louis the Pious.²¹² Louis was acting in response to the earlier actions of Charlemagne, who tightened the link between secular and spiritual imperialism.²¹³ With Charlemagne's control brutally established and, yet, resistance continually evident, Louis embarked on a new path of pacification. He called on Anglo-Saxon monks to embrace the epic poetry of the mead-hall culture and utilize it as a means to propagate the Christian faith. The Anglo-Saxons brought

²⁰⁹ See Jonas of Fontanelle's *Life of Wulfram*.

²¹⁰ See Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, 6.

²¹¹ See *Ibid.*, 7 and 131.

²¹² See Murphy, *The Saxon Savior*, 13.

²¹³ See Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 195.

books, an indispensable component of missionary infrastructure.²¹⁴ In this instance they did not just bring books with them, they wrote a new one, *The Heliand*.

The Heliand, while clearly Christian, adopted much of the Germanic culture and even created some subtle ambiguities between Odin and Jesus.²¹⁵ In the position of power, the Christian Franks and Anglo-Saxons were able to embrace the Germanic, but stay true to the Christian story. Arguably some of their thematic changes to the Christian code of conduct can be linked to behaviors that stand in tension with what is found in the canonical Gospels. One example of how *The Heliand* poet knowingly and blatantly changed the teachings of the Christian Gospels is seen in the rewriting of the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-12). In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the Beatitudes are rewritten and "Blessed are the peacemakers" becomes those who "do not want to start any fights."²¹⁶ At a glance, such a reinterpretation seems harmless and possibly inviting, but its significance lies, as we shall see, in the way that it contributes "to the development of the Crusade ideology," for it was used not only to instruct Saxon converts, but their own monastic instructors as well.²¹⁷ This included instructors such as the thirteenth-century Cistercian monk, Arnaud Amalric, who is credited with telling a Crusader worried about accidentally killing Christians in Constantinople to "Kill them all and let God sort them out."²¹⁸

²¹⁴ See *Ibid.*, 217.

²¹⁵ For more on the Christianity of *The Heliand* see John Hines, "The Conversion of the Old Saxons," in *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, eds. Dennis H. Green and Frank Siegmund (San Marino: Boydell Press, 2003), 309.

²¹⁶ G. Ronald Murphy, trans. *The Heliand: The Saxon Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 46.

²¹⁷ Russel, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity*, 190.

²¹⁸ *Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius*. (Kill them all. Certainly the Lord knows which are His.) found in the *Dialogus Miraculorum*. See also, Drew Thomas Craver and Carolyn Jones Medine, "Odinizing Jesus in the Holy Roman Empire: And the Creation of the Crusader" (Master's thesis, University of Georgia, 2017). See also, Carl Erdmann, *The Origin of the Idea of Crusade*, trans. Marshall W. Baldwin and Walter Goffart (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), xxi.

We have already seen how Charlemagne had recently conquered his eastern enemy, the Saxon Pagans, and outlawed their religion. As religion was completely interwoven with culture, it can be said that he banned their culture. A mainstay of that culture was the mead-hall, a place where tribal units would come together to practice ritual gift-giving and mead-drinking in order to seal their oaths of loyalty. These rituals were meant to ensure the safety, security, and continued prosperity of their people. An important function within the mead-hall was the performance of the shaper. The shaper was someone who was tasked with memorizing and performing at will and upon request the poetic (epic) histories and memories of their people. When Charlemagne outlawed the religion of the Saxons, he drastically reduced the legal content which the shaper would be allowed to recite. In addition, they were conquered by Christian Carolingian Franks, who would be sitting in that same mead-hall and no doubt would not want to hear the heroic tales of their comrades being killed and defeated by these Saxon Pagans. In essence, the shaper was no longer allowed to speak of the pre-conquest past, and an important part of Saxon culture was suppressed.

However, the ritual was permitted to continue using new stories. As J. Assmann suggests, “oral societies don’t merely need a technique of memory storage, they need a ritual order for presenting them.”²¹⁹ While their memory was forbidden, the mead-hall style ritual was still permitted with a new performative text. That text was “The Saxon Gospel,” *The Heliand*. It tells the story of Jesus as it appears in the four Gospels, mostly, with a bit of Germanic flair²²⁰ to make it more palatable. Written in Old Saxon half-line poetry, just like *Beowulf*, *The Heliand* fit the

²¹⁹ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 107.

²²⁰ See Dieter Kartschoke. *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im frühen Mittelalter* (Nördlingen: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1994), 145.

format of performance. They were no longer allowed to perform the *Voluspa*, but they had a performance nonetheless.

Let me now provide a brief plot summary of the performative text that has come to be called *The Heliand*. It begins with the “secret runes” being given to four heroes who were tasked with writing a book which details god’s commands. The four heroes were named Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and it is made clear that there was no one else picked by the power of god to undertake this project; they alone were to chant god’s spell. They told of the powerful strength of the mighty chieftain and how he made and bound the entire world with the power of words alone. We are told how the best of healers²²¹ came to the middle world. At the time of the healer’s birth, Rome ruled the world. Moreover, Herod was king of the Jewish people, and he was seen as a usurper who was not from their kinsmen.

One among their kinsmen, Zachary, who tended the shrine, once saw the angel Gabriel behind the altar. He is told that he is going to have a son who would never drink alcohol and that he would be created by fate, time, and god.²²² Gabriel tells Zachary that his son will be a warrior companion of the king of heaven and that he is to be called John. For his doubts, based on his and his wife’s age, Zachary is struck dumb until after the birth of John. After John’s birth, Zachary’s punishment is reversed.

Next, Gabriel is sent to Mary, the daughter of David²²³, who is engaged to Joseph. Gabriel tells Mary that she is going to give birth to the chieftain, the son of the high king of heaven and that the people will call him “Healer.” The narrator tells us that the “Holy Spirit became the baby

²²¹ Hence the title *The Heliand* - “the healer.”

²²² *Wurd, metod, and god.*

²²³ In *The Heliand*, Jesus is described as a descendant of David through his mother — as opposed to the canonical stories, which do so through his father. Based on the author’s knowledge of the Gospels we can be certain this was no accident. Did the author do this to avoid contradicting the story of Jesus’ virgin birth?

in her womb.”²²⁴ Joseph, troubled by this baby, no longer wants Mary in his hall, but fears she will be killed, as was their custom. A messenger then comes to him in a dream and persuades him to keep her safe among his warrior-companions.

Next, Joseph receives a message that he is to return to his home, the hill-fort of Bethlehem, to be counted in Caesar’s report. In Bethlehem, Mary’s son is born. He is “the strongest child, the most powerful of all kings.”²²⁵ The world and all its creatures are told of his arrival. On his eighth day of life, he is named “Healer,” and on his fortieth day, he is taken to the shrine. There, a good man of noble birth named Simeon recognizes him immediately. He speaks privately with Mary and tells her that this son will help many people, but will be overtaken by weapons. Then Anna, a widow, joins them and recognizes the child also.²²⁶ Mary, Joseph, and their son leave Jerusalem before Herod knows they are there, but Herod is alerted to his existence by men of the East. Herod asks that they notify him of the child’s location before they leave for home, but they do not. They leave soon after presenting the child with the three gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh, having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod.

In a separate dream, Joseph is warned of Herod’s desire to kill the child and is directed to flee with his family and warriors to Egyptland. Herod’s soldiers then kill many innocent children in Bethlehem, but not Mary’s son. Eventually, fate removes Herod, and Joseph is told, again in a dream, to return to Mary’s home in Galileeland.²²⁷ The child remains in the hill-fort Nazareth until he is twelve, when it comes time for “the Jewish people to worship their clan’s God in

²²⁴ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 13. See also footnote 20 for a brief discussion of the theological implications.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 20. See footnotes 28 and 29 for an explanation of the author’s use of *metod* and *giscapu*.

²²⁷ As will be discussed later in more depth, fate - *wurd* and *wyrd* - controls the time of death in both *The Heliand* and *Beowulf*.

Jerusalem.”²²⁸ While there, the child goes missing, and Mary finds him in the shrine speaking with the wise men. They are amazed and confused by his wise words, but he and Mary choose not to reveal his identity to them yet. He chooses to wait until his thirtieth year before revealing that he is the chieftain of all humans.

Between the time that the chieftain is seen at the shrine and his thirtieth year, John, Zachary’s son, has spent the majority of his life in the wilderness. A divine voice had told him that it was his duty to announce the coming of the chieftain. He goes to the Jordan River and immerses his followers in its waters, teaching them that, soon there will come one who is able to wash away their sins. Some people think John is Elijah, who had lived long ago, but he assures them that he is only the fore-messenger of their lord. He teaches them to forsake the power of Hel²²⁹ and make ready for the chieftain. The chieftain arrives after he has lived thirty winters in the world.

Immediately upon his arrival, John recognizes him and announces him as “the most powerful king of all!”²³⁰ The chieftain tells John to say nothing more about it before he himself undergoes the immersion, described as the “best of all baths.”²³¹ When the protector of the people emerges from the water, heaven opens up, and the holy spirit in the form of a powerful bird comes to rest on the chieftain’s shoulder. A voice from the heavens announces that this is the

²²⁸ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 29.

²²⁹ In Norse / Saxon belief she was the daughter of Loki and ruler of the realm of the dead where the inglorious went after death. *The Heliand* author often wittingly uses the term with polysemous understandings since the Christian version of Hell had not yet replaced the Pagan understandings of Hel in Saxony. See Murphy, *The Heliand*, 32, footnote 50.

²³⁰ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 34.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

Christ who has powers above all in the world, even the enemy,²³² whom he is quick to engage in a mystical form of one-on-one combat.

After his immersion, the chieftain wanders into the wilderness and remains there alone for a long time. He wanted to let powerful creatures and Satan test him. Satan is described as the one who led Adam and Eve into disloyalty. Since then, his tricks have led others into the realm of Hel. The Christian god wants to change that, so he sends his son to open the high-heaven kingdom to people. The enemy tries to trick the chieftain as he has so many others, but the chieftain's heart is hardened. Allowing himself to feel hunger and thirst for forty days, the chieftain tricks Satan into thinking he is just a man. Once he has the enemy believing he is simply a man, the enemy tempts him unsuccessfully. When the chieftain has had enough, he simply brushes Satan aside. The enemy returns to the valleys of Hel, and a crowd of god's angels come to assist the chieftain.

Once he is ready to leave the protective cover of the woods, the chieftain sets out to choose his warrior-companions. He goes to his home in Galileeland and gathers good men to be his word-wise warriors. He chooses twelve from the shores of the water. With his companions, he travels and heals many people along the way. After word spreads of his power, people begin to travel to him, seeking donations of food and relief from their sufferings. The author tells us that some of these people were from the "Jewish clan" and are described as "sneaky people."²³³ Others are wise and noble earls, and the chieftain receives and protects them all. He is constantly teaching his followers, and at times, would hold secret councils with his retinue of warriors. One of those times is on a mountain where he teaches them eight good fortunes; they correspond to

²³² Enemy = the devil.

²³³ Ibid., 43. This is the beginning of what at times may be unsettling tones of antisemitism.

the Christian Beatitudes. He teaches them many things about justice, peace, and mercy. The chieftain teaches them to cleanse their hearts, love their neighbors, and even to love their enemies. He teaches them to give and to pray in private, never being too boastful. His audience is silent; they needed to think about what he said.

One of his warrior-companions speaks first and asks how they should pray. John asks the chieftain, “teach us the secret runes.”²³⁴ He teaches them to pray the following prayer with their heads bowed.

<i>Fadar usa</i>	<i>firiho barno,</i>
<i>thu bist an them hohon</i>	<i>himila rikea</i>
<i>geuuhiid si thin namo</i>	<i>uuordo gehuuilico.</i>
<i>Cuma thin</i>	<i>craftag riki.</i>
<i>Uuerða thin nuilleo</i>	<i>obar thesa uuerold alla,</i>
<i>so sama an erðo,</i>	<i>so thar uppa ist</i>
<i>an them hohon</i>	<i>himilo rikea.</i>
<i>Gif us dago gehuuilikes rad,</i>	<i>drohtin the godo,</i>
<i>thina helaga helpa,</i>	<i>endi alat us hebenes uuard,</i>
<i>managoro menscudlio,</i>	<i>al so uue oðrum mannum doan.</i>
<i>Ne lat us farledean</i>	<i>leða uuihti</i>
<i>so forð an iro uuilleon,</i>	<i>so uui uuirðige sind</i>
<i>ac help us uuiðar allun</i>	<i>ubilon dadium.²³⁵</i>

“Father of us	the sons of men
thou beest in the high	heaven kingdom
blessed is thy name	in each word.
Come thine	mighty kingdom.
Thine will become	over all this world,
so same on earth	so is up there
in the high	heaven kingdom.
Give us advice/support each day,	lord the good,
thine holy help	and pardon, guardian,
our many crimes,	as we do for many others.
Nor let us be led	by evil creatures
so forth in their will	as we are worthy
but help us against all	evil deeds.”

²³⁴ Ibid., 54. His teachings are likened to a Germanic magic spell.

²³⁵ Anonymous, *Heliand und Genesis - Primary Source Edition*, ed. Otto Behaghel (Halle: Max Niemeyer, 1903), 56.

The chieftain follows this teaching with the admonition that they must forgive others if they expect god to forgive them. He adds that they are to fast quietly, not accrue wealth unjustly, and do good works. They are told to forget their treasures, forget their clothes, and focus their thoughts firmly on god. The teachings of the chieftain continue for seven out of the seventy-one songs in the epic.²³⁶

When the action of the epic restarts, it is at a wedding in Galileeland where the chieftain and his mother Mary are in attendance. Late in the evening, the wine runs out, and Mary, the holy virgin, asks her son to help. At first he rejects her, asking why she would speak to him like that in front of everyone, but eventually he concedes. Then, the chieftain turns six vats of water into wine, and the people's confidence in him grows. From there, he goes on to perform many miracles — more than will ever be known. However, the author does tell us about quite a few.

There is the commander of a hundred men who asks the chieftain to cure a cripple who lives in his household. His confidence in the chieftain is so great that he believes he can cure this cripple from afar and the chieftain, impressed, says that no one among the Jews has greater faith than he. The chieftain cures the cripple and tells the crowd that “many of the Jews, the sons of this kingdom, will be robbed, deprived of these glories, and will lie in dark valleys at the farthest ends of the infernal regions.”²³⁷ Later, he raises the son of a widow from the dead. The boy's life was taken by fate, “the great Measurer's doings.”²³⁸ The chieftain demonstrates power over the wind and the sea. He heals a cripple in the shrine and angers the “hostile-minded Jews” in the

²³⁶ I highlight this to point out that ten percent of the epic is focused entirely on Christian instruction, which supports the understanding of *The Heliand* as a didactic text with formative intentions.

²³⁷ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 71. The description provided here along with what follows clearly suggests that many of the Jews will be sent to Hel.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 72. Again we see that fate and time, *wurd* and *metod*, act outside the control of the Christian god, but the chieftain will show his power to be greater.

process.²³⁹ Here, the author plants a seed of the hatred that will end our epic, but before following that storyline, we are given more of the chieftain's teachings.

These teachings came in the form of parables and begin with one about sowing good seed. The slight detour lasts only for three songs before the author returns to the ill-intentioned actions of the Jews. We are told that they once try to throw him from a clifftop, but that he escapes using some sort of wizardry which renders him invisible. From there, he walks victorious into the wilderness. Then, we hear more of John, who earlier lived in the wilderness. We are told how he goes to the Jewish king and reprimands him with words for having married his brother's widow. We are told how that widow's daughter tricks the king into beheading John and how it grieves the king to do so. Nevertheless, he does it, and the man with no equal saw his last day. After that, John's followers seek out the chieftain and join him in the wilderness. His following continues to grow, and he becomes even more famous. It was said that there would never be a "wiser wizard" than him.²⁴⁰

The chieftain, being the magical wizard our author describes him as, it is only natural that the story returns to his miracles. We hear how he walked on water and how he commanded his thane Peter to do so as well. He heals a young woman, from another clan, who was tormented by evil creatures. Then he gives Peter power over Hel's gates, the keys to the heaven-kingdom, and authority over the Christian people. Afterwards, he takes Peter, James, and John to a mountain top to see a special wonder. There they see the chieftain exchange words with Elijah and Moses. The mountain glows and there is a garden, a meadow much like Eden and Valhalla.²⁴¹ There, the best of thanes hears the voice of god speak gladly of the chieftain telling them to follow him. The

²³⁹ Ibid., 77.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 93.

²⁴¹ See Ibid., 103, footnote 145.

chieftain tells them not to tell what they had seen until after he has died and arisen. Quickly, the storyline changes to another miraculous event, this time in Capharnaum.

The chieftain is forced to pay a head tax, and so he tells Peter to cast a hook in the sea. The first fish he catches has gold coins in its mouth, enough to pay for them all. The author uses that action to speak directly to the audience, saying that the chieftain, through his actions, revealed that everyone should willingly pay all taxes and debts.²⁴² Returning to the words of the chieftain, the audience hears his teachings about forgiving others and renouncing wealth. Continuing his instruction, the author shares more parables for the audience. There is a story of a rich man, who died and went to Hel, and a beggar who was ignored by the rich man in life, who sits in the lap of Abraham in heaven. We are told about workers in a vineyard who each received full wages, regardless of time worked, from his lord. Then the chieftain foretells his demise. To his twelve warrior-companions, the chieftain reveals events to come. He tells them how he will be tortured and killed, but will rise up from death on the third day. Then, he heals two blind men, and the author tells us that they represent anyone who was not yet a follower of the Healer, the Christ. The author writes that all we need to do is to call on the chieftain and that he will heal us too; he will enlighten us with his teachings.

Returning to the action of the story, we are told how the chieftain enters the hill-fort of Jerusalem and, there, tells of his impending fate. He weeps at the thought and adds that Jerusalem itself will be crushed by “words of war.”²⁴³ People sing as he enters the city — not riding on an ass.²⁴⁴ With the crowd, he goes to the shrine and there finds a crowd of “Jews, a

²⁴² Is this a politically and economically motivated moment where the author is telling the Saxons to pay all debts to the Church and taxes to the emperor?

²⁴³ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 121.

²⁴⁴ Was this left out to avoid the Saxon sense of humor? See Murphy, *The Heliand*, 121, footnote 177.

different kind of people.”²⁴⁵ The crowd there is doing business, which repulses the chieftain, and he drives them away. The chieftain watches as a poor woman at the shrine give a small gift, and he praises her generosity and promises that she will receive a long-lasting reward. His words enrage the crowd of Jews there, whom the author describes as “wicked troublemakers.”²⁴⁶ He defends himself against them, and he defends an adulterous woman as well. The epic’s antisemitism increases steadily, as the Jews are described as seeking his downfall at every turn from here on; and, the chieftain is portrayed as their victorious enemy, who is always one step ahead.

In some of his final actions, the chieftain saves the woman and raises Lazarus from the grave, but he cannot save himself from the anger of certain powerful figures in Jerusalem. They seek to kill him, but days pass before they can reach him. All the while, he continues teaching. He teaches them about the coming end of the world and the signs that will precede it. He tells them to be ready for that day, for when it comes, everyone will be judged according to their actions. Those deemed good will go to Heaven and those found bad will be sent to Hel. Then, he tells them how he will be killed in two days time, at the Jews’ Pascha. The author then tells us how a trap was set for him by “slithery-hearted ... southern people.”²⁴⁷ Judas, one of the chieftain’s companions, is paid to betray him. Knowing what is coming, the chieftain prepares his last mead-hall feast. During the feast, he tells Judas to follow through with his plans. Then he gives power to bread and wine and shares it with his thanes.

After the feast, he goes to Olivet mountain and orders his daring warriors to protect him while he prays. When enemies arrive to arrest him, Peter cuts off the ear of one of them, but the

²⁴⁵ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 122.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 125.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

Healer heals him. He tells his warriors to stand down and willingly goes with the hate-filled mob. As predicted, Peter later denies being the chieftain's thane, and the author tells us that it is proof that "a man's boasting is not very reliable."²⁴⁸ The bishop²⁴⁹ and the other leaders can find nothing damning about the man and send him to Pilate. He, too, can find nothing wrong with the Healer, so the priests take him to king Herod, who also can find nothing to convict him of. Pilate, Caesar's thane, puts the chieftain before the Jewish people, and they choose to have him killed. The author assures us that it is the leaders of the Jews who are to blame for this. Then the author tells us that even Satan tried to come to his aid.

Satan fears the death of the Healer, because he, then, can interfere with Satan's kingdom, so he sets out to overturn the judgment. He goes to Pilate's house, concealed by a magical helmet, and comes to his wife in a vision warning her that the Healer will take away her husband's power if he is not saved. She asks Pilate to save the chieftain's life, but he will not; he only washes his hands of responsibility.

Then the Jews take the chieftain and lead him away to be hung on the gallows; "a tree on a mountain."²⁵⁰ They take his clothes, nail him to the tree, and hang a sign saying "king of the Jews" above his head. They hang two criminals beside him. One of the thieves condemns the crowd, for he knows that the chieftain is innocent. Mary, John, and some other women stand below the tree as the chieftain dies. The sky goes dark, the earth trembles, and mountains shake as he passes. The curtain at the shrine is ripped in two, and the Jewish people can see the treasure hoard it conceals. Graves open, and dead men walk. The author says that not even these signs

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 166.

²⁴⁹ The Jewish high priest is described as a *biscop* or "bishop."

²⁵⁰ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 182.

could make the Jewish people trust in the Healer's power. An enemy pierces his side with a spearhead before he is taken down from the gallows.

Joseph is granted permission from Pilate to take the chieftain's body. His body is buried in a tomb in the ground, and a rock is placed over its entrance. The hateful Jewish people send guards to the tomb to make sure that his followers do not steal him and say he has risen. Not long after the guards arrive, they see a "holy breath, going under the hard stone to the corpse!"²⁵¹ Then the Healer rises up and goes where he wishes, leaving the doors of Hel unlocked. Later the women arrive and find an angel, wearing a "coat of feathers."²⁵² The guards are terrified as the angel arrives and lifts the stone. The messenger glows in radiance and frightens all who look upon him. The angel tells them that their chieftain has risen and that they are to go and tell his warrior-companions. The guards also leave and tell the Jewish leaders what they have seen. The leaders bribe them not to tell anyone, but the power of god compels them to do so anyway.

The chieftain's followers are overjoyed by the news, but Mary Magdalene's thoughts are in turmoil. The Healer appears to her, and after she recognizes him he tells her to tell the others. She is ecstatic to make such a wonderful thing known. The warriors doubt her, but the chieftain appears to them as well. He leads them to Bethany before leaving them to sit at the right side of god. From there he "observes everything that happens in the whole world."²⁵³ After he departs, the warriors return to Jerusalem, where they rejoice at the shrine. The performance as it appears in the Munich manuscript *M* stops there.

Through the performances of the epic, the hope was that the Saxons would learn something about their new religion. Everyone had been baptized under the laws of their

²⁵¹ Ibid., 191.

²⁵² Ibid., 192. The Norse goddess Freyja is said to own such a coat which gives its wearer the power to fly.

²⁵³ Ibid., 198. The description of his gazing downward is very similar to what Odin is said to do from the Hlidskjalf.

conquerors, some in chains, and those who resisted were killed. It was a didactic piece of performative literature adhering to the Christian mission of conversion. It was a formative epic, which was meant to form and inform a new religious identity of the conquered Saxons. It may be argued that it was so successful that the German [Saxon] himself, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *Aesthetics* stated that the *Nibelungenlied*²⁵⁴ is no longer relevant for Germany. He meant that Germany's Pagan heroes of the past were so distant and foreign that they had no relation to modern Germans. Instead, he stated that "The story of Christ, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Roman law, even the Trojan war have far more present reality for us than the affairs of the Nibelungs."²⁵⁵ Hegel's suggestion demonstrates how *The Heliand*, coupled with the power of the Christian Carolingian Franks, succeeded in completely supplanting the cultural memory of the defeated Saxon Pagans with a foreign, Frankish Christian one.

That foreign identity is the key to understanding *The Heliand*. Few scholars of epic recognize an instance in which an epic was created by one people to be used by a different people, one that reinterprets the accepted culture story of the conquered people through a new cultural story for purposes of creating a new cultural memory to be passed onto future generations, reshaping culture. *The Heliand* completely breaks from the classical model of epic because it is not written by Saxon Pagans for Saxon Pagans. Instead it was written by Anglo-Saxon Christians for Saxon Pagans. Paul Innes and Arshia Sattar would recognise it as a foreign epic forced on a conquered people and therefore nothing more than propaganda which has only come to be called epic by those who were not there during its conception. We may say

²⁵⁴ The German version of the Icelandic *Volsunga Saga*, telling the story of the archetypal Pagan Germanic hero.

²⁵⁵ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1057.

that it is a formative text written in the epic style, which was to be performed in the mead-hall for didactic purposes.

Hegel believed that the epic hero must be able to embody the nation, or as he put it, the “nation is concentrated in them.”²⁵⁶ With that in mind, we begin with the character of Jesus in *The Heliand* who, in the terms of formative epic, is reinterpreted, bringing elements of the Gospels into a relationship with Saxon culture, a pagan way of life to which Jesus stands in contrast.²⁵⁷ For example, his teachings of forgiveness would not be taken seriously in a culture in which revenge is an expected behavior. His teachings about not responding to violence with violence are almost comical to a militarized culture that has only survived, independently, for centuries because of its willingness and ability literally to fight off repeated and incessant invasions by the Roman Empire and later Frankish kingdoms and whose path to their afterlife, Valhalla, was through glorious and courageous death in battle. For them, violence was a way of living and dying; anything less was cowardice. It suffices to say that a Jesus who taught forgiveness and non-violence could not embody the Saxon Pagan culture and religion.

While Jesus in *The Heliand* cannot meet the criteria of “formulating the self-image of the group,”²⁵⁸ he can be seen as a teacher of Christianity, the new religion of the defeated people. To be sure, the origins of Christianity and the life of Jesus in *The Heliand* are not an exact copy of those contained in the Christian canon. In fact, to the twenty-first-century reader, there are some alarming contrasts such as the heavy tones of antisemitism.²⁵⁹ Also, the Jesus of this text is

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 1068.

²⁵⁷ For further discussion on the Germanic elements “in contrast” with Christianity see Carole M. Cusack, *Conversion among the Germanic Peoples* (London: Cassell, 1998), 129-30. And Ruth Mazo Karras, “Pagan Survivals and Syncretism in the Conversion of Saxony,” *Catholic Historical Review* 72 (October 1986), 558.

²⁵⁸ Assmann, *Religion and Cultural Memory*, 104.

²⁵⁹ For further reading on antisemitism in *The Heliand* see: G. Ronald Murphy, “The Jews in the *Heliand*”; Martin Friedrich, “Jesus Christ between Jews and Heathens: The Germanic Mission and the Portrayal of Christ in the Old

portrayed with a much more powerful demeanor and is often referred to as “the Strongest of kings” leading “warrior-companions.”²⁶⁰ Jesus, in *The Heliand*, was subtly refashioned to become a new culture hero who established common ground between the warrior religion of the Saxon Pagans and the pacifist religion of the Anglo-Saxon monks. I refer only to the monastics as participating in Christian pacifism because the Frankish and Roman military invaders of Saxony clearly were not peaceful.

The Heliand, written by Christian monks, was an inclusively accommodating text with didactic purposes, and its hero was meant to bridge the gap between the cult of Odin and the Christian Gospels. Hegel would say that its “religious interest prevails so strongly that what we have, instead of epic proper, are sagas and histories told in religious poetry, or only narratives meant to teach religion.”²⁶¹ The hero of *The Heliand* is simply meant “to teach religion.”

One teaching tool used to tell the hero’s story is the language used in *The Heliand*. To span the chasm separating the Germanic heroic Paganism and the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels, the author chose polysemous words. *The Heliand* is divided into 71 chapters, referred to as “songs.” The songs are composed of half-line poetry consisting of oral formulaic phrases such as those discussed in Chapter One. The half-lines utilize polysemous language, which was both necessary and tactically useful. James E. Cathey in “The Historical Setting of the *Heliand*, the Poem, and the Manuscripts” discusses the opposing mindsets and languages of Christians (Latin) and Pagans (Old Saxon) and how word choice posed a problem for *The Heliand*’s author. Cathey states that “the words with which the new message had to be conveyed were in themselves

Saxon *Heliand*,” in *Perspectives on the Old Saxon Heliand: Introductory and Critical Essays, with an Edition of the Leipzig Fragment*, ed. Valentine A. Pakis (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2010).

²⁶⁰ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 40.

²⁶¹ Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1096.

frequently opposite to what was meant. It was thus necessary for the mission to persevere and subvert old words to convey new meanings.”²⁶² *The Heliand* author, therefore, used the only religious words available in the Old Saxon language in order to describe the religious ideas and stories of the new, foreign religion. In the formative epic, the use of familiar language may have been believed to be more welcoming and comforting to the forced converts within the Saxon ranks. Such a strategy is tricky; however, it allowed, potentially, for the first generations to disregard the Christian message and to hear only the words’ Pagan meanings, but with the hope that, as the new epic story was communicated, later generations, having never learned the older Pagan meanings, would hear the Christian message that was meant by the author and is used by modern translators, in a new collective memory. Their polysemous word choice was never intended to remain ambiguous. In fact, I suggest it was always intended to take on monosemous definitions, which it mostly has done among modern translators who usually do not attempt to capture the multiple contextual meanings, as I shall try to do here, utilizing the translation of *The Heliand* by Ronald Murphy and my own.

The first sentence of the first song refers to the Gospel itself in polysemous language. The narrator states that the Gospel is about to be shared as *giruni*, or “secret runes.” Runes are characters in the Futhark, an alphabet speculated to be of Alpine, Etruscan origin. It was used by the Saxons, as well as other Germanic peoples for carving magical inscriptions, which gave them direct access to their gods and the fates with immediate results.²⁶³ From the start, the Anglo-Saxon poet manages to utilize an Old Saxon term with enough ambiguity to allow two

²⁶² James E. Cathey, “The Historical Setting of the *Heliand*, the Poem, and the Manuscripts,” in *Perspectives on the Old Saxon Heliand: Introductory and Critical Essays, with an Edition of the Leipzig Fragment*, ed. Valentine A. Pakis (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2010), 15.

²⁶³ See Ralph W.V. Elliott, *Runes: An Introduction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).

audiences to hear two different meanings. On one hand the Anglo-Saxon monks, Christian Franks, and their bishop could simply hear the “word of god,” in the Christian sense of the phrase. On the other hand, Saxon Pagans could hear the more literal, contextual translation of “the secret runes, the word of God.”²⁶⁴ In their minds, runes were a gift from their god Odin, who acquired knowledge of them and their secret powers through a ritualistic self-sacrifice, described in the *Hávamál*, where he pierced himself with his spear *Gungnir* and “hung on the windswept Tree [Yggdrasil], through nine days and nights.”²⁶⁵ Knowledge of the Runes gave Odin magical shamanistic powers, ranging from dulling “the swords of deadly foes,” to calming the wind “and the waves also,” to raising the dead, and restraining his enemies.²⁶⁶ Odin is known to have quite similar miraculous abilities compared to Jesus. However, in *The Heliand*, Jesus and the Christian god take Odin’s place as the possessor and teacher of the Runes. The Lord’s Prayer or Our Father, in the Catholic tradition (Matthew 6:9-13), in song 19, is also introduced as *giruni*, and it becomes a powerful spell capable of granting believers direct access to god.²⁶⁷ While the prayer’s message remains mostly Christian, it cannot be overlooked that relating it to a Runic charm and having Jesus as the bearer of such secret knowledge creates a connection between the two gods, Jesus and Odin that may make conversion possible.

The second song is less covert in its address; it covers the Christian story of when the Angel Gabriel visits the temple priest Zachary, known as Zechariah in Luke 1:5-80, to tell him about the birth of his son, John, who becomes The Baptist. Murphy translates the angel’s

²⁶⁴ Some translators choose to omit “runes” even though it is in the manuscript. See Tonya Kim Dewey, *An Annotated English Translation of the Old Saxon Heliand: A Ninth-Century Biblical Paraphrase in the Germanic Epic Style* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 1.

²⁶⁵ Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 143.

²⁶⁶ Lee M. Hollander, trans., “Hávamál,” in *The Poetic Edda* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 38 and 39.

²⁶⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of the Lord’s Prayer in *The Heliand* see Frank G. Bosman, “‘Teach Us the Secret Runes’: The Lord’s Prayer in Heliand.” *Perichoresis* 14, no. 2 (October 2016).

description of his miraculous birth to an aged mother, as “the workings of fate made him, time formed him, and the power of God as well.”²⁶⁸ Murphy’s translation of *The Heliand* often uses “god” for other words and always uses “god” with the capital G, but this is not present in the Old Saxon. The word “god” in Saxon was never capitalized, and while it was most likely meant to refer to the Christian god in these texts, it could refer to any god, Pagan or Christian. On the other hand, words such as *metod*, which Murphy often translates as God, fate, the measurer, or time, only meant “the measurer” in its Saxon context. The measurer (*metod*) could be understood, in its historical context, as Yggdrasil, the World Tree. All life owes its existence to Yggdrasil’s presence. All of creation is sustained by it and when it’s time runs out, everything’s time runs out; hence it is “the measurer.” However, it is in need of sustenance — water. The well of Fate (*Urdar brunni*) sustains it with the help of the Norse Norns or Fates: Past, Present, and Future. They are *wurd* (Fate) in the Old-Saxon language. The connection and divine authority of *metod* and *wurd* are clearly spelled out in the *Voluspa*, the greatest source of Norse cosmology for scholars of Scandinavian myth, written in Old Norse. Below are the two most relevant stanzas for understanding their significance in the mind of a Saxon Pagan.

<i>Asc veit ec standa,</i>	<i>heitir Yggdrasil,</i>
<i>hár baðmr, ausinn</i>	<i>hvítaauri;</i>
<i>þaðan koma doggvar,</i>	<i>þærs í dala falla,</i>
<i>stendr æ yfir, grænn,</i>	<i>Urdar brunni.</i>

<i>Þaðan koma meýiar</i>	<i>margs vitandi,</i>
<i>þriar, or þeim sæ,</i>	<i>er und þolli stendr.</i>
<i>Urð heto eina,</i>	<i>aðra Verðandi</i>
<i>— skaro a skiði —</i>	<i>Sculd ena þriðio.</i>
<i>þær log logðo,</i>	<i>þær lif kuro</i>
<i>alda börnom,</i>	<i>ørlog seggia.²⁶⁹</i>

²⁶⁸ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 7.

²⁶⁹ Gustav Neckel, ed. *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius Nebst Verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), 5.

“An ash I know is standing, it is called Yggdrasil
 a tall tree, moist with shining dew
 from it come the rains which downward fall
 green it stands over Urd’s well.

From there come maidens with great knowledge,
 three, from the lake, which stands under the tree.
 One called Urd, another Verdandi,
 — they cut the skiðis — and Skuld the third
 they logged the law they lives chose
 for children of men, told the thread of life.”

In the *Voluspa*, we can see the cosmic significance of *metod*, Yggdrasil, in the Saxon Pagan mind. It is the source of the life-giving waters which sustain the earth and in turn, humanity. Likewise, we can see how Christians, then and now, could see *metod* as god since they believed that it was god who created and sustained all life. It is a brilliant word choice by the author to align two audiences and two sentiments while seeking to stay true to their intended goal, to teach the Christian Gospels.

Unlike the Christian god, Yggdrasil is said to have a specific measure of time allotted to it and only the Fates knew when it’s and everyone else’s, including the gods’, time would run out. When a child was born, the Norns took a twig from the tree, *á skiði*, and carved a rune on it. That rune would choose their life, decide their destiny, or set their fate. *Wurd* (Fate) is a feminine noun related to the proper noun *Urd* (the premiere Norn or Fate) and derived from the “to be” verb *weorðan*. A Christian could hear *wurd* and assume fate, or the destiny chosen by god, but a Pagan could hear *Urd* and her Norns, the deciders of fate in Scandinavian myth. In *The Heliand*’s second song *wurd*, *metod*, and the Christian god are all placed side by side, as equals, participating in the creation of John the Baptist. Murphy recognized that these “highest entities in Germanic religion” are not “denied in the *Heliand*, and they are accorded a legitimate place in

the author's scheme of things in tandem with (as here), or in subordination to, the power of God."²⁷⁰ Fate may seem to lose its anthropomorphic nature in *The Heliand*, but its power is in no way diminished. The polysemous use of language in *The Heliand* allowed for the Christian message to be spread among the recently vanquished Saxons as well as accommodating the Norse cosmos that was still alive and well in the minds of its earliest generations of listeners.²⁷¹

Teaching audiences a forced ideology while also diplomatically appeasing them was certainly a challenging endeavor in early ninth-century Saxony. We have already seen one way in which the appeasement was achieved — polysemous and ambiguous language. Now we must spend a moment examining how this was, in fact, didactic or formative. First let us look at the author's choice of the word *metod* and how it is used. In song 6 we meet the character Anna who is sent to acknowledge the young Christ at the shrine, alongside Simeon. Before the woman performs her task, the narrator introduces her as a widow and elaborates on how that came about. It is said that “the power of the Measurer separated” her from her husband.²⁷² As I have demonstrated, the Measurer is itself a divine entity in Norse Mythology and is not to be prematurely reduced to an attribute of the Christian god. Murphy, in his translation, also acknowledges that the author of *The Heliand* is explicitly identifying *metod* as “the Measurer” and not intending any confusion. I have pointed out that the audience could receive and interpret it however they wished, but semantically the Pagan concept is clear. Immediately following

²⁷⁰ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 7, footnote 12.

²⁷¹ For further reading on the Christianization of *wurd* see Augustyn Prisca, “Wurd in the Heliand: Fate in Old Saxon,” *Interdisciplinary Journal for Germanic Linguistics and Semiotic Analysis* 4, no. 2 (1999): 281. See also Ladislaus Mittner, *Wurd. Das Sakrale in der Altgermanischen Epik* (Bern: Francke, 1955), 106. See also James E. Cathey, “Interpretatio Christiana Saxonica: Redefinition for Reeducation,” in *Interdigitations: Essays for Irmengard Rauch*, edited by Gerald F. Carr, Wayne Harbert, and Lihua Zhang (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 170.

²⁷² Murphy, *The Heliand*, 20.

metod is the word *uurdiscapu* — “the workings of fate.”²⁷³ The compound word *uurdgiscapu*, built upon *wurd* is also intentionally used to identify the Pagan divinity *Urd*, to whom we were introduced earlier. Here also, Murphy agrees that *The Heliand* poet knowingly uses the Pagan meanings of *metod* and *wurd*.²⁷⁴ The natural question any reader should ask at this time then is how can the acknowledgement of Pagan divinities holding power outside the control of the Christian god help to form a Christian community?

The answer is simple and therein lies its brilliance. We already saw in song 2 how John was born, or better yet, created by each of the three powers: *uurdgiscapu*, *metod*, and *god*. The poet’s exact wording is:

<i>metod gimarcod</i>	<i>so habed im uurdgiscapu, endi maht godes.</i> ²⁷⁵
metod and	so has him the workings of Urd, the might of god made.

The poet’s acknowledgement of the powerful entities of *Urd* and *Metod* in Norse or Germanic mythology is a calculated decision. Remember, our audience has not necessarily renounced the power of the old gods and cannot be assumed to have accepted the power of the new god yet. By adhering to Germanic belief and suggesting that *Urd* and *Metod* assisted in the creation of John they will win the approval of the audience. The next logical step is simply to place the “might of god” alongside them. Arguably one of the essential first steps of accepting Christianity is to accept the existence of their god and the power that is attributed to him. These simple three half-lines potentially manage to achieve just that, in a subtle and formative way.

²⁷³ Ibid., 20.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 20, see footnotes 28 and 29.

²⁷⁵ Anonymous, *Heliand Und Genesis*, 8.

What the poet achieved, in an equally subtle way, was to convince their audience that these powerful workings of *Urd* and *Metod* are inferior to the might of their god. I suggest that this has been achieved in a two-step process. The first step is to usurp the power that *Urd* and *Metod* have over the birth of all humans in Germanic belief. *The Heliand* poet accepts their power in the creation of humans, as was demonstrated with the conception of John, but the poet denies their power when it comes to the conception of Jesus. The narrator tells us that the Holy Spirit becomes the baby in her womb and makes no mention of *metod* or *uurdgiscapu*. They may create humans, but they did not create Jesus. By giving *Urd* and *Metod* a place in the conception of John, the author not only won the approval of their Germanic audience, but they also set up a circumstance where they could be removed from the creation of Jesus. The strategy is quite clever and the formative intentions are clear; Jesus is not to be mistaken for just any old person. Jesus is something powerful, beyond the scope of the highest powers in Norse mythology, and a product of the creative power of the Christian god. The first step of formation was achieved.

The second step was put off until much later; song 68 to be exact. This step is even more subtle, utilizing words left out. In song 68 Jesus rose from the dead. If *Urd* and *Metod* are in control of death, at least in Norse Paganism, how could Jesus have conquered death? The answer is simple: he is more powerful than them. While there is no mention of *metod* and *uurdgiscapu* at this particular point of the epic, I must highlight that it was the power of fate that sentenced Jesus to death in the first place. Therefore we are able to see that the poet intended to demonstrate, directly yet subtly, how Jesus was more powerful than *Urd*. In this thread of thought one can interpret the formative intentions of the poet — take a Pagan audience and convince them that the Christian god is as powerful as their most powerful divinity, demonstrate how the Christian

divinity is not subject to *Urd* and *Metod*'s authority, and finally show how Jesus and the Christian god are even more powerful than them. With that achieved, the poet may help supplement the forced conversion of the Saxons with an informed ideology which presents the Christian god as more powerful than any of their gods. *The Heliand* being composed as an epic was merely a tool for disseminating a message, and the message was intended to form and inform the thinking of a population. *The Heliand* was a formative epic which spoke to two audiences and suggested an ideology which could make them one. The task was not complete, however, and there were still very powerful and respected Norse gods that the poet needed to address. Subtle imagery was chosen by the poet to face the problem of powerful gods such as Odin.

One such instance of intercultural language occurred in song 12 when the imagery surrounding Jesus' baptism is likened to the Germanic god Odin. *The Heliand* describes Jesus, after having lived "thirty winters among the people in this world," arriving at the Jordan River to be baptized, along with many other thanes, by Zachary's son John.²⁷⁶ *The Heliand* tells us that when the Peace-Child came out of the water and stepped on land, "the doors of heaven opened up" and "like a powerful bird, a magnificent dove" came down and "sat upon our Chieftain's shoulder."²⁷⁷ While this is a seemingly harmless exaggeration of the dove referenced in the four Gospels, it is necessary to recognize that the author assuredly knew that the Saxon god Odin was always represented with the birds of consciousness (*Huginn*) and memory (*Muninn*) on his shoulders. Comforting the Saxons with a familiar image of their forbidden god, the author laid the groundwork for Jesus to become the new Saxon god.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 34.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 35.

In order for Jesus to become the new Saxon god, the Anglo-Saxon missionaries were forced to present him in a much more Germanic heroic fashion. While Christians had learned to see Jesus' actions as heroic, for a ninth-century Saxon he was not. For a Christian, Jesus sacrificing himself and dying on the cross was the epitome of the heroic. Yes, the Saxon god Odin also sacrificed himself, but, while Jesus allowed himself to be nailed to a cross and died three hours later, Odin speared himself through the torso and hung upside down for nine days and still did not die. Instead he gained the wisdom of the Runes and walked away to share their magic with humans, especially poets. In the Saxon mind, Jesus was a lesser god and had to be presented as more like Odin if he was going to be taken seriously.

The Eucharistic scene provides another exemplary moment in which *The Heliand* author refashions a biblical story to suit Germanic life and myth. In *The Heliand*, Jesus sent his “warrior-companions” to “a magnificent house, a high hall, which is everywhere hung with beautiful decorations,” and told them to prepare a banquet.”²⁷⁸ The location of the Last Supper in *The Heliand* has an uncanny resemblance to Odin’s hall, Valhalla, where his chosen warrior-companions will join him in the afterlife. The heavenly hall is adorned with shields, spears, the wolf, and the raven. The description of the celestial Valhalla and *The Heliand*’s Last Supper scene matches the descriptions of contemporary ninth-century Germanic Pagan halls. One of our best sources of what such a hall would look like is in Bragi Boddason’s *Ragnarsdrápa*, a short poem included in Snorri Sturlson’s thirteenth century *Prose Edda*, though scholars agree that it was passed down orally from centuries prior.²⁷⁹ It is presumed to have been written in the 850s, two decades and a day’s drive (by today’s standards) from *The Heliand*’s

²⁷⁸ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 149.

²⁷⁹ Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), x-xi.

composition.²⁸⁰ Bragi wrote it while in the court of the legendary Danish king Ragnarr Loðbrok, the father of the leaders of the Great Viking Army that invaded the island of Great Britain in the 860s, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Here we remain focused on the Last Supper as it is presented in *The Heliand*.

There is an interesting and timely variation of Church doctrine in *The Heliand*'s Last Supper. The Roman Catholic Church taught then what it teaches now, that the bread and wine in the sacrament of the Eucharist are truly transformed into the actual physical flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.²⁸¹ In *The Heliand*, the author writes that “the holy King of Heaven, the Ruler, made both wine and bread holy,” and Jesus describes them as “a thing which possesses power” a “holy image” that will “give honor to your Chieftain.”²⁸² Ronald Murphy elaborates in a footnote on this *mahtig* thing as “a power-filled (magic) thing” that would be welcomed in a shamanistic tradition such as those familiar to the Saxons.²⁸³ While Murphy may be right that it was meant to heighten the attraction that magical objects would have to worshippers of Odin, it may also have been an attempt to avoid the comparison to cannibalism. Medieval priests were fond of writing stories which depicted European Pagans as cannibals, but there is no actual evidence or any unbiased references which could substantiate their claims. While their later (post-conversion) literature often included stories of people feeding an enemy the remains of someone they cared about, that is not the same as choosing to eat someone. The point is that the concept of the Eucharistic bread and wine being flesh and blood is avoided completely. However, one can argue that *The Heliand*'s author may have unwittingly begun a debate about the authenticity of Church

²⁸⁰ See Christopher Abram, *Myths of the Pagan North: The Gods of the Norsemen* (New York: Continuum, 2011), 82.

²⁸¹ See Paschasius Radbertus, *De corpora et sanguine Domini* (Concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord).

²⁸² Murphy, *The Heliand*, 153.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 153, see footnote 235.

Theology in regards to the sacrament of the Eucharist, a debate that suggests that the formative epic may have an impact on the conquering culture as well.

A debate on Eucharistic Theology erupted a short time after *The Heliand's* composition at the nearby Abbey Corbie. The theologians Radbertus and Ratramnus are accredited with taking up the cause. Paschasius Radbertus (785-865) wrote *De corpora et sanguine Domini* (Concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord), within five years of *The Heliand's* commissioning. It was a treatise written exclusively about Eucharistic theology. In it, Radbertus sides with the Church and argues that the bread and wine are Christ's actual flesh and blood. It is possible to see this as a reactionary work against the missionary teachings to the Saxons where the Eucharist was represented as only a *mahtig thing*, a powerful, yet figurative thing.

In 843, Charles the Bald, son and successor of Louis the Pious, visited Corbie and asked the Benedictine monk Ratramnus (800-868) to contemplate a different theology of the Eucharist. Ratramnus published *De corpore et sanguine Domini* (Christ's Body and Blood). In it he challenged his Abbot Radbertus and argued in favor of *The Heliand's* representation of the holy sacrament as a powerful symbol of Christ's body and blood. It is well known and accepted that the Carolingian Dynasty wielded tremendous authority over the Roman Catholic Church at that time and influenced not only its long standing ecclesiastical hierarchy, but also the beliefs of its individual practitioners. The Holy Roman Empire conquered regional Christianity and attempted to establish a uniform Benedictine rule and Latin rite within its realm. The period has come to be called the Carolingian Reformation. During that time, they established policies which would strengthen ecclesiastical structures, promote doctrinal development, and fund religious artistic expression — i.e. churches, literature, art, etc. The policy was so successful that the Church later

formalized this Carolingian Christianity throughout all Roman Catholic churches. When the Dynasty's power diminished and they were no longer funding the monasteries, they lost influence over Church teachings and Rome squashed the debate, declaring Ratramnus' teachings heretical.

One important detail about this debate, for our purposes, was contributed in the ninth century by Rabanus Maurus (780-856). Rabanus took an understanding of the Eucharist similar to Ratramnus. Murphy has suggested that *The Heliand* was first composed at the Abbey Fulda, based on the simple truth that Rabanus was the abbot there at the time of its composition. According to Murphy, "Rabanus's broadminded tendencies with regard to non-Christian religious expression would speak well for his support of a monk attempting to write a saxonized version of the Gospel."²⁸⁴ More conclusive evidence is found in fragment V of *The Heliand*, which was traced to Mainz, where Rabanus was made archbishop after leaving Fulda.²⁸⁵ This strengthens the historical case for locating *The Heliand's* origin at Fulda, under the guidance of Rabanus.²⁸⁶ The theology of the Last Supper scene does allude to a figurative understanding of the sacramental "presence" of Christ in the Eucharist. Rabanus, "the schoolmaster of Germany," believed "the presence was primarily something realized by the recipient when united with the Lord in the sacrament."²⁸⁷ All of this supports the idea that *The Heliand* and the Christianity it taught the Saxons was under the authority of the abbot Rabanus.

²⁸⁴ Murphy, *The Saxon Savior*, 12.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 29, (see endnote 3).

²⁸⁶ For more support of Louis and Rabanus' contribution to *The Heliand* see Eric J. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict under Louis the German, 817-876* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 183. See also Dennis H. Green, "Three Aspects of the Old Saxon Biblical Epic, The Heliand," in *The Continental Saxons from the Migration Period to the Tenth Century: An Ethnographic Perspective*, eds. Dennis H. Green and Frank Siegmund (San Marino: Boydell Press, 2003), 249.

²⁸⁷ Hubert Cunliffe-Jones, ed. *A History of Christian Doctrine* (New York: T & T Clark, 1978), 242.

While Murphy does not address Eucharistic theology, he does illuminate another matter in which *The Heliand*'s author embraces the Germanic heroic code, later referred to as the *comitatus* code. Before taking "His seat in the hall," prior to the Last Supper, Jesus "told the twelve warrior-companions who were the most loyal to Him in their feelings" to feast with him.²⁸⁸ The word choice *gitriuiston*, "loyalest," is important. Murphy suggests that "the *Heliand* insists on internal attitudes: feelings determine who is a 'good thane' of Christ."²⁸⁹ A good thane is, in the Germanic worldview, a brave warrior willing to fight and die and who will remain loyal to his leader. The heroic code also demands that their leader is loyal to them and blesses them with honor and wealth, a fitting reward for their service.

The portrayal of Jesus as a Germanic hero/leader is apparent as the reader follows him to the garden on "Olivet mountain," where he is confronted by "an army of warriors."²⁹⁰ The Lord of the Runes merely spoke, and "the army of warriors pulled back in retreat — they could not stand up to the Word, the voice, of God."²⁹¹ Drawing from the Gospel of John, *The Heliand*'s author highlights a particular compatibility with Christianity and Paganism. The Saxons knew that Odin, with his Runic knowledge, possessed power "over the minds of men at war" able to drain them of "energy and will-power" causing any foe to retreat.²⁹² Once the spell had broken and the men "strengthened their resolve" returning to obtain their target, Peter "the noble swordsman flew into a rage" and he struck Malchus "a mortal wound."²⁹³ While it shows clear points of contact with the biblical story, this passage was emphasized and dramatized by the poet

²⁸⁸ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 150.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 150, (see footnote 228).

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 156 and 159.

²⁹¹ Ibid., 159.

²⁹² Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, 66.

²⁹³ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 159 and 160. The use of the name Malchus reflects the influence of the Gospel of John, which is the only Gospel to name the soldier.

to relate to the *comitatus* code of its Saxon audience. A passage from *Beowulf*, spoken by Wiglaf, a retainer of Beowulf, perfectly represents the severity of this code.

*þrong ymbe þeoden
Nu sceal sincþego
eall eðelwyn
lufen alicgean;
þære mægburge
idel hweorfan,
feorran gefricgean
domleasan dæd.
eorla gehwylcum*

pressed around the king
Now shall the receiving of treasure
all enjoyment of home
cease;
every one of your relatives
deprived,
from afar learn of
the inglorious deed.
for every earl

*Wergendra to lyt
þa hyne sio þrag becwom.
ond swyrdgifu,
eowrum cynne,
londrihtes mot
monna æghwylc
syððan æðelingas
fleam eowerne,
Deað bið sella
þonne edwitlif!²⁹⁴*

“Of defenders too little
when the time came for him.
and giving of swords,
gladness with your kin
of the opportunity to land-rights
will move about
after noblemen
your flight
Death is better
than a life of disgrace!”

The passage above is commonly referred to as “Wiglaf’s Prophecy.” After the death of Beowulf, Wiglaf shames the warriors who abandoned their lord to fight against the dragon alone. He makes no mention of the fact that during Beowulf’s pre-dragon fight boast, he stated clearly that he was to fight the dragon alone. Apparently, the code of loyalty between warrior and lord was even stronger than the expectation to follow orders. As Wiglaf states, had they disobeyed orders, they would not have brought such shame upon themselves and their families. Their culture of loyalty and shame was so great that it even extended to their distant relatives who

²⁹⁴ Klaeber, ed. *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, 98.

Wiglaf expects will be forced to wander without being able to own land: “Death is better ... than a life of disgrace.”

Peter’s action in the garden can be found in the Bible, but *The Heliand*’s emphasis and dramatization of his rage were clearly chosen by the author to appeal to the Saxon *comitatus* code and to emphasize their expected future loyalty to Jesus and his Holy Roman Emperor. Like Beowulf, the Chieftain assures Peter that this is his battle to fight alone and that if he wanted to, he could call down “many angels wise in warfare that no human beings could stand up to,” but since “the all-mighty Father has determined it differently,” he will not do it.²⁹⁵ Instead, Jesus orders Peter to sheathe his sword and heals the wounded Malchus before allowing the soldiers to lead him away in chains. While Jesus is chained, Satan lurks in the crowd. In *The Heliand*, Satan is a major character in a way that goes beyond what we find in the canonical Gospels. He is actively engaged in making sure that Jesus’ fate is sealed, even physically present yet “hidden by a magic helmet,” the *helidhelm*.²⁹⁶ The only other use of such a helmet is in *Nibelungenlied* in which Siegfried uses one in a scandalous bedroom scene, surely not in any copy of the Gospels. Concealed by his magic helmet, Satan succeeds in sealing the fate of Jesus and watches from the crowd as Jesus is led up the mountain, where he is executed and “died on the rope.”²⁹⁷ Jesus was Satan’s prisoner to be sacrificed “on the rope.” Jesus’ remains were laid in the ground, committed to the earth with a stone slab placed over him.

²⁹⁵ Murphy, *The Heliand*, 161. Here, the wording of *The Heliand* reflects the influence of the Gospel of Matthew. Clearly *The Heliand* author is utilizing the most heroic and sovereign moments of Jesus’ life as told in the canonical Gospels.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 180, (see footnote 283).

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

The Resurrection is described in much more detail in *The Heliand* with a “holy breath, going under the stone to the corpse.”²⁹⁸ “Brilliantly radiating, God’s Peace-Child rose up,” unlocking the doors of Hel and building a road to heaven.²⁹⁹ Earlier, during his battle with Satan, allowing himself to feel hunger, Jesus tricked Satan into “thinking now for sure that He was simply a man,” whose soul Satan wished to possess and take into the realm of Hel.³⁰⁰ *Hel* is another interesting polysemous word choice. Now, many Christians recognize Hell as the realm of Christianity’s Satan where sinners will be punished for all eternity, but ninth-century Saxon Pagans knew the word *Hel* to mean the realm of the goddess, Hel. She kept the souls of the dead who were not found heroic enough to be taken to Valhalla. It is not a place of torture or punishment; rather, it is a place similar to Sheol in the Hebrew Bible. In Hel, Jesus’ true identity is revealed as “the holy Guard of Heaven” who could not be contained by Satan.³⁰¹ Unlike the Saxon god Balder, whose death will bring about Ragnarok, the Pagan equivalent to Armageddon, Jesus escaped the abyss of Hel. The author demonstrated a belief in Jesus’ authority over death and Hel and presented him as a worthy *Drohtin*, a heroic leader and personal lord.

With the military conquest of the Franks completed, Christianity was free to wage war on the Saxon Paganism, and the result was what Carolyn Jones Medine calls “de-storying and re-storying.”³⁰² Saxon Paganism was “de-storied;” it was forbidden, and attempts were made to erase it. But its culture lived on in Carolingian Christianity and Western Christianity was “re-storied” in *The Heliand*, which, as a formative epic, seeks to align Jesus with figures and values of Pagan Saxon culture. This more heroic version of Jesus aligns with Saxon culture,

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 191.

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 191.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 38.

³⁰¹ Ibid., 37.

³⁰² Carolyn Jones Medine, Unpublished, 2015. Used with permission from the author.

making conversion for individuals more likely and altering the collective memory of the Saxons themselves. In an ironic twist, we see the formative epic raising a question about the central symbol of Catholicism, the Eucharist, as the need to form it to a Saxon sensibility opens questions about the nature of the elements, about transfiguration. As cultures collide, formative epic opens intercultural space in which new forms may come to be, though the intention of the conquering culture is to evangelize and to spread Christian culture.

CHAPTER 4

***BEOWULF*: CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

“The Danes have corrupted the Saxons so that they think of themselves as Danes.”

—Asser³⁰³

As the eighth-century westward expansion of Frankish Carolingian Christianity was solidified by ninth-century methods of the acculturation established by Anglo-Saxon monks and missionaries, a new phenomenon was set to erupt. The Viking Age (793-1066) is a notorious period in history when Danes, Norsemen, and Northmen took to the seas and rivers of Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. They were Norse Pagans, Heathens famously violent and militarily unmatched. They won almost every battle they fought, and their enemies often chose to hire them, pay them, and grant them lands and estates rather than fight them. Most of these Vikings were content to accept the wealth and simply assimilated into their new surroundings, marrying local women, and raising children according to the local customs. Within a matter of generations their bloodlines were linked to royalty all over Europe, and while their Heathen ways seemed to disappear into thin air, this chapter will show how it left a lasting impact wherever it went.

Our case study is the impact of the Viking conquest in England. There is cause to suggest that the sudden influx of Viking invaders in the ninth century was a response to the conquests of the Franks into continental Saxony. Saxons who refused to submit to their Frankish Christian

³⁰³ Bernard Cornwell, *The Pale Horseman* (New York: Harper Collins, 2006), 56.

overlords moved north into modern Denmark and joined the still Pagan and Free Danes in the conquest of new territory. The Franks had proven themselves a formidable foe, causing their Pagan neighbors to turn their eyes north and west, beginning wave after wave of attacks on English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish shores. At first, as Richard Fletcher points out, they raided “religious communities principally because they were repositories of treasure — not just their own ... but also the treasure of local lay society.”³⁰⁴ Fletcher describes these early medieval monasteries as similar to modern banks and concluded that pillaging them was exactly the same, to use a modern analogy, as robbing a bank.³⁰⁵ In essence, they were well-informed bank robbers. And contrary to popular myth they did not seem to be on an anti-Christian crusade as evidenced by the fact that “poorer religious communities seem to have been spared the Vikings’ attentions.”³⁰⁶ After getting rich, these Vikings then settled down, often within Christian territories, and eagerly integrated into the prevailing culture.³⁰⁷ In many of these places, they were hired as mercenaries, given local lordships, married Christian aristocratic women, and raised their children as Christians. The Scandinavians who remained at home in their native Pagan lands also assimilated into the Christian network of European principalities which traded with each other. We do not have the most detailed record of how this happened, but it seems that Scandinavian kings eventually succumbed to the economic pressures of wealthier Christian neighbors and their constituents gradually followed suit. Centuries later, Christian authors would write magnificent hagiographies about how this all took place.

³⁰⁴ Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 370.

³⁰⁵ See *Ibid.*, 370.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 371.

³⁰⁷ See *Ibid.*, 386 and 393.

Our focus in this chapter is to examine evidence which suggests that during the ninth and tenth centuries, an area known as Danelaw in northeast England underwent a sort of culturally religious conversion away from Christianity, in favor of Norse Paganism, or at least experienced a syncretism of the two. In order to defend my thesis that both Danish settlers and previously Christian Anglo-Saxon natives continued and/or began to participate in Pagan practices, we will survey linguistic, archaeological, historical, and religious writings that allude to such practices. One main source will be the sermons of Wulfstan, Archbishop of York, a powerful city within the Danelaw. His sermons are written in Old English, and I have included my translation of one of these in its entirety (see Appendix C), in order to hear a contemporary voice directly concerned with the religious practices being performed in tenth-century Danelaw. Wulfstan's opinion will have to be respected for what it is, a one-sided voice with the agenda of maintaining the wealth and status of Christianity, its abbeys, and bishoprics. Understanding that his view reflects a particular bias, we will be studying secondary sources written by archaeologists and historians whose findings may be able to corroborate Wulfstan's assertions of an apocalyptic³⁰⁸ Pagan resurgence.

My choice of the word "resurgence" is purposeful, because it highlights the fact that the Saxons who arrived on British soil centuries earlier, in the fifth century, brought with them a Norse Paganism which was very similar to that of the Vikings. Ronald Hutton discussed how the Celtic British adopted, under Roman occupation, a Gallo-Roman Paganism and later Roman Christianity which was subsequently replaced by the Norse Paganism of the Anglo-Saxons. Then the descendants of those Anglo-Saxon kings, thanks to Pope Gregory the Great, began to convert

³⁰⁸ Wulfstan believed the Christian Apocalypse was imminent and that the arrival of the Vikings was one of the signs of its arrival.

to Christianity and so did their subjects. But Hutton wrote that most of these English kingdoms reverted to their Saxon Paganism after the royal converts died.³⁰⁹ Aware of Britain's numerous religious affiliations throughout history, it is quite easy to see how the English would easily accept the influence of the new Viking ruling elite's religion and culture, which was similar if not identical to that of their ancestors.

When researching the Danish and Scandinavian influence on early medieval England, one finds an ongoing and heated debate about Viking settlements. The debate is being carried out by two opposing sides. While one side argues that the Viking settlers numbered in the tens of thousands, the other side insists they numbered only hundreds or thousands. I will not be joining this debate. In fact, I will *skirt* this conflict entirely. It may *seem odd* that I would do so, but I want to *sway* my *fellow* readers to *take* up a different debate, and *get* the point that Danish and Scandinavian Viking settlers, regardless of *their* numbers, *cast* a massive and lasting effect on English culture and religion which is visible even today. For instance, the words *skirt*, *seem*, *odd*, *sway*, *fellow*, *take*, *get*, *their*, and *cast* are all loanwords from Old Norse, the language of the Vikings. And in case I have not made myself abundantly clear already, even the word *loan* is borrowed from the Vikings.

Viking culture has left a lasting impact on English culture, which also, by means of seaborne invasions, has spread to all four corners of the globe. Scholars of Vikings and scholars who dismiss Vikings act sometimes as though there is nothing left to study about them. Utilizing the exemplary research of Jonathan Evans on the *their* pronoun in the *Peterborough Chronicle*,³¹⁰ I argue that there are still plenty of discoveries sitting right in front of us overlooked by

³⁰⁹ See Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, 319.

³¹⁰ One of the most comprehensive manuscripts which have collectively become known as *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

generations of earlier academics awaiting a fresh set of eyes. In his article “Scribal Error as Linguistic Evidence in the Peterborough Chronicle,” Evans discusses his discovery of the *þeora* (their) pronoun in the 449 annal. The 449 annal discusses the arrival of the Saxons and their leaders Hengest and Horsa. For this reason the 449 annal is one of the most widely studied annals in all of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Evans points out that “[a]lthough Peterborough annal 449 has been transcribed and edited several times in the last four centuries, the word *þeora* has not been discussed in secondary linguistic or historical scholarship and has scarcely been noted in editorial commentary on the manuscript.”³¹¹ The few mentions of it have dismissed it merely as a scribal error, but Evans, being keenly aware of the location of the *Peterborough Chronicle*’s composition in a region previously known as Danelaw, is able to point out that this *þeora* in place of the Anglo-Saxon pronoun *heora* was no mere error. It was, “indeed, the earliest datable example on record — of the spread of Scandinavian-derived plural pronouns in *þ-/th-* (NE ‘they’, ‘them’, ‘their’) in early English.”³¹²

Just as “the word *þeora* itself has survived centuries of scholarly scrutiny undetected,” this chapter utilizes similarly underdeveloped evidence to defend the thesis that Danish and Scandinavian influence in ninth- and tenth-century England was so strong that it even led to the hybridization of English Christianity and Norse Paganism.³¹³ In order to position the context of this argument, we must clarify exactly what is meant by Danelaw. The Danelaw is a term which came into use during the eleventh century, but referred to a territory existing since the late ninth century. From the first recorded arrival of the Vikings in Britain, in 787, the Danish and

³¹¹ Jonathan Evans, “Scribal Errors as Linguistic Evidence in the *Peterborough Chronicle*: Anglo-Scand/eME *þeora*” in *North-Western European Language Evolution*, vol. 37 (2000): 55.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 55.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 57.

Scandinavian Vikings won virtually every battle, large and small, until the Battle of Edington in 878. In 878, King Alfred of Wessex won a decisive victory against the army of Guthrum, a Danish Viking, and established what has come to be known as the Treaty of Wedmore, or the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum, which established the northeastern part of modern day England as Danish territories and the southwestern portion, as Wessex (see Appendix D: Figure 2). The Danish territories were ruled by the laws of the Danes, hence the name Danelaw. By drawing a diagonal line from London, in the southeast, to Chester, in the northwest, one can envision the boundary between the lands of the Danes and those of the Saxons.

The evidence in focus here has all been derived from within the lands of the Danes, or the Danelaw, and demonstrates the cultural influence of Danish Pagans on English Christians. One of the most readily available pieces of evidence within the Danelaw that is still accessible today are place names. The discussion of place names has become quite contentious, but the fact of the matter is that England, particularly northeast England, is filled with linguistically Scandinavian-derived place names. While some scholars have argued that these place names support the claim that a large scale Viking settlement took place, others have contested this view and maintained that they do not support such a claim. I am not concerned with the size of the settlement. Instead, my concern is with the cultural influence that Vikings had on England. Regardless of the number of Danish and Scandinavian settlers in northeast England, the fact that there are an abundance of Scandinavian place names and personal names does support the assertion that Viking influence was significant in England. Most notably the ancient city of Eoforwic, as it was known by the Saxons, came to be called York, a Scandinavian-derived³¹⁴ name of which even the modern

³¹⁴ Derived from the Old Norse word *Jórvík*.

citizen is aware. In fact, the Domesday Book, written by the Norman conquerors after the Battle of Hastings (1066), “records more Scandinavian personal names (140) than English (80) personal names and it is notable that, in 1066, all of the major Lincolnshire landowners had Danish names.”³¹⁵ The bottom line is that, as Kevin Leahy and Caroline Parson put it, “A small number of fighting men can have disproportionate impact on a country,” the sort of impact which can cause “some acculturation of the indigenous population.”³¹⁶ Such acculturation, specifically the use of foreign languages, is widely attested. More specifically, David N. Parsons boldly claims that the fact “[t]hat Scandinavian language was once spoken in fairly wide areas of England is certain.”³¹⁷ It stands to reason that the profound linguistic influence left on English lands, peoples, and language is strong evidence of an indigenous acculturation regardless of the number of Viking settlers.

Other evidence of Viking influence on Anglo-Saxon culture includes the many archaeological finds uncovered from English soil over the centuries. Historically speaking, material artifacts are some of the most decisive forms of evidence of a people’s presence, behavior, and even sometimes intentions. The bulk of material uncovered by archaeologists, both professional and amateur, in Britain includes metalwork, sculpture, fortifications, and burial sites. Beginning with burial sites, it is helpful to highlight a more recent find at Heathwood, Ingleby, Derbyshire. What is particularly striking about this graveyard is the evidence for cremation. As D.M. Hadley states, “[c]remation is unlikely to have been a choice exercised by

³¹⁵ Kevin Leahy and Caroline Paterson, “New light on the Viking presence in Lincolnshire: the artefactual evidence,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 183.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 183 and 191.

³¹⁷ David N. Parsons, “How long did the Scandinavian language survive in England? Again,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 299.

individuals and groups who had converted to Christianity. Therefore, the cremation cemetery at Heathwood ... seems likely to be the burial ground of pagan Scandinavian settlers.”³¹⁸ The real importance of a cemetery practicing cremation during the Viking Age is that they brought with them a culture, specifically a religious culture that remained intact and in stark contrast to Anglo-Saxon Christian culture. Early and medieval Christianity, with an emphatic belief in global physical resurrection, forbade the practice of cremation. Only in the most recent times are Catholic Christians beginning to practice cremation. Viking Age practitioners of Norse Paganism, however, famously practiced cremation upon pyres adorned with wealth and weapons. Of course many were also buried, outside holy grounds,³¹⁹ often with a hoard of wealth, animals, and weapons — which again separated them from the Christians. Pre-Viking Age Christians were rarely buried with such objects and those who were, were most likely to be buried within holy ground. The importance is that Scandinavian settlers brought with them a culture, in opposition to the Anglo-Saxon Christian culture, which would leave a lasting impact on it.

One of the most lasting pieces of burial information, readily available, are gravestones. As we mentioned, not every Viking in England was cremated. Julian D. Richards points out that “[a] very definite commitment to paganism is demonstrated at Ingleby by the performance of cremation rites in conjunction with mound burial and the laying out of stone kerbs.”³²⁰ Interestingly, Richards goes on to speculate that the varying burial practices among the Vikings at Repton might point to a split in the army, known as The Great Viking Army. In 873-74, the Great Viking Army, referred to as the Great Heathen Army by Anglo-Saxon Christians, set up

³¹⁸ Hadley, “In search of the vikings,” 17.

³¹⁹ Church graveyards.

³²⁰ Julian D. Richards, “Boundaries and cult centers: Viking burial in Derbyshire,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 101-2.

camp at Repton on the Trent river, a natural boundary of what would later become Danelaw. They set up camp utilizing the river and its steep bank as one defense along with the stone church now known as St. Wystan's and added fortifications to protect themselves from attack. Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle described what the excavations of Viking activities revealed, as a forensic scientist deciphers a crime scene. "There is no sign at Repton that the men of the Danish army or their leaders respected the church ... [t]o the contrary, they dug the ditch of their winter camp through the cemeteries, wrecked the church and the western mausoleum, broke up stone crosses, using one as rubble to make a cairn for a fallen warrior."³²¹ The destruction of church grounds by Scandinavians represents a lack of respect for Christianity.

Later, when Scandinavian motifs on church and gravestone sculptures began to appear, it may have been Anglo-Saxon Christians who were adopting knowledge of and respect for the Norse cosmos. Perhaps Anglo-Saxon Christians were adopting Scandinavian culture just as readily as later Scandinavian settlers began assimilating into the Christian culture of England. Hutton addresses this phenomenon specifically when describing gravestones in Yorkshire. He states that scholars believe "they represent a Christian appropriation of the pagan stories, so that it is actually the Crucifixion that brings about Ragnarök, and Sigurd is enlisted as a Christian hero."³²²

John McKinnell has written an enlightening piece discussing such sculptures found throughout Britain and their significance. Speaking specifically about Borwald's cross slab (see Appendix B: Image 1) from the Isle of Man, McKinnell highlights the Norse side's depiction of Ragnarök. He points out that "we would not be able to interpret these carvings without the help

³²¹ Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle, "Repton and the 'great heathen army'," in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 84.

³²² Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, 327.

of the *Snorra Edda* and the eddic poems, in this case the *Völuspá*, from which Snorri derived much of his material.”³²³ McKinnell explains that “[t]he same was probably true in the tenth and early eleventh centuries. Sculpted images allude to motifs rather than relating complete stories, and they require prior knowledge if those motifs are to be understood.”³²⁴ Hence his conclusion is that “[t]he sculptures clearly imply that some myths and heroic tales were sufficiently familiar in northern England in the Viking Age.”³²⁵ On this particular slab, which has a Christian side and a Norse side, we are able to discern concrete evidence that Norse religious culture was pervading tenth-century England and was not only recognized, but also respected. In fact, the Norse stories were so popular that McKinnell, building on the work of Judith Jesch, argues that some of the skaldic verse which survives even into modern day was potentially written in England.³²⁶ The two pieces in particular that McKinnell argues have Anglo-Norse origins are the *Völundarkviða* (The Lay of Volund) and the *Brymskviða* (The Lay of Thrym).³²⁷ He adds that his “paper has at least suggested that some eddic poetry was composed in Anglo-Scandinavian England, that some of it was of high quality, and that traces of it survive for us to enjoy today.”³²⁸

Other material evidence surviving to be discussed today are brooches, or ornamental pins used to fasten clothing in the medieval period (see Appendix B: Images 2 and 3). Leahy and Paterson’s work on indigenous acculturation in Anglo-Scandinavian England includes a section on the discovery of numerous metal brooches and their implications. They highlight that “[s]ome

³²³ John McKinnell, “Eddic poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian northern England,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 328.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 328.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 330.

³²⁶ See Judith Jesch, “Skaldic verse in Scandinavian England,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001).

³²⁷ McKinnell, “Eddic poetry in Anglo-Scandinavian northern England,” 338.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 339.

disc brooches from the rural Danelaw are typically Scandinavian in character, bearing Scandinavian motifs,” — the same motifs that McKinnell illustrated required prior knowledge of Norse cosmology to understand.³²⁹ Discussing other brooches found in the urban center of York, which depict backward-looking Jelling animals, Leahy and Paterson conclude that they “represent a final stage of cultural assimilation and were most probably made by native craftsmen, possibly even for native women.”³³⁰ Such wondrous finds continue to shed light on and strengthen the understanding that Vikings did not simply settle, get baptized, and assimilate, but that there was an ongoing give and take of cultural assimilation affecting both peoples, religions, and cultures. This ultimately revealed itself in a sort of hybrid culture, which may still be found hiding in plain sight and which will be evident in *Beowulf* as well. The fact that English craftsmen were creating sculptures and metalworks, such as brooches, depicting Norse motifs and potentially selling them to an Anglo-Saxon market is proof that cultural sharing was not unidirectional. Agreeing with the argument of hybridity, Leahy and Paterson point out that it was most common in “urban centers, such as York ... where cultural integration might be expected to have been at its most active.”³³¹

York, formerly Eoforwic, is the center upon which the larger argument finds its greatest defense. York was captured by the Great Viking Army in 867 and was held by Danes until the Norman conquest in 1066.³³² For nearly two centuries, the Viking Pagans controlled and lived side-by-side with Anglo-Saxon Christians in the urban center of York. Since this ancient city has held such prominence in trade and manufacture long before the Viking Age, its status was

³²⁹ Leahy and Paterson, “New light on the Viking presence in Lincolnshire: the artefactual evidence,” 195.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

³³² See *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

recorded and discussed often in contemporary writings. It was an international trade center where even the minting of monies was a regular occurrence. Mark Blackburn has done a wonderful job documenting the minting activities of Vikings in Danelaw and clarifying its significance. First, it must be stated that, at the time of the Viking Age no coin production was taking place in Scandinavia.³³³ Recognizing the value in coin production, as a movable form of currency that is easy to quantify and distribute, the Vikings poured resources into making sure certain locations of money production stayed in business. The Danes brought moneyers from France and allowed certain centers such as York to continue production. In York, they utilized the established authority of the archbishopric to aid in this endeavor. As Blackburn points out, “the profits of minting were a source of revenue that was jealously guarded by the ruling authority ... Thus for much of the Middle Ages, the archbishops of Canterbury and York took a portion of the profits of the local mint.”³³⁴ With the church as an authority over the moneyers, “[i]t was clearly acceptable to promote a Christian message.”³³⁵ Therefore, many of the coins depict saints, crosses, and other Christian motifs. What is more striking are those, such as the St. Peter pennies, which not only depicted Christian motifs, but also included Norse ones, in this case a hammer, presumably Thor’s (see Appendix B: Image 4).³³⁶ Having pointed out that the archbishop carried authority over the moneyers we might speculate that coins with Norse motifs must also have had the blessing of the church, or at least the local archbishop.

³³³ See Mark Blackburn, “Expansion and Control: Aspects of Anglo-Scandinavian minting south of the Humber,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001), 138.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 136.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 136.

³³⁶ See Lesley Abrams, “The conversion of Danelaw,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, eds. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow, 2001) 37.

That blessing was, no doubt, a simple move of diplomacy or self-preservation. Killing Christians, even monks and bishops, was of no consequence to a Dane. The famous 793 annal of *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describes how the Vikings attacked the monastery at Lindisfarne, killing and plundering everything. But what is not often talked about is how Vikings not only killed bishops, they killed the office of the bishop. Lesley Abrams discusses the process of eliminating the office of bishops quite clearly when he points out that during and within the Danelaw “[b]ishops and their sees seem to have been prominent among the casualties.”³³⁷ After a thorough discussion of how these bishoprics were being systematically eliminated throughout the Danelaw and how bishoprics were previously “not casually mislaid,” Abrams adds that “only Lindisfarne and York remained in business in Scandinavian ruled regions, and only the latter continued in its original location.”³³⁸ Thus we find ourselves at York where a voice of Christianity can be heard crying in the wilderness, through the sermons of the archbishop Wulfstan.

Wulfstan was a diplomatic man. He was also a reformer, but he had to be diplomatic to maintain his see. His status among the royalty of England is well attested both then and now. He lived at the turn of the second millennium, dying in 1023. Milton McC. Gatch points out that “[d]uring the years of his archiepiscopate, Wulfstan drafted legislation for both Æthelred and his Danish successor Cnut, wrote on the nature of the political order, and worked to reform clerical life and teaching.”³³⁹ This implies that not only did Wulfstan have the favor of the king and traveled in the most powerful circles, but he also worked directly with the Danes. King Cnut was

³³⁷ Ibid., 33.

³³⁸ Ibid., 33.

³³⁹ Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 19.

king of England, Denmark, and Norway, as was his father Sweyn Forkbeard. Together they make up the only two Vikings to ever claim kingship over all of England. Wulfstan, while a staunch Christian, often worked with these Vikings, perhaps involuntarily, but his work is a fact nonetheless.

Wulfstan, through his political work, was enacting a reform, similar to the prior monastic reform of the Carolingians. The monasticism that emerged in England emphasized a strong reliance on a king.³⁴⁰ According to Gatch, “the work of centralization of the state was furthered considerably by the reforms and the reform program was extended to the secular church.”³⁴¹ Wulfstan worked directly with kings to strengthen the authority of the church by validating the authority of a single king who could be allied with the interests of the church. Gatch adds that “Wulfstan was motivated chiefly by the desire ... to reform and revitalize the church,” and I would add that Wulfstan began to reinstate the practice of preaching, which Gatch states had been lost to monotonous ritual in the early medieval period.³⁴² Wulfstan saw the power of preaching as not only religious instruction, but also as political. As an active reformer and famous orator, who recorded numerous sermons, with an inclination towards the political, Wulfstan presents an indispensable voice of diplomatic opposition addressing both Christians and Pagans alike. In Appendix C, I have included my translation of one such sermon, which is pertinent in the discourse of Norse Pagan influence on Anglo-Saxon Christian culture. The sermon is titled *De falsis deis* (On false gods) and was written in Old English.

Wulfstan’s sermon sheds light on his present time and mentions the behavior of Christians and Pagans alike. The first point to highlight is his interesting work as a religious

³⁴⁰ See *Ibid.*, 9-10.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 18.

comparatist discussing Jove and Mercury, who he states are known as Thor and Odin among the Danish, *gehāten Ōðrum naman on Denisce wīsan*. It is important to add that the very next line begins with “Now say” (*Nu secgað*), with the verb to say in the present plural case, “some of the Danish men” (*sume þā Denisce men*). The point is that the adverb *now* and the present tense verb *say* makes it quite clear to the reader that the talk, praise, and worship of Odin and Thor were quite literally still common practice in the Danelaw. In this moment, Wulfstan gives us one of the most concrete pieces of evidence that the Viking settlers continued to live as Norse Pagans even in Christian England. His argument against the validity of their belief system is summed up in his presupposition of their misunderstanding of the relationship between Odin and Thor. He adds that the Danes think Thor is Odin’s son, but he knows, from books (*we rædað on bōcum*), that since Jove, called Thor by another name (*hätte Þor oðrum naman*), is Saturn’s son, they must be wrong. He also argued that all Heathens are wrong because they were tricked through the devil’s teaching (*þurh dēofles lāre*) into worshiping men as gods. We know now that Norse Pagans did not write books about their religion; Wulfstan was not reading any authoritative Norse Pagan text. Instead he must have been reading Roman Pagan texts and projecting a one to one correlation between the two. This was a common mistake made by others as far back as Tacitus and Julius Caesar.³⁴³ There are no known written Norse Pagan texts from the time of Wulfstan. However, there were Christian authoritative texts, such as Matthew and Luke. A reader of either of those Gospels, intent on disproving them, could just as easily make incorrect assumptions about the parentage of Jesus. Matthew begins with a lineage of Jesus to David through his human

³⁴³ See Tacitus, *Germania* and Julius Caesar, *De Bello Gallico*.

father Joseph. And Luke also traces his lineage through David and Joseph. Aside from that, let us look directly at Wulfstan's entire sentence about the fatherhood of Thor. It reads as follows:

*Nu secgað sume þā Denisce men on heora gedwylde þæt se Iouis wære, þe hy Þor hatað, Mercuries sunu, þe hi Oðon namiað, ac hi nabbað na riht, forðan þe we rædað on bocum, ge on hæpenum ge on Cristenum, þæt se hetula Iouis to soðan is Saturnes sunu.*³⁴⁴

Now some of the Danish men say in their error that he were Jove, whom they call Thor, Mercury's son, whom they call Odin, but they are not right, because we read in books, you among the Heathens [and] you among the Christians, that the hostile Jove in truth is Saturn's son.

It is significant that he addresses both Heathens and Christians. Clearly, this is a didactic moment, and the implication is that not only does he have the ear of each group, but he also intends to teach both. It would be easy to presume that he intends it as instruction for Christians to go out and systematically convert their Heathen neighbors, but after examining the plethora of evidence that demonstrates a likely syncretism, even among the Christians, one cannot help but wonder if he intends to teach the Christians as well, in their error. Soon, teaching was not as necessary because the English king began to exert his authority over the Danes in a way similar to what Charlemagne had done to the Saxons.

When Wulfstan was given the authority to execute his intentions, under Æthelred "the Unready" (968-1016), a Christian king, he enacted a "flurry of prohibitions of pagan worship in northern England in 1000-2."³⁴⁵ In the position of power, Christians no longer had to appeal to love of neighbor or spreading the good news, they were able forcefully to persecute their neighbors for not sharing their beliefs. But, as Gatch puts it, the "Scandinavian influence dissipated not in a sudden dramatic foreclosure, but in a long, slow, incremental merging into the

³⁴⁴ Wulfstan, "De falsis deis," in *The Cambridge Old English Reader*, ed. Richard Marsden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 208.

³⁴⁵ Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, 342.

speech, culture, and ways of life of the region.”³⁴⁶ With the help of prohibitions, persecutions, and the approaching Norman conquest, the Christians won. Robert Hutton describes the success of Christianity in Britain, stating, “[i]t seems that the more aggressive, determined and monopolistic religion had the edge over its rivals, simply because it cared more about winning, and demanded absolute victory.”³⁴⁷ Hutton also points out that the Danelaw, in fact, was encircled by Christians on every side and that “the faith thus preached to them had already been adopted by the most powerful, sophisticated and culturally and technologically advanced states in Europe, to which rulers who accepted it could much more easily be linked in trade, diplomacy and alliance.”³⁴⁸ The bottom line is that Christianity was a globalizing economic force similar to the free trade agreements made between modern nation states with the ability to increase the wealth and power of all of its aristocratic supporters. But as is abundantly clear, the Christianity of Danelaw was no longer the same Anglo-Saxon Christianity of the English — it “was left with a recognisably Danish identity.”³⁴⁹

Before that influence was finalized, there was still a need to propagate the Christian faith. In this chapter we have looked at evidence which supports the case that the tenth-century Danelaw was in need of Christian formation. In the next chapter we will discuss the tenth-century English Benedictine Reformation and examine how it customized a particular instrument to assist in the Christian formation of the Danelaw: the formative epic *Beowulf*.

³⁴⁶ Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England*, 36.

³⁴⁷ Hutton, *Pagan Britain*, 342.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 318.

³⁴⁹ Leahy and Paterson, “New light on the Viking presence in Lincolnshire: the artefactual evidence,” 182.

CHAPTER 5

BEOWULF: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

“I want that song chanted in every hall. I want it shouted in Wessex, heard in East Anglia, told to the Welsh, and sung in Frankia. Make it good, priest, make it bloody, make it exciting!”

—Uhtred³⁵⁰

While the *Beowulf* manuscript may be one of the most written about pieces of English literature in criticism, it is not true to suggest that there is nothing left to say about it. There is still room to contribute to its interpretation, and this chapter will seek to do so by advancing and defending the thesis that *Beowulf* was not simply an epic or oral literature that was finally committed to writing, but was a formative epic that was written with a clear purpose and that spoke to a specific audience. The manuscript’s dating in the 990s is not coincidental.³⁵¹ It was the time of the tenth-century English Benedictine Reform when the four most famous Old English codices were compiled. The Junius, Exeter, Vercelli, and Nowell (which includes *Beowulf*) codices were uniquely Anglo-Saxon Christian literatures. Among them is one, *Beowulf*, which is even more singular in character. While the others are all quite clearly Christian with Christian heroes, *Beowulf*’s hero is not so clearly Christian. In this chapter, we will look at why this was no

³⁵⁰ Bernard Cornwell, *Warriors of the Storm* (New York: Harper Collins, 2016) 156-57.

³⁵¹ Currently scholars agree that the *Beowulf* manuscript was composed within two decades of the year 1000 CE, regardless of their stance on it having an earlier oral composition. For discussion of recent criticism on the manuscript’s dating see Andy Orchard, *A Critical Companion to Beowulf* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003), 20. See also Colin Chase, “Opinions on the Date of *Beowulf*, 1815-1980”; Kevin S. Kiernan, “The Eleventh-Century Origin of *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf* Manuscript”; John C. Pope, “On the Date of Composition of *Beowulf*”; in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. Colin Chase (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981). Regardless of the forty year range the argument presented here stands — it was composed during the time of the Danelaw.

coincidence of syncretism, but was instead a planned work for a specific audience. Its primary audience was presumably living in the Danelaw, a region still ruled by Viking settlers, their descendants, or their Anglo-Saxon neighbors who adopted their ways.³⁵² Many of these people nominally had accepted Christianity, but as we demonstrated in the previous chapter, they continued in their old Pagan ways.

Before delving entirely into *Beowulf* and the Danelaw, it is prudent to look further at the contents of the codices in order to highlight just how different the *Beowulf* manuscript was. The Junius manuscript includes a copy of *Genesis*. It is a copy from the ninth-century Old Saxon manuscripts known as *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*. It also includes short versions of *Exodus* and *Daniel*, as well as another work titled *Christ and Satan*. The Exeter Book is composed of short poems and riddles, including the famed *Seafarer* and *The Wanderer*. The Vercelli manuscript includes longer narratives such as *Elene* (the story of Constantine's mother), *Andreas*, and the *Dream of the Rood* (a story about the crucifixion). And the Nowell codex includes *Beowulf*, *Judith*, and Alfred's translation of Augustine's *Soliloquies*. These are not exhaustive lists of the codices' contents, but have been selected here to demonstrate the types of contents included in each. As is obvious, their pages are filled with Judeo-Christian stories having saints, apostles, and Jesus as their heroes. But *Beowulf* includes no saints, no apostles, and no Jesus. The exception, *Beowulf*, has a Pagan hero, a Christian narrator, and many instances of polysemous language. Considering the cost of making such manuscripts, we can be certain that it was not just the whim of one creative author. This was an investment, paid for by the Church, for the Church.

³⁵² For further reading in support of *Beowulf*'s composition coinciding with the Danelaw see Kevin S. Kiernan, "The Eleventh-Century Origin of *Beowulf* and the *Beowulf* Manuscript"; Roberta Frank, "Skaldic Verse and the Date of *Beowulf*"; Alexander Callander Murray, "*Beowulf*, the Danish Invasions, and Royal Genealogy"; in *The Dating of Beowulf*, ed. Colin Chase.

The English Benedictine Reform included such investments in their Church's transformation of a uniform and celibate network of Benedictine churches and monasteries throughout England. Monks and clerics were recruited from Frankia to help with the task, in the same way that prior to the Viking Age, Frankia had enlisted Anglo-Saxon clerics to aid in their missionary efforts and Carolingian Reformation. It is important to note that *Genesis*, in the Junius manuscript, was a copy of the Old Saxon *Genesis A* and *Genesis B*. These were texts written alongside *The Heliand* during the ninth century conversion efforts among the conquered Saxons. The monks who knew these stories also may have known *The Heliand* and its potential effectiveness. We are aware that a copy of *The Heliand* was made in England in the tenth century.³⁵³ And these clever clerics also would have recognized that the circumstances in tenth-century Danelaw were different than those in ninth-century Saxony. I suggest, therefore, that, as part of the English Benedictine Reform, these monks set out to create a culturally formative text, similar to *The Heliand*. That text was the formative epic *Beowulf*.

It may be helpful to provide a brief plot summary of *Beowulf* before we take a more in depth look at specific points. The poem begins in an early medieval mead-hall where a *scop*, a shaper, a performer of traditional oral poetry, addresses the audience. *Hwæt!* The famous first word of *Beowulf* can be translated in many ways: Lo, Now, Listen, What, etc. In this instance, it has a meaning similar to a speaker asking the crowd to be quiet and direct their attention. As modern readers we are asked the same; "listen up!" as we begin the epic of *Beowulf*.

Our shaper asks the audience to remember the "days of yore," a time when legendary kings ruled the Spear-Danes. Scyld-Scefing was the progenitor of the dynasty and so the tale

³⁵³ See Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 265.

begins with him. The audience is told how he mysteriously arrived on the Danish shores as a young child in a ship loaded with treasure, and later, we learn that his dead body was sent off in exactly the same manner. Although sickly and weak as a child, he was a glorious king who successfully subdued all of his enemies. He “was a good king,” as the shaper describes him, and his descendants ruled well. After a brief description of his lineage, the shaper brings our attention to Scyld’s great-grandson, Hrothgar.

Hrothgar is also a “good king,” and he rules many winters. He turns a band of young warriors into an army, renowned throughout the nations, who spend their treasure wisely. He pays his retainers well and ensures their loyalty; then, he builds the greatest hall ever known for his kingdom to enjoy. They call it Heorot. In it, Hrothgar behaves as the ideal Germanic king, doling out rings and treasure, providing feasts, and entertainment. But as the shaper says, “it was not long” before “edge-hate ... should awaken.” It comes in the form of an *ellengæst*, “a courageous-ghost,” some sort of bold-demon or monstrous enemy. We are told that the “grim ghost” is called Grendel.

Grendel is described as a descendant of Cain, from the infamous biblical story in which Cain murders his brother Abel and lies to god about it. In the epic of *Beowulf*, Cain is punished for that crime by being banished from human contact and cursed to spawn a race of “evil-offspring.” His lineage includes monsters, elves, and giants. We are told that the “eternal lord” avenged that killing.³⁵⁴ The poet was potentially highlighting, even condoning, the Germanic heroic culture’s requirement for vengeance when the death of kin is involved. The *Beowulf* poet was focusing their audience on a point of compatibility between the Old Testament

³⁵⁴ Meaning that the Christian god takes revenge on Cain by cursing his descendants.

narrative and Germanic Paganism. Then the poet quickly returns to the story, where our shaper tells of Grendel's first attack on Heorot.

The attack made by the “grim and greedy” guest results in the killing of thirty of Hrothgar's thanes. When morning comes and Hrothgar learns of the invasion, he “suffered slowly / endured thane-sorrow.” There is nothing they can do; Grendel returns, and cannot be stopped. Eventually “that best of houses / stood idle” for twelve winters. Tales of Hrothgar's scourge travels with the merchants to foreign lands. Then the *Beowulf* poet inserts his or her voice again and describes how those Danish Pagans went to *hærgtrafum*, “heathen temples,” and offered oaths to the “soul-slayer,” because, as our poet tells us, they did not know “the *helm* of the heavens.” The poet seems to be forgiving these Pagan ancestors while simultaneously admonishing his present audience. Coincidentally, after making offerings at “heathen temples,” the story turns to a young thane of Higelac who decides to ready a ship and go to the aid of Hrothgar.

For some time, the young warrior remains nameless. All we know is that he is a Geat, from southern Sweden, and is one of Higelac's retainers. “Wise earls” do not wish to see him go, but “found little fault” with the request and sent him as “one of fifteen” to travel the sea. His journey seems relatively short and ends with a watchman of Hrothgar's questioning him about his intentions. Having deemed them to be friends and recognizing that the young thane is no ordinary man, the watchman instructs them to go with their weapons and armor to Heorot. Once at Heorot, they are again questioned, and the young thane then reveals his identity: *Beowulf is min nama*, “Beowulf is my name.” The guard tells Hrothgar of their arrival, and the king knows exactly who Beowulf is, saying that he knew him as a boy as well as his father, Ecgtheow.

Hrothgar says he has heard that Beowulf has the grip of thirty men and tells the guard to invite the warriors in, noting that “holy god” has sent them. Beowulf and his troop then enter the hall, but leave one man outside to guard their weapons. Once inside, formal introductions are made, and Beowulf states his purpose, to “hold a *þing*³⁵⁵ with the giant,” to face the monster in one-on-one combat, without a weapon. Beowulf asks only that his mailshirt be returned to Higelac, should he lose, since he acknowledges that Grendel will leave nothing of his body. Hrothgar accepts this foreign warrior to fight his battle, highlighting how he too once did a favor for Beowulf’s father, and then he invites the Geats to a feast.

During that feast, we are introduced to the essence of the Germanic heroic culture: flyting, boasting, and kinship. Early in the feast, Beowulf is addressed by Hrothgar’s man, Unferth. Referring to a childhood swimming contest, Unferth insults Beowulf and expresses doubt in his ability to defeat Grendel. Beowulf quickly explains the magnitude of his swimming excursion, points out Unferth’s inability to defend Heorot, and finishes by condemning him for having killed his own kin. There was no greater sin than fratricide to a Germanic warrior. Hrothgar ends their dispute, recognizing that there is a firm resolve in Beowulf’s boast. Then Hrothgar’s wife Wealtheow bears a cup of mead, first to the king, then his retainers, and eventually to Beowulf. It is a binding ritual of allegiance and agreement. Beowulf promises her that he will either succeed or die trying. She is pleased by his words and joins the king before they retire to their chamber. Hrothgar then announces that, for the first time, he will entrust Heorot to another, to Beowulf. Before the Geats lie down, with weapons ready, Beowulf makes his final boast and then waits quietly in the dark for Grendel’s arrival.

³⁵⁵ Old English word for “meeting.” Here it is used in the sense of one-on-one combat.

Grendel bursts through the door with fire in his eyes, and Beowulf watches as he quickly devours one of his thanes in his entirety. Next, Grendel goes for Beowulf, but is quickly seized by the Geat. The shaper tells us that Grendel had never met another man “with a greater grip.” As he struggles to free himself, the two crash and scream throughout the hall. Our shaper says that it “was a great wonder” that the hall survived the battle. Eventually, Grendel breaks free and flees Heorot, but he is forced by Beowulf to leave his arm in return. The following morning brings great rejoicing, and Grendel’s arm is hung from the rafters of Heorot. Danes from far and wide come to gaze at its sight, as well as the footprints left during Grendel’s desperate escape.

As a poetic device, our shaper uses another shaper inside the epic to document the beginning of the fashioning of Beowulf’s tale. But before the shaper inside the poem begins to sing the song of Beowulf, he, first, sings of Sigemund of the Volsungs.³⁵⁶ Later, Beowulf is asked to retell the story to Hrothgar who, afterwards, presents the hero and his thanes with many gifts and throws a celebratory feast in his honor. During the feast, we hear from the story’s shaper again as he tells us a divergent story known as the Finnsburg digression. It is a treacherous tale of vengeance that took place between the Frisians and the Jutes.³⁵⁷ After the shaper finishes and the crowd cheers in approval, Wealtheow addresses the crowd. She speaks in praise of Beowulf and enlists him to help protect her sons, Hrethric and Hrothmund, in the future. Her words are prophetic and threatening towards Hrothulf, whom she suspects of future treachery. She then

³⁵⁶ Sigemund is the father of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, but in *Beowulf* Sigurd seems to be called Sigemund. Sigurd is an archetypal Germanic hero and most scholars would agree that he is either the sole source of the idea of Beowulf or an inspirational figure which added to the character of Beowulf. His reference in the *Beowulf* epic is the earliest known literary telling of the story of the Volsungs.

³⁵⁷ *The Fight at Finnsburg* is an important piece of Anglo-Saxon literature, but can be confusing. It will not be discussed here since it is not required for our greater argument. Likewise, I have chosen to leave out the details of the other two digressions.

presents Beowulf with a cup and her famous necklace, the “*Brosinga mene*.”³⁵⁸ Then the party continues until everyone sleeps, with Beowulf in a private chamber.

During that sleep an avenger arrives, Grendel’s mother comes to exact her revenge. She quickly captures a shield-warrior, takes Grendel’s arm, and returns to her moor. In the morning, Hrothgar’s sorrow returns, his trusted companion Aeschere is dead. He tells Beowulf that he had previously heard rumours that Grendel often traveled with a female companion and expected that she was to blame for the attack. Hrothgar says he knew where they lived, in a fen accessed through “water under the earth,” but acknowledges that no one has ever seen its bottom. Beowulf responds with promises that he will enter this water, find the monster, and kill her too. Beowulf and Hrothgar then travel together with their men to this misty moor, where they find Aeschere’s head along with “strange sea-dragons” and “water-monsters.” Beowulf readies himself for battle, and Unferth presents him with the legendary sword named Hrunting.

Before that battle, Beowulf speaks to Hrothgar and asks him to care for his thanes and to send the treasure he was already awarded to Higelac should he not return. Then he jumps into the lake. He battles “sea-beasts” on his way down and survives their jaws, thanks only to his ring-mail. Eventually, drawn to a light, Beowulf finds an entrance to a cave with a fire burning inside it and ancient treasures adorning the walls. He sees Grendel’s mother and strikes her hard on the head with Hrunting, but the blade “would not bite.” He trusts in his strength as the two join battle. She attacks him with her *seax*,³⁵⁹ but his armor avails him. On the wall, he sees an “old-sword made by giants.” With it he strikes her in the neck and “the blade waded-through / the fated flesh-cloak.” With his enemy dead on the floor, Beowulf searches the chamber and

³⁵⁸ Old English word for “necklace.”

³⁵⁹ A long knife that is the namesake of the Saxons. They were said to always carry one.

finds Grendel's body. He uses the sword to cut off his head. Meanwhile, on land, Hrothgar's men, seeing blood in the water, leave for home presuming Beowulf to be dead. Only Beowulf's thanes remain. Back in the cave, Beowulf watches as the sword's blade melts like ice from the venomous blood of the "alien-ghost." Beowulf carries the remaining hilt of the sword and Grendel's head back into the water.

Beowulf's men rejoice at his return and walk with him back to Heorot. We are told that it took four of them to carry Grendel's head, hanging from a "battle-pole." When they enter Heorot, they drop Grendel's head on the floor where the men are drinking; it was "a splendid spectacle." Then, Beowulf recounts the tale of his glorious deed. He tells how Hrunting failed and the ancient sword had melted. While presenting Hrothgar with the golden hilt of the ancient sword, he promises him that he "need not dread" as he earlier had. Hrothgar examines the hilt and finds that on it is written "the origin of ancient strife," giants killed by a great flood. Then Hrothgar begins his own digression about a king named Heremod who became proud and greedy. The digression is commonly called Hrothgar's Sermon, and it is possible that it is made up of a sermon which was spliced into the epic. Nevertheless, it is an admonition for Beowulf to understand what makes a good king and to behave like one. Then Hrothgar thanks god for the victory and orders a feast. It is enjoyed by all, and in the morning Beowulf says that he is eager to leave.

Beowulf returns Hrunting and compliments the blade, thanking Unferth for the gesture. He then makes a final speech to Hrothgar and promises to tell Higelac that he was well treated and assures the king that he would return if they ever need his help again. Hrothgar responds in admiration of the wisdom and power displayed by the young man. He orders elaborate gifts to be

bestowed upon Beowulf and his thanes. Then he expresses his deep sorrow in the expectation that this is the last time he would see Beowulf, for he is an old man who has ruled over fifty winters. The shaper describes him as a “good king.” Treasure-laden, the warriors return to their ship. There they meet the man who has guarded the boat, and Beowulf presents him with a sword. We are told that that gift forever increases the social status of that man. Then the warriors fill their vessel with their treasure and rapidly return to Geatland.

In his homeland, Beowulf quickly visits his lord Higelac and finds him in his hall. There we meet Higelac’s wife, Hygd, and another digression follows. This time we learn what makes a good queen, and Hygd is used as the positive comparison to a historical queen Fremu,³⁶⁰ the wife of Offa. Then the shaper returns us to the hall where Higelac asks Beowulf about his journey. Beowulf tells the story of both of his battles and his time spent with the Danes in detail. He adds something about Freawaru, Hrothgar’s daughter, who is promised as a “peace-weaver”³⁶¹ to the son of Froda. Beowulf then digresses to remind us of a past feud between the Danes and the Heatho-Bards where this was also attempted unsuccessfully. After his lengthy speech, Beowulf orders his gifts brought in and presents them to Higelac. The Brosinga necklace he gives to Hygd. Higelac then gives Beowulf seven thousand hides, approximately twenty-one thousand acres of land. The shaper, quickly, tells us of Higelac’s death in a later battle and how the kingdom comes to be under Beowulf’s rule.

We are told that Beowulf rules well for fifty winters and how one night a thief steals a cup from a dragon’s hoard. That same dragon then, in anger, wreaks havoc upon Beowulf’s

³⁶⁰ I have translated the queen’s name as Fremu in agreement with Ernest A. Kock and R.D. Fulk. See Klæber’s *Beowulf*, commentary on line 1931.

³⁶¹ A “peace-weaver” is a princess or daughter married off to a rival tribe or nation in the hope that she and her offspring will weave a web of peace between the two peoples.

kingdom. The thief is said to have been pressured into doing so by his lord. The shaper briefly tells us how a band of warriors once filled that barrow with their treasure and that, after they died, a dragon entered it and has guarded it ever since. For three hundred winters he slept until enraged by the thief. That night the dragon spits fire and burns homes. Beowulf is “made known of the terror;” one of the homes was his. He orders a shield made from iron, and the shaper digresses to tell us about Beowulf’s many exploits. We learn of one in which he was in Friesland (Frisia) when Higelac was slain. While the battle may have been lost, Beowulf left them with no cause for exaltation. We learn how Heardred, Higelac’s son, was killed and how Beowulf avenged his death. The shaper tells us that Beowulf too “was a good king.”

The good king, with his new iron shield, takes eleven companions and the thief to the dragon’s barrow. There he gives his famous pre-dragon fight boast and tells his retainers to stand aside and let him fight alone as he has in the past. As he approaches the hoard, a flame bursts from its entrance. The two approach each other in battle. The shield holds, but the sword could not cut the head of the dragon. One of Beowulf’s retainers, Wiglaf, urges the others to assist their king, but he is alone when he joins the hero in battle. Together they fight bravely, but Beowulf’s sword, Naegling, cannot withstand the combined strength of Beowulf and the dragon. It “burst apart.” The dragon bites Beowulf’s neck and blood shoots forth in waves. Wiglaf stabs the dragon on the underside,³⁶² and Beowulf draws a knife, cutting it further down. Together “they felled the fiend,” but this is to be Beowulf’s last victory.

The hero sits on a nearby wall where Higelac goes to his aid. He asks Wiglaf to raid the hoard and show him what they won. Wiglaf obeys and returns in haste with a handful of treasure.

³⁶² This is the same way Sigurd slew his dragon.

Studying the treasure, Beowulf makes his final requests. He orders a mound made and a pyre prepared where a high tower is to be built on Whales-Bluff in remembrance. He asks Wiglaf to care for his people since he is the last of their kin, and, then, he dies. Beowulf and the dragon lay dead together.

Soon after, his retainers arrive from the nearby wood and are scorned by Wiglaf, in what is commonly called Wiglaf's Prophecy. He shames them for their cowardice and warns that after foreigners hear of it, they will come to invade the formerly proud kingdom. He tells them "Death is better / for each earl / than a life of disgrace!" The shaper tells us how the gold was cursed.³⁶³ The dragon and Beowulf both died because of it. The warriors cut up the dragon and shove it over the cliff into the sea below. Then Beowulf is burned on the pyre. "Heroes lamented" and a Geatish woman, "with bound hair / sang sorrowfully." "Heaven swallowed the smoke." The mound is built as requested, and the treasure is sealed in the ground, "where it now yet lives." Then twelve men stand around the mound and mourn their king.³⁶⁴

As can be seen by the hero's funeral alone, *Beowulf* is clearly both Pagan and Christian. It is, however, a bit more Pagan when compared to *The Heliand*. When we compare the historical context of *The Heliand*, we see that the Christians were in a position of power, and in the context of *Beowulf*, the Pagans were in the position of power. Nevertheless, it is a masterpiece of woven themes in which "the ideals, divine and human, of paganism and Christianity exist side by side."³⁶⁵ While it stands to reason that the *Beowulf* poet was Christian, likely an Anglo-Saxon monk, it is also possible that he or she was of Danish or Scandinavian descent. Christian or not, the poet knew well the shared history and memory of the Germanic Pagan past and often

³⁶³ The dragon's treasure in *The Saga of the Volsungs* is also cursed.

³⁶⁴ Quite possibly a poetic allusion of the twelve apostles mourning the death of Jesus.

³⁶⁵ Tietjen, "God, Fate, and the Hero of *Beowulf*," 161.

highlighted that knowledge throughout numerous digressions within the poem.³⁶⁶ *Beowulf* spoke to both the Christians and the Pagans alike. It united them through the bonds of their mutually shared history and memory. It acknowledged the Pagan practices and gods of their ancestors while presenting its heroes as having Christian behaviors and beliefs. It was didactic and, as we suggest, formative in nature and intention, but it may have been conceived in the spirit of resistance to foreign Pagan rule. We could even go so far as to say it was resistance literature. It set itself up in contrast and even in conflict with the Pagan practices of the ruling Danes and backsliding Christians. It had the intention of bringing them into the fold, so to speak, converting them to Christianity.

W.E.B. Du Bois spoke about art and resistance literature in his article *Criteria of Negro Art*.³⁶⁷ In it, he tells the story of an African American author who, after being denied publication, changed “the color of the characters and the locale and sent it under an assumed name with a change of address,” which resulted in its publication and the promise from the publisher “to take anything else.”³⁶⁸ The market of early twentieth-century American literature preferred white characters in the same way that the market for mead-hall performances in the Danelaw preferred Pagan heroes. So the author of *Beowulf* gave his audience a Pagan, who seemed also to be Christian. Du Bois argued that artists have “one true method of gaining sympathy and human interest.”³⁶⁹ The artist behind *Beowulf* used their method to garner exactly that type of “human interest.” Du Bois concludes saying that all “art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the

³⁶⁶ For further reading on the identity of the *Beowulf* poet one may begin with Paul F. Baum, “The *Beowulf* Poet,” in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963).

³⁶⁷ W.E.B. Du Bois, “Criteria of Negro Art,” in *The Oxford W.E.B. DuBois Reader*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 327.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

wailing of purists.”³⁷⁰ He adds that “whatever art I have for writing has been used always for propaganda for gaining the right of black folk to love and enjoy.”³⁷¹ Building on the thoughts of Du Bois, we can see how the *Beowulf* manuscript, when compared with the other writings during the English Benedictine Reformation, is completely different and must have been used to pique “human interest” among Pagans and their sympathizers. The physical and financial investment of an undertaking as grand as *Beowulf*, even if only copying it, is proof alone that it was motivated by more than inspiration. It was an investment in the future of the Church and sought to speak to an audience outside its usual membership. Its Pagan hero was intended to inspire Christian sympathies among the Danish settlers and their sympathetic Anglo-Saxon neighbors.

While my suggestion that the intended audience for the performance of *Beowulf* was made up of Danish settlers and inhabitants of the Danelaw may initially be dismissed by certain scholars, the first three lines of the epic coupled with the timing of the manuscript’s creation, coinciding with the Danelaw, make it much harder to do so. Let us briefly look at those lines.

<i>Hwæt, we Gar-Dena</i>	<i>in geardagum,</i>
<i>peodcyninga</i>	<i>brym gefrunon</i>
<i>hu ða æþelingas</i>	<i>ellen fremedon.</i> ³⁷²

“Now, we have heard	the strength
of the Spear-Danes’ people’s-kings	in days of yore
how those noblemen	performed courage[ous deeds].”

After commanding attention with the word *Hwæt* the shaper turns the attention of the audience to the Spear-Danes, warrior Danes. Arguably *we Gar-Dena* could be translated as “we of the Spear-Danes,” but scholars have come to agree that it modifies *peodcyninga* and should be understood as “we have heard” of the people’s-kings of the Spear-Danes. Nevertheless, the

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 328.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 328.

³⁷² Klaeber, ed. *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, 3.

shaper's call to attention is followed by a discussion of Danish kings. An Anglo-Saxon audience which had been at war with Danish and Scandinavian Viking invaders for two centuries would presumably not want to hear about the legendary kings of the Danes. A Danish audience, in power in the Danelaw, however, would love nothing more than to hear of the lineage of their cultural heroes. It is only a small step to acknowledge the possibility that *Beowulf* was intended for an audience other than Christian Anglo-Saxons. Moving beyond this possibility, through further analysis I intend to demonstrate how the poet intended that this formative epic would assist in the formation of an English Christian collective identity throughout the island of Britain.

The formative intentions of the epic do not present themselves immediately. First we hear of three legendary Danish kings who show no signs of Christian sentiments and the poet attributes none to them as well. The kings are Scyld, Beow, and Healfdane. Healfdane is the father of Hrothgar, a major character in the early part of the story. The appearance of Hrothgar brings with it the first overt formative intentions of the poet. Hrothgar is introduced as the younger brother of Heorogar, a greater, more worthy king. However, Heorogar is killed in battle, and Hrothgar is destined to assume the throne. To the delight of his kingdom, he excels at the task and soon has all his neighboring kingdoms paying tribute to him. He was generous to his warriors, a good protector of his people, and the patron of Heorot, the high-hall. Soon his fortunes change, and his kingdom is plagued by the monster Grendel, who is the embodiment of a curse, made by the Christian god on the lineage of Cain. The sin of Cain is labeled disloyalty, and his punishment carries on to all of his descendants. Our first hint of formation is the poet's use of the shaper to tell his audience that disloyalty to the Christian god will result in the punishment of entire family lineages. Hrothgar did not say this; the shaper did, and the shaper,

we can presume, is a poetic tool used to speak on behalf of the poet. The character of the shaper in a subtle, yet distinct way has threatened those disloyal to the Christian god who may be in the audience with a curse that would make them and their families enemies of men for all eternity.

Seemingly emboldened, the character of the shaper then embarks on another formative admonition. The shaper tells us that many people in Hrothgar's kingdom went to Heathen temples and asked for relief from their distress. The great Danish king, Hrothgar ruled over a Pagan citizenry. The shaper does not tell us exactly who goes to these temples, but that does not seem to be of any great importance to the narrator. What is important is the opportunity it provides the shaper to insert his own didactic comments in the hope of informing the audience. The shaper explains that these people were not to blame; they knew not of the Christian god. By avoiding outright condemnation, the poet diplomatically sidesteps a potentially negative reception of the story. Instead, the moment comes and quickly goes, yet not without instruction. The shaper specifically says that "*metod* they knew not," (*metod hie ne cuþon*).³⁷³ This is the first mention of *metod* in the epic, and it is apparent that the poet intends to have it represent the Christian god. In the pages that follow, we will examine how this is complicated by its association with *wyrd*, which is not so clearly Christian. Having established *metod* as the Christian god and identified a people who did not know him we see that the poet is suggesting that Hrothgar's kingdom was Pagan.

Despite Hrothgar's ruling over a Pagan kingdom, the poet carefully presents the king as somewhat of a Christian himself. When Hrothgar is first alerted to the arrival of the Geats and notified that one among them is called Beowulf, he rejoices and suggests that "holy god" (*halig*

³⁷³ Ibid., 9.

god) sent them.³⁷⁴ The poet's word choice is interesting and requires some unpacking. The shaper has already identified *metod* as the Christian god, and as we will see in the following pages, *god* could mean any god. Is the poet purposefully keeping Hrothgar's word choice ambiguous? Or is it simply to adhere to the alliteration of Old English poetry? With three h's already in line 381, a fourth is not necessary.³⁷⁵ *Metod* could have been used in the place of *halig god*. Nevertheless, what may have been ambiguous and polysemous to the original audience is virtually always translated and understood as the holy Christian god in modern times. The poet used ambiguous words such as *metod* and *god* because they were the available vocabulary, but the intention was that they would develop in ways that ultimately erased the older meanings.³⁷⁶ The shaper is the character who clarifies, most subtly, that Hrothgar has Christian sentiments. The formative nature of such a presentation is simple: if one of the Danes' greatest kings of old was aided by the Christian god, could they not be as well? The time had come for them to know *metod* and swear loyalty to the Christian god — avoiding eternal curses. It is worth mentioning that there remains a discrepancy with the shaper's message.

If we look strictly at the action in the epic's plot and ignore the narrator's opinions, there is a glaring contradiction. We are told in lines 175a-178a that people in Hrothgar's kingdom visited Heathen temples and asked for help. Granted, the poet does describe the receiver of these prayers as the "soul-slayer" (*gastbona*), a derogatory term which implied their help was from some sort of devil. But, if we omit the shaper's opinions immediately following in lines 178b-188b, the next course of action is that word of Grendel reached the land of the Geats and

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁷⁵ Old English half-line poetry utilizes alliteration throughout. The ideal would be to have two stressed words beginning with the same sound in one half-line and another, with the same sound in the other half-line.

³⁷⁶ For a discussion on how the *Beowulf* poet attempted, but failed to synthesize Pagan and Christian ideals see Craig R. Davis, *Beowulf and the Demise of Germanic Legend in England* (New York: Garland, 1996).

consequently Beowulf. The fact that a brief omission could drastically alter the religious ideology of the epic is striking. By omitting the shaper's injection the audience could simply hear that Hrothgar's kingdom asked for help at a Heathen temple and then Beowulf, the hero who was to save them, heard that call. I am not suggesting that in certain performances of *Beowulf* shapers chose to omit these lines, even though this does remain a possibility. What I am suggesting is that those ten lines highlight the formative nature of this epic. They demonstrate that the poet was a Christian who used the character of the shaper to promote a Christian message to an audience that had not entirely bought into Christianity. The audience of the Danelaw was complicated to say the least. Some were Christian, some were Pagan, and others were even both or at least some hybrid version. The intention of the author was to form the complicated identity of *Beowulf*'s audience into a more unified one. The formative epic of *Beowulf* was intended to transcend cultural identities and create a collective English Christian identity. The shaper and Hrothgar were not the only tools at the poet's disposal; the hero Beowulf was as well.

The hero Beowulf, in the poem, is a truly Germanic hero who is presented to a Germanic people. Beowulf was a Geat (a southern Swede), who, at one point, was fighting for the Danes. The poem describes many other peoples throughout, including Frisians and Jutes. In the context of the manuscript's composition, England was inhabited and ruled by Danish Vikings. The "native" Christian Anglo-Saxons were descended from Saxons, Angles, and Jutes, with these groups coming from northern Germany, Denmark, and southern Sweden (and northern Denmark) respectively. While the early medieval period of northern Europe had numerous kingdoms and tribal affiliations, they were all Germanic, and the contemporary audience of the poem knew their relation to each of those tribes. And even though those tribes were sometimes enemies and

at other times allies, they were all inhabiting England and Danelaw in the 990's and would have felt culturally aligned with the text. Beowulf was an archetypal hero, similar to the Volsungs' Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, and he embodied the code, culture, and religion of all the historical Germanic peoples. In that way his purpose as a didactic hero was to create unity and "a sense of shared identity" that was potentially lacking on the then war-torn island of England.³⁷⁷

Beowulf and the shared identity he brought to the mead-hall table, helped to create a common cultural memory that has informed Great Britain into the modern day. Determining his religious identity has generated a significant amount of academic discourse over the last century. Is he a Pagan or a Christian? He was a Pagan, but he often thanked a god. While it seems clear in translations of *Beowulf* that that god is the Christian god, this chapter and my subsequent translation of *Beowulf* will demonstrate how the wording is often quite ambiguous and how a Danish Pagan easily could have understood it to be any one of their gods. Beowulf lived, died, and was cremated as a Pagan, but he clearly showed Christian tendencies and the poem as a whole had Christian leanings. It was not only Christian, it also rebuked the Pagan — gently, of course, because it might insult the ruling Danish Pagans, and their own ancestors, for that matter. The poet who composed the text was quite aware of his or her current political climate and brilliantly created a Germanic epic that was able to formulate a shared identity among people who were often at war and among religions that were frequently in conflict. The religious language used was so subtle that either a Pagan or a Christian could hear whatever they wanted when listening to its performance. And later translators could just as easily pick a side and translate it to seem entirely Christian or Pagan, depending on their preference.

³⁷⁷ Innes, *Epic*, 8.

It is easy for a modern reader simply to ignore the historical meanings of the poet's word choice, at least it was until the work of F. A. Blackburn. Blackburn took an extreme reading of the poem and claimed that it was entirely Pagan and that all that was necessary to restore its Paganism was "not to change a word but only to assign to it its older meaning."³⁷⁸ For example, Beowulf's, or the *Beowulf* poet's word choice in his pre-dragon fight boast could easily be Pagan by simply recognizing the older meanings of *wyrd* and *metod*. In the boast, Beowulf suggests that *wyrd* will decide the time of death and by "recognizing the older meaning" that could be translated as *Urd (Urðr)* instead of the Christian god. While I do not take as extreme a reading of *Beowulf* as Blackburn does, I do agree, without any doubt, that this is an epic with Pagan roots, written for an audience with Pagan sympathies and understandings, and that it knowingly uses Pagan terms that most likely still held their "older" meaning in the time of its composition. Blackburn and his interlocutor Larry D. Benson respectively argue that the poem is either wholly Pagan or entirely Christian, but I, like Mary Tietjen say that it is a willful combination of the two. Like Tietjen I see a "peaceful co-existence in *Beowulf* of the concepts of a benevolent God and of the inexorable force of *wyrd*."³⁷⁹

Mary Tietjen argues that "textual evidence which serves to indicate that fate in *Beowulf* is subject to God is limited to two passages."³⁸⁰ Working with Alan H. Roper, Tietjen concludes that although those "two instances share with Boethius a Christian view of God's control of fate, the concept of *wyrd* itself as it consistently appears in the poem is neither Boethian nor Christian," but is itself "the bringer of ... death."³⁸¹ Tietjen, continues to stress that textual

³⁷⁸ Blackburn, "The Christian Coloring in *Beowulf*," 217.

³⁷⁹ Tietjen, "God, Fate, and the Hero of *Beowulf*," 164.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 161.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 161-162.

evidence supports the belief that *wyrd* is in *Beowulf* a power that exists outside the domain of the Christian god and that rules the time of man's death. While the concept of fate had clearly diminished since the personified Germanic Norns, it nonetheless remained a powerful entity outside the grasp of even the Christian god. Beowulf in his famous pre-dragon fight boast used language to support exactly that. He says:

<i>weorðan æt wealle, metod manna gehwæs.</i> ³⁸²	<i>'ac unc sceal, swa unc wyrd geteoð</i>
--	---

be at the wall the measurer (<i>metod</i>) of every man."	"but for us it shall as for us <i>wyrd</i> decrees,
--	--

While Beowulf's language may appear ambiguous to us, it would not have been at all unclear to a medieval Germanic audience. He was saying that *wyrd* or fate is the decider of death and that its partner *metod* measured the timing of such. In *Beowulf*, *wyrd* still ruled the time of death, but the Christian god ruled life and the afterlife. In the midst of his death Beowulf himself thanked the Christian god for his victory and the dragon's treasure hoard.

<i>'Ic ðara frætwa wuldurcyninge ecum dryhtne, þæs ðe ic moste ær swyltdæge</i>	<i>freat ealles ðanc, wordum secge, þe ic her on starie, minum leodum swylc gestrynan.</i> ³⁸³
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"I for all of the treasure to the king of glory to the eternal lord, this which I was able before death's day	thank the lord, with words say, for which I here look on, for my people [to get] such wealth."
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The Christian god was the new gift-giver. While *wyrd*, by the time of *Beowulf*, still ruled

³⁸² Klaeber, ed. *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 86.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 95.

over death, it had lost its authority over destiny and life's blessings. Instead, the new Christian god was the ruler of destiny and the giver of life's blessings. *Beowulf* was a moment in history, a crossroads recorded, wherein the Pagan and Christian ideals coexisted in a dialectical relationship that exposes tensions, engages in interplay, and negotiates meaning before Christianity reigned triumphant. Tietjen remarked that the agents contributing "to the final events of the poem, the Christian God and the *wyrd* of Germanic paganism, are both given their due."³⁸⁴ And she goes on to argue that the "most prominent role of the Christian God in *Beowulf* is that of bestowing rewards upon men according to their merit."³⁸⁵ She adds that men's talents are gifts of god and, when used rightly, will be blessed with fame and riches and must be recognized as a gift from god.³⁸⁶ By this time the god of Anglo-Saxon Christianity was a giver of earthly riches, as well as other worldly ones.

Gift-giver or not, the Christian god is still at odds with the Norse gods, and the poet is forced to find some semblance of balance between the two.³⁸⁷ Insulting the gods of the Anglo-Saxons' ancestors and the Danish aristocracy in the Danelaw was not as easy for the *Beowulf* poet as it was for *The Heliand's*. While the struggle facing the *Beowulf* poet is clear, it is also apparent that he or she waded through those troubled waters well. During the passage that leads to the eventual fight with Grendel, the *Beowulf* poet elaborates on the hardships Grendel's

³⁸⁴ Tietjen, "God, Fate, and the Hero of *Beowulf*," 166.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

³⁸⁶ See *Ibid.*, 169.

³⁸⁷ For more on the discussion of incompatibility of Pagan and Christian elements in *Beowulf* see C. Tidmarsh Major, "A Christian *Wyrd*: Syncretism in *Beowulf*," *English Language Notes* 32, no. 3 (March 1995): 1-10. However, Major argues that *Beowulf* demonstrates a "synthetic nature" and the problem of Pagan or Christian "does not exist." For further discussion on the inability to translate concepts from one culture and language to another see Anna Wierzbicka, *Semantics, Culture, and Cognition: Universal Human Concepts in Culture-Specific Configurations* (New York:Oxford University Press, 1992).

attacks caused the Danes and on all the attempts they made to relieve their sufferings. A famous passage concerning Pagan religious practice reads as follows:

<i>Hwilum hie geheton</i>	<i>æt hærgtrafum</i>
<i>wigweorþunga,</i>	<i>wordum bædon</i>
<i>þæt him gastbona</i>	<i>geoce gefremede</i>
<i>wið þeodþreaum.</i>	<i>Swylce wæs þeaw hyra,</i>
<i>hæþenra hyht;</i>	<i>helle gemundon</i>
<i>in modsefan,</i>	<i>metod hie ne cuþon</i>
<i>dæda demend,</i>	<i>ne wiston hie drihten God,</i>
<i>ne hie huru heofena helm</i>	<i>herian ne cuþon,</i>
<i>wuldres waldend.</i> ³⁸⁸	

“Sometimes they promised	at heathen temples
honor to idols,	with words bade
that for them the soul-slayer	help [would] perform
against the distress of the people.	Such was their custom,
the hope of the heathens	thinking of hell
in [their] heart,	<i>metod</i> they knew not
the deemer of deeds.	They knew not the lord god
indeed they knew not	to praise the <i>helm</i> of the heavens
the ruler of heaven.”	

There is much to be gleaned from the passage above. First, there is the condemnation of Heathen customs, which are almost forgiven as simple blameless ignorance. Thomas Hill writes that “the Anglo-Saxons (like most archaic peoples) were deeply conservative and venerated antiquity.”³⁸⁹

Anglo-Saxons took kinship seriously and admired their ancestral heroes of old, even Pagan heroes. As Hill put it, “a secular Anglo-Saxon ... would be much less inclined to ignore the achievements of his pagan ancestors than a monk cut off from his own family and culture.”³⁹⁰

That statement by Hill supports the thesis that *Beowulf*, presumably a creation of a monastic poet, was written for a broad, secular, audience. If *Beowulf*'s intended audience was clerical only,

³⁸⁸ Klaeber, ed. *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 8-9.

³⁸⁹ Thomas Hill, “The Christian Language and Theme of *Beowulf*,” in *Companion to Old English Poetry*, eds. Henck Aertsen and Rolf H. Bremmer (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1994), 63.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

the previous passage would be scathing as opposed to gently forgiving. Instead we must focus on how the language was potentially intended to save and serve Anglo-Saxon Christianity.

The *Beowulf* poet included this passage as a reflection on Christianity's assertion that Pagan religion is futile. The Pagans offered honor to Pagan idols, but their suffering did not cease. However, not long after this passage, the poet subtly inserts which religion the poet believed succeeded in ending their suffering. Upon Beowulf's arrival at Heorot, Hrothgar speaks of Beowulf, before talking directly to him. Hrothgar, referred to as *helm Scyldinga*, "the helm of the Scyldings," says:

<p><i>manna mægen-cræft hæporof hæbbe. for arstafum</i></p>	<p><i>Dæt he þritiges on his mundgripe Hine halig God us onsende³⁹¹</i></p>
<p>has the might-craft in his hand-grip. for generosity</p>	<p>“That he brave in battle of thirty men Him holy god sent us”</p>

The poet's assertion is that the Germanic hero Beowulf is the solution to their woes, but that it was the Christian "holy god" who sent him. Again, the word choice "god" could have meant any god. The capital G for god was inserted by later editors and is not found in the manuscript. We can be certain that the Christian god is the one meant by the poet because of the adjective "holy." The Norse gods were never described, even by their followers, as "holy," suggesting that the poet had didactic intentions.

The poet's overall didactic intention was not to renounce Germanic culture, just their Pagan religion. In fact, the epic intended to highlight a compatibility between Germanic culture

³⁹¹ Klaeber, ed. *Klaeber's Beowulf*, 15.

and Christianity, particularly in the term *helm* used in both of the previous passages. *Helm* is the Old English word that is the etymological source of Modern English's "helmet," but in its historical context it could also mean "lord" or "protector." As I mentioned, in reference to the *comitatus* code, the Germanic lord was the "protector," not just the ruler, of their people. Hence, Hrothgar is the *helm Scyldinga*, the "lord/protector of the Scyldings," (the Danes) and the Christian god is *heofena helm*, the "lord/protector of the heavens." *Beowulf*, as a formative epic, was used to instruct the *Adelskirche* of Danelaw and to create a Christianity that highlighted Germanic heroic culture within the Christian mission of loyalty to god, each other, and the Catholic Church. As we can see, formative epic carries out this function and presents the accepted culture story of the conquered people through a new cultural story and/or ideology, making the epic hero the bearer of the relationship between the two, subtly changing collective memory.

The resilience of Germanic culture is impressive, to say the least, and remains powerful in this intercultural exchange. The Germanic peoples never forgot their cultural-religious concerns of fate, kinship, honor, and success. While it seems plausible that Christianity erased some of these notions, Winterbourne argues that "[w]hat the church was unable to obliterate, it refashioned in its own image, and for its own purposes."³⁹² He states that "[t]he most important of these was the concept of fate."³⁹³ In his words, "an all-embracing *Urðr* gave way to its domesticated version, as in the comparable Anglo-Saxon *wyrd*."³⁹⁴ Even though it was

³⁹² Anthony Winterbourne, *When the Norns Have Spoken* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), 135.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

“domesticated,” *wyrd* and *metod* still retained their “older” Pagan meanings during the time of the *Beowulf* manuscript’s composition.

In fact, *wyrd* and *metod* are used a combined 23 times in the poem. A close reading of the text in its original Old English illustrates that, out of the 12 uses of *wyrd* there is not a single time where it is used in the Christian sense. In fact, in nine out of those twelve uses, it is very much a feminine personification outside the authority of the Christian god and with absolute authority over men’s deaths.³⁹⁵ Remember, *wyrd* is a feminine singular noun, the same as *Urd*, the Norse divinity who controls the fates of men and gods alike. A few representatives of those nine instances include lines 455b, 477b, 1205b, and 2574b. Line 455b states *Gæð a wyrd swa hio scel*, “*wyrd* always goes as she shall.”³⁹⁶ Line 477b reads, *hie wyrd forsweop*, “*wyrd* swept them away.”³⁹⁷ Line 1205b says *hyne wyrd fornam*, “*wyrd* took him.”³⁹⁸ And line 2574b-2575a is as follows, *swa him wyrd ne gescraf / hreð æt hilde*, “as him *wyrd* assigned not / triumph in battle.”³⁹⁹ Allowing the reader to use the word *wyrd*, instead of translating it as “fate,” makes it apparent how the polysemous language in tenth-century Danelaw could be understood as something far different from the concept of fate as an attribute of the Christian god. Aristocratic warriors who knew *Wyrd* as the primacy of the Norns, a divinity more powerful than the gods, would have had no misconceptions, but as time passed and *Wyrd* / *Urd* was forgotten. The understanding of *wyrd* as fate — an attribute of the Christian god — came to replace it in nearly

³⁹⁵ For more on the multivalent perspectives of *wyrd* in *Beowulf* see Tetsuji Oda, *Semantic Borrowing of Wyrd with Special Reference to King Alfred’s Boethius: A Reconsideration from an Etymological Point of View* (Münster: Nodus Publikationen, 2004), 74. See also Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf and the Appositive Style* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 31.

³⁹⁶ Klaeber, ed. *Klaeber’s Beowulf*, 17.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 88.

all modern translations. I am suggesting that this was part of the poet's plan. In order for *Beowulf* to be enjoyed in the mead-halls of Danelaw it needed to speak to Pagan and Christian sentiments alike.

Metod was there to speak to the Christians and to lead the Pagans toward a cultural conversion. It also helped turn the polysemous language into monosemic language as generations passed and the personified *Wyrd* was forgotten. *Metod* often accompanies *wyrd* in the poem, just as Urd and Yggdrasil are companions in the *Voluspa*. Unlike the use of *wyrd*, *metod* is not so Pagan or ambiguous. Arguably *metod*'s meaning is only ambiguous in two of the eleven times it is used. In nine of the eleven times it is used, it seems to clearly represent a masculine singular deity, the Christian god. Lines 1778b-1779a are *Ðæs sig metode þanc / ecean dryhtne*, "I should thank *metod* for this / the eternal lord."⁴⁰⁰ In these two half-lines a student of English religious history can see a moment at which the old religion was being rewritten into the new religion through the language of the formative epic. Words with older meanings were being used in conjunction with newer Christian phrases, and the polysemous *metod* became the monosemous *dryhten*, "god/lord," as it is almost always translated. *Beowulf*'s author knew exactly what he or she was doing.

Beowulf is a formative epic, written with a clear purpose, speaking to a specific audience. The audience may have been both Pagan and Christian, but it was entirely Germanic. The themes of the poem are clearly Germanic and spoke to a group of people who idealized the Germanic heroic code. Over time Christianity disposed of the power of *Wyrd* / Fate. The Christian god, who simply joined Clovis' pantheon, had risen to rule over it, turning *wyrd* into a mere attribute

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 60.

of the Christian god's plan. Interestingly Winterbourne claims that common folk are the ones who made it final. He describes Christianity as "[t]he hook onto which the nonheroic, ordinary Norse farmer would be caught by the new faith ... a version of Valholl was on offer that was more democratic"⁴⁰¹ We see, through this, the way that formative epic's strategies enter the everyday life of peoples, changing cultural memory and exchange, which are passed onto the next generations.

Beowulf's Christianity offered a god who rewarded merit with riches and simple folk with an after-life. This was not the Valhalla of Odin which was available to only a select few of earth's greatest heroic fighters. Likewise, it was not the Christianity which condemned them. *Beowulf's* Christianity embraced the Germanic heroic code, looked endearingly on the Pagan past, and pointed forward towards a new worldly Christianity which could entice even the staunchest Danish settler.⁴⁰² It allowed Germanic tradition and culture to coexist with Christianity. It promised wealth and blessings for those who used their strengths wisely, and it offered an afterlife, to even the non-heroic. It succeeded, I might add, as England returned to a clearly Christian nation, with the help of the Christian Norman Conquest (1066) of course, and *Wyrd* digressed etymologically into the estranged "weird," which is, nowadays, used most often in a derogatory manner.

A well-informed reading of *Beowulf* in its historical language and context helps one to see it as a memory- and identity-making text. And for the historian, it highlights a moment at which numerous identities were beginning to merge into what would eventually become the

⁴⁰¹ Winterbourne, *When the Norns Have Spoken*, 141-142.

⁴⁰² For more on the compatibility of Paganism and Christianity in *Beowulf* see Susanne Weil. "Grace under Pressure: 'Hand-Words,' 'Wyrd,' and Free Will in 'Beowulf.'" *Pacific Coast Philology* 24, no. 1/2 (1989): 94-104. doi:10.2307/1316605.

Christian English. For students of literature, it marks a time where the transition from the oral tradition to the written tradition was in its early stages. The text utilizes oral formulas, but does not rely on them. *Beowulf* is not an ancient, oral story that was passed down through generations, and, then, finally transcribed, as some have suggested.⁴⁰³ In fact, scholars such as Patrick Wormald renounce that hypothesis outright. Wormald suggests that “the way in which the *Beowulf* poet used formulae has made oral composition seem less and less plausible.”⁴⁰⁴ Wormald goes on to say that “the poem was composed with pen, not harp, in hand ... the same is true of *Waldere* and *Maldon*.”⁴⁰⁵ Bill Griffiths suggests that *The Battle of Maldon* was written with the intention “to inspire resistance to the Vikings, and to counter the policy of paying Danegeld that dominated the 990s; it could thus be seen as a political as much as a historical or heroic poem.”⁴⁰⁶ With that in mind, there seems to be a trend in tenth-century England to write resistance literatures in response to the Vikings and the Danelaw. While *The Battle of Maldon* was political, I argue that *Beowulf* was primarily religious and cultural.

Returning to the topic of oral formulaic, we remember Donald K. Fry, who suggests that the poets composed these stories in the oral formulaic mode because of how easy it was to memorize.⁴⁰⁷ The poet utilized Germanic heroic archetypes, blended them with Christian elegy, and wrote *Beowulf* with traditional oral characteristics in order to disseminate the story among the lands of the Danes. The timing of the manuscript, coinciding with both the Benedictine

⁴⁰³ For arguments in favor of *Beowulf* having a long oral composition see Blackburn, “The Christian Coloring in *Beowulf*”; and Magoun, “The Oral-Formulaic Character of Anglo-Saxon Narrative Poetry”.

⁴⁰⁴ Patrick Wormald, “Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy,” in *The Times of Bede*, ed. Stephen Baxter (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 36. For similar arguments suggesting that *Beowulf* is a poetic composition using the oral style see also Benson, “The Pagan Coloring in *Beowulf*”; J.R.R. Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, (British Academy. *Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Lecture*: Haskel House, 1936); and Baum, “The *Beowulf* Poet”.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁴⁰⁶ Bill Griffiths, *The Battle of Maldon: Text and Translation* (Chippenham: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1992), 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Fry, “The Memory of Cædmon,” 79.

Reformation and the Danelaw, helps to illuminate its real purpose. It was intended to spread a message, to set upon a pillar an archetypal Germanic hero who could represent all the tribes of tenth-century England, demonstrate respect for the heroic lifestyle of their ancestors, and guide them towards a unified future under the new religion of Christianity. It was a formative cultural text that helped create what would later become the English identity.

From the perspective of memory studies, *Beowulf* can be regarded as a cultural text, with a much more organic origin than *The Heliand*. It informed and formed a Germanic Christian culture made up of Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Danes with a Pagan past that is not loathed, but honored, revered, and respected.⁴⁰⁸ From the perspective of myth theory, it can be viewed as a didactic and formative epic used, as Bruce Lincoln puts it, “to impart something that makes their audiences wiser and better.”⁴⁰⁹ In fact, it has so many proverbial and elegiac sayings that Tolkien, in his lecture *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, argued that it was “not an ‘epic’,” but “an heroic-elegiac poem.”⁴¹⁰ While I agree with Tolkien’s assertion that *Beowulf* was elegy, I also suggest that it was more. *Beowulf* was a didactic text that used elegy as one of its techniques of instructing, informing, and influencing its audience. Tolkien himself considered it “a construction bearing clearly the marks of design and thought.”⁴¹¹ Its design was didactic, and in light of myth theory, *Beowulf* can be viewed as the presentation of a new myth for a new people, a hybrid Germanic English people, that had endearing sentiments for their heroic culture, Pagan past, and would-be Christian future.

⁴⁰⁸ For more on the Christian reverence for their Pagan past see Marie Padgett Hamilton, “The Religious Principle in *Beowulf*,” in *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1963), 105.

⁴⁰⁹ Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth*, 34.

⁴¹⁰ Tolkien, *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*, 31.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

Students of *Beowulf* must recognize the tenth-century “English” as a hybrid people, a unique audience which demanded a unique text. With the literal and contextual translation that follows, one can see the many meanings in the text’s original use of the Anglo-Saxon language. Like *The Heliand*, *Beowulf* was performed for aristocrats and clerics, some of whom were Christian and others of whom were Pagan. Each segment of that audience was able to hear the same poem and receive it on multiple levels — a key characteristic of the two formative epics that we have examined. For instance, in *Beowulf*, Jesus is never mentioned, and the word most often used for a deity is *god*, the Anglo-Saxon word from which modern English’s “god” is derived. Therefore, it translates easily. However, without the footnotes, it is easy to ignore the fact that it could refer to any god, even Odin, Thor, or Frey, as many of its audience may have preferred to believe. *Beowulf* also commonly uses the words *metod* and *wyrd*, which, as I have demonstrated, are not just god and fate, but “the measurer” and Urd — at least to the Pagan members of the audience. The Christian members, however, could just as easily have heard the god of Abraham and fate, an attribute of that same god. The most astounding fact about the poem is that it was intended to be multivalent and was therefore filled with nuanced language, Norse Paganism, Anglo-Saxon Christianity, and the Germanic heroic code. It informed and helped form a new English identity.

For our purposes, it is important to stress that *Beowulf* is more than just literature. This formative epic was an expensive undertaking which had a clear purpose from the beginning. It was meant to maintain the authority of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy by culturally and religiously converting the new Danish born aristocrats to join and adhere to its *Adelskirche*. As we previously noted, the same *Adelskirche* that was created by the Carolingians on the European

continent was fully established in England before the arrival of the Great Viking Army, and it found itself seriously threatened during their conquest and establishment of the Danelaw territory in northeast England before the *Beowulf* manuscript was composed. The condition of the arrangement was that Guthrum, one of the Danish Pagan leaders, was to be baptized. His Christian name was Æthelstan, and Alfred was his godfather. The missionary tactics of converting kings and nobility was at work again. Alfred was convinced that if Guthrum became Christian, then the Pagan Vikings would follow suit and all would be well again on the island of Britain.

Converting the Danish Viking Pagans to Christianity was as much about self-preservation and the protection of the nobility's status quo as it was about altruistically spreading the gospel. As Fletcher points out in his *Barbarian Conversion*, "Christianity became an inseparable component of the aristocratic identity" in England, prior to the settlement of the Vikings.⁴¹² Fletcher explains that "[t]he conversion of the 'barbarian' Europe ... brought Roman and Mediterranean customs ... notions about law, authority, property and government; the habits of living in towns and using coins for exchange."⁴¹³ The Romanesque laws that had controlled England for centuries were encoded in the Roman Catholic Church. These same laws not only maintained peace and order, they also maintained the status of their nobility. Their authority was upheld by that of the church. The Anglo-Saxon nobility and the Catholic Church needed each other and made it their mission to convert those they could not conquer, the Danish Viking Pagans. At their disposal were various tools used to accomplish their goal of converting the

⁴¹² Fletcher, *The Barbarian Conversion*, 192.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

Danes and, as has been demonstrated, one of their most effective and expensive tools was *Beowulf*.

What follows is my own literal translation of *Beowulf*. I have purposefully left *wyrd* and *metod* untranslated in order for the readers to decide for themselves just how Christian and/or Pagan it really is. With that in mind, the readers must ask themselves to consider the broader argument posed by this work — that *Beowulf*, a formative epic used to propagate the Christian faith, may be considered with reference to the category of propaganda.⁴¹⁴ The philosopher Jason Stanley, in his book *How Propaganda Works*, asks his readers to recognize that propaganda does not automatically mean “false” or “insincere.”⁴¹⁵ That, he argues, is “demagogic propaganda.”⁴¹⁶ Instead, discussing political propaganda, he states that “[p]ropaganda is in the service of either *supporting* or *eroding* ideals.”⁴¹⁷ Stanley discusses numerous tools and methods used to *support* and/or *erode* ideals, but for our purposes the most relevant is what he has to say about the linguistic tool. Stanley states that “propaganda uses linguistic complexity with precise or simple tools ... [a] straightforward example is an ambiguous word that can be described in two precise, non-ambiguous ways.”⁴¹⁸ A word such as *wyrd* that comes to carry more than one meaning is a strong example.⁴¹⁹ And we have demonstrated, it had two precise, unambiguous meanings in the tenth-century Danelaw. As the reader engages the following translation, she may ask if *wyrd* truly does fit the description, suggested by Stanley, of a tool of propaganda, thus classifying *Beowulf* as a formative epic.

⁴¹⁴ See also the discussion of propaganda in chapter 1.

⁴¹⁵ Stanley, *How Propaganda Works*, 41.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 170-71.

⁴¹⁹ For more on the use of *wyrd* in the slow process of conversion see Jon C. Kasik, “The Use of the Term ‘Wyrd’ in *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons.” *Neophilologus* 63 (1979): 128–35.

In order to assist the reader the following translation will utilize, extensively, the assistance of footnotes. On one hand, they will be there to clarify the meaning of certain words and kennings. For instance, literal translations of words used in lines 8a — “waxed” (*weox*), 9b — “near-sitters” (*ymsittendra*), and 10a — “whale-road” (*hronrade*) may leave certain readers confused. With the use of footnotes I am able to keep the most literal translation possible while still making certain that my audience recognizes the nuanced meanings of such words. Waxed means grew, near-sitters are neighboring peoples, and the whale-road is the sea. The poetic function of the kenning, combining two differing words to mean something altogether different, is lost without a literal translation, but footnotes are helpful for interpreting them.

On the other hand, footnotes are provided as a continuation of the textual analysis already begun in this chapter. They allow me to highlight many instances of polysemous language and to illustrate moments where the poet’s formative intentions reveal themselves. Much of this has been done in piecemeal already, but the greater connectedness of how the poet achieves his or her intentions on a grander scale is better perceived when studying the epic as a whole. It is my intention that the reader should see the big picture for themselves and that, with the help of footnotes, I may be able to draw their attention to specific details worth discussing. Therefore, my method of choice is a literal translation with numerous footnotes. My suggestion is that, while there are many good translations of *Beowulf*, the following one may be of particular benefit to scholars who wish to study it as a formative epic. There is only one manuscript of the *Beowulf* epic in existence. It is currently housed at the British Library in London. The following

translation is of the highly respected fourth edition of *Klaeber's Beowulf*, which builds upon nearly a century of scholars⁴²⁰ transliterating the manuscript.

⁴²⁰ The editors of this most recent edition include R.D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork, and John D. Niles. Together they have built upon Frederick Klaeber's first English language edition of the *Beowulf* manuscript, first published in 1922.

CHAPTER 6

BEOWULF

A LITERAL TRANSLATION⁴²¹

By:

Drew Craver

	Now, ⁴²² we have heard	the strength
	of the Spear-Danes' people's-kings	in days of yore
	how those noblemen	performed courage[ous deeds].
	Often Scyld-Scefing	from troops of enemies
5	from many peoples	took away mead-seats ⁴²³
	terrified earls	after earlier he was
	found frail. ⁴²⁴	Relief from it he awaited
	waxed ⁴²⁵ under the sky	with glories thrived
	until each	of the near-sitters ⁴²⁶
10	over the whale-road ⁴²⁷	should hear that
	[and] yield tribute to him.	That was a good king.
	To him a son was	after born
	young in the yards	whom god ⁴²⁸ sent
	as a relief to the folk	he saw the dire distress
15	that they earlier endured	lordless

⁴²¹ Of - *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*, Fourth Edition.

⁴²² *Hwæt* - A call from the shaper to quiet down and listen up is followed by the expectation that the audience knew of the legendary kings of the Danes. This suggests that the real-life audience resided in the Danelaw.

⁴²³ Ultimately, he killed his enemies and deprived them of the chance to feast in the mead-hall.

⁴²⁴ Scyld was a weak and sickly child.

⁴²⁵ Grew.

⁴²⁶ Neighboring peoples.

⁴²⁷ The sea.

⁴²⁸ Presumably the god of Abraham, some scholars would say Odin. Potentially it is purposefully ambiguous.

	a long while.	To him this life-lord ⁴²⁹
	wielder of glory	gave worldly honor:
	Beow ⁴³⁰ , son of Scyld	was famous
	[his] renown spread wide	in Scandinavian lands.
20	So shall a young man	do good works
	with splendid wealth-gifting	[while] in the father's keeping ⁴³¹
	so that after in old [age]	close-companions
	will stand by him	when war comes
	[as] men should serve	with praiseworthy deeds
25	in each of the nations	[so that] men may thrive.
	From them then Scyld departed	at the fated time
	very-vigorous he went	into the lord's keeping.
	They then him bore out	to the currents of the sea
	dear companions	as he himself bade
30	when he wielded words	the lord of the Scyldings
	loved land-maker ⁴³²	long ruled.
	There at the harbor stood	the ringed-stem ⁴³³
	icy and out-fussy ⁴³⁴	a hero's vessel
	they then laid	the loved leader
35	the ring-giver ⁴³⁵	in the ship's embrace
	glorious by the mast.	There was much treasure,
	precious things, led	from far away.
	Never heard I of a comelier	ship geared
	with war-weapons	and battle armor
40	blades and byrnies; ⁴³⁶	in its ⁴³⁷ breast lay
	many treasures	that with him should
	in the flood's ⁴³⁸ possession	travel far.
	They him no less	furnished with gifts
	with great offerings	then they did
45	who him at [his] beginning	sent forth

⁴²⁹ *Liffrea*. *Frea* is used for human or divine lords, it is etymologically descended from the deity word and almost identical to the Norse god and goddess, Frey and Freyja.

⁴³⁰ Not Beowulf.

⁴³¹ A prince should strengthen allegiances with the king's men while his father still lives.

⁴³² Nation builder or prince of the land.

⁴³³ The dragon-headed longship.

⁴³⁴ Eager to embark.

⁴³⁵ A Germanic kenning for a king, known for giving rings and treasure to their warriors.

⁴³⁶ Mailshirts.

⁴³⁷ The ship's.

⁴³⁸ The sea's.

alone over the waves
 Then yet they set by him
 high over head
 gave over the spear-man.⁴⁴¹
 50 spirits were mourning.
 to say in truth
 heroes under heaven
 Then was in the burg⁴⁴²
 the loved people's king
 55 renowned among folks⁴⁴³
 ealderman of the yard⁴⁴⁴
 the high Healfdane.
 the glad Scyldings
 With four children
 60 in the world awoken
 Heorogar and Hrothgar
 heard I that [...
 of the Battle-Scilfings⁴⁴⁸
 Then was Hrothgar
 65 the worthy mind of warfare
 eagerly heard⁴⁵⁰ him
 a great band of young retainers.
 that he would order
 men to build
 70 than the born of old⁴⁵²
 and there inside
 young and old

as a child.⁴³⁹
 a golden sign⁴⁴⁰
 they let the sea bear [him]
 For him hearts were sad
 Men know not
 hall-counselors
 who that freight received.
 Beow of the Scyldings
 for a long time
 [his] father gone elsewhere
 until to him after awoke⁴⁴⁵
 He ruled as long as he lived
 ancient and fierce in fighting.
 all told
 for the host's⁴⁴⁶ leader
 and Halga the good
 On]elan was queen⁴⁴⁷
 dear bed-fellow.⁴⁴⁹
 success in battle given
 so that his retainers
 until the young warriors waxed
 For him in spirit was born⁴⁵¹
 a hall-building
 a mead-hall great[er]
 ever heard
 to dole to all
 such as god gave to him

⁴³⁹ Legend says Scyld, as a child, arrived in a ship much the same way he was sent out after his death.

⁴⁴⁰ A war banner.

⁴⁴¹ They sent their warrior-king's dead body adrift.

⁴⁴² The town stronghold.

⁴⁴³ Implying the folk of many nations.

⁴⁴⁴ King of the land.

⁴⁴⁵ Was born.

⁴⁴⁶ Warriors'.

⁴⁴⁷ Damaged piece of the manuscript.

⁴⁴⁸ The Ynglings of ancient Scandinavia.

⁴⁴⁹ Term used to describe spouses.

⁴⁵⁰ Obeyed.

⁴⁵¹ He was inspired.

⁴⁵² The ancestors.

but not the folk-share⁴⁵³
 Then I widely heard
 75 in many nations
 the decorated folk-stead.⁴⁵⁴
 promptly with people
 the greatest of hall-buildings.
 the one whom with his words
 80 He never left a boast unfulfilled;
 treasure at the feast.
 high and wide-gabled,
 [and] loathsome fires,
 that the edge-hate⁴⁵⁸
 85 after deadly violence
 Then the courageous-ghost⁴⁵⁹ with difficulty
 suffered hard times,
 because he each day
 loud in the hall.
 90 the clear song of the *scop*.⁴⁶⁰
 of the origins of people
 he said that the almighty
 the beautiful land
 set the triumphant
 95 luminaries to light
 and decorated
 with limbs and leaves,
 every kind of kin⁴⁶²
 So the warriors then
 100 happily
 to do violence
 The grim ghost

and the lives of men.
 [of] the ordered work
 throughout this middle-earth
 In time it came to pass
 so that it all happened in a year —
 He shaped⁴⁵⁵ it the name Heorot⁴⁵⁶
 had wide wielding.⁴⁵⁷
 he doled out rings,
 The hall towered
 it awaited battle-surges
 yet it was not long then
 from in-laws
 should awaken.
 the one who in darkness remained,
 heard rejoicing
 There was harp music
 He who knew spoke
 to tell of times far away
 made the earth
 that water surrounds,
 sun and moon,
 for land-dwellers,
 the surface of the earth
 each life shaped⁴⁶¹
 those who live [and] move about.
 lived with delight,
 until that one began
 the fiend in hell⁴⁶³.
 was called Grendel,

⁴⁵³ The land.

⁴⁵⁴ People's place. Great hall.

⁴⁵⁵ "To shape" is to create, with words, deeds, or divine power. He "named" it Heorot.

⁴⁵⁶ Hart, stag, or buck.

⁴⁵⁷ Power.

⁴⁵⁸ Sword-hate. Hostility. War.

⁴⁵⁹ Bold demon or enemy.

⁴⁶⁰ Pronounced "shop." Poet, such as those who would recite *Beowulf* in mead-halls.

⁴⁶¹ Created.

⁴⁶² All people.

⁴⁶³ Not necessarily biblical. Instead the realm of the dead ruled by the Norse goddess, Hel.

	the famous wanderer	who ruled the moors ⁴⁶⁴
	the stronghold in the marshes ⁴⁶⁵	the yard of the race of monsters.
105	The unfortunate man	occupied [it] a long while
	since him the shaper ⁴⁶⁶	had pre-decreed
	in Cain's kin,	because he slew Abel
	the eternal lord	avenged that killing.
	He rejoiced not in that fight	but he, <i>metod</i> , ⁴⁶⁷
110	for that crime	drove him ⁴⁶⁸ far from mankind.
	From him ⁴⁶⁹ the evil-offspring	all awoke ⁴⁷⁰
	giants and elves	and monsters,
	such giants	that against god fought
	[for a] long time;	he to them this loan repaid. ⁴⁷¹
II	115	He went then to nose ⁴⁷²
	the high house	after night became
	after beer-drinking	how in it the Ring-Danes
	He found then there in	had settled.
	sleeping after the feast;	a band of noble retainers
120	the misery of men.	they knew not sorrow
	grim and greedy	The unholy creature
	fierce and furious	was soon geared ⁴⁷³
	thirty thanes.	and seized in rest
	exalting with plunder	From there, after he went
	with the slaughter-fill ⁴⁷⁴	to go to home
125	Then was in morning	home to nose.
	Grendel's war-craft	with early-day ⁴⁷⁵
		revealed to men

⁴⁶⁴ The heath or the wasteland.

⁴⁶⁵ Literally the stronghold and the marsh.

⁴⁶⁶ A divine shaper. Creator.

⁴⁶⁷ Most often translated as "God" or "Maker." It is literally "measure" or "the measurer" and is synonymous with the Norse concept of the World Tree. Christians understood this as their god. Heathens understood it as Yggdrasil, the World Tree, which sustains all things. I will not translate it in this epic in order to highlight the potential ambiguities available to its contemporary audience. Nevertheless, the poet is intending it to mean the Christian god.

⁴⁶⁸ Cain. However, here god is angered by Cain's diloyalty as opposed to the murder itself.

⁴⁶⁹ Cain.

⁴⁷⁰ Are descended.

⁴⁷¹ God punished the monsters for that fight ... A likely parallel to Genesis 6 where the god of Abraham kills the giants and evil men by means of Noah's flood.

⁴⁷² *Neosian* - "to find, to inspect." Grendel went to inspect.

⁴⁷³ *Gearo* - "ready."

⁴⁷⁴ Full with slaughter.

⁴⁷⁵ Daybreak.

	after that was known much mourning-sounds.	weeping raised up The great king
130	the noble old man suffered slowly after they saw of the accursed ghost; ⁴⁷⁷ loathsome and long.	sat unhappy endured thane-sorrow ⁴⁷⁶ the enemy footprint that strife was too strong
135	but after one night more murder the battle and the crime Then was easy to find far away	It was not a long time again he made and mourned not for he was too fixed on it. him who elsewhere would rest
140	in bed in a private chamber said truthfully of hall-thane hate far and fixed So he ruled	when he was beckoned ⁴⁷⁸ with clear evidence held him afterward the one who escaped the fiend. and fought against right until that best of houses
145	one against all stood idle. twelve winters time endured the affliction great sorrows.	It was a great while the lord of the Scyldings of each woe Because [it] became visibly known
150	to the born of old ⁴⁷⁹ with sad tales long against Hrothgar violence and battle Always fighting	that Grendel fought waged hostile-hate for many half-years. ⁴⁸⁰ he wished no peace of the host of the Danes
155	who against men [with] deadly attack removed no witan ⁴⁸¹ there of brighter relief The combatant	compounding wealth, had good reason to think from the hands of the slayer. was persecuting old and young ⁴⁸²
160	the dark death-shadow	

⁴⁷⁶ Sorrow for the loss of his thanes.

⁴⁷⁷ Creature.

⁴⁷⁸ After Grendel, thanes would use any excuse to not stay in Heorot at night.

⁴⁷⁹ Descendants of ancestors.

⁴⁸⁰ Seasons.

⁴⁸¹ King's councilor.

⁴⁸² *Dugobe* (older, seasoned warriors) and *geogobe* (young retainers).

	hovered and ambushed, the misty moors. whither demons ⁴⁸³	in perpetual night he ruled Men know not wandering go.
165	So many crimes the horrible solitary one hard humiliations. the richly decorated hall He was not able with treasure for <i>metod</i> ;	the enemy of mankind often performed Heorot he inhabited by dark nights. to greet the gift-stool ⁴⁸⁴ he knew not his mind.
170	That was a great wreck ⁴⁸⁵ [a] breaking of spirit. the rich to rune ⁴⁸⁶ who with bravery against sudden horror	for the lord of the Scyldings Many often sat counsel considered were the best to advance.
175	Sometimes they promised honor to idols, that for them the soul-slayer ⁴⁸⁷ against the distress of the people. the hope of the heathens	at heathen temples with words bade help [would] perform Such was their custom, thinking of hell
180	in [their] heart, the deemer of deeds. indeed they knew not the ruler of heaven. ⁴⁸⁹ through terrible violence	<i>metod</i> they knew not They knew not the lord god to praise the <i>helm</i> ⁴⁸⁸ of the heavens Woe be to the one who shall shove the soul
185	into fire's arms in any way to change; after the death-day	not to expect relief well be to the one who may seek the lord

⁴⁸³ *Helrunan* (Hel-councilors). Either the Norse goddess of the underworld, Hel, or the Christian Devil. Purposefully ambiguous?

⁴⁸⁴ Salute the throne with respect.

⁴⁸⁵ Distress.

⁴⁸⁶ The powerful to consult. The word *run*, related to runes, the ancient Germanic alphabet used for magical inscriptions, was often used in a verb-like fashion meaning to council or consult.

⁴⁸⁷ Derogatory term for the heathen gods. Relating them to devils and proving the Christian intentions of the author.

⁴⁸⁸ Helmet. Implying a protector or lord, used in terms of war. Here the Christian god is described as a warlord.

⁴⁸⁹ Lines 180b-183a offer us our first concrete glimpse into the formative intentions of the poet. Using the character of the shaper, the poet tells that Hrothgar rules over a Pagan kingdom, that Pagan prayers go unanswered, and that *metod*, *god*, and the *helm* of the heavens are all supposed to be understood as the Christian god, the "ruler of heaven."

	and in the father's arms	desire peace. ⁴⁹⁰
III	So the time of sorrow	for the son of Healfdane
190	always seethed ⁴⁹¹	the wise hero could not
	put aside woe;	that strife was too great
	loathsome and long	which on the people became
	the grim dire distress	the greatest of night-attacks.
	So from home	Higlac's thane
195	the good one among the Geats ⁴⁹²	heard of Grendel's deeds. ⁴⁹³
	He was of mankind	of might the strongest
	in that day	of this life
	noble and great.	Ordered him a wave-traverser ⁴⁹⁴
	good [and] geared;	said he to the war-king
200	over the swan-road ⁴⁹⁵	he would seek
	the famous king	[because] he was in need of men.
	The expedition for him	wise earls
	found little fault with,	though he was dear to them,
	they urged the valiant [one],	examined the omens.
205	The good [one]	of the Geatish people
	had chosen champions,	the boldest that he
	might find.	One of fifteen
	sought the sea-wood, ⁴⁹⁶	a man led the way,
	a sea-skilled man,	to the land-boundary. ⁴⁹⁷
210	Time went forth,	the ship was on the waves,
	the boat under the bluff.	The heroes prepared
	stepped on the stem. ⁴⁹⁸	Waves crashed
	sea against sand.	The men bore
	into the breast of the boat	bright decorated armor,
215	richly equipped war-gear.	The men shoved out,

⁴⁹⁰ Now the shaper instructs the audience about the Christian belief that their god will either bless or punish people who lead others to or from their god. Here the poet's intention is outlined: they wish to lead people to the Christian god.

⁴⁹¹ Brooded.

⁴⁹² Swedes. Some argue that they are the ancestors of the Goths.

⁴⁹³ Curiously the action of the epic, if we remove the interjection from the shaper, jumps from Pagans asking for relief at Heathen temples to Beowulf hearing of their distress and deciding to go help.

⁴⁹⁴ Ship.

⁴⁹⁵ Sea.

⁴⁹⁶ Ship.

⁴⁹⁷ Shore.

⁴⁹⁸ The prow.

men on the wished for journey,
 Departed then over the sea,
 the foamy-necked float⁵⁰⁰
 until after that fixed time
 220 the wound-stem⁵⁰¹
 so that the voyagers
 shining sea-cliffs
 broad sea-bluffs.
 the voyage at an end.
 225 the people of the Weders⁵⁰²
 sealed⁵⁰³ the sea-wood
 war garments
 who their way across the waves
 Then from the wall saw,
 230 the one whom the sea-cliff
 bearing over the deck of the ship
 war-gear in readiness;
 thought he,
 Went him then to the shore
 235 the thane of Hrothgar
 might-wood⁵⁰⁴ in hand
 “What are you
 warriors with mail-shirts
 over the sea-street
 240 hither over the water?
 end-sitting⁵⁰⁶
 so that on Danish land
 with ship-army
 Never here more openly
 245 shield-bearers
 warriors
 the consent of kinsmen.

the bound wood.⁴⁹⁹
 wind driven,
 most like a bird
 of two days
 had advanced
 saw land,
 steep hills
 Then was the sea crossed,
 From there up quickly
 stepped on land
 shook mail-shirts
 thanked god
 made easy.
 the warden of the Scyldings
 should hold,
 shining shields
 his anxiety broke forth;
 what were these men.
 riding a horse
 shook with force
 asking for formal words,
 armor-having
 who thus the high ship
 came leading
 [I a whi]le⁵⁰⁵ was
 holding sea watch
 none of hostiles
 might not harm.
 undertook to come
 without permission,
 not at all knowing
 I never saw a greater

⁴⁹⁹ Ship.

⁵⁰⁰ Ship.

⁵⁰¹ Ship with a curved prow or dragon's head.

⁵⁰² Weders = Geats, Weder-Geats.

⁵⁰³ Fastened.

⁵⁰⁴ Spear.

⁵⁰⁵ Damaged section of the manuscript.

⁵⁰⁶ Stationed at the territorial boundary, or end of a territory.

earl over earth
 the man in war gear.
 250 adorned with weapons,
 [his] glorious appearance.
 shall know;
 deceitful-observers⁵⁰⁸
 go further.
 255 seafarers
 onefold⁵⁰⁹ thought,
 to announce

IV Him, the eldest
 with wise words
 260 “We are men
 and hearth-companions⁵¹⁰
 My father was
 the noble front-fighter⁵¹¹
 He lived many winters
 265 of age in the homestead.
 remembers him
 We with friendly hearts
 the son of Healfdane
 the protector of the people.
 270 We have a great errand⁵¹³
 lord of the Danes.
 be, this I expect.
 truthful, as we
 that with the Scyldings
 275 hidden deed-hatred⁵¹⁴
 manifests terror
 humiliation and slaughter.
 through a roomy⁵¹⁵ heart

than is your one,
 That is no hall-man⁵⁰⁷
 unless his countenance deceives him,
 Now I your lineage
 before you, far from here,
 on Danish land
 Now you far-dwellers
 hear my
 haste is best
 from where you are coming.”

answered,
 unlocked the word-ward,
 of the Geatish people
 of Higelac.
 known by folk
 called Ecgtheow.
 before he went away⁵¹²
 Certainly every wise man
 around the wide earth.
 your lord
 come to seek
 Be you good council to us.
 for the great
 A secret there shall not
 You know if it is
 heard said
 of the enemy I know not what
 with dark nights
 unknown violence
 I may
 help to advise Hrothgar

⁵⁰⁷ An ordinary thane.

⁵⁰⁸ Spies.

⁵⁰⁹ Simple.

⁵¹⁰ Retainers.

⁵¹¹ Leader. Point man.

⁵¹² Died.

⁵¹³ Or message.

⁵¹⁴ One who shows their hatred by deeds.

⁵¹⁵ Large or kind.

how he, old⁵¹⁶ and good,
 280 If a change of fortune
 relief after
 and the care-welling
 or always after
 dire-need endure
 285 in the high-place
 The warden spoke
 the fearless officer.
 the sharp shield-warrior
 [between] words and works
 290 I hear that
 to the lord of the Scyldings.
 weapons and armor.
 Also, I will order
 against each enemy
 295 newly-tarred
 with honor to hold
 over the sea-streams
 the wood with the wound-neck⁵¹⁷
 As should be given
 300 that survives
 Went they then to fare.⁵¹⁸
 remained on the rope,
 on anchor fastened.
 over the cheek-guards
 305 colored and fire-hardened
 with grim war-mind.⁵²⁰
 marched all together
 richly equipped and ornamented with gold might see.
 That was the foremost
 310 of buildings under the skies.
 it glittered [and] gleamed

the fiend [may] overcome.
 should ever come for him
 distress [and] destruction,
 become cool,
 torturous-time
 as long as it remains
 the best of houses.”
 as he sat on [his] horse
 “Of each shall
 know the shade [of distinction]
 he who well thinks.
 this host is friendly
 Go forth bearing
 I will show you the way.
 my young thanes
 your float
 the ship on the sand
 until it after bears
 the dear men
 to the land of the Geats.
 [to] one doing good
 the battle-storm whole.”
 The ship stayed still,
 the roomy ship
 The boar-sign⁵¹⁹ shone
 decorated with gold
 holding life-guard
 The men hurried,
 until they the timbered hall
 for earth-dwellers
 In it the king awaited.
 over many lands.

⁵¹⁶ Wise.

⁵¹⁷ The ship with the curved prow.

⁵¹⁸ To go.

⁵¹⁹ A warrior's insignia. The boar was a common image among Germanic Heathen warriors, associated with the Norse god Frey.

⁵²⁰ Description of a war helmet decorated with a golden boar, protecting the wearers life.

	Him ⁵²¹ the battle-dear pointed out the resplendent ⁵²² directly go.	of the brave that they might to it The one of the war-heroes
315	turned [his] horse “[It] is time for me to go. with generosity ventures sound. against wrathful warriors	[and] after said a word, Father all-powerful keep your I will [go] to the sea to hold guard.”
V	320 The street was stone-decorated ⁵²³	the path led
	the men together hard hand-linked singing war-gear. in their grim-gear	in shining war-shirts glorious ring-iron Then they to the cellar ⁵²⁴ went forth.
325	Sea-weary they set shields wonderfully-strong, Went then to bench. ⁵²⁵ armor of the men war-gear of the sea-men	[their] broad shields, against the hall wall. Mail-shirts rang, spears stood gathered together
330	ash-shafts grey on top. with worthy weapons.	The iron-threat ⁵²⁶ was
	asked the warriors “From where [did] you bring the grey mail-shirts	Then there a bold warrior about [their] descent. the ornamented shields and the grim-helmets
335	the heap of battle-shafts? ⁵²⁷ herald and officer. this many brave-looking I expect that you for daring but for greatness of heart	I am Hrothgar’s I never saw foreign men. not at all for exile sought Hrothgar.”
340	Him the brave [one] the bold one of the Weders	answered after spoke a word

⁵²¹ The end-sitter.

⁵²² Heorot.

⁵²³ Paved with stones.

⁵²⁴ Hall.

⁵²⁵ They sat.

⁵²⁶ Armed troop.

⁵²⁷ Spears.

hard⁵²⁸ under the helmet.
 table-companions,
 I wish to say
 345 to the great lord,
 to your lord
 such goodness that we him
 Wulfgar spoke
 his character was
 350 valor and wisdom.
 the king of the Scyldings
 the giver of rings
 the glorious king
 and to you the answer
 355 which to me the good [one]
 He went then quickly
 old and grey-haired
 the brave [one] went
 of the Danish lord.
 360 Wulfgar spoke
 “Ferried here are
 over the expanse of the ocean
 the oldest one
 call Beowulf.
 365 that they, my lord,
 exchange⁵³⁰ words.
 your answer
 They in war-gear
 of the esteem of earls.
 370 the [one] whom the battle-warriors

“We are Higelac’s
 Beowulf is my name.
 to the son of Healfdane,
 my errand
 if he will grant to us
 might greet.”
 who was of the Wendlas⁵²⁹
 known by many
 “I the lord of the Danes
 will ask
 just as you are requesting
 about your adventure
 will promptly announce
 thinks to give.”
 to where Hrothgar sat
 with his troop of earls
 so that he stood before the shoulders
 He knew the custom of the host.
 to his friendly lord,
 come from afar
 people of the Geats
 the warriors
 They are petitioning
 with you may
 [Do] not refuse to grant them
 glad-man⁵³¹ Hrothgar.
 think [themselves] worthy
 Indeed the leader is strong
 led hither.”

VI Hrothgar spoke,
 “I knew him
 his late-father was
 whom to home⁵³³ gave

the *helm*⁵³² of the Scyldings,
 [as] a boy
 called Ecgtheow
 Hrethel of the Geats

⁵²⁸ The hard one.

⁵²⁹ Vandals. An eastern Germanic tribe.

⁵³⁰ *Wrixlan* - “to wrestle.”

⁵³¹ Gracious.

⁵³² Leader.

⁵³³ To wed.

375	[his] only daughter. the hard one, come here Furthermore it [is] said that who brought gifts thither to thank	His brave son is now seeking a loyal friend. by seafarers to the Geats that he brave in battle
380	has the might-craft ⁵³⁴ in his hand-grip. for generosity to the West-Danes against Grendel's terror.	of thirty men Him holy god sent us ⁵³⁵ this I have expected I to the good one shall
385	for his daring Be thou in haste, see the band of kinsmen also say to them with words with the people of the Danes.”	offer treasure. order to go in together that they are welcome
390	“[To the people of the Weders] ⁵³⁶ my victorious lord chief of the East-Danes and you are to him hard-heads ⁵³⁷	offered word inside ordered [me] to say to you that he knows your descent over the sea-wellings welcome hither.
395	Now you may go under grim-helmets Let battle-boards ⁵³⁸ wooden battle-shafts ⁵³⁹	in with your war-equipment to see Hrothgar. here await the outcome ⁵⁴⁰ of words.”
400	Arose then the mighty a heap ⁵⁴² of powerful thanes guarded the war-gear They moved quickly together under Heorot's roof	many ring-men ⁵⁴¹ around him one there awaited as him the hard [one] bade. the man led [them] [the brave in battle went] ⁵⁴³

⁵³⁴ Strength.

⁵³⁵ Hrothgar, the ruler of a Pagan kingdom, thanks the “holy god,” which we have established is meant to mean the Christian god. The poet uses the character of Hrothgar to lead the audience (by example) towards the Christian god, or at least a level of thankfulness and acknowledgment that life's blessings come from that god.

⁵³⁶ Damaged manuscript. Words are suggested by Klaeber.

⁵³⁷ Brave-minded.

⁵³⁸ Shields.

⁵³⁹ Spears.

⁵⁴⁰ *Gebinges* - “the thing” - the word used for democratic assemblies among archaic Germanic peoples.

⁵⁴¹ Warriors. Ring-bearing as a sign of loyalty to their lord.

⁵⁴² Troop.

⁵⁴³ Damaged manuscript. Words are suggested by Klaeber.

the hard under *helm*⁵⁴⁴
 405 Beowulf spoke,
 the sewed battle-net
 “Hail⁵⁴⁵ to you Hrothgar!
 kinsmen and young thanes
 glorious deeds in youth.
 410 on my native-turf
 seafarers say
 best of houses
 idle and unused
 under heaven’s vault
 415 Then my people
 the best
 lord Hrothgar
 because they knew
 [They] oversaw themselves
 420 colored from fiends.⁵⁴⁷
 destroyed the kin of giants
 water-monsters of night
 avenged the affliction of the Weders. They sought woe.⁵⁴⁸
 I crushed the grim ones
 425 with that combatant
 a thing⁵⁴⁹ with the giant.
 chief of the Bright-Danes
 protector of the Scyldings
 that you not refuse me
 430 dear-friend of the folk.
 so that I alone might
 and with this hard heap⁵⁵⁰
 I have also heard
 for his recklessness
 435 I that⁵⁵¹ therefore scorn

so that he on the hearth stood.
 on him the mailshirt shone
 with the ingenuity of a smith.
 I am of Higelac’s
 I have accomplished many
 The thing of Grendel came to me
 obviously well known
 that this hall stands
 to each of the ring-men
 after evening-light
 becomes hidden.
 learned⁵⁴⁶ me that
 wise earls
 I should seek you
 of my might-craft.
 when I came from battle
 There I bound five
 and on waves slew
 severe-distress endured
 and now against Grendel shall
 alone hold [meeting]
 I you now
 wish to ask
 one favor
 shelter of the warriors
 Now I came thus far
 with my troop of earls
 purge Hereot.
 that the combatant
 cares not for weapons.
 so that Higelac with me

⁵⁴⁴ Here *helm* means “helmet” or “head protector.”

⁵⁴⁵ *Hal* - “hail” ... be well, be whole, be healthy.

⁵⁴⁶ Advised.

⁵⁴⁷ Covered in the blood of enemies.

⁵⁴⁸ They asked for trouble.

⁵⁴⁹ An ancient democratic process of deliberation practiced by many Germanic peoples. (Ironic?)

⁵⁵⁰ Tough troops.

⁵⁵¹ Weapons.

	my man-lord	should be happy of heart. ⁵⁵²
	I the sword should [not] bear	nor a broad shield
	a yellow-round ⁵⁵³ to battle	but I with grip shall
	grapple against the fiend	and fight for life ⁵⁵⁴
440	against the loathsome hostile.	There I shall believe in
	the doom ⁵⁵⁵ of the lord	the one whom him death takes.
	I expect that he will	if he might win
	in the war-cellar ⁵⁵⁶	the people of the Geats
	eat unafraid	as he often did
445	the glorious-host of men.	You [will] have no need
	to hide my head ⁵⁵⁷	because he will have me
	dripping with blood	if me death takes.
	He will bear the bloody corpse	he will think to eat
	he will eat alone	unmournfully.
450	He will mark the moor-retreat.	Don't you worry about
	caring for my body	[nor] grieving long.
	Send on to Higelac	if me battle should take
	the best of battle shrouds	which my breast protects
	the best of mailshirts	that is Hrethel's heirloom
455	the work of Weland ⁵⁵⁸ .	<i>Wyrd</i> ⁵⁵⁹ always goes as she ⁵⁶⁰ shall." ⁵⁶¹
VII	Hrothgar spoke	the <i>helm</i> of the Scyldings.
	"For fights you	Beowulf my friend
	and for favors	sought us.
	Your father brought about	the greatest feud
460	because Heatholafe	he slew with his hands

⁵⁵² Proud.

⁵⁵³ A linden wood shield.

⁵⁵⁴ To the death.

⁵⁵⁵ Decree. Here the Christian god has power over the timing of men's deaths.

⁵⁵⁶ Hall. The Old English word *sele* is the source of Modern English's "cellar," but referred to a structure more akin to a "mead-hall."

⁵⁵⁷ Bury my body.

⁵⁵⁸ Legendary Germanic smith. *Volundr* in Old Norse. He was a descendant of giants, apprenticed to dwarves, and worked for the Norse gods. See John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 316-7.

⁵⁵⁹ Often translated as fate, an attribute of the Christian god. Easily recognizable as *Urd*, the principal Norn, a Norse divinity controlling the fate of men and gods alike. I will not translate it in this epic in order to highlight the potential ambiguities available to its contemporary audience.

⁵⁶⁰ *Hio*, feminine nominative singular - "she." Supports the argument for the possible reception of *Wyrd*, the Anglo-Saxon spelling, as *Urd*, the Old Norse spelling, principal of the Norns (equivalent to the Greek Fates - past, present, and future). Can also be neuter plural - "they." Supports the plurality of the Norns.

⁵⁶¹ Here *Wyrd* has authority over men's deaths.

with the Wylfingas.
 for war-terror
 Then he sought
 over the rolling of the waves
 465 when I first wielded⁵⁶²
 and in youth held
 the hoard-city⁵⁶³ of heroes.
 my older brother
 born of Healfdane
 470 After that feud
 sent to the Wylfingas
 old treasure
 Sorrow is mine to say
 to any man
 475 humiliation in Heorot
 accomplished with hostile-attacks
 the war-heap diminished.
 into Grendel's terror.
 put an end to the deeds
 480 Full often boasted
 over the ale-cup
 that they in the beer-cellar⁵⁶⁵
 Grendel's battle
 Then was this mead-hall
 485 the splendid-cellar stained with gore
 all the bench-planks
 the sword-gory⁵⁶⁷ hall.
 dear seasoned-warriors
 Sit now to feast
 490 the victory-glory for men
 Then was for the Geat-men
 in the beer-cellar
 There the strong-minded

Then the kin of the Weders
 would not have him.
 the South-Danish folk
 the Honor-Scyldings
 the folk of the Danes
 the wide kingdom
 Then was Heregar dead,
 unliving
 he was better than I!
 settled by money
 over the water's ridge
 he swore oaths to me.
 in my spirit
 what Grendel has [done] to me.
 with his hate-thoughts
 my hall-troop is
Wyrd swept them away⁵⁶⁴
 God easily may
 of the daring-scather.
 beer drunk
 warriors
 would await
 with dreadful edge.⁵⁶⁶
 in morning-time
 when the day shone
 wet with blood
 I had less of those loyal
 whom death took.
 and loosen thoughts
 as should whet your spirit."
 all together
 the bench vacated.⁵⁶⁸
 went to sit

⁵⁶² Ruled.

⁵⁶³ Treasure-filled.

⁵⁶⁴ Here, again, *Wyrd* controls the time of death.

⁵⁶⁵ Mead-hall.

⁵⁶⁶ Sword.

⁵⁶⁷ Blood-stained.

⁵⁶⁸ The Geats were given a place to sit in the mead-hall.

	famous for strength.	The thane held service
495	the one who bore in hands poured the sweet clear drink. clear-voiced in Heorot. an un-little ⁵⁶⁹ host	decorated ale-cups While the <i>scop</i> sang There was gladness of heroes of Danes and Weders.
VIII	Unferth spoke	born of Ecglaf
500	who sat at the foot unbound battle-runes. ⁵⁷⁰ the high-spirited seafarer because he wished not of middle-yard ⁵⁷¹	of the lord of the Scyldings Beowulf's journey was for him a great cause for resentment that any other man [would] ever accomplish greater than he himself.
505	deeds under heaven "Art thou the Beowulf ⁵⁷² on the spacious sea where you two for pride and for foolish-boasting	the one who with Brecca contended competed while swimming tempted the sea in the deep water
510	risked [your] lives? neither loved nor loathed from the sorrowful journey there you two, the sea-stream, measured the sea-street	Not any man could dissuade you two when you swam on the sea-water. with arms covered moved quickly with hands
515	glided over the ocean. with surging water of winter. worked seven-nights had more might. on Heatho-Raemes ⁵⁷³	The sea-waves welled You two on the waters had he who outmatched you at swimming Then him in morning-time the sea bore up
520	from there he sought loved by his people the fair stronghold residence and rings. ⁵⁷⁵ the son of Beanstane ⁵⁷⁶	[his] own native land ⁵⁷⁴ the land of the Brondingas where he had folk All vow against you truly won.

⁵⁶⁹ *Unlytel* - a use of poetic litotes, common in Old English.

⁵⁷⁰ Let loose hostile speech.

⁵⁷¹ Earth.

⁵⁷² What follows is called a *flyting* - a Germanic battle of words and an important part of Germanic heroic culture.

⁵⁷³ Southern Norway.

⁵⁷⁴ Here the Germanic rune ǣ (odal) was used in place of the Old English word *epel* - "native land, home."

⁵⁷⁵ Wealth.

⁵⁷⁶ Brecca.

525	Therefore I expect for you though you in the battle-storm in fierce fighting in the long-night time Beowulf spoke		a worse thing everywhere did well if you dare to remain near Grendel.” born of Ecgtheow
530	“What a great many things you, beer drunk, spoke of his journey. that I have more power on the waves		my friend Unferth spoke about Brecca The truth I tally sea-strength than any other man.
535	We agreed and boasted still in youth would dare our lives We had naked ⁵⁷⁷ swords		being young boys when we were both that we out on the ocean and so we carried that out. hard in hands
540	when we swam on the sea. against sea-monsters. far with the flood-waves Quicker in the water Then we two together		We thought to defend ourselves He never at all from me could float. ⁵⁷⁸ I would not go from him. were on the sea
545	five nights time the welling ⁵⁷⁹ water night grew dark battle-grim turned against [us]. the spirit ⁵⁸⁰ of sea-fish		until that flood drove us [apart] the coldest weather and the north wind Rough were the waves. was aroused.
550	There me against the loathed [ones] hard hand-locked the woven war-garment garnished with gold. the hostile enemy-fiend		my body-sark ⁵⁸¹ did help lay on the breast Took me to the ground ⁵⁸² held fast
555	grim in grip that I the combatant [of] the battle-blade. the mighty sea-beast		however [it] was given to me hit with the point The battle-storm took through mine hand.

⁵⁷⁷ Unsheathed.

⁵⁷⁸ Could swim.

⁵⁷⁹ Surging.

⁵⁸⁰ Temper.

⁵⁸¹ Mailshirt.

⁵⁸² Sea-floor.

IX	Frequently in this manner	evil-doers
560	severely threatened me. with dear sword They by no means had Guilty-destroyers sat around the feast	I served them as it was fitting. their pleasure of the fill. so they took me near the sea-ground
565	but in morning they were lying put to sleep ⁵⁸³ by the sword. near the high sea of seafarers.	wounded by the sword up on the shore After that [they] never hindered the passage The eastern light came
570	bright beacon of god that I the sea-bluffs the windy walls. the doomed earl Indeed [it] was given me	the sea subsided might see <i>Wyrd</i> often preserves when his courage avails! ⁵⁸⁴ that I with sword slew
575	nine sea-monsters. under heaven's vault nor on the water-stream Yet I the foe's grip weary of the undertaking.	I never heard say of a harder night fight a more forlorn man. with life survived Then me the sea bore off
580	the flood along the current the welling water. of such battle-contests of terror swords. at battle-sport	into the land of the Finns I never anything of you heard say Brecca [and] you [too] never nor either of you
585	accomplished with shining swords. However you against your brother against close-kin. ⁵⁸⁵ suffer damnation ⁵⁸⁶	so bold a deed For that I boast not. turned to kill For this you shall in hell though your wit is good.
590	I say to you in truth	son of Ecglaf

⁵⁸³ Killed.

⁵⁸⁴ Norse Heathens believed that everyone had a fated time to die, which one could not escape. You could die early if you were cowardly, but you could not outlive your destined death. Here *Wyrd* aids Beowulf's adventure because he is courageous and it is not yet his time of doom. Again, *Wyrd*'s power is outside the domain of the Christian god.

⁵⁸⁵ There is no greater crime in the Germanic code than to kill a kinsman.

⁵⁸⁶ Here is a Christian appropriation of the Germanic code. Cain's crime was murder and lying, not so much fratricide.

that Grendel would never
 the terrible combatant
 humiliation in Heorot,
 as battle-grim as
 595 But he has found
 terrible sword-storm
 dread much
 He takes the toll
 of the Danish people
 600 kills [and] destroys
 from the Spear-Danes.
 [with] strength and courage
 offer him war.
 proud to mead⁵⁸⁹
 605 to the born of old⁵⁹⁰
 the sun radiantly clothed
 Then was in happiness
 grey-haired and battle-brave
 believed in the help
 610 the herder of the folk
 There was laughter of heroes,
 words were friendly.
 Hrothgar's queen
 gold adorned she
 615 and the excellent wife
 first to the king
 bid him happiness
 loved by the people
 the feast and the hall-cup
 620 Then went round
 worthy-warriors and rising-retainers
 a portion of the precious cup
 until she [came] to Beowulf
 with victorious spirit

have performed so many terrors
 to your elder,⁵⁸⁷
 if your heart were
 your mind considers yourself.
 that he the fight need not
 from your people
 the Victory-Scyldings.
 sparing no one
 but he [with] lust⁵⁸⁸ fights
 expecting no conflict
 But I of the Geats shall
 now, before long
 Go after he who might
 after morning-light
 [whom] of other days
 shining from the south.⁵⁹¹
 the dispenser of treasure
 the chief of the Bright-Danes
 heard in Beowulf
 thought firmly resolved.
 cheerful clamor,
 Wealtheow went forth
 mindful of noble procedure
 greeted the men in the hall
 offered the full cup⁵⁹²
 of the East-Danes
 at the beer taking
 he in pleasure received
 the king courageous in victory.
 [the] lady of the Helmingas
 doled to each
 until that time arose
 the ring-adorned queen
 bearing the mead cup.

⁵⁸⁷ Hrothgar.

⁵⁸⁸ Pleasure.

⁵⁸⁹ Proudly to the feast.

⁵⁹⁰ Children of ancestors.

⁵⁹¹ Let he who dies go feast with his ancestors. Seemingly a subtle allusion to Valhalla.

⁵⁹² The noble procedure, a ritually binding drink to seal an oath in archaic Germanic culture.

625	She greeted the man of the Geats with wise words the one in whom of any earl [could] relieve their pain. The battle-fierce man	thanked god that her wish had come she believed He took that cup from Wealtheow
630	and then spoke Beowulf spoke — “I intended that sat [in] the sea-boat that I by all means	ready for war. born of Ecgtheow when I set out on the sea with my troop of men — would carry out the wishes
635	of your people fast in the fiend’s grip. heroic courage or live to see The woman [was]	or die in the slaughter I shall perform in this mead-hall, my end-day.” well pleased by the words
640	the boast-speech ⁵⁹³ of the Geats noble ⁵⁹⁴ folk’s-queen Then was after just as earlier	the gold-adorned went to her lord to sit. inside the hall
645	strong words spoken the sound of victorious-folk the son of Healfdane evening rest. to the high-hall after the sunlight [when] it grew dark	the people in happiness until suddenly would seek He knew the combatant thought to battle he might see night over all
650	shapes of the shadow-helmet ⁵⁹⁵ black under clouds. Greeted then Hrothgar [to] Beowulf and wield ⁵⁹⁶ of the wine-hall	came to wander The men all arose. one man to another to him bid health and this word spoke.
655	“Never I to any man while I hand and round ⁵⁹⁷ the great house of the Danes Have now and hold	earlier entrusted might hoist but you now. the best of houses

⁵⁹³ Boasting is part of the mead-hall culture. A warrior is expected to boast what he will do in battle, then do it.

⁵⁹⁴ *Freolicu* - “free-body,” free-person(s).

⁵⁹⁵ Creatures of the night.

⁵⁹⁶ Control.

⁵⁹⁷ Shield.

	mindful of glory	make known your mighty courage
660	watch against wraiths! if you this work of courage	You will not want for anything survive with life.”
X	Then from him Hrothgar went	with his troop of men
	protector of the Scyldings	out of the hall.
	The war-chief wished	to seek Wealtheow
665	the queen as bed-fellow. against Grendel set a hall-guardian. for the chief of the Danes Indeed the man of the Geats	The most glorious of kings had as men heard He upheld distinguished service offered to watch against the giant. firmly trusted
670	[his] courageous strength Then he removed his the helmet off his head the choice iron and ordered [him] to hold	[and] <i>metod</i> 's favor. ⁵⁹⁸ iron-byrnie ⁵⁹⁹ gave his decorated sword to [his] attending-thane the battle-gear.
675	Spoke then the good one Beowulf of the Geats “I tally myself one no poorer war-works Therefore I him with the sword	with boasting words before he would step in bed. in war-stature than Grendel himself. will not kill
680	deprive [him] of life He knows not of the goods he could hew the round ⁶⁰⁰ in violent-works forego the sword	though I easily may. with which he may slay me though he should be brave but we two tonight shall if he dares to seek
685	a fight without weapons on whichever hand ⁶⁰¹ may deem glorious Then the battle-brave bent down; the earl's face	and afterward wise god holy lord as he thinks proper.” ⁶⁰² the cheek-cushion ⁶⁰³ received and around him many

⁵⁹⁸ Here *metod* is used as the Christian god and the shaper is telling the audience that Beowulf trusted him. The poet is revealing their formative intentions.

⁵⁹⁹ Mailshirt.

⁶⁰⁰ Shield.

⁶⁰¹ To either side.

⁶⁰² Beowulf is suggesting that the Christian god is the one who grants victory in battle, a priority among Germanic warriors. The subtle suggestion made by the poet is of course that loyalty to the Christian god will be rewarded with victory - just as it was for Constantine, Clovis, and Edwin.

⁶⁰³ Pillow.

690	brave sea-warriors Not any of them thought ever after Folk or friend-burg because they had heard	lay down on the cellar-rest. that he should from there seek the loved-yard ⁶⁰⁴ where he was fed ⁶⁰⁵ that before them
695	in that wine-hall too many great Danish men. fortune of victory ⁶⁰⁶ help and support through one man's craft	slaughter-death took But the lord gave them people of the Weders so that they their fiend all overcame
700	with his own might. that mighty god ruled for a long time.	The truth is well known mankind
	gliding in the dark-night. who that gabled-house	The shadow-walker came the warriors slept should hold
705	all but one. that he may not The hostile-demon but he kept watch lingered enraged	It was known by all whom <i>metod</i> would not. ⁶⁰⁷ drew quickly under the shadows with hostility and enmity [for] the thing's ⁶⁰⁸ outcome.
XI	710 Then came from the moor Grendel going the man-scather thought some of man's kin He went under clouds	under a dark mist bearing god's ire to ensnare in that high hall. to the wine-hall
715	the gold-hall of men shining with decorations. that he Hrothgar's Never he in life-days ⁶⁰⁹ found in the hall	he most certainly knew That was not the first time home sought. before or after a harder hall-thane.

⁶⁰⁴ Home.

⁶⁰⁵ Raised.

⁶⁰⁶ The shaper is quite explicit now as to who is the giver of victory.

⁶⁰⁷ One cannot do what *metod* would not allow one to do. It is no accident that this line follows lines 701-2, which state that the mighty god rules mankind, i.e. *metod* is the mighty Christian god.

⁶⁰⁸ The meeting, the battle.

⁶⁰⁹ All the days of his life.

720	<p>Came then to the hall deprived of joy. fast on the fire-bands⁶¹¹ the evil-intending one then he was enraged.</p>	<p>the ring-man⁶¹⁰ travelled The door soon gave way after he touched [it] with [his] hands the mouth of the hall swung open Quickly after that</p>
725	<p>on the shining floor went angry. shone from his eyes Saw he in the hall a band of kinsmen asleep</p>	<p>the fiend trod A horrible light most like fire. many ring-men all together</p>
730	<p>a heap of young-warriors. He thought that he would sever the horrible combatant of each one. would come to pass.</p>	<p>Then his mind laughed. before the day would come life from the body He was expecting that fill of feasting <i>Wyrd</i>⁶¹² was then yet</p>
735	<p>that he may not consume after that night. kinsman of Higelac with sudden grip The combatant</p>	<p>more of mankind The strong [one] watched how the man-scather would go. thought not to delay</p>
740	<p>but he quickly seized a sleeping ring-man bit the bone-lock⁶¹³ swallowed a huge morsel, consumed all</p>	<p>with first occasion tore without hindrance drank from the bloodstream soon had the unliving's</p>
745	<p>feet and hands. then took with hands ring-man in rest. the fiend with fingers⁶¹⁴ with hostile-purposes</p>	<p>Forth he stepped nearer the strong-willed He reached out against him he quickly seized and sat up on his arm.⁶¹⁵</p>
750	<p>Soon found that he never met on earth's surface</p>	<p>that herder of crimes in middle-yard⁶¹⁶ another man</p>

⁶¹⁰ Grendel here is described as a ring-man, a warrior loyal to a specific leader.

⁶¹¹ Swung quickly on its hinges.

⁶¹² Here *Wyrd* is simply fate, Grendel's fate.

⁶¹³ Joint.

⁶¹⁴ Literally hands. I chose fingers for the alliteration.

⁶¹⁵ Beowulf has grasped Grendel while lying down.

⁶¹⁶ In the world.

	with a greater grip. afraid for life	He in spirit was none the sooner could he [go] from [there].
755	His mind was eager to get away to seek the company of devils ⁶¹⁷ such as he in life-days Remembered then the good evening-speech	he wished to flee to the hiding place his way of life was not there earlier met. kinsmen of Higelac stood upright
760	and lay firm hold of him the giant was outward ⁶¹⁸ The notorious one thought escape to wider [spaces] flee to the fen-retreat, ⁶¹⁹	fingers burst the earl stepped further. as to where he might and away from there he knew his fingers were held
765	in a grim grip. that the harm-scather The lord-cellar resounded the city-dwellers a terror to the earls.	That was a sad journey from Heorot took. became to all the Danes to each one of the brave
770	fierce house-guardians. It was a great wonder withstood the battle-beasts the beautiful building in and out	They were both angry The hall resounded. that the wine-cellar ⁶²⁰ that the house did not fall but it was fastened with iron-bands
775	smithed with ingenuity. many mead-benches with gold trimming The wise men of the Scyldings that it ⁶²¹ at any time might	There fled from the floor as I have heard there the hostiles fought. never before expected by any man
780	excellent and bone-decorated destroy with skill should swallow [it] in flames. new [and] abundant horrible terror	might break apart except [if] the embrace of fire The sound rose up arose in the North-Danes for each one
785	there through the wall god's enemy	heard the lamentation sang the terrible song

⁶¹⁷ Literally *deofla* - "devils," with an implied meaning of "demons."

⁶¹⁸ Attempting escape.

⁶¹⁹ A fen is a marsh or moor.

⁶²⁰ Mead-hall.

⁶²¹ Heorot. For the first time they are thinking it might be destroyed, and not by fire.

	the song of defeat bewailed in pain. he who was 790 on that day	hell's captive Held him fast the strongest of men in this life.
XII	The protector of earls would not	for anything
	the murderous visitor his life-days he tallied not beneficial. 795 an earl of Beowulf he would to protect the glorious chief They knew not the hard-headed 800 and on all sides the soul to seek that any over earth none of the battle-blades because he against victory-weapons 805 each edge. on that day be miserable in the power of fiends Then found that 810 mind's affliction performed crimes until his body But he the brave had by the hand 815 loathsome [by] living. the terrible combatant. an unmistakable incurable wound the bone-lock ⁶²⁸ burst.	let leave alive for any people There earnestly drew an old heirloom ⁶²² the life of the lord there as they might. when they engaged in battle battle-men thought to hew the hostile-scather of the choicest iron ⁶²³ could greet ⁶²⁴ had forsworn ⁶²⁵ His life-separation should of this life and the ghost of elsewhere travel far. ⁶²⁶ the one who earlier many against mankind — he feuded against god ⁶²⁷ — would not last. kinsman of Higelac each was to the other He bore the body-sore For him on the shoulder arose sinew sprung Beowulf was

⁶²² Sword.

⁶²³ Best swords.

⁶²⁴ Harm.

⁶²⁵ Cast a spell on.

⁶²⁶ Grendel shall go to Hell.

⁶²⁷ Or good, but most likely the Christian god. Deliberately ambiguous?

⁶²⁸ Joint.

	given war-glory.	Grendel would from there
820	life-sick flee	under the fen-slope ⁶²⁹
	seek the joyless settlement	who surely knew
	That his life was	going to end
	[his] days [were] numbered.	The will of all the Danes
	after that bloody-conflict	happened to come.
825	He had then purged	the one who earlier came from afar
	wise and strong-minded	Hrothgar's cellar ⁶³⁰
	preserved against violence.	Of the night-work he rejoiced
	In the heroic deeds.	The man of the Geats had
	to the East-Danes	fulfilled [his] boast ⁶³¹
830	likewise he relieved	all distress
	the savage-sorrow	that they earlier suffered
	and for dire-need	should endure
	un-little trouble.	That was an unmistakable token
	after the battle-brave	laid down the hand
835	arm and axle ⁶³²	there [it] was all together
	the grip of Grendel	under the vaulted roof.
XIII	Then was in morning	as I have heard said
	around the gift-hall	many ring-warriors.
	folk-leaders ferried ⁶³³	from far and near
840	over wide-ways	to see the wonder
	the last [tracks] of the loathed.	His life-parting
	[was] not sorely thought	by any sword-man
	who examined the treads	of the glory-less one
	how he weary	[went] on the way from there
845	overcome by the battle	to the mere ⁶³⁴ of sea-monsters
	fated and put to flight	bore bloody tracks.
	There was with blood	water welling
	the terrible swirl of waves	all mingled
	with hot blood	battle-blood welled.
850	Death-fated	then devoid of delight

⁶²⁹ Into the marsh.

⁶³⁰ Synonymous with hall.

⁶³¹ Boasting and fulfillment of the boast is paramount in Germanic culture. Beowulf is here shown to be a warrior worthy of respect and admiration.

⁶³² Shoulder.

⁶³³ Came.

⁶³⁴ Lake or pool of water.

	concealed in the fen-refuge the heathen soul.	laid down life There him Hel ⁶³⁵ took.
	From there after went likewise, many young [ones]	old-retainers from the cheerful-journey
855	brave from the mere heroes on white [horses].	with horses to ride There was the glory
	of Beowulf spoken that south nor north	many often said between the seas
	over the immense earth	no other
860	under the expanse of the sky round-having ⁶³⁶	none was better more worthy of rule.
	Indeed they [did] not in their friendly-lord	find any fault because he was a good king.
	in glad Hrothgar Sometimes the battle-brave	let their pale horses proceed
865	leap in contest where the path	well known [and] excellent At times the king's thane
	appeared pleasant to them. ⁶³⁷ a man laden with boasts	mindful of songs old-sagas ⁶³⁸
	the one who all the many remembered a great many	found other words He began to say
870	truthfully bound. Beowulf's adventure	to stir with skill a ready spell ⁶³⁹
	and in skill to recite with varying words.	He said everything heard said
875	that he of Sigemund [his] courageous deeds	many of the unknown extended expeditions
	struggles of the Volsungs ⁶⁴⁰ that the sons of men	certainly did not know except for Fitela with him
	crimes and feuds	he would tell of such since they were
880	to whom at times uncle to his nephew	companions in need at each battle

⁶³⁵ The Norse goddess who rules the underworld, similar to Hades. Or Christian Hell ambiguity?

⁶³⁶ Shield-holding.

⁶³⁷ The joyful riders are allowing their horses to take the lead.

⁶³⁸ Old-sayings. Old-stories.

⁶³⁹ A skillful tale. A *spel* is a powerful story, not just a witch's magic. In Norse culture, to have a song about you was the greatest honor (similar to Achilles). Here Beowulf's is beginning to be written.

⁶⁴⁰ Oldest known literary reference to *The Saga of the Volsungs*. Beowulf is most likely an archetypal character similar to the Volsungs' Sigurd the Dragon Slayer, here called Sigemund.

	[they] had a great many slain with swords. ⁶⁴¹	of the kin of giants [Word of] Sigemund sprung out
885	after the death-day of battles since heard the holder of hoards. born of nobles the audacious deed	[of his] un-little deeds he killed the dragon He under grey stone alone he dared Fitela was not with him.
890	Anyhow for him befell the splendid serpent ⁶⁴² the noble iron The combatant had that he may enjoy	that that sword penetrated so that it stood fixed in the wall the dragon died from murder. obtained with courage the ring-hoard's
895	glory himself. bore in the ship's breast descendant of the Volsungs Far and wide	He loaded the sea-boat glorious treasure melted [by] dragon heat. he was the greatest of heroes protector of warriors
900	with deeds of valor after the battle strength and courage. in the fiends' control quickly sent away.	he prospered for this of Heremod ceased He with giants was forth misled Surging sorrow
905	hindered him too long. to all the nobles likewise many wise earls by [his] bad deeds those who counted on him	He [was] to his people a great sorrow were often saddened strong-minded ventures to remedy affliction
910	that that king's son with [his] father's rank receive the hoard and the strong-hold the home ⁶⁴³ of the Scyldings. the kinsmen of Higelac	should prosper control of the folk the kingdom of heroes He there was to all a dear friend
915	to mankind	[but] sin entered him. ⁶⁴⁴

⁶⁴¹ Here the writer of the epic has the character of the *scop* compare Beowulf to Sigurd the Dragonslayer from *The Saga of the Volsungs*. A convincing argument can be made that Beowulf's story is based on Sigurd's. This attests to an author writing to reach the Norse audience in England.

⁶⁴² Dragon.

⁶⁴³ Here the Germanic rune ǰ (odal) was used in place of the Old English word *epel* - "native land, home."

⁶⁴⁴ Our presumably Christian author seems to be putting admiration of the Volsungs in check, after all they were Heathens. Hence the need for a Christianized version ... Beowulf.

	While flyting ⁶⁴⁵ [was] met with mares. ⁶⁴⁶ shoved and advanced. strong-headed	the glossy street Then was morning-light Many warriors went to that high hall
920	to see the curious-wonder from the bride-chamber treaded full of glory with the choicest well known measured the mead-hall path	likewise the king himself the warden of the ring-hoard with a great company and his queen with him with a troop of maidens.
XIV 925	Hrothgar spoke stood on the steps decorated with gold “For this sight quickly one should. ⁶⁴⁷	he to the hall went saw the steep roof and Grendel’s hand. thank the all-powerful I endured many loathsome
930	griefs from Grendel. wonder after wonder It was not long ago far [and] wide relief from my miseries	Always may god work shepherd of glory. that I from any expected not to live to see when blood stained
935	the best of houses wide-reaching woe those who [did] not expect the land-work ⁶⁴⁸ of the people demons and evil-spirits.	stood sword-gory to each of the wise-men that they for a long time could defend against enemies Now a warrior has
940	through the lord’s might ⁶⁴⁹ which we all with wisdom [and] trickery. ⁶⁵⁰ even whichever of maidens among mankind	performed the deed earlier could not Now that [woman] may say as the one [who] bore the young man if she yet lives
945	that to her, old- <i>metod</i>	was gracious

⁶⁴⁵ Competitive trash talk.

⁶⁴⁶ Traversed by horses.

⁶⁴⁷ The poet uses the character of Hrothgar to suggest to the audience that the Christian god should be quickly thanked for victory in battle.

⁶⁴⁸ Stronghold.

⁶⁴⁹ The Christian god is responsible for victory.

⁶⁵⁰ Is Hrothgar stating that his Pagan kingdom and their Pagan rituals were unable to achieve victory?

in child-bearing.⁶⁵¹
 best of men
 love in heart.
 the new kinship.
 950 of the world's desirable things
 Full often I for less
 hoard-honor
 inferior at fighting.
 performed [these] deeds
 955 forever and ever.
 should repay with good
 Beowulf spoke
 "We that courageous-work
 performed the fight;
 960 the strength of the unknown.
 that you his self
 the fiend in trappings
 I him quickly
 on the death-bed
 965 so that he for
 lie life-busy⁶⁵⁴
 I could not
 hinder his going.⁶⁵⁵
 the life-enemy
 970 the fiend in going forth.
 for life-protection⁶⁵⁶
 arm and axle.
 [for] the wretched man
 It lives no longer
 975 afflicted by sin
 in malicious grip
 by baleful bonds.

Now I, Beowulf, you
 will as a son
 Hold forth well
 You will not want for any
 which I have wield of.
 appointed reward
 to lower ring-men
 You who have yourself
 that of your [glory will] live
 The all-wielder you
 as he now yet did!"⁶⁵²
 born of Ecgtheow.
 with great good
 daringly we braved
 Rather I wish
 could see
 fall-weary.⁶⁵³
 clasped hard
 thought to bind
 my hand-grip should
 but his body escaped.
metod would not
 I could not readily hold him
 was too mighty
 However, he left his hand
 a track to follow
 Nonetheless there [was] not any
 relief bought.
 the loath-spoiler⁶⁵⁷
 but he has sore [pain]
 closely encircled
 There he shall abide

⁶⁵¹ Old-*metod* gifted Beowulf's mother with a great son. Old-*metod* is ambiguous, a Christian could hear god, but a Norse Heathen could hear *Wyrd* or *Urd*. The Norns oversaw the births of everyone.

⁶⁵² As he has up to now.

⁶⁵³ Dead.

⁶⁵⁴ Struggling for life.

⁶⁵⁵ Beowulf acknowledges his limitations when it came to keeping Grendel from fleeing. His character is used to express the power of the Christian god (*metod*) in making that decision and allowing Grendel to flee.

⁶⁵⁶ To save his life.

⁶⁵⁷ Evil doer.

	the man guilty with crime how him bright <i>metod</i>	[in] great doom of will decree.” ⁶⁵⁸
980	Then the man was silent in boasting-speech after the nobleman over the high roof the fingers of the fiend	son of Ecglaf ⁶⁵⁹ of war-works saw the hand the earl’s craft before each one ⁶⁶⁰ was
985	in the place of each nail the heathen’s hand-spur the horrible un-good. that no hard could touch him	most like steel of the warrior Everyone said good-old iron would weaken
990	the bloody battle-hand	of this combatant.
XV	Then was quickly ordered decorated with the hands. men and women the guest-cellar prepared.	Heorot inward Many there was who that wine-hall Gold-adorned webs ⁶⁶¹
995	shone on the walls to any man there That bright house all inside hinges sprung apart	many wonder-sights who on each stared. was quite broken fast with iron-bands the roof alone survived
1000	sound in every respect the foe with fiery-deeds despairing of life. to flee but soul-bearers ⁶⁶²	when the combatant turned in flight Death be not easy try [it] who will shall seek
1005	compelled by need ground-dwellers where his body sleeps after the feast.	[those] born of men the place prepared fast in the lying-bed ⁶⁶³
	that to the hall went	Then was the season and the time Healfdane’s son

⁶⁵⁸ Again, *metod* is the great decision maker and the word is ambiguous yet the poet’s intentional meaning is clear.

⁶⁵⁹ Unferth.

⁶⁶⁰ At the end of each finger.

⁶⁶¹ Tapestries.

⁶⁶² Humans.

⁶⁶³ Grave.

1010	the king himself would I heard not of a people toward their treasure-giver Bent then to bench full of rejoicing		take the feast. a better troop to behave better. the glorious fairly consumed
1015	many a mead-full ⁶⁶⁴ strong-minded Hrothgar and Hrothulf. filled with friends the people of the Scyldings		those kinsmen in that high hall Heorot inside was no treachery at all then performed.
1020	He gave then to Beowulf ⁶⁶⁵ a golden sign a decorated battle-banner A great treasure-sword Born before the hero.		Healfdane's brand ⁶⁶⁶ a reward for victory helmet and byrnie. ⁶⁶⁷ many saw Beowulf took
1025	the cup in the hall before the shooters I have not heard of a friendlier gold garnished on the ale-bench		there [at] the treasure-giving he had no need to be ashamed. four treasures of many men given to another.
1030	About the helmet's roof with wound wire so that many swords might not injure against anger		the head-protection a ridge held out the shower-hardened when the shield-warrior should go.
1035	Ordered then, the protector of earls with ornamented cheek-guards under the enclosure. with a shining skilful saddle That was the battle-seat		eight mares led in the hall There one stood adorned with treasure. of the high-king
1040	when sword play would perform. of the widely-known fighting-force		the son of Healfdane He never failed in the front when battle corpses fell.

⁶⁶⁴ Many cups of mead.

⁶⁶⁵ Another immensely important part of Germanic culture is the ritual of gift giving. Hrothgar is shown to be a generous lord, and therefore worthy of loyalty. A subtly formative technique used in this epic is to present the Christian god also as a generous gift giver, also worthy of loyalty.

⁶⁶⁶ His father's sword.

⁶⁶⁷ Mailshirt.

	And then to Beowulf gave possession	the protector of the friends of Ing ⁶⁶⁸ of both
1045	horses and weapons So manly the hoard-warden of heroes with horses and treasure the one who will say	ordered him to use [them] well. the great king repaid the battle-storm so that no man could lie truth rightly. ⁶⁶⁹
XVI 1050	Then yet to each those who with Beowulf on the mead-bench there an heirloom. ⁶⁷⁰ gold given	the lord of earls took the sea-passage he gave treasure And then the one ordered to the one who earlier Grendel
1055	in wickedness killed him only the wise god and this man's spirit. of mankind There understanding is	as he their better would <i>wyrd</i> ⁶⁷¹ could have withstood <i>Metod</i> rules all as he now yet does. everywhere the best
1060	forethought of the mind. love and hate in this day of struggle There was song and sway Before the battle-leader	Many shall experience the one who long here enjoys the world. all together of the Half-Danes
1065	the wood of entertainment greeted whenever Healgamen after mead-benches of Finn's son ⁶⁷² the hero of the Half-Danes	tales often told Hrothgar's <i>scop</i> spoke as he should when the sudden attack overtook him Hnaef of the Scyldings
1070	in the Frisian-battlefield Indeed Hildeburh did not the troth ⁶⁷³ of the Jutes deprived of dear	would fall. have reason to praise guiltlessly she was sons and brothers

⁶⁶⁸ *Ing* - a Germanic god whose story is now unknown. Hrothgar is shown to also be a protector of Pagans. Does this liken him to a lord in the Danelaw?

⁶⁶⁹ Hrothgar paid Beowulf so well that not even a liar could say he didn't.

⁶⁷⁰ Sword.

⁶⁷¹ Which god? The Christian god or the Norse goddess *Wyrd*?

⁶⁷² Here begins the famous Finnsburg digression. Hrothgar's *scop* tells the story of treachery and battle between the Frisians and the Jutes. The audience would have known the story.

⁶⁷³ Trustworthiness.

	at that shield-play.	They in fate fell
1075	wounded by the spear.	That was a sad woman!
	Not at all in vain	Hoc's daughter
	mourned <i>metod's</i> decree ⁶⁷⁴	after morning came
	so that she under heaven	might see
	the murder of kinsmen	where she earlier held
1080	the greatest joys of the world.	War took all
	of Finn's thanes	except for a few
	so that he might not	fight at all
	on the battlefield	war with Hengest ⁶⁷⁵
	nor [could] the few survivors	drive out the warriors
1085	the chief's thanes	but they offered them terms
	that to them all	they yielded another hall
	the hall and the high-seat ⁶⁷⁶	so that half the power
	of the sons of the Jutes	they would give
	and at the dispensing of treasure	to the sons of Folcwalda
1090	each day	would adorn the Danes
	Hengest's heap	with rings would present
	even so with very much	treasure
	with decorations of gold	likewise they the kin of the Frisians
	in the beer-hall	would entertain.
1095	Then they swore a truce	on two halves ⁶⁷⁷
	they were bound by peace.	Finn to Hengest
	quickly without dispute	declared with oaths
	that he the battle-survivors	with the authority of wise men ⁶⁷⁸
	would hold with honor	that there no man
1100	with words nor works	should not break
	nor through enmity	ever should mention
	that they their ring-giver's	murderer would pursue
	lord-less	as it was a necessity for them.
	Thus if any Frisian	spoke with audacity
1105	of this murder-hate	were reminding,
	then it with sword's edge	after would be settled.
	Oaths were carried out	and eagerly ⁶⁷⁹ gold

⁶⁷⁴ *Metod* is encroaching on *wyrd's* authority over death.

⁶⁷⁵ Potentially the legendary Hengest, who with his brother Horsa led the Saxon conquest of Britain in 449.

⁶⁷⁶ Throne.

⁶⁷⁷ Both sides.

⁶⁷⁸ By the judgement of the council of wise men (*witan*).

⁶⁷⁹ *Icge* (hapax legomenon) could also be edge or swords.

- was taken from the hoard
 best of ring-warriors
 1110 In the pyre was
 the blood-stained mailshirt
 the iron-hard boar helmet
 destroyed⁶⁸¹ by wounds
 Ordered then Hildeburh
 1115 her own son
 to burn the body
 his uncle at his shoulder.⁶⁸²
 Lamented with songs.
 went to the clouds
 1120 shouted in front of the barrow.⁶⁸⁴
 wound-gates burst
 of the bodies' hostile bites
 the most ravenous creature
 of both folk.
- XVII 1125 Then the warriors departed
 friends befallen
 homes and high-burgs.
 the slaughter-stained winter
 he unhappily
 1130 Nevertheless he could not
 the ring-prowed ship
 contended against wind
 ice-bound
 came in the yard
 1135 for those who always
 gloriously-bright weather.
 the fair embrace of the earth.
 was eager [to go] from the yard
 he thought more
- the Here-Scyldings'⁶⁸⁰
 was on the prepared pyre.
 easily seen
 all covered with the image of the boar
 many nobles
 those who fell in battle.
 at Hnaef's pyre
 given over to the flame
 and in the pyre placed
 The woman mourned
 Battle-reek⁶⁸³ ascended
 the great funeral-fires
 Heads melted
 then blood sprang out
 fire swallowed all up
 those who there battle destroyed
 Their blood was shaken.⁶⁸⁵
- to seek their settlements
 to see Frisia
 Hengest then yet
 remained with Finn
 thought of home.
 on the sea drive
 the sea surged with storm
 winter locked the waves
 until that other year
 as it now yet does
 watch over the hall
 Then was winter shaken⁶⁸⁶
 The hero, the stranger
 [but] of revenge
 than to sea-journey

⁶⁸⁰ The Army-Scyldings'.

⁶⁸¹ *Awyrded* - to un-become.

⁶⁸² She orders her brother and her son burned together.

⁶⁸³ Smoke.

⁶⁸⁴ An ancient burial mound, often used for ashes.

⁶⁸⁵ Their glory was gone. Their vigor departed.

⁶⁸⁶ Or "Their glory departed."

- 1140 if he might bring about
so that inwardly he would
[and] so he [did] not refuse
when Hunlafing⁶⁸⁷
the best of swords
- 1145 This sword was well known
Likewise bold in spirit
cruel sword-destruction
After the grim attack
after the sea-journey
- 1150 blamed the portion of misery
restrain itself in the breast.
with the bodies of enemies
the king among the troops
Warriors of the Scyldings
- 1155 all the house-property
so much at Finn's home
of skillfully wrought gem-jewels.
the noble woman
led [her] to [her] people.⁶⁸⁹
- 1160 the glee-man's⁶⁹¹ tale.
bench-noise erupted
wine from wonderful vessels.
going under golden rings
nephew and uncle sat
- 1165 each true to the other.
sat at the foot of the lord of the Scyldings every one of them trusted his mind
that he had great spirit
at sword-play honorable.
"Receive this cup
- 1170 dispenser of treasure.
gold-friend of men
with mild⁶⁹² words
- the hostile meeting
remember the sons of the Jutes
worldly-rule
the battle-light⁶⁸⁸
on his lap placed.
with the Jutes.
Finn after befell
at his own home.
Guthlaf and Osulf
complained sorrowfully
the restless heart could not
Then was the hall decorated
likewise Finn was slain
and the queen was seized.
carried to the ships
of the king of the land
they would find
They on the sea-journey
carried to the Danes
- The lay⁶⁹⁰ was sung
Amusement after arose
cupbearers pored
Then Wealthew came forth
where the two good
then yet was their kinship all together
Also Unferth the spokesman there
though he who to his kinsmen was not
Spoke then the woman of the Scyldings.
my noble lord
Be you in happiness
and speak to the Geats
as a man should do.

⁶⁸⁷ A famous Danish sword.

⁶⁸⁸ Sword. Shimmers in the sunshine.

⁶⁸⁹ They broke their truce, killed the Frisians, and brought their queen home.

⁶⁹⁰ A poem meant to be sung.

⁶⁹¹ Musician.

⁶⁹² Benevolent.

	Be glad with the Geats from near and far	mindful of gifts which you now have.
1175	To me a man said would this warrior have. the bright ring-cellar your many rewards folk and kingdom	that you for your son Heorot is purged as long as you can make use of and leave with your kin when you shall [go] forth
1180	to see <i>metod's</i> decree. ⁶⁹³ cheerful Hrothulf ⁶⁹⁴ hold with honor lord of the Scyldings I expect that he with goods	I know my that he the young ⁶⁹⁵ will if you earlier than he leave the world. ⁶⁹⁶ will repay
1185	our two sons which we two with gladness since he was a child She turned then to the bench near Hrethric and Hrothmund	if he remembers all that and worthy-minds performed with honor.” where her sons were and the hero's sons
1190	young warriors together. Beowulf of the Geats	There the good [one] sat between the two brothers.
XVIII	To him the cup was carried with words offered bestowed with esteem	and friendship and wound gold two arm-rings
1195	mail-shirts and rings of those which I on earth Not any under heaven in the hoard-treasures of heroes to his bright city	the greatest of neck-rings have heard. I heard is better since Hama carried away the Brosinga <i>mene</i> ⁶⁹⁷
1200	the jewel and treasure-object of Eormenric Then Higelac of the Geats the nephew of Swerting	fled the cunning-hate chose eternal gain. had the ring for the last time

⁶⁹³ *Metod* is encroaching on *wyrd's* authority over death. “The Measurer” is not so clearly Christian, but we know the poet intends it to be.

⁶⁹⁴ He becomes a traitor and burns Heorot with the Heathobards.

⁶⁹⁵ Her sons.

⁶⁹⁶ Wealtheow expects Hrothulf to protect her sons if Hrothgar dies. She is using passive aggression to oblige Hrothulf to do so.

⁶⁹⁷ The Brisingamen necklace. Made by the dwarves for the goddess Freya in Norse mythology.

- 1205 after he under the sign⁶⁹⁸
 defended the spoil of battle.
 after he for pride
 a feud with the Frisians.
 the precious-stones
 the mighty chief
 1210 Went then into the arms of the Franks the life of the king
 breast-garments⁷⁰⁰
 Worse warriors
 after the battle-shearing
 held the place of corpses.⁷⁰²
 1215 Wealtheow spoke
 “Enjoy this ring
 young man with health,
 the people’s wealth
 show yourself with skill
 1220 gracious of counsel.
 You have fared
 all men will praise [you]
 even as far
 the walls of the winds.
 1225 prosperous, prince.
 treasures.
 proper with deeds —
 Here is every earl
 mild in spirit
 1230 thanes are harmonious
 warriors [having] drunk
 She went then to sit.
 men drank wine.
 the grim fate⁷⁰⁷
- protected the treasure
Wyrd took him⁶⁹⁹
 asked for woe
 He then wore the treasure
 over the full waves
 he under the shield crumbled.
 and the ring together.
 rifled⁷⁰¹ the corpse
 the people of the Geats
 The hall was seized by noise.⁷⁰³
 she spoke before the warriors
 dear Beowulf,
 and this ring-net⁷⁰⁴
 and prosper properly
 and be to these boys⁷⁰⁵
 For that I will reward you.
 so that those far and near
 for a long time
 as the sea surrounds
 Be as long as you live
 I thee will properly give
 Be thou to my sons —
 benefactor.
 true to the other
 loyal to man-lord
 the people all prepared
 do as I bid.”⁷⁰⁶
 There was the best of banquets
Wyrd they knew not
 as it was going to be

⁶⁹⁸ War banner.

⁶⁹⁹ Again, *Wyrd*'s power is outside the domain of the Christian god.

⁷⁰⁰ Mail-shirt.

⁷⁰¹ Robbed.

⁷⁰² Won the battle.

⁷⁰³ Is this line out of place?

⁷⁰⁴ Mail-shirt.

⁷⁰⁵ Her sons.

⁷⁰⁶ A caution to Beowulf that Hrothgar's men are loyal to her should he have any treacherous ideas.

⁷⁰⁷ *Geosceaft* - old-world?

1235	for many earls and from them Hrothgar departed the king to rest. countless earls They cleared bench planks ⁷⁰⁸	after evening came to his house Guarded the hall as they often earlier did. it was overspread
1240	with beds and cushions. ready for and doomed to die Set them [next] to heads splendid wooden-shields over the nobleman	One of the beer-drinkers was couched in the hall. battle-shields there on the bench was easily seen
1245	the battle-steep helmet a magnificent spear. that they often were both at home and on raids on every occasion	a ringed mail-shirt Their custom was geared for a war and every one of them such as their man-lord's
1250	needs befell. ⁷⁰⁹	That was a good troop.
XIX	They sank then to sleep. for evening rest when Grendel occupied doing unright	One sorely paid as it full often happened the gold-hall until that end became
1255	death after sin. widely known with men lived after the loathed ⁷¹⁰ after the battle-strife. the lady, combatant-woman	It was seen that that an avenger then yet a long time Grendel's mother remembered misery
1260	the water-terror the cold streams to edge-slay father-kinsman. ⁷¹¹ marked for murder	who should inhabit after Cain was [his] only brother He then went bloodstained to flee man-pleasure
1265	inhabited the waste[land]. old-world-ghosts the hateful fierce-outcast the man keeping watch	From there awoke many where Grendel was one the one found at Heorot awaiting war.

⁷⁰⁸ Moved the tables and benches to make room for sleeping.

⁷⁰⁹ Germanic warriors were often ready for war regardless, but always when their lord told them to be.

⁷¹⁰ Grendel.

⁷¹¹ Paternal-kinsman.

<p>1270 There him the combatant however he remembered the ample gift and he from the ruler relief and support humbled the hell ghost. 1275 pleasure deprived enemy of mankind ravenous and sad in spirit [on a] sorrowful journey Came then to Heorot 1280 throughout that hall slept. a reversal [of fortune] for the earls reached inside. even as much the war-horror of a woman 1285 when the bound sword the sword with sweat blood shears the boar Then was in the hall sword over seat 1290 heaved by hand fast [nor] the broad byrnie She was in haste far from protection quickly she a nobleman 1295 fast seized That one was to Hrothgar of companions had a powerful shield-warrior the glorious man. 1300 but was in another [place] after treasure-giving Outcry arose in Heorot the well-known hand⁷¹³ returned in the precinct. 1305 that they on both halves</p>	<p>was grasping at mighty strength which him god gave believed in help thus he overcame the fiend Then he wretched went to see the death-place and his mother then yet would go to avenge [her] son's death. where the Ring-Danes Then there soon was after Grendel's mother The terror was less as is the strength of a woman is [less than] a weaponed-man hammered through⁷¹² with strong edges over the helmet opposite. the hard-edge drawn many a broad-shield helmet none remembered when the horror seized him. would out from there when she was found had one then she to the fen went. the dearest of heroes between the two seas the one whom she killed in rest Beowulf was not there earlier assigned for the famous Geat. she under gore took sorrow was renewed That exchange was not good should pay</p>
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⁷¹² Forged with hammering.

⁷¹³ Grendel's hand.

	with the lives of friends.	
	the grey battle-man after he the chief-thane, the dearest,	Then was the old king in troubled spirit unliving, knew [to be] dead.
1310	Beowulf was quickly the victorious man. went with some earls with his retainers [wondering] ⁷¹⁴ whether for him the ruler ever will	fetches from the chamber Together in early day the noble champion where the wise one waited
1315	after the woe-spell ⁷¹⁵ Went then over the floor with his hand-troop so that he the wise lord of the friends of Ing	perform change. the war-worthy man the hall-wood resounded addressed with words asked him if
1320	after the summons	the night were agreeable.
XX	Hrothgar spoke “Do not ask, you, after happiness! for the people of the Danes Yrmenlaf’s	the <i>helm</i> of the Scyldings Sorrow is renewed dead is Aeschere ⁷¹⁶ older brother
1325	my rune-advisor shoulder-companion heads defended ⁷¹⁷ boars struck. ⁷¹⁸ ever-good	and my counselor when we in battle when troops clashed So should an earl be as Aeschere was.
1330	For him [it] came to pass in Heorot the wandering slaughter-ghost. the terrible proudly dangerous for the feast. [in] which you yester-night	by the hand-slayer I know not whether returned for food She then avenged the feud ⁷¹⁹
1335	through violence-hood ⁷²⁰ because he too long	killed Grendel with hard grip to my people

⁷¹⁴ Suggested by Liuzza.

⁷¹⁵ The news of woe.

⁷¹⁶ Ambiguity? Jewish Asher? Norse Ash?

⁷¹⁷ Watched each others’ backs.

⁷¹⁸ Striking with swords the boar on enemy helmets and mailshirts.

⁷¹⁹ Or to avenge the feud?

⁷²⁰ *Had* - “maaner, form.” The precursor to the modern English suffix “-hood.”

- waned⁷²¹ and destroyed.
 from a guilty life
 a mighty man-scather
 1340 and so far has
 This which may seem
 the one whom after the treasure-giver in spirit weeps
 hard heart-bale⁷²² now the hand lies
 the one which every one of you treats with good will.
 1345 I heard said
 hall-counselors
 that two such
 Large mark-steppers⁷²³
 alien-ghosts. There another was
 1350 this one whom they certainly might know
 [with] a woman's likeness the other [a] wretched
 man's form trod the path of exile
 never was any other man greater than he
 the one earth-dwellers in days of yore
 1355 called Grendel. They knew no father
 [or] whether before him any mysterious creature
 was born. They inhabited hidden land
 the retreat of the wolf windy bluffs
 terrible passage across the fen where the mountain-stream⁷²⁴
 1360 under the misty bluffs downward goes
 water under the earth.⁷²⁵ [It] is not far from here
 measured in miles that the mere stands
 a grove covered with frost hangs over it
 trees with firm roots hanging over the water.
 1365 There with each night dreadful wonders may [be] seen
 fire on water. No son of men
 old and wise lives that knows the bottom of this.
 Though the heath-stepper harassed by hounds
 the hart⁷²⁶ with strong horns seeks the forest-shield
 1370 flees far would give up [his] life

⁷²¹ Diminished.

⁷²² Distress.

⁷²³ Wasteland-wanderers.

⁷²⁴ Waterfall.

⁷²⁵ A strange mountain waterfall where the water falls into a deep pool unknown to man.

⁷²⁶ Stag or buck.

	life on the shore [save his] head. ⁷²⁷ From there surging waters dark to the clouds	before he will That place is not good. rise up when the wind stirs until the sky chokes
1375	hostile storms the heavens weep. again on you alone. the terrible place the sinful man ⁷²⁸	Now is the help dependent You know not the region where you might find seek [it] if you dare!
1380	I you for that fight with ancient treasure with wound gold	will recompense with wealth as I earlier did if you come away.
XXI	Beowulf spoke “[Be] not sorrowful wise man.	born of Ecgtheow Better it is for everyone than mourn him much. await the end work [to win fame] he who may which is best after unliving. go out quickly of Grendel’s kin. he ⁷²⁹ in <i>helm</i> will not escape not in mountain-wood go where he ⁷³⁰ will. have patience as I expect you to.” thanked god ⁷³¹ this the man spoke. horse bridled The wise king shield-having The tracks were
1385	that he his friend avenge Each of us shall of world life before the doom of death for warriors	
1390	Arise, warden of the kingdom, to see the track I promise you this not in earth’s-bosom not on ocean’s ground	
1395	This day of all your woes Leapt up then the man the mighty lord	
	Then was Hrothgar’s	
1400	the horse with wound-hair. ⁷³² went richly equipped band on foot stomped. ⁷³³	

⁷²⁷ Even the buck would rather die on the banks of that pool than jump in it to save their life.

⁷²⁸ *Secg* - “man”. An instance where a “man” word was not gender specific in Anglo-Saxon.

⁷²⁹ She. It didn’t matter in Anglo-Saxon.

⁷³⁰ She. It didn’t matter in Anglo-Saxon.

⁷³¹ Again, the character of Hrothgar is used to give an example of a worthy warrior who thanks god.

⁷³² Braided.

⁷³³ A troop marched beside him.

- after the forest-path
 going over the ground
 1405 over the murky moor
 the best young thane
 of those who with Hrothgar
 Then went over
 the steep stone-slope
 1410 the narrow path for one
 steep bluffs
 he one of a few
 of the wise men
 after that he suddenly
 1415 over the grey stone
 the joyless wood
 blood-stained and stirred up.
 to the friends of the Scyldings
 to endure
 1420 a grief for each of the earls
 Aeschere's head
 A flood of blood welled
 with hot gore.
 ready the war-song.
 1425 They saw then over the water
 strange sea-dragons
 likewise on the headland-hill
 They in morning time
 the sorrowful trek
 1430 worms⁷³⁷ and wild deer.
 bitter and emboldened
 the war-horn sing.
 of the arrow-bow⁷³⁸
 of wave-strife
 1435 the hard army-arrow.
- widely seen
 went directly
 [where she] bore
 soul-less
 protected home.
 the son of nobles⁷³⁴
 the narrow path
 the unknown passage across water
 the house of many water monsters
 went ahead
 to see the place
 the mountain-trees
 found to lean
 the water under stood
 To all the Danes [this] was
 grievous in spirit
 for many a thane
 after they met
 on the sea-cliff.
 the folk saw
 A horn sang with time
 All the troop sat.
 many worm-kin⁷³⁵
 trying to swim
 water-monsters lying.
 often watch
 on the sail-road⁷³⁶
 They hurried on the way
 they heard the noise
 One of the Geatish men
 deprived of life
 so that in its life⁷³⁹ stood
 He on the sea was

⁷³⁴ The tracker.

⁷³⁵ Types of serpents.

⁷³⁶ The sea.

⁷³⁷ Snakes.

⁷³⁸ An archer.

⁷³⁹ Vitals, guts.

- swimming slower
 Quickly he was on the waves
 with sword-hooks⁷⁴¹
 assailed with violence
- 1440 the wonder body [of] the wave roamer the men stared at
 the terrible guest.
- with earl-armor
 should the battle-byrnie
 broad and cunningly decorated
- 1445 the one who the bone-cove⁷⁴²
 so that him the battle-grip
 the malicious grip of anger,
 But the white helmet
 [of] the one who should
- 1450 seek the surging water
 encircled with lordly-chains
 the weapon smith worked
 set it with swine likenesses
 no brand⁷⁴³ nor battle-swords
- 1455 That was not the smallest
 when that for him in need
 the hilted sword
 that was one before
 The edge was iron
- 1460 hardened by battle-sweat⁷⁴⁶
 for any man
 He who dared to go
 to the folk-stead of the foe
 that it a courage-work
- 1465 However Ecglaf's kin⁷⁴⁸
 of crafty power
- whom death took.⁷⁴⁰
 with boar-spears
 hard pressed
 and drawn on the shore
- Beowulf geared himself
 not at all for life mourned
 braided with hands
 try to swim
 knew to protect
 might not the heart,
 harm life.
 protected the head
 stir-up the mere-grounds
 with honored treasure
 as him in days of old
 with wonder made
 so that he afterwards
 might bite.
 powerful-help
 Hrothgar's spokesman⁷⁴⁴ loaned
 named Hrunting
 old-treasures.
 decorated with poison-twigs⁷⁴⁵
 it never failed at battle
 of those whom it wound with hand.⁷⁴⁷
 on the dreadful expedition
 that was not the first time
 should do.
 [did] not remember
 what he earlier spoke

⁷⁴⁰ The archer has shot one of the slower swimming sea-dragons.

⁷⁴¹ Barbs.

⁷⁴² Body.

⁷⁴³ Sword.

⁷⁴⁴ Unferth.

⁷⁴⁵ Serpentine patterns.

⁷⁴⁶ Blood.

⁷⁴⁷ Grasped.

⁷⁴⁸ Unferth.

	wine drunk to the better sword-warrior under the waves		when he this weapon loaned [he] himself dared not venture for life
1470	bravery to perform courage-glory. after he him to battle		there he lost authority [It] was not so for the other had geared.
XXII	Beowulf spoke		born of Ecgtheow
	“Think now, the great		kin of Healfdane
1475	wise king gold-friend of men if I should lose [my] life that you to me always were		now I am eager for the venture [of] what we two formerly spoke at your service departed in the place of a father.
1480	Be you a protector close-companions Also you then the treasure dear Hrothgar Then in receiving the gold		to my young-thanes if me battle should take. which you gave me send to Higelac. the lord of the Geats
1485	Hrethel’s son may see that I with manly-virtue ring-giver	[and]	when he stares on that treasure found a good I made use of [it] when I had opportunity.
	And you let Unferth have the ornamented wave-sword		the ancient-heirloom widely known by men
1490	the hard-edge. will work glory		I me with Hrunting until death takes me.” the leader of the Weder-Geats
	After those words hurried with courage await an answer		would not at all the brimming-lake received
1495	the battle-man. before he the lake-bottom Soon she found held fiercely-ravenous grim and greedy		Then was a while of the day might perceive. the one whom the expanse of the water for a hundred half-years that there one of the men
1500	from above Grasped then opposite with terrible grip.		explored the yard of the all-wight. ⁷⁴⁹ seized the ring-warrior None the sooner injured

⁷⁴⁹ The monster’s estate.

	the unhurt body	the ring-mail protected from without
	so that she the war-garment	the locked coat
1505	might not penetrate	with hostile fingers.
	The she-wolf of the sea then bore	with her to the bottom came
	the lord of the rings ⁷⁵⁰	to her house
	so that he might not	no matter how brave he was
	wield weapons	but him the many strange-beings
1510	harassed while swimming	many sea-beasts
	with battle-tusks.	The shirt of mail broke
	they pursued the combatant.	Then the earl perceived
	that he in the hostile-hall	was not welcome
	there him no water	in no way injured
1515	nor him because of the roofed hall	might not touch
	the attack of the flood. ⁷⁵¹	He saw fire-light
	brilliant luminary	shining bright.
	Saw then the good	the outcast of the deep
	the mighty mere-woman	[he] gave a mighty-rush
1520	with the battle-sword	[he] did not withhold the hand blow
	so that on her head	the ring-minked [sword] sang
	the greedy war-song.	Then the guest found out
	that the battle-light	would not bite,
	harm life,	but the edge failed
1525	the prince in need.	Earlier it endured many
	hand-meetings	often scarred helmets
	fated war-garments	then was the first time
	for the precious treasure	that its glory failed.
	After was resolute	courage not less
1530	mindful of glory	the kinsman of Higelac
	the angry warrior knew then	the sword with curved markings
	bound with works of art	that it on earth lay
	strong and steel-edged.	He trusted in strength
	the might of [his] hand-grip.	So shall a man do
1535	when he at war	thinks to gain
	long-lasting glory.	He cared not after his life
	the man of the War-Geats	not shrinking from the fight
	seized then by the shoulder	the mother of Grendel

⁷⁵⁰ *Hringa þengel* - likely source for J.R.R. Tolkien's title.

⁷⁵¹ Beowulf now recognizes himself to be in Grendel's mother's hall. A chamber empty of, but entered through water.

	the battle hard then swung quickly	he was enraged
1540	so that she fell on the floor	the deadly-foe.
	She quickly after him	repaid the loan
	with grim grip	and rose against him.
	Weary the strongest of warriors	then stumbled
	the foot-champion	so that he had fallen.
1545	She then set upon the cellar-guest	and took her <i>seax</i> ⁷⁵²
	broad [and] bright-edged	she would avenge her son
	[her] only offspring.	On his shoulder lay
	the broad breast-net	that protected life
	against point and against edge	entrance withstood.
1550	Then would have perished	the son of Ecgtheow
	under the wide ground	the champion of the Geats
	if not for the help performed	by his mail-shirt
	the hard battle-net	and holy god.
	To bring about victory	the wise lord,
1555	ruler of heaven,	decided it in right ⁷⁵³
	easily	as soon as he after stood.
XXIII	Saw then in the war-gear	a victory-blessed blade
	[an] old-sword made by giants ⁷⁵⁴	with a firm edge
	the honor of warriors.	That [was] the choicest of weapons.
1560	But it was greater	than any other man
	to battle-sport	might bear-out
	good and richly-equipped	a work of giants.
	He seized then the linked-hilt	the bold one of the Scyldings
	savage and sword-grim	the braided ring-mail
1565	despairing of life	angrily struck
	so that against her neck	it gripped hard
	broke the bone-rings ⁷⁵⁵	all the blade waded-through
	the fated flesh-cloak.	She on the floor fell.
	The sword was sweaty. ⁷⁵⁶	The man rejoiced in the work.
1570	The light shone	the light inside arose
	even as heaven's	sky candle

⁷⁵² A knife from which the Saxons took their name. They were said to always carry one.

⁷⁵³ The Christian god grants Beowulf victory again.

⁷⁵⁴ Or Jutes?

⁷⁵⁵ Vertebrae.

⁷⁵⁶ Bloody.

	shines clear.		He after looked at the hall
	went then by the wall		heaved a weapon
	hard by the hilt		Higelac's thane
1575	irate and resolute.		The edge was not useless
	for the battle-man		but he quickly would
	repay Grendel		many battle-storms
	which he worked		on the West-Danes
	much oftener		than on one journey
1580	when he Hrothgar's		hearth-companions
	slew in sleep		consumed sleeping
	Danish folk		fifteen men
	and to such others		offered out
	the loathsome gift.		He him this loan repaid
1585	the fierce champion		to the one in rest he saw
	war-weary		Grendel lying
	lifeless		because he earlier injured
	[in] battle at Heorot.		The corpse sprung wide
	since he after death		suffered the blow
1590	the hard sword-swing.		And he carved off the head.
	Soon saw that		the wise earls
	those who with Hrothgar		looked on the water
	that it was surging		all mingled
	water colored with blood.		The grey-haired
1595	old [men] about the good [one]		together spoke
	that they this nobleman		after expected not
	that he the glorious-victor		would come to seek
	the great king.		Then this many agreed
	that him the sea-wolf		had destroyed.
1600	Then came the ninth hour ⁷⁵⁷ of day.		The bluff was left
	by the valiant Scyldings.		Went him home then
	the gold-friend of men.		The guests sat
	sick of heart		and on the mere starred
	wished and expected not		that they their dear lord
1605	himself would see.		
			Then that sword began
	from battle-sweat ⁷⁵⁸		to battle-icicles
	the war-sword to wane.		That was some wonder

⁷⁵⁷ 3:00 pm.

⁷⁵⁸ From Grendel's blood.

	that it all melted	most like ice
	when the bond of frost	the father loosens.
1610	Unwinds the water-fetters	the one who wields power
	[over] seasons and time	that is the true <i>metod</i> . ⁷⁵⁹
	He took from in that place	the man of the Weder-Geats
	no more precious-property	though he there saw many
	but the head	and the hilt together
1615	decorated with jewels	the sword [that] earlier melted
	the pattern-welded sword burned up	the blood was so hot to it
	[of the] venomous alien-ghost	which there in died.
	Soon was in swimming	the one who earlier at battle survived
	war-death of the enemy	dove through the water up
1620	tossing-waves were	all purged
	the vast yard	then the alien-ghost
	left life-days	and this loaned ⁷⁶⁰ world.
	Came then to land	the <i>helm</i> of the sea-man
	the strong-minded swam	rejoiced in the sea-booty
1625	the mighty-burden	of those which he had with him.
	Went them then together	thanked god
	a powerful heap of thanes	rejoiced [in their] lord
	because they may	see him sound.
	Then was from the strong one	helmet and byrnie
1630	quickly loosed.	The lake subsided
	water under the clouds	colored with battle-blood.
	They fared forth from there	on the walking-track
	glad in hearts	they measured the earth-way ⁷⁶¹
	the well-known street	king-bold men
1635	from the sea-cliff	bore the head
	with difficulty	more than two
	of their very-brave	four should
	on the battle-pole	fare with difficulty ⁷⁶²
	to the gold-hall	Grendel's head
1640	until that suddenly	to the hall they came
	firm [and] war-like	fourteen

⁷⁵⁹ Possibly a direct, and slightly subtle, attack on the Pagan *metod*. The suggestion of a “true *metod*” may imply an untrue *metod*.

⁷⁶⁰ The Medieval Christian mindset thought this life was a loan from their god.

⁷⁶¹ Walked the path.

⁷⁶² It takes four men to carry Grendel's head hanging from a spear.

	Geats going brave in the mingling Then came in to go	with the man-lord tread the mead-plain. the leader of the thanes
1645	the deed-keen man the battle-brave hero Then was by the hair Grendel's head terrible to the earls	honored with glory to greet Hrothgar. on the floor borne where the men drank and the woman there with [them]
1650	a splendid spectacle	the men inside saw.
XXIV	Beowulf spoke "Look, we you this sea-booty man of the Scyldings [this] token of glory	born of Ecgtheow son of Healdane we have brought with pleasure which you see here.
1655	I that un-softly the war under water with difficulty would have ended I could not at battle	survived with life the deed I dared immediately the battle if god had not shielded me. with Hrunting
1660	accomplish anything But granted me that I on the wall saw immense ancient-sword devoid of friends	though the weapon is good. the ruler of old hanging a beautiful haste guided so that I drew that weapon.
1665	Slew then at battle there the guardian of the house. the pattern-welded sword burned hottest battle-sweat. from the fiend ferried away	when I had opportunity Then that battle-sword as the blood sprang out I that hilt from there avenged the wicked-deeds
1670	the slaughter of Danes I to you then promise sleep sorrow-less and each thane old and young ⁷⁶³	as it was fitting. that you in Heorot may with your troop of men in your land that you him ⁷⁶⁴ need not dread
1675	leader of the Scyldings death from warriors Then was the golden hilt	on that half as you earlier did." to the old warrior

⁷⁶³ *Dugobe* (older, seasoned warriors) and *geogobe* (young retainers).

⁷⁶⁴ Another gender ambiguity. Grendel or Grendel's mother?

	to the grey war-chief the ancient-work of giants.	in hand given It in possession passed
1680	after the fall of devils the work of the wonder-smith(s) left this world guilty of murder [it] passed in control	to the lord of the Danes and when the grim-hearted man god's adversary and his mother also to the best
1685	of earthly kings of those whom in the Danish realm Hrothgar spoke the old heirloom. the origin of ancient strife	between the two seas doled out treasure. examined the hilt On it was written after the flood ⁷⁶⁵
1690	the rushing sea the death of giant kin. to the eternal lord through welling waters Also on the sword-guard	brought about terribly That was a people foreign them the final reward god gave. ⁷⁶⁶
1695	in runic letters set down and said with choice iron the worm-decorated and wreathed-hilt.	of glorious gold was rightly marked for whom that sword was first made Then the wise one spoke
1700	the son of Healfdane "Indeed, one may say remembers folk old land-warden ⁷⁶⁷ born better. through distant regions	all were silent. the one who in truth and right all life that this earl was [Your] glory is exalted my friend Beowulf
1705	over all the lands. strength and wisdom of mind. friendship, as we two said a short time ago. ever lasting a help to heroes.	You, hold it all with patience I to you shall fulfill my You shall become a consolation for your people
1710	with the sons of Ecgwelan He did not mature as they wished	Heremod was not so from the Honor-Scyldings. but to slaughter

⁷⁶⁵ Noah's flood.

⁷⁶⁶ A formative suggestion? Remember that god does not only give victory and reward, he also gives punishment.

⁷⁶⁷ Here the Germanic rune ǣ (odal) was used in place of the Old English word *epel* - "native land, home" for the compound *epelweard* - "land-warden."

	and to death enraged he killed shoulder-companions ⁷⁶⁸	for the Danish people table-companions until he went alone
1715	the infamous prince Although the mighty god exalted him with power advanced forth a blood-rough breast-hoard ⁷⁶⁹	from the pleasures of human life. with joys of strength over all men he yet grew in spirit he did not give rings
1720	to the Danes after glory so that he for this struggle [he was] a long-lasting harm to the nation. I wise with winters tell this tale understand virtue.	joyless he bade deeds suffered learn you by this ⁷⁷⁰
1725	how mighty god dispenses wisdom to mankind For a while he in love of glorious kin	Wonder is to say through great spirit land and lordship he has all control. ⁷⁷¹ allows men's minds to move about
1730	gives him home to hold renders him such power a spacious kingdom for his folly	joy of earth the stronghold of men of [his] portion of the world that he his self may not conceive the end.
1735	He lives in abundance hinders him not at all darken his heart manifest anywhere turns in his desire	sickness nor age sorrow does not nor does enmity [or] edge-hate but all the world he the worse knows not
XXV 1740	until that him on the inside grows and flourishes the soul herd[er] bound with troubles	the portion of over-pride when the warden sleeps the sleep is too fast with the slayer so near

⁷⁶⁸ Comrades in arms. Shoulder to shoulder on the battlefield.

⁷⁶⁹ A blood-thirsty heart.

⁷⁷⁰ Potential beginning of a real life sermon spliced into the epic.

⁷⁷¹ An important didactic moment demonstrating the poet's message — the Christian god is the dispenser of wisdom and wealth.

	the one who from the bow	shoots fire.
1745	Then he is in the breast by a bitter arrow from the crooked mysterious commands	under the helmet struck him to protect knows not of the accursed ghost
	thinks him too little covets hostile-hearted	what he long held not at all gives in the boast
1750	gold-gilded rings forgets and neglects the ruler of heaven	and he then destiny this which him earlier god gave portion of glory.
	In the end that the loaned body	after it comes to pass declines
1755	falls fated the one who unmourningly ancient-treasures of earls	another seizes him doles riches heeding not terror.
	Protect you then from baleful-violence	dear Beowulf
	best of men	and choose you that better
1760	eternal councils ⁷⁷² great champion. only a while. your strength's end or fire's grasp	be not over-proud ⁷⁷³ Now is the glory of thy might Soon after is [in] sickness or by edge or flood's surge
1765	or the sword's grip or terrible old age fails and darkness that you leader of men	or the spear's flight or eyes' brightness suddenly is death over-powers.
	Just as I the Ring-Danes	a hundred half-years
1770	held under the skies against many nations from ash and edge ⁷⁷⁴ any under heaven's expanse	and protected then from war around this middle-yard that I considered not my adversary.
	Look, in my home	this change (of fortune) came
1775	grief after enjoyment the life-enemy I for that visitation	since Grendel my invader became. continually carry

⁷⁷² End of sermon. Connect 1723a to 1760b for the more authentic poem?

⁷⁷³ Is this the formation of a more Germanic Christianity where pride is not a sin; only too much pride?

⁷⁷⁴ Spear and sword.

	such soul-sorrow. the eternal lord	I should thank <i>metod</i> for this ⁷⁷⁵ this which I in life awaited
1780	that I on the head ⁷⁷⁶ over old strife Go now to settle battle-worthy treasures shared	blood-stained with eyes [may] stare (at). enjoy the delightful feast between us shall [be] a great many after it is morning.”
1785	The Geat was glad in heart nose a seat then he was after as earlier with the hall-sitters with time anew. ⁷⁷⁷	he went soon to as the wise commanded. with the courage-strong the feast fairly prepared The night-helmet ⁷⁷⁸ darkened
1790	dark over the noble-men. the grey-haired would the old Scylding. the strong shield-warrior soon him a hall-thane	The seasoned-veterans ⁷⁷⁹ all arose of bed to nose The Geat immeasurably well desired rest weary of the journey led forth
1795	from a far country in reverence the needs of the thane War-travelers	one saw to all such as in those days would have.
	Rested him then the roomy-hearted	the hall towered
1800	vaulted and gold-decorated until that black raven the joy of heaven. ⁷⁸⁰ to pass the nobles were	the guest inside slept blithe of heart announced Then came the bright the warriors moved quickly after to the people
1805	in a fuss to fare ⁷⁸¹ the bold-spirited visitor	would far from there [his] ship to nose.
	Ordered then the hard	Hrunting borne
	to Ecglaf’s son	commanded his sword to take

⁷⁷⁵ Hrothgar is thanking *metod* and in the next half-line the poet makes it clear that they mean the Christian god - forming the audience’s mind to remove the polysemous understanding of the word and to adopt one Christian meaning of it.

⁷⁷⁶ Grendel’s head.

⁷⁷⁷ On a new occasion.

⁷⁷⁸ Evening-sky.

⁷⁷⁹ *Duguð*.

⁷⁸⁰ The sun is announced by the raven, one of three “beasts of battle” - the raven, the wolf, and the eagle are seen at battles awaiting the feast of corpses.

⁷⁸¹ A rush to go.

	the loved-body iron	said thanks to him for this loan
1810	said he the war-friend ⁷⁸²	reckoned good
	war-crafty	not at all with words blamed
	the edge of the sword.	That was a high-spirited ⁷⁸³ man.
	And then journey-firm ⁷⁸⁴	geared with armor
	the warriors were	went the worthy one to the Danes
1815	the nobleman up to the high-seat	where the other was
	the brattle-brave hero	greeted Hrothgar.
XXVI	Beowulf spoke	born of Ecgtheow.
	“Now we sea-farers	will say
	come from afar	that we desire
1820	to seek Higelac.	We were here pleasantly
	well attended to	you treated us well.
	If I then on earth	anything may
	for your hearts-love	[can do] more
	[for you] leader of men	than I yet did
1825	war-works	I [will] soon be geared.
	If I hear that	over the flood region
	that you near-setters ⁷⁸⁵	threaten terror
	as your enemies	once in a while did
	I you a thousand	thanes will bring
1830	heroes to help.	I in Higelac know
	lord of the Geats	though he is young
	[you] folks heard	so that he for me will perform
	with words and works	that I should praise you well
	and you to help	shall bring the spear-shaft
1835	the help of might	where you be in need of men.
	If him then Hrethric	to the house of the Geats
	the king’s son thinks [to go to]	he may there
	many friends find.	A far country is
	better sought	by the one who is himself good.”
1840	Hrothgar spoke	to him in answer.
	“To you then the word-speak	the wise lord
	in spirit sent	never heard I a wiser

⁷⁸² Sword.

⁷⁸³ Considerate.

⁷⁸⁴ Eager to depart.

⁷⁸⁵ Neighbors.

	in such young life	man make.
	Thou art strong of might	and old in mind
1845	wise with word-speak.	I expect it is likely
	if it happens	that the spear takes
	the sword-grim battle	Hrethel's offspring
	sickness or iron	your elder
	the folk's herder	and you your life have
1850	that the Sea-Geats	have not
	any better king	to choose
	the heroes' hoard-warden	if you will hold
	the kingdom of kinsmen.	Your mind-spirit ⁷⁸⁶
	pleases me long as well	dear Beowulf.
1855	You have fared	so that the fighting folk
	the Geatish people	and the Spear-Danes
	in common peace	shall rest
	the enmity	they earlier engaged in. ⁷⁸⁷
	[It will] be while I rule	the wide kingdom
1860	treasures shared	one to another
	greet with good	over the sea-bird's bath
	the ring-prowed ship shall	over the sea bring
	gifts and love-tokens.	I know these people
	both against fiend and with friend	[will] work fast
1865	in everything blameless	[as it] was in old."
	These yet the protector of earls	inside give
	the son of Healdane	twelve treasures.
	Ordered him with the gifts	[his own] dear people
	to seek in safety	[and] quickly after to come.
1870	Kissed then	the king from good descent
	leader of the Scyldings	the best of thanes
	and took him by the neck ⁷⁸⁸	tears fell from him,
	the grey-haired.	For he was of both expectation
	with old wisdom	especially of the other
1875	that he afterward	would [not] see
	courageous council.	To him the man was too dear
	that he the breast-welling	might not restrain

⁷⁸⁶ Character.

⁷⁸⁷ Is Beowulf's action, which caused peace between the Geats and the Danes, symbolic of the *Beowulf* epic's attempt to make peace between the Anglo-Saxons and the Danes?

⁷⁸⁸ Hugged.

	but him in the heart after the dear man		fast in the mind's bond a secret longing
1880	burned with blood. the war-man gold-adorned exulting in treasure. the owner-lord		Him Beowulf from there tread the grass-mold ⁷⁸⁹ The sea-goer ⁷⁹⁰ awaited the one which on anchor rode. the gift of Hrothgar
1885	Then was in going often esteemed. ⁷⁹¹ in every respect blameless from him joy of might		That was one king until that old age took the one who often injured many.
XXVII	Came then to the sea young		the very-brave bore ring-nets
1890	locked limb-sarks. ⁷⁹² the after-journey ⁷⁹³ of the earls he without harm greeted the guests said the welcome	1890	The land-guard found as he earlier did of the hill-side cape rode toward them to the people of the Weders to the ship they fared. the sea-curved ship the ring-prowed ship the mast towered hoarded-wealth.
1895	warriors in shining armor Then was on the sand laden with army-garments with mares and treasure over Hrothgar's	1900	gave a sword so that he after was more worthied by the treasure They departed on the ship left the land of the Danes. some of the sea-garments the sound-wood thundered journey was hindered not the sea-goer fared forth over the waves over the ocean-streams
1900	He to the boat-guard bound with gold on the mead-bench the heirloom. ⁷⁹⁴ stirred up the deep water		
1905	Then was by the mast the sail fast with ropes there the wave-floater's [by] wind over the waves floated foamy-necked		
1910	the bound-prow ship		

⁷⁸⁹ Turf.

⁷⁹⁰ Ship.

⁷⁹¹ Praised.

⁷⁹² Mailshirts.

⁷⁹³ Return.

⁷⁹⁴ Beowulf's gift to the guard has increased his status.

	so that they the Geatish cliffs the known bluffs weather-beaten Quickly was at the sea	might see the ship pressed up on land-stood. the harbor-guard ready
1915	the one who earlier for a long time longing at the sea sealed to the sand fast with the anchor-band the winsome wood ⁷⁹⁵	the well-loved men far looked out for the roomy ship lest the force of the waves might drive it away.
1920	Ordered then up to bear decorated armor and plated gold [went] to seek Higelac, son of Hrethel himself with [his] retainers	the wealth of the noblemen not at all they far from there the dispenser of treasure there at home residing near the sea-wall.
1925	The building was splendid in the high hall wise and well-thought [of] under the burg-lock ⁷⁹⁶ Haereth's daughter.	the king very valiant Hygd very young though with little winters had experienced She was not at all poor however
1930	not too sparing with gifts of treasure. of Fremu the folk's queen none that dared [her] dear companions	for the people of the Geats She considered the arrogance ⁷⁹⁷ the terrible violence bold [and] brave except the great lord
1935	so that on her one day but reckoned the deadly bond woven by hand after the hand-grip that it the pattern-welded sword	with eyes starred destined for him quickly since she was sword determined may settle ⁷⁹⁸
1940	to make mortal-attack known. for a woman to perform that a peace-weaver ⁷⁹⁹ after insult	It is not such a queenly manner though she is glorious should deprive men of life the well loved.

⁷⁹⁵ The handsome ship.

⁷⁹⁶ Stronghold.

⁷⁹⁷ Many translations say "she considered Bryth," but I translated it as "the arrogance of Fremu," in agreement with Ernest A. Kock and R.D. Fulk. See Klæber's *Beowulf*, commentary on line 1931.

⁷⁹⁸ Line 1939b is the beginning of the second scribe's work.

⁷⁹⁹ A bride meant to unite two uneasy kingdoms.

	However Hemming's kinsman ⁸⁰⁰	stopped that
1945	an ale-drinker	said to another
	that she man-harm	performed less
	malicious-violence	since first she was
	given gold-adorned	to the young champion
	to the dear one of noble descent	after she to Offa's hall
1950	over the glossy flood	by her father's bidding
	sought a voyage.	There she since well
	on the man-stool ⁸⁰¹	more good
	life's-world	living she enjoyed
	held high-love	with the hero chief
1955	of all mankind	as I have heard
	the best	between the seas
	of humankind	therefore Offa was
	With gifts and with wars	a spear-keen man
	widely honored	with wisdom he held
1960	her native land.	From there Eomer awoke
	with heroes to help	Hemming's kinsmen
	grandson of Garmund	battle crafty.
XXVIII	Went him then the hard one	with his hand-troop
	himself over the sand	tread the sea-plain
1965	the wide shore.	The world-candle shone
	the sun hurtling from the south.	They the journey endured
	with courage went	to the protector of earls
	Ongentheow's slayer	within the burg
	the young war-king	they heard the good
1970	doled rings.	Higelac was
	of Beowulf's journey	made known without delay
	that there in the enclosed homestead	the protector of heroes
	of shield-companions	living returned
	from the battle-sport whole	to the house to go.
1975	Quickly was cleared	just as the mighty one commanded
	for the foot-guests	the hall inward.
	Sat then with himself	the one who from fighting survived
	kinsman with kinsman	after the man-lord
	through ceremonious-speech	loyally greeted

⁸⁰⁰ Offa.

⁸⁰¹ Throne.

1980	with hearty words. around that hall loved by the people to the hands [of] the heroes. to fairly ⁸⁰² question	The mead-vessel moved about Haereth's daughter bore the pleasant-cup Higelac began in that high hall
1985	his companion of how the expeditions "How [did] the journey turn out for you when you suddenly fighting to seek	curiosity broke him of the Sea-Geats were. dear Beowulf resolved far over the salt water
1990	battle at Heorot? The widely known woe for the great king? with surging sorrow seethed of the dear man.	But [did] you for Hrothgar [you] bested the wight I this heart-care trusted not in the trip I you long bade
1995	that you the slaughter-ghost let the South-Danes the battle with Grendel. for this, that I you sound Beowulf spoke	the wight not greet themselves settle To god I say thanks may see." born of Ecgtheow lord Higelac
2000	"It is not hidden [the great] ⁸⁰³ meeting what a time of war came to pass in that place for the Victory-Scyldings	by many people I with Grendel where he a great many sorrow[s] made
2005	misery all the time. So need [not] boast any over earth the one that lived longest seized by sudden attack.	I avenged all that. Grendel's kinsman the night-uproar of the loathsome kin
2010	to that ring hall soon me the great since he knew with his own sons The host was in joy.	I there first came to greet Hrothgar; son of Healfdane my character assigned [me] a seat.
2015	under heaven's vault more mead-gladness.	I saw not ever from hall-sitters While the famous queen

⁸⁰² Courteously.

⁸⁰³ Damaged manuscript.

	the folk's peace-pledge compelled by the young boys. [she gave] to men	went about all the hall Often the ring-wreath before they went to sit.
2020	While for seasoned-veterans ⁸⁰⁴ to the earls on the end Then I Freawaru ⁸⁰⁵ heard call gave to the heroes.	the daughter of Hrothgar bore the ale-cup. the hall-sitters there she the studded treasure-cup She [is] promised
2025	young gold-adorned these words have of the realm heard that he with this wife fighting should settle.	to the glad son of Froda by the lord of the Scyldings and that reason considers a portion of slaughter-feud Seldom often where
2030	after the fall of a people the deadly-spear rests This then may offend and each of the thanes when he with the woman	a little while though the bride should be good. lords of the Heatho-Beardans of that people goes in the hall
2035	the lord-child of the Danes On him glistens hard and ring-marked while they with those weapons	to entertain the seasoned-veterans. ⁸⁰⁶ an heirloom of ancestors ⁸⁰⁷ treasure of the Heatho-Beardans were able to wield
[XXIX-XXX]	until that they fore-led ⁸⁰⁸	to the shield-play
2040	dear companions When says at beer the old ash-warrior ⁸⁰⁹ the spear-death of men mourning-mind begins	and their own lives. the one which sees the ring the one who remembers all he is grim in spirit for the young champion
2045	through heart thought war-bale ⁸¹⁰ to wake "Might you my friend the one your father	of spirit to test and these words speaks. recognize the sword bore to fight

⁸⁰⁴ *Duguðe*.

⁸⁰⁵ Hrothgar's daughter.

⁸⁰⁶ *Duguð*.

⁸⁰⁷ A sword won in war worn by a Dane, once owned by the Heatho-Bardans, causing resentment.

⁸⁰⁸ Died.

⁸⁰⁹ Spear-warrior.

⁸¹⁰ *Wigbealu* - hapax-legomena.

	under the army-mask	for the last time
2050	the dear iron	him the Dane slew
	they wielded the slaughter-place ⁸¹¹	since Withergyld lay
	after the death of the hero	what Scyldings?
	Now here one of the slayers	the son of the one
	exulting with weapons	in the hall goes
2055	boasts of murder	and bears the treasure. ⁸¹²
	The one that you with right	reason should.”
	So he urges and reminds	each time
	with sore words	until that season comes
	that the thane of the female	for the deeds of the father
2060	after the bite of the sword	sleeps blood-stained
	guilty of life.	Him the other from there
	escapes living	for he certainly knows the land.
	When are broken	on both sides
	the oath-words of earls	since for Ingeld
2065	slaughter-violence wells	and for him wife-love
	after care-welling ⁸¹³	becomes cooler
	I [do] not reckon the friendship	of the Heatho-Bards
	the dole of lord-peace	with the Danes [is] without-deceit
	the friendship fast.	
		I shall speak forth
2070	further after Grendel	so that you should surely know
	dispenser of treasure	what happened ⁸¹⁴
	in the hand-fight of heroes.	After heaven’s gem ⁸¹⁵
	glided over the grounds	the ire ghost came
	terrible evening-angry	to nose us.
2075	Where we sound ⁸¹⁶	guarded the hall.
	There was for Hondscioh	the fatal battle
	the fated deadly-attack	he died first
	the girded champion	for him Grendel turned out
	for the famous young-thane	the devourer ⁸¹⁷
2080	the man’s life	the body all swallowed.

⁸¹¹ Won the battle.

⁸¹² The sword.

⁸¹³ Sour feelings.

⁸¹⁴ Literally *to whom since came to pass*.

⁸¹⁵ The sun.

⁸¹⁶ Safe.

⁸¹⁷ Mouth-slayer.

	None the sooner out then the terrible	empty-handed
	the slayer blood-toothed	mindful of attacks
	from that gold-cellar	would go
	but he with might	tested my strength
2085	grasped with ready hand.	The glove hung
	large and strange	fast with a cunningly wrought band
	it was with skill	all geared
	with the craft of the devil	and with dragon skin. ⁸¹⁸
	He me there on the inside	un-sining ⁸¹⁹
2090	the dear deed-doer	would put
	one of many.	It was not so
	since I in anger	stood upright.
	Too long is to reckon	how I that man-enemy
	for each evil	the reward repaid
2095	there I my lord	your people
	honored with works.	He away escaped
	a little while	life-joy enjoyed.
	However his strong hand	remained behind
	in Heorot	and he the humiliated from there
2100	mournful of mind	to the mere-ground fell.
	To me for the deadly-onslaught	the friend of the Scyldings
	plated gold	many paid
	with many treasures	after morning came
	and we to feast	had set.
2105	There was song and music	the old Scylding
	well informed	told of far [times]
	for a while the battle-dear	the joy of the harp
	the entertainment-wood greeted	for a while told a tale
	true and sad	for a while the wonderful spell
2110	told after right	the roomy-hearted king
	for a while often undertook	bound by old age
	the old war-man	spoke of youth
	battle-strength	inside [his] breast welled
	when he wise with winters	remembered many things.
2115	As we there inside	the entire day
	seized pleasure	until that night became

⁸¹⁸ Felt.

⁸¹⁹ Guiltless.

- another past.⁸²⁰
 geared to avenge grief
 travelled sorrowful
 2120 the war-hate of the Weders.
 avenged her son
 valiantly
 wise counselor of old
 Him they could neither
 2125 the death-weary
 burn up with fire
 the loved man
 in the arms of the fiend
 That was to Hrothgar
 2130 of those that the people's-prince
 Then the king me
 implored mind-troubled
 should perform an act of heroism
 perform a glorious deed.
 2135 I then [in] this surging water
 the grim terrible
 There we for a while were
 the water welled with blood
 in that war-cellar
 2140 with an immense edge.
 I bore away [with my] life.
 But to me the protector of earls
 many treasures
- XXXI So the people's-king
 2145 not at all did I
 reward for strength
 the son of Healfdane
 those which I warrior-king
 to present with esteem.
 2150 [handed in] kindness
 of head-kin⁸²²
- Then was quickly after
 Grendel's mother
 death took [her] son
 The unpleasant woman
 killed a man
 there was Aeschere
 life departed.
 after morning came
 the people of the Danes
 nor on the pyre lay
 she the body bore out
 under the mountain-stream.
 the cruelest of sorrows
 long begot.
 by your life
 that I in the water throng
 should venture with life
 He ordered mead for me.⁸²¹
 which is widely known
 ground-guardian found.
 fighting by hand
 and I carved the head
 of Grendel's mother
 Un-softly from there
 I was not then yet fated.
 after gave
 the son of Healfdane.
- lived by customs
 for that loan lose
 but he me treasures gave
 on my own judgement
 wish to bring
 Further [it] is all to you
 I little have
 except for you Higelac."

⁸²⁰ The second night after Grendel's defeat.

⁸²¹ Used to ritually seal an oath.

⁸²² Near-relatives.

	Ordered then in to bear	the boar-head-sign
	the battle-steep helmet	the old byrnie
	the war-sword richly-equipped.	A tale after uttered.
2155	“Me this battle-sharp	Hrothgar gave
	the wise king	ordered with some words
	that I this first [to] you	good will should say
	he said that king Heorogar	had it
	the man of the Scyldings	a long while
2160	none the sooner to [his] own son	would give
	to the valiant Heorowearð	though he were loyal to him
	the breast-garment.	Use [it] all well!”
	Heard I that with the decorated armor	[were] four mares
	quickly alike	should follow last
2165	apple-fallows ⁸²³	he to him gifts granted
	of horses and treasures.	As shall kin do
	not at all a net of malice	for the other to braid
	with secret skill	death to prepare
	for close-comrades.	Higelac’s nephew
2170	the battle-hard	was very loyal
	and either to the other	[were] mindful of benefits.
	Heard I that he the neck-ring	to Hygd gave
	the splendid wonder-treasure	the one which Wealtheow gave him
	to the king’s daughter	three horses together
2175	graceful and saddle-bright	her breast since
	after the ring-receiving	was adorned.
	So shown bold	born of Ecgtheow
	the man known for war	for good deeds
	acted with glory	not at all drunk slew
2180	[his] hearth-companions	nor was he with troubled spirit
	but he mankind’s	greatest strength
	the ample gift	which god gave him
	held the battle-dear.	The high one was,
	as one born of the Geats,	long not considered good;
2185	he on the mead-bench	was not worth much,
	the lord of the Weders	rendered,
	expected,	that he were slack,
	an un-firm nobleman. ⁸²⁴	[A] change of fortune came

⁸²³ Dapple-dun. A particular breed of horse.

⁸²⁴ Apparently Beowulf had been considered lazy and thus soft in his younger years.

	to the man blessed with glory	for each of [his] griefs.
2190	Ordered then the protector of earls	in to fetch ⁸²⁵
	the battle-brave king	Hrethel's heirloom
	garnished with gold	[there] was not with the Geats then
	a better jewel-treasure	on swords had.
	That he on Beowulf's	lap laid
2195	and to him gave	seven thousand [hides of land] ⁸²⁶
	[a] building and princely seats.	They were both together
	in that country	land inherited
	yard[s] of ancestral right	more especially by the other
	was the large[r] kingdom	to the higher rank there. ⁸²⁷
2200	After it happened	in later days
	in the clash of battle	after Higelac died
	and Heardread	by battle-swords
	under shield-covering	was killed
	then they sought	the glorious man
2205	the hard battle-fighters	Battle-Scylfingas
	attacked with violence	the nephew of Hererice
	after the broad kingdom	into Beowulf['s]
	hand went.	He ruled well
	for fifty winters;	he was then a wise king
2210	an old home-guardian	until that one began
	in dark nights	a dragon to rule.
	The one which in the high home	watched over the hoard
	the stark stone-barrow	the path lay under
	the departed unknown	there on the inside went
2215	a certain one of men	the one which pressed near
	to the heathen hoard	the hand [seized] ⁸²⁸
	the decorated treasure.	He ⁸²⁹ never since that
	slept though	ensnared by a word
	of a thief's craft. ⁸³⁰	The nation [found]
2220	the inhabitants of warriors	that he was enraged.

XXXII Not at all of his own accord the power of the dragon's hoard

⁸²⁵ Bring.

⁸²⁶ A hide is approximately thirty acres.

⁸²⁷ Both Beowulf and Higelac ruled the land of the Geats, but Higelac was still in control.

⁸²⁸ Illegible manuscript.

⁸²⁹ The dragon.

⁸³⁰ The dragon had slept, under a spell, but not any more.

	[nor] by his own will		he who him sorely injured
	but for dire-need		that someone
	of a hero's son		fled the hate-swings
2225	in need of a house		[went] in there. ⁸³¹
	The man sin distressed		immediately fled
	where for the guest		horror stood.
	Whether the wretched		ventured for life
	[...]	⁸³²
2230	afraid in heart		him who disaster overtook
	sought a precious cup.		There were so many
	ancient treasures		in the earth-cellar
	as they in days of old		certain men
	of noble kin		[and] immense legacy
2235	taking thought		there hid
	the dear treasures.		Death took them all
	at an earlier time		and the one who then still
	of the host of the people		who then moved about the longest
	the warden friend-mourning		expected the same
2240	that he in a little space of time		long-accumulated
	enjoyed the best.		A barrow all ready
	situated in a field		near the waves of the sea
	new by the bluff		fastened by the craft of difficult access
	there the guardian of the rings		bore on in
2245	the earl's treasure		the portion worthy of being hoarded
	gilded of gold		few words he spoke.
	"Guard you now ground		the earl's property
	no hero can.		Look, it earlier from you
	the goods were begotten		war-death
2250	terrible deadly-attack		took every one
	of my nation's people		those who left this life
	saw the joys of the hall.		One who shall carry the sword
	or bear forth the plated cup		the dear drinking vessel
	I don't have. ⁸³³		The seasoned-veterans elsewhere departed.
2255	The hard helmet shall		with decorative-gold
	with plating decay		when the polisher sleeps
	who the war-mask		should care for.

⁸³¹ Presumably a slave has fled the beatings of his master and entered the dragon's hoard seeking shelter.

⁸³² Missing line.

⁸³³ The earl who hid the dragon's hoard had no heir.

	Likewise, you the battle-shirt over breaking boards ⁸³⁴	the one experienced at battle biting irons ⁸³⁵
2260	decays after the hero. after the war-chief with heroes by [his] side. the amusement of glee-wood throughout the hall fly	The mailshirt may not ring traveling widely By no means the harp joy nor the good hawk nor the swift steed
2265	in the fortified place beat. many of the human race So sad of mind alone after all the days and nights	Baleful-death has sent forth.” he spoke in sorrow joyless were until that flood of death
2270	touched at the heart. found the joy-hoard he who burning the naked hostile-dragon encircled by fire.	The old night predator standing open seeks the barrow who by night flies ⁸³⁶ Him humans
2275	dread greatly. a sanctuary in the earth guards heathen gold So the people’s-enemy held in the earth	He shall seek where he wise with winters though him it betters in no way at all. three hundred winters a huge sum
2280	of the treasure house enraged him in spirit the plated cup his lord requested. The hoard diminished by a ring	until that one man the lord’s man bore the compact of peace Then was the hoard explored the request granted
2285	by the poor man. the ancient work of humans When the worm awoke [it] followed the stone after the scent	The lord examined for the first time. strife was renewed stout-hearted found
2290	with mysterious skill So may the undoomed woe and misery the ruler’s favor.	he stepped forth too near the dragon’s head. easily survive he who holds The hoard-warden sought

⁸³⁴ Shields.

⁸³⁵ Swords.

⁸³⁶ Oldest record of a flying dragon in Germanic culture.

earnestly over the earth
 2295 the one who grievously
 hot and fierce
 all outside
 in the wilderness
 the work of fighting
 2300 sought the precious cup.
 that some man had
 the splendid treasure.
 Impatiently
 The keeper of the burial mound
 2305 he would repay the one
 for the precious cup.
 for the dragon in desire
 remain long on the wall
 fire fussy.
 2310 for the people in the land
 their treasure-giver

XXXIII

Then the ghost began
 bright homes to burn
 on the departed in anger.
 2315 the loath[ed] air-flier
 This worm's war was
 the violent narrow-foe
 how the war-enemy
 hated and humbled.
 2320 the hidden lord-cellar
 The people of the land had
 by flame and burning.
 in war and walls.
 Then was Beowulf
 2325 quickly in truth
 the best of buildings
 the gift-seat of the Geats.
 sorrow in the heart
 The wise one expected

wishing to find the man
 sorely treated him in sleep
 he often moved about the cave
 not there any man
 to rejoice yet of battle
 in a short while he went in the cliff
 He then soon found
 tampered with the gold
 The hoard-warden waited
 until that evening came
 was then enraged
 with loathsome fire
 Then was the day departed
 he would not
 but with bale went
 The beginning was terrible
 as it quickly happened
 sorely ended.

to spew with fire
 a gleam of fire stood
 There naught of the living
 would leave.
 widely seen
 near and far
 the people of the Geats
 He shot⁸³⁷ to the hoard after
 before the time of day.
 [been] seized by fire
 He trusted in the barrow
 The expectation deceived him.
 made known of the terror
 that his own home
 melted in the surging fires
 That was for the good one
 the worst of heart sorrows.
 that he the ruler

⁸³⁷ Hurried.

- 2330 over old right
bitterly enraged
with dark thoughts
The fire-dragon had
outside the water-land
- 2335 destroyed with flames.
the chief of the Weders
Ordered him then made
all from iron
a wrought-body war-board
- 2340 that him the hault-wood
shield against fire.
the good old nobleman
of life's world
though that hoarded-wealth
- 2345 Scorned then
that he the far-flier
with a large army
nor him the worm's war
strength and courage
- 2350 narrows dared
of battle-crashes
the victorious man
and at battle gripped
the loathsome kind.
- 2355 of hand-meetings
since the king of the Geats
the friend-lord of the folk
Hrethel's offspring
beaten by the blade.
- 2360 by his own craft
had him in arms
battle-gears
The Hetware⁸⁴⁰ not at all
of the foot-fight
- the eternal lord
the breast inside welled
as for him was not customary.⁸³⁸
the stronghold of the people
the region of earth
For it this war-king
devised revenge.
a shelter of warriors⁸³⁹
the lord of earls
he knew well
might not help
Should the voyager of days
experience the end
and the worm together
he held long.
the lord of the rings
should seek with a company
he dreaded not the attack from it
for the wight performed
because he earlier many
violence survived
since he Hrothgar's
cleansed the hall
Grendel's kinsmen
- That was not the least
where a man slew Higelac
in the rush of battle
in Friesland;
died sword-drunk
From there Beowulf escaped
bore himself swimming
[...] thirty
that he [brought] to the sea.
had good reason [for] exulting
when he earlier against

⁸³⁸ Beowulf is unusually sad, remembering some offence to god which he believes brought this punishment.

⁸³⁹ Shield.

⁸⁴⁰ Franks along the Rhine.

2365	[them] bore shields. from that fighter He over-swam then the expanse of the sea	Few after returned to nose home. son of Ecgtheow
	the forlorn one entrenched There to him Hygd offered	afterward [went] to [his] people. the hoard and the realm
2370	rings and the lord-stool. that he against foreign armies knew how to hold Not at all the poor people for that nobleman	[Her] son she trusted not the ancestral-throne since Higelac was dead. might find any thing
2375	that he over Heardred or the royal power However he him in the folk with esteem with honor [and] ruled the Weder-Geats. ⁸⁴¹	were as lord would choose. held with friend-lore until that he were older
2380	over the sea sought they had rebelled against the best those which in Sweden the famous king.	Him wretched-men sons of Ohtere the protector of the Scyldings of sea-kings dispensed treasure That became the mark for his life's end.
2385	He there [for] the hospitality with the swing of a sword and him afterward went home to nose let then the chief-stool	was allotted with a life-wound the son of Higelac the son of Ongentheow since Heardred lay [dead] Beowulf hold
2390	to wield [over] the Geats.	That was a good king.
XXXIV	He this people's-calamity in later days a friend to the wretched; over the wide sea	the loan remembered to Eadgils he became he stepped with the folk to the son of Ohtere
2395	with warriors and weapons with cold and care-sorrow So he of battles each of severe slights,	he avenged after deprived the king of life. had survived son of Ecgtheow,

⁸⁴¹ Higelac's wife Hygd chooses Beowulf to rule, but he chooses only to hold the throne until her son Heardred is of age. Some scholars suggest this is political propaganda promoting the bloodline of Saxon kings, instead of Danish ones.

	of courage-works	until that one day
2400	which he against that worm	should fight.
	He went then, one of twelve	emboldened by anger,
	the lord of the Geats,	to see the dragon.
	He had then learned	how the feud arose
	the bale-violence of warriors	[in]to his possession came
2405	the glorious treasure-vat	through the hand of this informer.
	He ⁸⁴² was in that company	the thirteenth man
	he [who] brought about	the origin of this strife
	the captive head-sad	the despised should from there
	lead [the way to] the place.	He went against [his] will
2410	to this earth-cellar which he	alone knew
	the barrow under the ground	near to the surge of the sea,
	to the wave-strife,	the inside was full
	of ornaments and wires.	The unpleasant warden
	the geared fighter	held gold-treasures
2415	old under the earth	that was no easy bargain
	to obtain	for any man.
	Sat then on the headland	the battle-hard king
	then offered good luck	to the hearth-companions
	the gold-friend of the Geats.	He was sad in spirit
2420	restless and ready for death.	<i>Wyrd</i> exceedingly near ⁸⁴³
	the aged one	would greet
	seek the soul hoard	to part asunder
	life from body.	Not long was
	the life of the nobleman	wound with the flesh.
2425	Beowulf spoke	born of Ecgtheow
	“Many I in youth	of battle-storms survived
	of war-times	I that all remember
	I was seven winters	when the lord of treasures
	friend-lord of the folk	took me from my father
2430	held and had ⁸⁴⁴ me.	King Hrethel
	gave me treasure and feast	[our] kinship he remembered.
	I was not to him in life	more loathed for anything

⁸⁴² The thief who stole from the dragon's hoard.

⁸⁴³ After a long section of the poem where there is no religious interjection from the shaper we alerted to the presence of *Wyrd*. She has come to take Beowulf's life.

⁸⁴⁴ Kept.

	a man in the burg Herebeald and Haethcyn	than any of his sons ⁸⁴⁵ the other, my Higelac.
2435	The eldest was by deeds of a kinsman after him Haethcyn his friend-lord he missed the mark	unfittingly spread on the murder-bed from the horn-bow struck down with an arrow and shot his kin
2440	the other brother That was a money-less ⁸⁴⁶ fight though heart-weary in the breast the nobleman unavenged So it is sad	blood-stained by the spear. with sin [and] violence he would however part from life. for an aged earl
2445	to experience young on the gallows. a sorry song to the benefit of the raven old and wise	that his son should ride Then he should utter a speech when his son hangs and he him may not help do any[thing].
2450	Ever it is called to mind of the son's journey-elsewhere to await another for an inheritance-guardian ⁸⁴⁷ through death's need	each morning he cares not of another inside the burg when the one has of deeds experienced.
2455	He sees sorrow-caring ⁸⁴⁸ the deserted wine-hall dreary [and] deprived heroes in the grave amusement in the yard	on his son's chamber the windy rest[ing place] riders sleep there is not music of the harp such as there formerly was.
XXXV 2460	He goes then on the bed one after another the home-stead place. after Herebeald welling weighed	singing a song of sorrow thought him all too roomy So the <i>helm</i> of the Weders heart's-sorrow he could not in any way better the feud.
2465	on that life-slayer	

⁸⁴⁵ "More loathed ... than ... his sons." - Hrethel treated Beowulf as well as he treated his own sons.

⁸⁴⁶ No reparations were (or could be) paid.

⁸⁴⁷ Heir.

⁸⁴⁸ Looks sorrowfully.

None the sooner he the warrior
 for the loathsome deeds
 He then with that sorrow
 he gave up man-pleasures
 2470 to [his] offspring he left
 land and people-burgs⁸⁴⁹
 Then was sin and strife
 over the wide water
 hard army-violence
 2475 until that to him Ongentheow's
*fyrð*⁸⁵⁰ firm
 over the sea hold
 terrible malicious slaughter
 My kinsmen
 2480 the feuds and the crimes,
 though the other
 a hard bargain
 lord of the Geats
 Then I in morning learned
 2485 with the edge of the sword
 where Ongentheow
 the battle-helmet split
 fell battle-pale
 enough feuds
 2490 I to him those treasures
 paid at war
 with a bright-sword
 yard [and] home-joy.
 that he to the Gifthas⁸⁵²
 2495 or in Sweden
 of worse warriors
 always I would [go] before
 the one on point
 do battle
 2500 which before and after

could not hate
 though he was not loved by him.
 the sore that befell him
 he chose god's light
 as does the prosperous man
 when he from life went.
 between the Swedes and Geats
 wrought in common
 after Hrethel died
 sons were
 friendship they would not
 but near the Hill of Sorrows
 they often performed.
 avenged that,
 as it is known
 paid with [his] life
 for Haethcynn
 the battle became fatal.
 a kin to another
 in bane avenged
 nosed Eofor
 the old Scylfing
 [Eofor's] hand remembered
 did not deny the life-swing.⁸⁵¹
 that he gave to me
 as was given to me
 he gave me land
 For him was not any need
 or to the Spear-Danes
 should need to seek
 with wealth to buy
 him in the troop
 and forever in life shall
 while this sword endures
 often served me

⁸⁴⁹ Towns.

⁸⁵⁰ Army of company.

⁸⁵¹ Fatal-blow.

⁸⁵² East Germanic peoples.

	since I in front of seasoned-veterans	Day-Ravens ⁸⁵³
	slew by hand	the champion of Hugas
	not at all he then the decorated armor	the Frisian king
	the breast ornament	could bring
2505	but in the fight cringed ⁸⁵⁴	the keeper of the standard
	the nobleman in courage	the edge was not the slayer
	but him the battle-grip	wellings of the heart
	broke the bone-house. ⁸⁵⁵	Now shall the edge of the blade
	hand and hard sword	fight about the hoard.
2510	Beowulf spoke	with boasting words he declared
	for the last time.	“I dared many
	battles in youth	yet I will
	the old people’s ward	seek a fight
	perform a glorious deed	if me the man-scather
2515	of the earth-cellar	seeks me out.”
	Then he greeted	each one of the men
	the valiant helmet-bearers	for the last time
	dear companions.	“I would not bear a sword
	a weapon to the worm	if I knew how
2520	against the combatant	[I] otherwise might
	fulfill the boast with grip	as I earlier did against Grendel
	but I expect the heat	of battle-fire there
	of breath and poison.	Therefore I will have on me
	board and byrnie.	I will not the ward of the barrow
2525	flee from the length of a foot	but for us it shall
	happen at the wall	as for us <i>wyrd</i> assigns
	<i>metod</i> of each man. ⁸⁵⁶	I am firm in spirit
	that I against the war-flier	abstain from boasting.
	Wait on the barrow	with byrnies defending you
2530	men in war-gear.	Which of us two
	after the deadly-onslaught	better may
	survive the wound.	This is not your journey
	nor the allotment of [any] man	except mine alone
	that he against the combatant	should match strength

⁸⁵³ Warriors of Hugas.

⁸⁵⁴ Died.

⁸⁵⁵ Body.

⁸⁵⁶ Beowulf himself states that it is *Wyrd* who is the decider of death. And he seems to understand *Metod* to be “the Measurer.” His Pagan tendencies are apparent.

- 2535 should perform acts of heroism.
 gain the gold
 the dangerous deadly-attack
 Arose then by the shield
 hard under the helmet
- 2540 under the stone-cliffs
 of one man
 Saw then by the wall
 with good manly-virtue
 crash of battles
- 2545 stone-bows stood⁸⁵⁸
 burst from the barrow
 from hot battle-fires
 unburned
 survive inside
- 2550 He let then from the breast
 the leader of the Weder-Geats
 the stark-heart stormed⁸⁶⁰
 a battle-clear roar
 Hate was aroused
- 2555 the voice of a man
 of friendship to ask for.
 came first from
 hot battle-sweat;
 the warrior under the barrow
- 2560 against that grim-guest
 then was of the coiled-creature
 to seek battle.
 the good war-king
 with edges not blunt
- 2565 baleful-headed⁸⁶¹
 The stout-hearted stood
 protector of friends
 quickly together
- I with courage shall
 or battle
 will carry off your lord.”
 the rough warrior
 boar the battle-sark⁸⁵⁷
 he trusted in the strength
 such is not the way of the cowardly!
 the one that a great many [things]
 of wars did
 when troops clashed
 a stream out from there
 there was a welling of burn⁸⁵⁹
 he could not [get] near to the hoard
 any while
 for the fire of the dragon.
 when he emboldened was
 a word out to go
 the voice in[side] became
 under the grey stone.
 the hoard-warden recognized
 there was not more time
 The breath of the combatant
 out of the stone
 the ground resounded
 swung the board-round
 the lord of the Geats
 the heart incited
 The sword first drew
 the ancient heirloom
 each of the two was
 a terror to the other.
 with a steep shield
 when the worm coiled
 he in war-gear remained.

⁸⁵⁷ Mailshirt.

⁸⁵⁸ A stone arch.

⁸⁵⁹ Stream of fire.

⁸⁶⁰ The stout-heart shouted.

⁸⁶¹ Intending harm.

<p>Went then burning 2570 to rush to fate. the life and limbs for the glorious lord where he the first must wield 2575 triumph at battle.⁸⁶² the lord of the Geats with the ancient-heirloom brown⁸⁶³ on the bone then this people's-king 2580 compelled by distress. after the battle-swing throwing deadly-fire battle-lights.⁸⁶⁴ the gold-friend of the Geats; 2585 naked at battle the ere-good iron. that the illustrious one would give should wish for 2590 somewhere else to let⁸⁶⁵ the loan-days.⁸⁶⁶</p> <p>that the combatants the hoard-warden took heart a new time 2595 seized by fire Not at all those in the troop sons of noblemen by the best of battles they protected [their] life. 2600 the spirit with sorrows.</p>	<p>bowed to slide The shield well protected for less while than his mind sought time of days as him <i>wyrd</i> assigned not The hand raised up struck the terrible-colored so that the edge gave way it bit un-strongly had need [for], Then was the warden of the barrow in fierce mind wide sprung Of glorious victory he rejoiced not, the battle-blade failed as it should not That was not an easy journey the son of Ecgtheow ground-plain then the home yard as shall each man</p> <p>It was not long after they after met [again] his breast welling with breath [Beowulf] suffered narrows⁸⁶⁷ the one who earlier wielded the people. the hand [picked] comrades around stood but they in the wood bowed In one of them welled Nothing may ever</p>
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⁸⁶² Nearing towards the final formation the poet uses the shaper to explicitly state that *Wyrd* is not the victory-giver, only the life-taker.

⁸⁶³ Reflecting.

⁸⁶⁴ Flames.

⁸⁶⁵ Give up.

⁸⁶⁶ Life.

⁸⁶⁷ Distress.

	unwind kinship	for the one who thinks well. ⁸⁶⁸
XXXVI	Wiglaf he was called the dear-body ⁸⁶⁹ shield-warrior kinsman of Aelfhere	Weohstan's son a man of the Scylfings he saw his man-lord suffering heat.
2605	under the army-mask Remembered then the honor the wealthy homestead each of the folk-rights ⁸⁷¹ He could not then hold back.	that he him earlier gave of the Waegmundigas ⁸⁷⁰ as his father had. He seized the hand-round drew the ancient sword the heirloom of Eanmund That one at fighting was by Weohstan slain and to his kinsmen out-bore ⁸⁷²
2610	the yellow linden that was with the ancestors the son of Ohtere. the friendless wretch with the edge of the sword	the ringed byrnie Onela gave to him the war-garments He never spoke about the feud killed.
2615	the brown-colored helmet the old sword made by giants that his kinsman eager-body war-armor. because he his brother's son	for many half-years ⁸⁷³ until when his son might as his fore-father the war-garments when he of old went ⁸⁷⁴
2620	He held the decorated armor the blade and the byrnie the earlship perform gave him then with the Geats un-counted number of everything	Then was the first time that he of the war-race should perform.
2625	wise in way-forth. the young champion with his noble-lord For him the heart-mind [did] not melt	nor his kinsman's heirloom The worm learned that had gone.
2630	after they together Wiglaf spoke said to [his] companions	many right-words his mind was mourning.

⁸⁶⁸ Proverbial statement about the bonds of blood.

⁸⁶⁹ Admirable.

⁸⁷⁰ Beowulf and Wiglaf's family.

⁸⁷¹ Inheritance.

⁸⁷² Carried-away.

⁸⁷³ Seasons.

⁸⁷⁴ Died of old age.

<p> “I remember that time when we promised 2635 in the beer-hall that we him in the war-gear if for him such need [with] helmets and hard swords. for this adventure 2640 he considered us worthy of glories he who us spear-warriors valiant helmet-bearers. this courage-work to perform for us 2645 because he the greatest of men deeds of daring. that our man-lord of good war-men. to help the war-chief 2650 a grim fire-terror. that for me is much dearer with my gold-giver Methinks it not proper after to the home 2655 fell the foe of the leader of the Weders. that old-deeds were not so of the veterans of the Geats fall at fighting. 2660 byrnie and war-shroud He went then through the deadly-reek to the king in support “Dear Beowulf as you in youth-life 2665 that you should not let your glory decline. strong-minded nobleman protect life. After those words </p>	<p> where we consumed the mead to our lord who gave us these rings would repay should come to pass Then he chose us from in the army of his own will and gave us these treasures considered good Though that lord alone thought herder of the folk performed the most glorious Now is the day come has need of the strength Let us go too while heat may be God⁸⁷⁵ knows in me that my body flame should enfold. that we bear shields unless we first may defend the life Surely I know that he alone should suffer affliction We shall [go] with our sword and helmet both in common.” bore the war-head a few words he spoke. do all well said of yore by that living Now you shall with rough deeds with all your might I support you.” the worm came in ire </p>
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⁸⁷⁵ Or good?

- 2670 the horrible malicious-ghost
the foe with fire-surges
the loathed men.
burned the board with the boss.⁸⁷⁶
for the young spear-warrior
- 2675 but the young man
went with courage
by flames consumed.
remembered [his] spirit
with the battle-blade
- 2680 compelled by hostility.
failed at fighting,
aged and silver-colored.
that for him the iron
help at battle.
- 2685 the one that of swords each
with the swing overtaxed
a hard wound weapon
Then was the people's-enemy a third time
the terrible fire-dragon mindful of the fight.
- 2690 rushed on the strong one
hot and battle-grim
with bite bones.⁸⁷⁸
by soul-blood.
when for him room was yielded
it seized all around the neck
He was made bloody
The sweat⁸⁷⁹ welled in waves.
- XXXVII Then I [heard] at need
the people's-king
showed courage
as was in his nature.
but the hand burned
where he helped his kinsman
somewhat lower struck
so that the sword dove [in]
so that the fire began
Still the king himself
- 2695 the earl standing alongside
craft and boldness
He heeded not this head
of the moody⁸⁸⁰ man
so that he the violent-ghost
- 2700 the man in war-gear
shining and gold-plated
then to subside.⁸⁸¹

⁸⁷⁶ The metal center of a Germanic shield.

⁸⁷⁷ Beowulf's sword.

⁸⁷⁸ Teeth. The dragon has bitten Beowulf's neck.

⁸⁷⁹ Blood.

⁸⁸⁰ Spirited.

⁸⁸¹ Then died down.

<p>wielded his wits bitter and battle-sharp 2705 the <i>helm</i> of the Weders cut through They felled the fiend; and they him then both related-nobles. a thane in need! 2710 the last of victories of world works.</p> <p>which on him the earth-dragon began to burn and to swell; that him in the breast 2715 after [venom] on the inside. so that he by the wall sat on the seat how the stone-arch the eternal earth-house 2720 He then with hands the glorious lord his friendly-lord battle sad</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Beowulf spoke</p> <p>2725 the wretched-deadly wound that he the day-whiles the joy of earth of days-numbered “Now I to my son 2730 war-garments any heir belonging to the body. fifty winters; of neighboring peoples 2735 with war-friends to threaten with terror. the time of destiny. nor sought cunning-violence</p>	<p>drew the battle-knife that he carried on the byrnie the worm in the middle. courage took the life, had cut down Such should a man be That for the lord was by [his] own deeds</p> <p>Then the wound earlier worked he soon found that bale-hate welled Then the nobleman went wise-headed saw in the work of giants fast with stone-pillars held inside. blood-stained the thane exceedingly good refreshed with water and unfastened his helmet. he over the wound declared he knew [full] well had experienced then was all departed death exceedingly near. would give were I given such from <i>wyrð</i>⁸⁸² I this people held no folk king was any of them dared to greet me I in the yard awaited I ruled mine well nor me swore many</p>
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⁸⁸² *Wurde*. The Norse Norns also ruled over birth.

- 2775 him loaded in embrace
by his own decree
the brightest beacon.
the edge was iron
that those treasures
- 2780 a long while
hot from the hoard
in the middle of the night
The messenger was in haste
furthered by treasures
- 2785 whether bold of spirit
in the plain-stead
courage-sick
He then with the treasures
his lord
- 2790 at the end of life.
to sprinkle water on him
broke-through the breast-hoard.
- old and grieved
“I for these treasures
- 2795 the world-king
to the eternal lord
for this which I could
before death’s-day
Now I [for] the treasure hoard
- 2800 old life-fate
the need of the people.
order the battle-more⁸⁸⁶
after the bright funeral-pyre
It shall [be in] remembrance
- 2805 a high tower
seafarers
Beowulf’s Barrow
over the flood’s darkness
- cups and dishes
the sign also he took
The blade earlier scathed
the old-lord’s
was the hand-bearer⁸⁸⁴
waged fire-terror
fierce-welling
until that he died from murder.
yearning of the return
anxiety broke him
he would meet alive
the leader of the Weders
where he earlier left him.
the famous chief
found dreary
He began
until that word’s point
- Beowulf spoke
scanned the gold
thank the lord of all⁸⁸⁵
with words I say
which I stare on here
for my people
gain such.
sold my
still attend to
I may not be here long.
to make a mound
at the sea’s cape.
for my people
on Whales-Bluff
[will] after call it;
when the ships
drive from afar.”

⁸⁸⁴ Guardian.

⁸⁸⁵ The final formation - Beowulf himself, a warrior worthy of impersonating, thanks the Christian god for his victory over the dragon.

⁸⁸⁶ Brave.

<p>2810 Did⁸⁸⁷ him from the neck the bold-minded chief to the young spear-man the ring and the byrnie “Thou art the last remnant the Waegmundingas 2815 of my kinsmen earls in courage. That was the old one’s from breast-thoughts hot hostile-flames. 2820 the soul to seek</p>	<p>a golden ring the thane gave the gold ornamented helmet ordered him to use well. of our kin <i>wyrd</i> swept off all to <i>metod</i>⁸⁸⁸ I shall go after them.”</p>
<p>Then happened with difficulty his dear lord was faring wretchedly. 2825 the terrible earth dragon, oppressed by the attack.⁸⁹⁰ worm coiled but him the iron the hard battle-sharp 2830 that the wide-flier felled to the ground Not at all after in the air in the middle of the night appeared the sight 2835 because of the hand-work Few men on land prospered at that even if he in each one of deeds that he could rush against the breath 2840 or the ring-hall</p>	<p>last word before he should choose the pyre From his breast went the doom of the true-fast.⁸⁸⁹</p> <p>that the man of youth he saw on the ground life at end The slayer also lay, bereaved of life By the ring hoard the long wielding no more edge destroyed hammer heirloom with wounds stilled near by the treasure-house. flying moved about proud of treasures but he to the earth fell of the war-chief. however strong as I have heard say were daring of the venomous enemy with hands could stir up</p>

⁸⁸⁷ Took off.

⁸⁸⁸ *Wyrd* continues to have control over death, but the dead are then taken to *metod*, according to Beowulf. Is the character of Beowulf suggesting that *wyrd* works for *metod*? Is the formation now complete? Is Paganism to be replaced by Christianity?

⁸⁸⁹ The fate of the righteous.

⁸⁹⁰ Beowulf and the dragon lay dead near each other. The parallel to Thor and the Midgard Serpent is obvious. See the *Voluspa*.

<p>if he should find residing in the mound. for a portion of the noble treasure each of the two had 2845 of their [loaned] lives.</p> <p>those battle-late the weak traitors those [who] earlier dared not in their man-lord's 2850 but [now] ashamed they war-garments to gaze on Wiglaf. the foot-warrior [so that he] with water should wake him.</p> <p>2855 he might not on earth for the chieftain nor change God's doom would each man</p> <p>2860 Then was the grim answer from the young Wiglaf spoke the man sad at heart "One now may say 2865 that the man-lord warlike-gear when he on the ale-bench to the hall-sitters the lord to his thanes 2870 anywhere far or near that he straightway rashly threw away Not at all the folk-king had need to boast 2875 the ruler of victories⁸⁹¹</p>	<p>waking the warden Beowulf was repaid with death reached the end</p> <p>It was not then long until that left the woods ten together move with spears great distress bore shields to where the aged lay He sat weary near the shoulder of the lord He succeeded not at all. though he should wish well to hold life anything of the ruler. by deeds rule as it now still does. easy to obtain to any one who earlier lost his courage. Weohstan's son looked on the un-loved the one who will truth speak the one you those treasures gave which you there stand in often gave helmet and byrnie such as he the strongest-body might find war-garments that he in war got. to war-comrades yet him god granted that he himself avenged</p>
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⁸⁹¹Reiterating the next step of formation for the audience, the shaper states that the Christian god is the "ruler of victories."

	alone with the edge I him life-protection give at the battle over my means	when to him courage was needed. little might and began as though help my kinsman.
2880	Always was the weaker the deadly-foe[‘s] welled from the head. pressed around the king Now shall treasure-receiving	when I struck with the sword fire un-stronger Of defenders too little when the time came for him. and sword-giving
2885	all enjoyment of home cease. every one of your relatives deprived from afar learn of	gladness with your kin Of the opportunity to land-rights will move about after noblemen your flight
2890	the inglorious deed. for each earl	Death is better than a life of disgrace!
XL	Ordered then that the battle-work	[be] announced to the camp
	up over the edge-cliff the whole morning	where that band of warriors sat heart-sad
2895	board-having the end of days of the man’s life. of the new spells ⁸⁹² but he truly	expecting both and of the aftermath He was not silent the one who rode up to said to all.
2900	“Now is the joy-giver the lord of the Geats occupying that slaughter-rest the life-enemy sick from <i>seax</i> -wounds.	the leader of the Weders fast in the death-bed by the worm’s deeds lies beside him The sword could not in any way ⁸⁹³
2905	on the combatant work a wound. over Beowulf [one] earl over the other holding head-weary	Wiglaf sits the son of Wihstan un-living the death-watch
2910	of the loved and the loathed.	Now is expected by the people

⁸⁹² News, tales, stories.

⁸⁹³ Literally - of any thing.

	a time of war becomes widely revealed the Franks and the Frisians. hard against the Franks	after the fall of the king among The strife was shaped after Higelac came
2915	to fare with the float-army where him the Hetwares ⁸⁹⁴ with courage went so that the byrnied-warrior ⁸⁹⁵ fall ⁸⁹⁶ in the troop.	on Frisian land with battle attacked with superior-force should bow Not at all [were] treasures given
2920	from the lord to the <i>dugoðe</i> . ⁸⁹⁷ by the Merovingians ⁸⁹⁸ Nor I from the Swedish-people in any way [do] not expect that Ongentheow	Afterward to us kindness was denied. of peace or truth but it was widely known deprived the life
2925	of Haethcyn son of Hrethel when for arrogance first sought Soon him the old old and terror-full	within Raven's Wood the Geatish people the War-Scylfings. father of Ohthere gave onslaught
2930	cut down the sea-king the aged wife of old mother of Onela and then followed until that they went-away	rescued [his] bride deprived of [her] gold and Ohthere [his] life-enemies with difficulty
2935	into Raven's Wood He besieged then with the huge-army weary with wounds. to the wretched land said he in the morning	lord-less. the sword-leavings ⁸⁹⁹ He often promised woe all the long night with sword edges
2940	he would gut to amuse. for the sorry-minded	some on the gallows-tree ⁹⁰⁰ Relief after came to pass together with the early-day

⁸⁹⁴ Franks on the lower Rhine.

⁸⁹⁵ Higelac.

⁸⁹⁶ Die.

⁸⁹⁷ Seasoned-veterans.

⁸⁹⁸ Dynastic line of the Franks prior to 751 CE.

⁸⁹⁹ Survivors.

⁹⁰⁰ The Norse god Odin sacrificed himself on a "gallows-tree" to gain the secret knowledge of the ruins. Germanic Pagans are said to have sacrificed prisoners of war, to Odin, on a gallows-tree. Christian missionaries used the imagery of the gallows-tree to describe the crucifixion of Jesus.

	after they heard the sound horn and trumpet 2945 going on the footprint ⁹⁰¹	of Higelac's when the good one came of the people's troop.
XLI	The bloody-track was the deadly-onslaught of men how that folk with him Went him then the good 2950 the old very-sad the earl Ongentheow he had heard bold war-craft that he against the sea-men 2955 with battle-voyagers sons and brides old under the earth-mound. to the people of the Swedes then went forth 2960 after the Hrethelings There was Ongentheow the grey-haired so that the people's-king to Eofor's judgement alone. 2965 Wulf of Wonred so that him from the swing forth under the hair. the old Scylfing with a worse exchange 2970 after the people's-king The bold one could not to the old earl but he him on the head so that he stained by blood 2975 fall on the earth. but he him recovered Higelac's thane the broad sword	of the Swedes and the Geats widely seen awoke the feud. with his kinsmen the stronghold to seek turned farther away of Higelac's battle of resistance he trusted not might fight withstand the hoard he fled after from there Then was chase given the standard of Higelac over the field of refuge pressed forward to the enclosure. with the edges of swords brought to bay should submit He angrily hit with weapon blood in a stream sprang He was not afraid however but quickly repaid [for] the slaughter-stroke turned thither. the son of Wonred give a counter-stroke earlier cut through the helmet should bow, He was not doomed then yet though that wound hurt him. the hard one let [swing] then his brother lay [dead]

⁹⁰¹ Tracking.

<p>2980 the old-sword made by giants broke over the shield-wall. the folk's herder Then were many they quickly reared;⁹⁰³ that they the slaughter-place 2985 Meanwhile reaved⁹⁰⁴ took from Ongentheow the hard-hilted sword the grey armor He those treasures seized 2990 rewards for the people Then the lord of the Geats Hrethel's offspring to Eofor and to Wulf gave to each of them 2995 of land and locked rings. had good reason to reproach him for that gift and then to Eofor he gave home-worthy⁹⁰⁶ That is the feud 3000 the deadly-hate of men when the Swedish people after they hear life-less against enemies 3005 after the fall of heroes worked for the good of the people made ready the earlship. that we the people's-king and bring the one 3010 onto the funeral-pile. melt with the brave un-numbered gold</p>	<p>the helmet made by giants Then the king bowed was mortally wounded. whom his kinsman bound⁹⁰² it was granted them may wield. the others' treasure the iron-byrnie and his helmet together Higelac bore. and to him fairly commanded and such was fulfilled. repaid the battle-storm when he to home came with over-treasures⁹⁰⁵ a hundred thousand No man in the middle-yard since they achieved it with glorious fighting [his] only daughter to wed [pledges] of friendship. and the friendship of which I have [expectation] seek us of our king the one who earlier held the hoard and the kingdom the valiant Scylfings until further still Now is haste best there look upon who gave us rings No one thing shall but there is the treasure hoard grimly purchased</p>
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⁹⁰² Bandaged.

⁹⁰³ Carried.

⁹⁰⁴ Robbed.

⁹⁰⁵ Exceeding-treasures.

⁹⁰⁶ An honor to his home.

	and now at the last bought the rings.	with [his] own life Then shall burning devour
3015	fire enfold treasure to remember have on the neck but shall the mourning-mind often not once	[let] not any earl carry ⁹⁰⁷ nor may lovely [ladies] a ring-worthy bereft of gold tread the foreign-land
3020	now the army-wise amusement and glee[ful]-festivity. many a cold-morning heaved in hands to wake the warriors	lay down laughter Because the spear shall be wound with hands not at all harp music but the black raven ⁹⁰⁸
3025	fuss over the doomed say to the eagle while he with the wolf So the valiant man of loathed spells.	many speak how him at eating succeeded reaved the slaughter. ⁹⁰⁹ was saying He [did] not lie much
3030	of <i>wyrd</i> nor words. went un-joyful [with] welling-tears Found then on the sand hold[ing] the rest-bed	The host all arose under Earna Naes ⁹¹⁰ a wonder to see. soul-less the one who gave them rings
3035	in earlier times by the good one reached the leader of the Weders Earlier they there saw the worm on the plain	then was the end-day so that the war-king died a wondrous-death. ⁹¹¹ the strange creature opposite there
3040	the loathed lay. grimly colored it was fifty long in lying of night's while	The fire-dragon was scorched by flames foot-marks ⁹¹² it held lift-joy ⁹¹³ downward after it went

⁹⁰⁷ Wear.

⁹⁰⁸ The first of the three beasts of battle, the raven, the wolf, and the eagle.

⁹⁰⁹ Robbed (ate) the corpses.

⁹¹⁰ A promontory near the place of the dragon fight.

⁹¹¹ The sort of death a Norse Pagan would desire and believe would grant entrance into Valhalla. Similarly, a hero's death desired by medieval Christians.

⁹¹² Feet.

⁹¹³ It once had the joy of flying.

<p>3045 of the den to nose; it had enjoyed the end By him stood dishes lay rusty eaten through</p> <p>3050 a thousand winters Then was that heritage the gold by men of old so that the ring-hall by any man</p> <p>3055 the truth-king of triumphs he is the protector of men even as whichever of men</p>	<p>XLII</p> <p>3060 ornaments under the wall. the one of few wrathfully avenged. the courage-strong earl of life's-fate</p> <p>3065 a man with his [kins]men So it was for Beowulf sought skilled-hate through what his parting from the world As it until doom's-day</p> <p>3070 deeply declared that the man were confined in the heathen temple⁹¹⁷ tortured by misfortunes The curse on the gold</p> <p>3075 the owner's will Wiglaf spoke "Often shall many an earl</p>	<p>it was then bound by death of the earth-cave. cups and pitchers; and dear swords as they within the earth's-bosom there inhabited. over-crafted⁹¹⁴ wound in a spell could not [be] touched except god⁹¹⁵ [him]self gave the one that he would the hoard to open as him thought proper.</p> <p>that the journey prospered not inside hid The ward earlier slew so that the feud was A wonder it is where then should ferry to the end when long may not reside in the mead-hall. when he the barrow's warden [he him]self [did] not know should come to pass. great princes when that there they did [place]⁹¹⁶ guilty from sin fast in the hell-bonds the one who would plunder the place.⁹¹⁸ was readily had before viewing. Wihstan's son. by the will of one</p>
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⁹¹⁴ Well-crafted.

⁹¹⁵ Could also be "the good" meaning Beowulf.

⁹¹⁶ A curse.

⁹¹⁷ *Hergum* - can also mean "sanctuary."

⁹¹⁸ A complicated sentence meaning that only those with the permission of the hoard's owner may look upon it without being cursed by misfortune.

	endure distress	as is good for us.
	We might not dissuade	the dear lord
3080	herder of the kingdom	by any reason
	that he not greet	the gold-ward
	to let him lie	where he long was
	to reside in the residence	until the world-end.
	He held on[to] high-destiny.	The hoard was examined
3085	grimly gotten.	That gift ⁹¹⁹ was too harsh
	which drove	the one thither.
	I was there inside	and looked over all the
	objects of the hall	when to me it was granted
	not at all gently	the expedition allowed
3090	in under the earth-wall.	I in haste seized
	much with hands	a mighty-burden
	of hard-stores	hither bore out
	to my king.	He was then still living
	wise and witty	a great quantity he spoke
3095	all in care	and ordered to greet you
	bade that you make	after ⁹²⁰ the deeds of the lord
	in the pyre-place	a high barrow
	much and more ⁹²¹	because he the man was
	the worthiest was	around the wide earth
3100	while he of the burg-wealth	could enjoy.
	Let us now hurry	for another [time]
	to see and to seek	the skill-heap ⁹²²
	the wonder under the wall.	I will show you
	so that you enough	[from] near [will] see
3105	the rings and braided gold.	The bier ⁹²³ should speedily
	be made ready	when we come out
	and then ferry	our lord
	the dear man	where he long shall
	in the ruler's	keeping remain.”
3110	Ordered then to bid	the son of Wihstan
	the battle-brave warrior	to many heroes

⁹¹⁹ Or “fate.”

⁹²⁰ In remembrance of.

⁹²¹ Mighty and glorious.

⁹²² The treasure hoard.

⁹²³ Portable cremation frame.

	building-owners should ferry from afar to meet with the good one.	that they fire-wood folk-owners
3115	the dark flame to wax the one who often endured when the storm of arrows shot over the shield-wall with feather-gear ready	“Now shall the fire consume of warriors with strength the iron-shower oppressed with strength the shaft did its duty full-went the arrows.”
3120	Indeed the wise called forth from the troop with some seven he went one of eight of the battle-men	son of Wihstan the king’s thanes the best under the evil-roof one bore in hands
3125	a fire-light Was not then by lot since un-guarded men saw loaned to lie	the one who on point ⁹²⁴ went. who that hoard should plunder any portion in the hall to remain little any mourned
3130	that they hastily dear treasures. ⁹²⁵ the worm, over the wall-cliff the flood to enfold Then was the wound gold	out ferried The dragon also they shoved, let the wave take the herder of treasures. on a wagon led
3135	every one un-counted the grey battle-warrior	the noblemen bore to Hrones Naesse.
XLIII	For him then they geared a funeral pyre on the earth hung the helmet	the people of the Geats the un-weak with battle-boards
3140	with bright byrnies laid then in the midst Heroes lamented They began then on the headland warriors to wake	as was his request the famous king. the dear lord. the greatest of funeral-fires wood-reek rose up
3145	black over the flames wound with weeping until that he the bone-house	the fire roared wind-blowing lay [still] had broken

⁹²⁴ In front.

⁹²⁵ No lots were drawn. No one complained though little was taken.

	hot in the heart.		With un-right ⁹²⁶ minds
	they mourned with heart-care		the death of the man-lord.
3150	Likewise a mourning song		a Geatish woman
	after Beowulf		with bound hair
	sang sorrowfully;		abundantly said
	that she [for] their army-young		sorely dreaded
	a great many slaughters		the terror of the host
3155	injury and captivity.		Heaven swallowed the smoke. ⁹²⁷
	Wrought then		the people of the Weders
	a mound on the promontory		it was high and broad
	by wave-voyagers		widely seen
	and they timbered		in ten-days
3160	the battle-lord's beacon.		The leavings of the flames
	they wrought in a wall		so it the most worthy
	fore-wise men		might find.
	They in the barrow did		rings and jewels
	all such ornaments		as [was] earlier on the hoard.
3165	The hostile-headed man		had taken [it].
	They let the wealth of the earl		the earth hold
	gold in the sand		where it now yet lives
	as unneeded to men		as it earlier was.
	Then around the mound rode		the battle-brave
3170	sons ⁹²⁸ of the nobleman		twelve in all, ⁹²⁹
	they would speak with care		and mourn the king
	recite a wood-song		and speak about the man.
	They considered the earlship		and his courage-work
	deemed [well] his prowess		as it is fitting
3175	that a man his friend-lord		with works should praise
	should love with hearts		when he forth shall
	from the body		be led. ⁹³⁰
	So grieved		the Geatish people
	their lord		hearth-companions
3180	said that he were		of world-kings
	the mildest of men		the kindest of men

⁹²⁶ Sad.

⁹²⁷ Beowulf is cremated like a Pagan, but Heaven swallows the smoke. Is this a way to accept that some Pagans may have been worthy of entering the Christian Heaven?

⁹²⁸ Earlier Beowulf said he had no sons. Here it seems as though he does. Kinsmen is most likely the meaning.

⁹²⁹ Beowulf is mourned by twelve. Is this an allusion to the twelve apostles?

⁹³⁰ By Valkyries? God? Angels?

the most pleasant of people

and the most praise-eager.⁹³¹

⁹³¹ A glory seeker. A hero.

CONCLUSION

“There's nothing in the world more powerful than a good story.
Nothing can stop it. No enemy can defeat it.”

—Tyrion Lannister⁹³²

In this work, I have argued that the *Beowulf* manuscript was not just a piece of literary entertainment, but was, as well, an intentionally influential text written in the oral formulaic tradition to be used in mead-halls across northern England in order to construct a new English Christian identity among the Danish Viking settlers and their Anglo-Saxon supporters. It is a formative epic. Scholars such as D. M. Hadley and Patrick Wormald, conveniently, have called for a work such as this. Hadley calls upon scholars to move past the discourse of how many Danish Vikings settled in the Danelaw and to research a new topic, “[t]he process by which the settlers were accommodated and assimilation was achieved.”⁹³³ Wormald suggests that *Beowulf* “might have important implications for our understanding of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy” and that it might be relevant “for students of religious change in early England.”⁹³⁴ The argument of this dissertation positions itself between these two requests and suggests and, thereby, seeks to advance the academic discourse in that area of research.

⁹³² *Game of Thrones*. Season 8 Episode 6: “The Iron Throne.” Directed by David Benioff and D.B. Weiss. Written by George R.R. Martin, David Benioff, D.B. Weiss, and Gursimran Sandhu. HBO, May 19, 2019.

⁹³³ Hadley, “In search of vikings,” 26.

⁹³⁴ Wormald, “Bede, *Beowulf* and the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy,” 37.

To argue the point, we have connected *Beowulf* to the literary tradition of *The Heliand*, a similar epic with known formative intentions. Studying *The Heliand* through the lens of formative epic, readers can begin to see how *Beowulf* is a formative epic. When comparing them, obvious differences regarding their plots and themes appear. While *The Heliand* is simply a retelling of the New Testament, *Beowulf* makes a seemingly outright and “conscious avoidance of New Testament doctrine.”⁹³⁵ One need only compare the historical contexts of each text to understand why. Yet, the two have similar purposes and use similar strategies: language that admires the culture of the Pagans and allows for multivalent interpretations, and words with meanings designed to evolve and become more Christian.

Having focused on the *Beowulf* manuscript as a work of the tenth century and a product of the English Benedictine Reformation, one recognizes the second contribution of this work — making readers aware of the opposing and yet mirroring historical contexts of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*. Yet, in each epic, one can recognize the continuity of Pagan culture as it encounters Christianity and how that Christianity adopted Pagan culture as well. The Pagan Vikings still ruled the north, and while many of them adopted Christianity, at least nominally, archaeological evidence proves that Norse Pagan culture was still alive and well in the Danelaw. We focused on several key examples — the Borwald’s cross, Jelling brooches, cremation sites, and St. Peter’s (and Thor’s) pennies. What becomes apparent, especially when studying the brooches, is that the Danes were not the only ones perpetuating the Norse motifs; the presumably Christian Anglo-Saxons were as well.

⁹³⁵ Ibid., 39.

The interconnectedness of Pagan and Christian cultures in early medieval northern Europe is apparent and unavoidable. One culture did not supplant the other in rapid succession. Historians have shown us that towns and tribes often moved from one culture to another, as well as participating in each simultaneously. Historians of Europe and Christianity have acknowledged and must continue to acknowledge the complexity of the Pagan / Christian relationship in the medieval period. One suggestion this dissertation hopes to convey is that literary scholars of epic, history, and religion treat *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* in the same manner. Due to the separation in the time and location of these two epics, they are often studied in isolation. Here, in the United States, *The Heliand* is most often read in German Departments and *Beowulf* in English Departments. I submit that there is great benefit in reading the two in tandem and that this should be done not only in departments of German and English, but also in departments of Religion. The two epics contain a wealth of information about history, culture, and religion, far more than I have yet to uncover. In the spirit of scholars before me, I too am calling for interdisciplinary scholars of religion, literature, and history to revisit *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* and to view them in comparison and intertextually, regardless of how different they may seem on the surface.

Arguably, their differences are not as paramount when stacked against their similarities. May I be so bold as to suggest that we cannot truly understand one without reading the other? Their differences are simply due to their historical contexts. And I hope that this dissertation has demonstrated the ways in which they are clear representatives of their respective contexts. The Pagan *Beowulf*, for the Pagan, ruled Danelaw, and the Christian *Heliand*, for the Christian, ruled Saxony. The contextual differences of each epic are extremely important for interdisciplinary

medieval scholars. The forced conversion of the Saxons is a period in Christian history that is too often overlooked. Naturally, as we have seen, many scholars have taken up the burden, but more voices in the discourse could benefit all. Scholars from different disciplines are bound to uncover new evidence, relevant in our contemporary world. Religious violence has in no way been eradicated, and scholars whose focus is on the “common good” and other similar issues potentially could benefit from a better understanding of past actions in which religion was used as a force of domination and suppression. Likewise, a more thorough examination of *Beowulf* and its historical context could highlight other less violent acts of religious propagation.

When *Beowulf* is considered as a formative epic with intentions similar to those of *The Heliand*, its differences are apparent. Christianity in the Danelaw could not be presented in the same manner as *The Heliand* in Saxony. The audience of the Danelaw was far more complex, and the authority of Christian clerics was precariously bound by the good will of Pagan rulers. The tactic of the oral epic was exactly the same, as we have seen, but the story itself had to be different. Hrothgar could thank god, but the wording had to be ambiguous enough to please all parties. The narrating shaper could admonish Pagan ritual sacrifices, but not to any scathing extreme. The shapers could not simply Christianize Sigurd or Sigemund; they had to create a new character who was equally heroic. Beowulf could stand in the place of Sigurd, slay dragons, win cursed treasures, be cremated as a Pagan, represent the Scandinavian heritage, and thank a god who might just as well be the Christian god. The author of *Beowulf* could not present *The Heliand* to Anglo-Scandinavian crowds in tenth-century Danelaw. And he or she could not present a Christian version of *The Saga of the Volsungs*. But he or she could present *Beowulf*, a

hybrid Christian / Pagan text, wherein a Germanic hero was blessed with victory from a Christian god.

Each of the Vikings, regardless of which nation they came from, embraced that Germanic heroic code and would look more favorably on a Christianized character who lived a similar life of glory. Beowulf sought fame, glory, and treasure just as the Danish settlers had. And he subtly adopted some form of Christianity, just as they had. The epic *Beowulf* served its purpose and encouraged, even formed, a collective identity in which Christianity was compatible with the heroic code.

The purpose of *Beowulf*, as I have presented it here, is what makes it similar to *The Heliand*. That purpose was to propagate the Christian faith. It is a purpose which I only recognized when, by happenstance, I was studying *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* at congruent moments in time — which is why I request that other scholars do the same. Reading them in concert, I became certain that *The Heliand* was an epic form of propaganda — which I have here labeled a formative epic — and quite confident that *Beowulf* was as well.

The concept of the formative epic, I hope, will be taken up by literary and interdisciplinary scholars and better defined than I have been able to do so here. With all the differences between *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* there remains a striking similarity in style. Their style is the oral formulaic. The oral formulaic allowed shapers of all calibers to participate in the dissemination of each epic in their own respective territories. The intention of religious and political propaganda hinged on the ability of an aristocratic class to spread its ideologies and the method of dispersal at that time was the oral formulaic. The oral formulaic, coupled with

propagandistic intentions, makes these two texts formative epics that reshape culture and identity.

I am also convinced that one must understand the formative epic in order to make the most of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*. There is, as well, an exciting possibility that scholars of other epics, even more modern ones, will be able to use the characteristics of the formative epic in order to better inform their own research. Could *Ben Hur* or *Moby Dick* be formative epics in their own right? Could the concept be applied to even further reaching pieces of cultural arts? That is for others to decide.

The only decisions this dissertation has made are as follows: 1) There is a type of epic that was written with propagandistic and culture- and identity-forming intentions, which I have designated “formative epics.” 2) *The Heliand* and *Beowulf*, though, we must remember that not all scholars would agree, were probably also written with these propagandistic intentions and can therefore be labeled as formative epics. 3) It may be necessary to study *The Heliand* in order to better understand *Beowulf*. 5) Further discussion of the category of “formative epic” may not only improve our understanding of *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, but may also prove fruitful for interpreting other epics, both historical and modern.

While no incontrovertible argument about *Beowulf* may ever be made, I have attempted to answer the call of the scholarly tradition to take a different approach to the text and have suggested a new way of thinking about the text: reading it in relation to *The Heliand* and with reference to its probable propagandistic and culture-altering intentions in the setting of the tenth-century Danelaw. Such a comparison suggests that *Beowulf* was a culturally formative text — a formative epic — commissioned to construct an English Christian identity. The island’s

identity, at the time of *Beowulf*'s composition, was divided among numerous ethnic groups, languages, and religious beliefs. There was a desire among the English Church and the aristocracy to form a cultural identity that centralized power and supported and sustained their authority, and *Beowulf*, which operated as a text supporting conversion through the formation of an altered cultural memory, was one such tool used to fashion this new identity. *Beowulf* and *The Heliand*, therefore, are not only epic in size and genre, they are also formative epics, used for the formation of collective identity. The development of the concept of a formative epic, with its attention to the cultural elite, is an insight that, I hope, will be explored by other scholars, extending interdisciplinary scholarship of the epic. Many academics already are working with related concepts in their own areas of research.⁹³⁶

Here we looked at the medium of the oral formulaic and how it was used to spread a Christian ideology in an early medieval Pagan world. *The Heliand* helped to form a German Christian identity, and a better understanding of the text's context and intentions informs a new interpretation of the *Beowulf* poem. *Beowulf* was intended to assist in the creation of an English Christian identity. Each work used the epic style and the traditional oral formulaic to disseminate a heroic Christianity which came to inform their respective cultural and geographically collective identities. *Beowulf* and *The Heliand* were formative epics. When studied together, we understand them as such, and that understanding helps articulate a definition of the formative epic — an epic written with propagandistic intentions and used to form and inform collective identities.

⁹³⁶ See for instance Richard Friedman, *The Exodus* (New York: Harper One, 2017), which suggests that the story of the Exodus was experienced and recorded only by the Levites, yet it came to form the memory and identity of all of the Israelites.

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APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Angles - Fifth-century inhabitants of what is now southern Denmark.

Anglo-Saxons - Fifth-century conquerors and settlers of southeastern Great Britain, made up of Angles, Jutes, and Saxons. They ruled a territory relatively consistent with that of modern day England until the Norman invasion of 1066. Speakers of Old English.

Danes - Pre-Christian inhabitants of modern day Denmark and the earliest Vikings who settled in Great Britain in the ninth and tenth centuries. Speakers of Old Norse.

Franks - A western Germanic people who served the Roman military in the third century. After the collapse of Rome they extended their reach to rule what is modern day France, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, and Germany.

Germanic - Early northern European peoples who spoke Germanic languages.

Jutes - Fifth-century inhabitants of what is now northern Denmark.

Metod - (Old English, Old Saxon) - “measure, the measurer” also translated in the Christian sense as “fate, or god.” In the Norse Pagan sense it can be understood as Yggdrasil, the World Tree.

Norns - Norse divinities who control the fates and destinies of humans and gods alike.

Norse - Vikings, speakers of Old Norse. A word used to describe warriors from the North, or Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

Norse Paganism - The indigenous religion of northern Europe which practiced different forms of belief in the gods of the Æsir and the Vanir, as well as the Norns.

Norman - Viking conquerors and settlers of what is modern day Normandy in northern France. The Franks called them Northmen and that name evolved into Normans - “north-men.”

Old English - The written and spoken language of the Anglo-Saxons between roughly the sixth and eleventh centuries, it later evolved into Modern English.

Old Norse - The written and spoken language of the Vikings which later evolved into Modern Icelandic.

Old Saxon - The written and spoken language of the Saxons, closely linked with Old English. It later evolved into Modern German.

Saxons - Pre-Christian Germanic peoples who inhabited what is now northern Germany. They were defeated and forcefully converted to Christianity by Charlemagne in the eighth and ninth centuries. Speakers of Old Saxon.

Skuld - One of the three premier Norns, equivalent with “Present” in terms of the Greek Fates. Her name is derived from the Old Norse verb *verða* meaning “to become.” Skuld means “becoming, or happening.”

Urd - The premier Norn (*Urðr*), equivalent with “Past” in terms of the Greek Fates. Her name is derived from the Old Norse verb *verða* meaning “to become” and is cognate with the Old English *Wyrð*. Urd means “became, or happened.”

Verdandi - One of the three premier Norns, equivalent with “Future” in terms of the Greek Fates. Her name is derived from the Old Norse verb *verða* meaning “to become.” Verdandi means “is to be, or will happen.”

Wurd - (Old Saxon) - It is cognate with the Old Norse *Urd* and the Old English *Wyrð* and is translated by Christians as “fate” and was understood by Norse Pagans as *Urd*, the premier Norn.

Wyrð - (Old English) - It is cognate with the Old Norse *Urd* and the Old Saxon *Wurd*. It is translated by Christians as “fate” and was understood by Norse Pagans as *Urd*, the premier Norn.

APPENDIX B

IMAGES






Image 1: Þorwald's Cross⁹³⁷



The left side depicts the Norse god Odin fighting Fenris at the final battle, known as Ragnarok. The right side depicts a person with a book (the Bible?) and a hammer looking cross (Jesus? A saint? Thor?) battling a serpent (the Midgard serpent? The Devil?). At the bottom is a signature stating that Þorwald raised this cross.

⁹³⁷ "Thorwald's Cross," BBC, *A History of the World*, accessed September 4, 2019. http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/lK4EapVHRgKV_DyFGeDelQ

Image 2: Anglo-Scandinavian Brooches⁹³⁸

Name of brooch (put in classification field)	No. in Kershaw 2010	How to recognise	Sub-period(s) and Date	Examples
East Anglian series	236	Flat. Relief decoration of lozenge and knots.	Late, 850-1000	 NMS-9CA914
Jansson type II	II A: 41 II C: 1 II D: 8	Domed. Borre-style heads. II A: 3 inward-looking heads, rounded trefoil between. II D: triangular centre, 3 outward-looking heads.	Late, 850-950	 NMS-CC7155
Terslev style	32	Slightly domed. Geometric C-scrolls bound by square or circle	Late, 900-1000	 SWYOR-4243E2
Jansson type I	I D: 19 I E: 6 I A: 11 I B: 1 I C: 2	Jelling-style animals. I D: Backward-turned, S-shaped animal I E: Two S-shaped animals I A: Openwork looped animal I B and I C: Single animals of other types	Late, 900-1000	 SF7482  SWYOR-114BB0

⁹³⁸ "Brooches," *Portable Antiquities Scheme*, accessed September 4, 2019.
https://finds.org.uk/counties/findsrecordingguides/brooches-2/#Circular_brooches

Image 3: Anglo-Scandinavian Brooches⁹³⁹

Name of brooch (put in classification field)	No. in Kershaw 2010	How to recognise	Sub-period(s) and Date	Examples
trefoil	74	Flat with three long rounded lobes	Late, 850-950	 LIN-56D731
openwork lozenge	32	Four holes forming cross in lozenge	Late, 850-950	 LIN-DFAF06
bird	7	In the shape of a bird, no cross or crest	Late, 1000-1150	 SF-6E8BFE
oval	10	Large and domed with relief decoration	Late. 850-1000	 LON-F2F201
equal arm	5	Lozenge-shaped terminals, arched bow	Late, 900-1000	 SWYOR-FAFC04 and SWYOR-50BAF5
rectangular	6	With Borre-, Jellinge- or Mammen-style art	Late, 850-1000	 NMS-DE2312
openwork animal	4	Urnes-style animal in openwork interlace	1050-1130	 LIN-F79A53

⁹³⁹ Ibid., accessed September 4, 2019.

Image 4: Saint Peter's Penny⁹⁴⁰

Production of this silver penny began in York in 910. One side (left) depicts a cross and the other (right) displays a sword and a Thor's hammer amulet (bottom).

⁹⁴⁰ "Collection Online," *The British Museum*, accessed September 4, 2019.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=1068678&partId=1

APPENDIX C

ON FALSE GODS

A LITERAL TRANSLATION⁹⁴¹

BY:

Drew Craver

“Alas, formerly it was that through the devil many things went wrong and that mankind too greatly misheard God and that Heathenism all too widely did great harm and it [now] does harm widely. We read not still however in books that any man anywhere erected heathen-idols anywhere in the world in all the time which was before Noah’s flood. But since that it happened that Nimrod and the giants worked⁹⁴² the wonderful steeple⁹⁴³ after Noah’s flood, as so for them came about as many languages, as the book⁹⁴⁴ says, as there was workers. Since then they dispersed widely by land and mankind then soon greatly increased. And then at last [it] happened [that] they [were] deceived through the old devil who earlier deceived Adam long ago, so that they perversely and heretically made heathen gods for themselves and the true God and their own creator scorned whom they as man created and worked.

Then they also took for themselves as wisdom, through the teaching of the devil,⁹⁴⁵ so that they worshipped as gods the sun and the moon for their shining brightness and at last through the devil’s teaching offered them sacrifices and abandoned their Lord who created and worked them. Some men also said about the shining stars that they were gods and began keenly to worship them and some they believed also in fire for its sudden heat, some also in water, and some believed in the earth, because she feeds all things.⁹⁴⁶ But they might readily understand, if they knew reason, that the true God is the one who all things made for us men⁹⁴⁷ to enjoy and to use because of his great goodness which he granted mankind. These created things also all do such as their own creator directed them and nothing may happen without our Lord’s consent, because [there] is no other creator but the one true God whom we believe in and we him alone

⁹⁴¹ For original see: Wulfstan, “De falsis deis,” in *The Cambridge Old English Reader*, ed. Richard Marsden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 203-8.

⁹⁴² Made.

⁹⁴³ The tower of Babel.

⁹⁴⁴ The Bible.

⁹⁴⁵ Literally ‘the devil’s lore’.

⁹⁴⁶ The implication being that the devil tricked humans into worshipping the sun, the moon, the stars, the elements, and the earth as gods and goddesses.

⁹⁴⁷ The word *man* in Old English usage was not as gender-specific as it is in Modern English. Often it is employed when discussing women and clearly had the ability to refer to both men and women in the plural sense as well. See annal 639 in *The Peterborough Chronicle* as an example, where *man* is used while speaking of Ercongota, the daughter of the Kentish King Ercenbright.

over all other things praise and worship with sure faith, proclaiming with mouth and with heart's conviction that [the] true God is the one who all things created and worked.

Yet the heathens would not be beholden to so few gods as they earlier had but took to worshipping at last various giants and violent worldly men who became mighty in worldly-powers and were awe-inspiring as long as they lived, and their own lusts foully followed. One man who was called Saturn was in former days living on the island which is called Crete, and he was so bloodthirsty that he killed his own children, all but one, and unlike a father⁹⁴⁸ destroyed their lives in youth. Nevertheless he reluctantly left one to live, though he killed all the brothers, and he was called Jove and he otherwise became [an] enemy. He expelled his own father after from the same aforesaid island which is called Crete and would readily destroy him if he could. And Jove became so greatly wanton that he married his only sister; she was named Juno and she was reckoned [a] glorious goddess according to Heathenism. Their two daughters were Minerva and Venus. These wicked men⁹⁴⁹ whom we speak about were reckoned for the greatest gods in that day and the heathens worshiped them greatly through the devil's teaching. But, even so, the son⁹⁵⁰ was worshipped more greatly in heathenism than the father was and he is also reckoned [the] most honorable of all the gods whom the heathens in that day had for gods in their error. And he is called Thor by another name among some nations, the Danish people praise him [the] most and in their error worship most earnestly. His son called Mars, he always made strife and contention, and conflict and enmity he stirred up often. After his death the heathens worshipped this wretch even for [a] glorious god and as often as they went to war or wished to fight, then they offered their sacrifice in advance to honor this false god. And they believed that he might help them greatly in the fight, because he loved fighting and war in life.

One man also was called Mercury in life, he was very crafty and, through fully wise-words, deceitful in deeds and in trickeries. The heathens by their reckoning made him also for themselves a greater god, and often at crossroads and constantly through the devil's teaching and to high barrows⁹⁵¹ brought him often various praise-offerings. This false god was honorable even among all heathens in that day and he is called Odin by another name in [the] Danish manner. Now some of the Danish men say in their error that he were Jove, whom they call Thor, Mercury's son, whom they call Odin, but they are not right, because we read in books, you among the heathens [and] you among the Christians, that the hostile Jove in truth is Saturn's son. And some woman called Venus; she was Jove's daughter and she was so foul and so wicked in lust that with her own brother she⁹⁵² copulated, this which men said, through the devil's teaching, and the heathens worshipped that evil [woman] even as a holy woman.

Many other heathen gods were also devised in various ways and likewise even heathen goddesses [were held] in great honor around [the] world⁹⁵³, to ruin mankind, but this was however considered the beginning of Heathenism, though they lived foully in the world. And the scheming devil who ever is treacherous towards mankind brought the heathen men in[to] that high heresy, so that they as vile [people] chose them as gods who [had] made their vile lust as a

⁹⁴⁸ Literally 'unfatherly'.

⁹⁴⁹ Another instance where the *men* word is not gendered and refers here to gods and goddesses, or as Wulfstan insists, men and women.

⁹⁵⁰ Jove.

⁹⁵¹ Burial mounds.

⁹⁵² Literally 'they'.

⁹⁵³ Literally 'middle-earth'.

law for themselves and all lived their life in uncleanness as long as they existed. But he is blessed who all such scorns and the true God praises and worships whom all things shaped and worked. One is almighty God in three parts, that is father and son and holy ghost. All three names encompass one divine might and is one eternal God, ruler and maker of all created things. To him be always praise and honor in all the world, world without end. Amen.

APPENDIX D

MAPS

The following pages contain two maps relevant to this dissertation. Their borders are not entirely accurate, but are representative of regions controlled by the peoples listed inside them. Territorial boundaries often shifted during these time periods and these maps are intended only to aid the reader by providing a rough outline of where specific Germanic groups were living in each respective century.

Figure 1. Fifth-Century Northern Europe

Figure 2. Tenth-Century Northern Europe

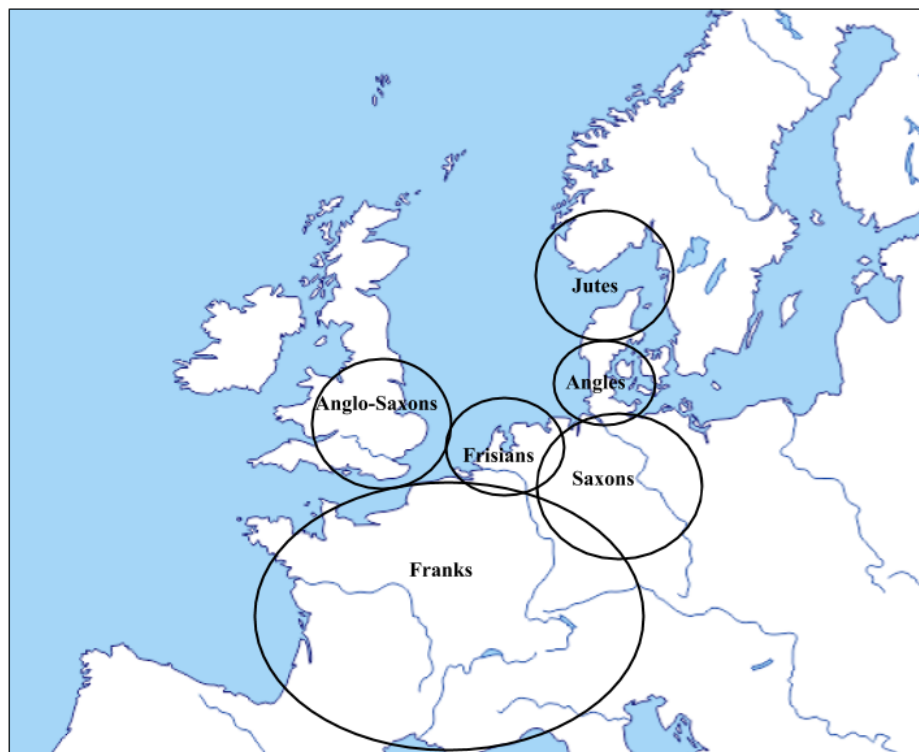


Figure 1

Fifth-Century Northern Europe

<https://www.d-maps.com/m/europa/europemax/europemax05.gif>

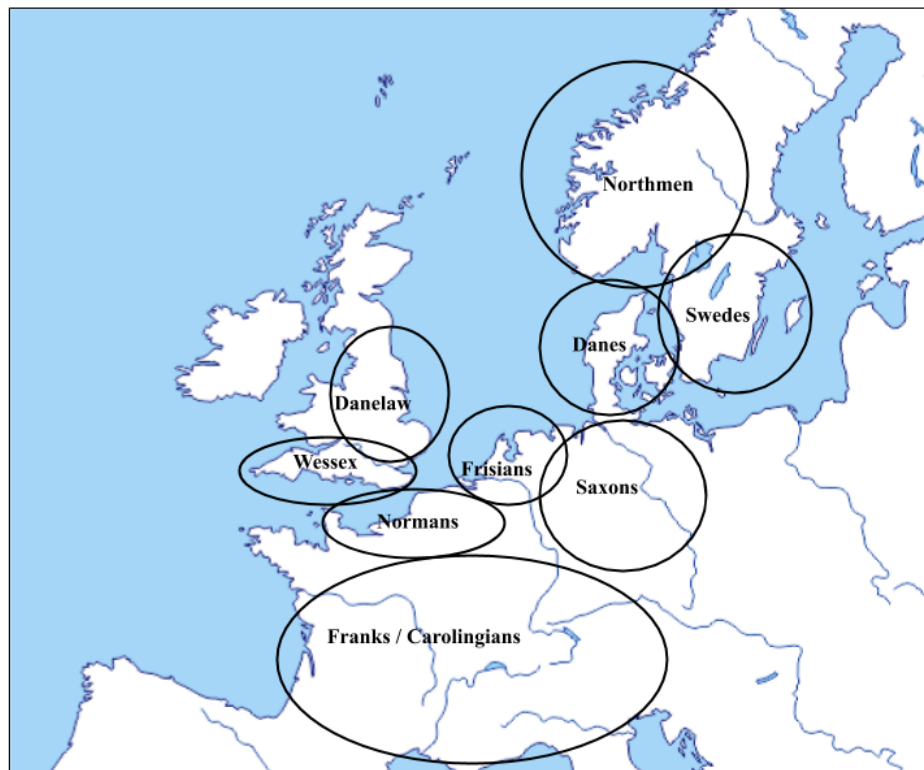


Figure 2

Tenth-Century Northern Europe

<https://www.d-maps.com/m/europa/europemax/europemax05.gif>