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**Creating the Christian Anglo-Saxon and the Other in the Old English *Judith* and *Beowulf***

A Thesis Presented

by

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to

The Graduate School

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements

for the Degree of

**Master of Arts**

in

**English**

Stony Brook University

**May 2012**

**Stony Brook University**

The Graduate School

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Abstract of the Thesis

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This thesis explores the thematic relationship between the Old English poem *Judith* and the Old English epic *Beowulf*. I focus on seven narrative similarities between the two texts that are used to distinguish between the heroes, Judith and Beowulf, and their enemies, Holofernes, Grendel, and Grendel's mother. In doing so, I claim that this *Beowulf-Judith* parallel exists because they define what the Christian Anglo-Saxon is versus what it is not despite the fact that both poems based on stories that are not Christian or Anglo-Saxon in origin. The seven similarities create a Christian Anglo-Saxon us versus them dichotomy as a way to identify the Christian Anglo-Saxon as a distinct identity and culture.

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## Introduction

The *Nowell Codex*, more commonly known as the *Beowulf Manuscript*, contains five Old English texts: a fragment of *The Life of Saint Christopher*, the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, *Wonders of the East*, *Beowulf*, and *Judith*. Since its discovery, most of the scholarship surrounding the manuscript has focused on the works' language and linguistics. Only in recent years have scholars begun to speculate on any thematic relationships tying the texts together. One of the few medievalists to enter this area of study is *Beowulf* scholar Andy Orchard. In his recent book *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*, Orchard explains that "investigation of the relationship to *Beowulf* to the other texts in the manuscript highlights...the interests of the anonymous compiler in assembling what at first glance might seem an eclectic collection of texts."<sup>1</sup> He claims that two themes are present throughout the manuscript: "interest in the outlandish and [interest] in the activities of overweening pagan warriors from a distant and heroic past."<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Orchard focuses his study on *Beowulf* and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, while dedicating only a few pages to the link between *Beowulf* and *Judith*.

This *Beowulf/Judith* link is stronger and more apparent than the connection between *Beowulf* and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* simply because (1) both texts are in verse whereas *Beowulf* is in verse and the *Letter of Alexander to Aristotle* in prose; and (2) the scribe who recorded the latter half of *Beowulf* also copied down *Judith*. Assuming that the scribe had more than just *Judith* to choose from, why would he decide to transition from *Beowulf*, with its three violent and monstrous battles, to *Judith*, a woman saving her people? Like those who

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<sup>1</sup> Orchard, Andy. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Orchard, 27.

theorize on the thematic associations within the *Nowell Codex* as a whole, I believe that *Judith* follows *Beowulf* because of both narrative and linguistic similarities. Some of these are covered by Orchard's monster theory, as well as in the work of Mary Flavia Godfrey, who postulates that "*Judith* was copied and eventually included in the *Nowell Codex* largely because of its thematic and verbal similarities with the episodes of decapitation and dismemberment in *Beowulf*."<sup>3</sup>

But monsters and decapitation do not fully encompass the resemblance of *Judith* and *Beowulf*. The most detailed study of these parallels is perhaps Patricia Belanoff's article "Judith: Sacred and Secular Heroine", in which the author notes at least seven narrative and thematic connections:

The similarities are basically in the narrative lines: (1) both heroes intentionally travel toward their enemies but are brought to the actual decapitation sites by hostile forces; (2) both face inert enemies; (3) both use a sword providentially available; (4) both protagonists' people are described as sad after the audience knows their leaders have been successful; (5) both carry the head to a servant or servants who then bear it to a large body of people; (6) neither describes the decapitation; and (7) the followers of both derive satisfaction from looking upon the bloody sign of victory.<sup>4</sup>

Although Belanoff studies these shared features in great depth, she concentrates primarily on *Judith* and never truly explains *why* these similarities are present in both texts. This thesis will explore the narrative relationships between *Beowulf* and *Judith*, two poems based on stories that are not Christian or Anglo-Saxon in origin, as a way of defining what identifies the Christian Anglo-Saxon versus what does not. In other words, the *Beowulf-Judith* parallel exists because both poems separately aim to create the same *them* versus *us* Christian Anglo-Saxon dichotomy.

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<sup>3</sup> Godfrey, Mary Flavia. "Beowulf and Judith: Thematizing Decapitation in Old English Poetry." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 31.1 (1993): 1-43. JSTOR. 13 Feb. 2012. at 5.

<sup>4</sup> Belanoff, Patricia. "Judith: Sacred and Secular Heroine." *Heroic Poetry in the Anglo-Saxon Period: Studies in Honor of Jess B. Bessinger, Jr.* Ed. Helen Damico, Jess B. Bessinger, and John Leverle. Michigan: Western Michigan Univ. Medieval, 1993. 247-64. at 256.

*Beowulf* and *Judith* derive from sources that are neither Christian nor Anglo-Saxon. *Beowulf* is thought to be Scandinavian in origin, on account of its many Norse analogues, though there is no one particular textual parent, while *Judith* is an Old English version of the Judith tale in the Vulgate. As such, both *Beowulf* and *Judith* are capable of producing a *them/us* dichotomy because “the Anglo-Saxon literary tradition is one in which Christian virtues and pagan heroic diction become gradually intertwined, and the past is constantly reassessed and reinterpreted in the light of the new learning.”<sup>5</sup> The literature of the period was quite literally a merging of the cultures of early Anglo-Saxons and Roman Christians. Texts that straddle this divide, like *Judith* and *Beowulf*, thus serve as “new narratives of cultural identity for a [newly] Christian England.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, original texts are often “altered to conform with specific cultural ideals and expectations,” resulting in the Old English corpus that survives today.<sup>7</sup> Thus *Beowulf* has been able to “generate its own historical context,” one which “has had no small role in defining ‘Anglo-Saxon England’ as a distinct socio-political culture.”<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the *Judith*-poet, for example, “puts a prayer to the Trinity in his heroine’s mouth, sends Holofernes off to a very Christianlike hell, and never recognizes that Judith and her people are Jews.”<sup>9</sup> It was typical for Jewish literary culture to be adapted and refined by the Christian Anglo-Saxon poet because “figural interpretation of the Old Testament allows Jewish narratives to be recast and neutralized

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<sup>5</sup> Orchard, 170.

<sup>6</sup> Liuzza, Roy. “*Beowulf*: monuments, memory, history.” *Readings in Medieval Texts: Interpreting Old and Middle English Literature*. Eds. David Johnson and Elaine Treharne. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2005. 91-108. at 103.

<sup>7</sup> Fee, Christopher. “*Judith* and the rhetoric of heroism in Anglo-Saxon England.” *English Studies* 78.5 (1997): 401-6. *MLA International Bibliography*. 13. Feb. 2012. at 406.

<sup>8</sup> Scheil, Andrew. “The Historiographic Dimensions of *Beowulf*.” *The Journal of English and German Philology* 107.3 (July 2008): 281-302. at 281.

<sup>9</sup> Belanoff, 248.



for a Christian readership.”<sup>10</sup> Scheil’s work explicitly discusses the “understanding of the role Jews and Judaism play in the construction of social identity and the shaping of the literary imagination in Anglo-Saxon England.”<sup>11</sup> It is easy to see, therefore, why Belanoff claims that *Judith* “powerfully unites” the Anglo-Saxon and Christian traditions.<sup>12</sup>

Using this historical cultural given, the characters of Beowulf and Judith represent the Christian Anglo-Saxon *us*, whereas Holofernes, Grendel, and Grendel’s mother<sup>13</sup> become the *them*, those who are not Christian or Anglo-Saxon. This reading can be found echoed in Fredrik Heinemann’s dissertation on the two poems when he states that “the hero and the villain are positive and negative paradigms of heroic conduct, respectively.”<sup>14</sup> While Heinemann is discussing specifically Beowulf and Grendel, this claim is applicable to Judith and Holofernes as well. Their similarity can be summarized nicely—“Grendel’s dam and her son pose a heathen threat to Germanic society (the macrocosm) and to the individual (Beowulf the microcosm) as Holofernes and the Assyrians posed a heathen threat to Israelite society (the macrocosm) and to the individual (Judith the microcosm).”<sup>15</sup> Additionally, this *heathen* threat in Old English literature almost always stems from either Cain, Judas, or Satan, who are the “proverbial epitomes of betrayal, dangerous but external.”<sup>16</sup> Just as Grendel’s mother and Grendel are said to

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<sup>10</sup> Scheil, Andrew. *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England*. Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2004. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel* 9.

<sup>12</sup> Belanoff, 259.

<sup>13</sup> Throughout this thesis, Grendel and Grendel’s mother are mostly conflated into one entity parallel to Holofernes; however, my focus is primarily on the events after the Beowulf-Grendel fight in Heorot.

<sup>14</sup> Heinemann, Fredrik. “Approach-to-Battles Type-Scenes in *Judith*, *Beowulf*, and *Hrafnkels Saga Freysgoda*.” Diss. State Univ. of New York at Stony Brook, 1971. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Chance, Jane. *Women as Hero in Old English Literature*. Syracuse: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1986. 104-5.

<sup>16</sup> Magennis, Hugh. *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996. Print. 19.

be descended from Cain himself, Heinemann notes that the Assyrians of *Judith* “must have been regarded by an Anglo-Saxon audience as aliens or members of the race of Cain.”<sup>17</sup>

I will examine the seven major narrative similarities between *Beowulf* and *Judith* that serve as a template for the them/us dichotomy in early Christian Anglo-Saxon literature as represented by Judith/Holofernes and Beowulf/Grendel/Grendel’s mother. Stemming from Belanoff’s observations, as well as my own, the analysis will focus on: (1) the delivery of Judith and Beowulf to their enemies, Holofernes and Grendel’s mother respectively; (2) Holofernes’ curtain versus Grendel’s and his mother’s underwater cave; (3) the use of the enemies’ swords, conveniently present nearby; (4) the incapacitation of both enemies, Holofernes by drink and Grendel by death; (5) the repeated use of the swords (Judith must strike twice to kill Holofernes; Beowulf slays Grendel’s mother and then cuts off Grendel’s head); (6) the carrying of the head back home by others—Judith’s handmaiden and Beowulf’s servants/retainers; and (7) the absence of the physical act of decapitation in both Judith’s and Beowulf’s speeches to their peoples.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Heinemann, 5.

<sup>18</sup> In *Judith*, not all of the narrative similarities deviate from the original plot in the Vulgate. This does not weaken my argument for the text’s creation of an us/them dichotomy because it is simply adapting a pre-existing us/them dichotomy between the Jews and the Assyrians. As said previously, it was easy for the Christian Anglo-Saxon poet to re-imagine the existing Jewish tales in the Old Testament because so many of the same values were already present. The poem is simply fine-tuned to fit a Christian Anglo-Saxon model instead.

## **Brought to their Enemies**

The first parallel appears when “Beowulf is dragged to the underground cave by Grendel’s mother and Judith is led to Holofernes’ tent by his subordinates.”<sup>19</sup> As Belanoff notes, “neither is brought to the scene by the specific enemy (Grendel, Holofernes) whom they will eventually decapitate.”<sup>20</sup> First is *Judith*:<sup>21</sup>

Ordered then [the one][by] iniquity corrupted  
the blessed maiden [with] haste to fetch  
to his bed, [the one] with bracelets decked,  
[with] rings adorned. They quickly did,  
servants, as them their leader commanded,  
mailed warriors’ lord, instantly advanced  
to the guest-hall where they Judith  
found prudent and then quickly  
warriors to lead began  
the bright maiden to tent the high [one]  
where the powerful [one] himself rested in perpetuity  
at night inside, [to] Saviour hateful,  
Holofernes.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Belanoff, 254.

<sup>20</sup> Belanoff, 254.

<sup>21</sup> References to *Judith* are from *A Guide to Old English*, 7<sup>th</sup> edition, Eds. Bruce Mitchell and Fred Robinson, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007. 313-25. Hereafter cited by text and line number. All translations are my own; original text will be footnoted.

<sup>22</sup> Hēt ðā nīða geblonden  
þā ēadigan mægð ofstum fetigan  
tō his bedreste bēagum gehlæste,  
hringum gehrodene. Hīe hraðe fremedon,  
anbyhtscealcas, swā him heora ealdor bebēad,  
byrnwigena brego, bearhtme stōpon  
tō ðām gysterne þær hīe Iūðithðe  
fundon ferhðglēawe ond ðā fromlice  
lindwiggende lædan ongunnon  
þā torhtan mægð tō træfe þām hēan  
þær se rīca hyne reste on symbel  
nihtes inne, Nergende lāð,  
Hōlofernus. (*Judith* 34b-46a)

In these lines, the poet emphasizes Holofernes' *orders* to his men rather than his own *action*. Combined with the quick and instant response of Holofernes' men, this indicates his power, the fear his men have towards him and the possible repercussions of inaction. His men should follow him willingly, not fearfully, and as such the poet characterizes Holofernes as a warrior who has no true sense of honor, leadership, and camaraderie. He is further alienated through the explicit contrast in the images of himself and Judith. Holofernes is *nīða geblonden*, whereas Judith is *ēadigan* and *ferhðglēawe*. These descriptions nicely distinguish between Judith, the pure and virtuous Christian maiden who is also sensible, and the evil and sinful Holofernes. The sins and un-heroic conduct of Holofernes then continue to be emphasized by references not just to his tent but to his relaxation in bed because this highlights the "physical danger," in other words, the threat of rape or physical intercourse, from Holofernes to Judith.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, it is made clear that this is a man who is *Nergende lāð*, promoting yet again the image of a very un-Christian and Anglo Saxon warrior lord.

Holofernes' representation of the other, the not Christian and not Anglo-Saxon, is intensified through the characterization of his men when they complete their task of delivering Judith to his tent.

They then into bed brought  
 quickly the wise woman;    went the hardhearted [ones];  
 warriors [to] their lord to reveal    that was the holy maiden  
 brought into his pavilion.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Olsen, Alexandra Hennessey. "Inversion and Political Purpose in the Old English *Judith*." *English Studies* 63.4 (1982): 289-93. *MLA International Bibliography*. 13 Feb. 2012. at 292.

<sup>24</sup> Hīe ðā on reste gebrōhton  
 snūde ðā snoteran idese;    ēodon ðā stercedferhðe;  
 hæleð heora hearran cyðan    þæt wæs sēo hālige mēowle  
 gebrōht on his būrgetelde. (*Judith* 54b-57a)

As before with Holofernes, Judith is contrasted with the Assyrians through specific adjectives. While she is *snoteran* and *hālige*, they are *stercedferhðe*. This stresses the indifference of the warriors to Judith’s plight, linking them closer to Holofernes. It has already been suggested that Holofernes is “almost an embodiment of evil”, but now “his own actions are paralleled and supported by those of the entire group.”<sup>25</sup> By having Judith forcibly brought to Holofernes by his warriors, rather than let his eunuch request her presence as in the Vulgate, the poet is able to underscore the negative traits of Holofernes. This also allows him to find these characteristics in Holofernes’ men as well as increase the purity and innocence of Judith. Also in the Vulgate, Judith willingly enters Holofernes’ camp because she plans to seduce him. While the Old English text does not contain the beginning of the Vulgate tale, it still seems clear that the Anglo-Saxon Judith does not intentionally plan to seduce the Assyrian general. She is much more passive, holy, and pure than in the original, aligning her with the other Anglo-Saxon women and female Christian saints. By removing any active and visible sexual aggression, the poet thus widens the gap between them, Holofernes and the Assyrians, and *us*, Judith.

At first glance, it can be said that Beowulf willingly enters Grendel’s cave; however, as with Judith, there are other forces at work:<sup>26</sup>

After these words      the storm-Geats’ leader  
hurried with courage,      not answer  
to wait for wished:      turbulent waters received  
[the] hero.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Campbell, Jackson. “Schematic Technique in Judith.” *ELH* 38.2 (1971): 155-72. *JSTOR*. 13 Feb. 2012. at 158.

<sup>26</sup> References to *Beowulf* are from *Beowulf*, Ed. Seamus Heaney, New York: W.W. Norton, 2000. Hereafter cited by text and line number. All translations are my own; original text will be footnoted.

<sup>27</sup> Æfter þæm wordum      Weder-Geata leod  
efste mid elne,      nalas andsware  
bidan wolde;      brimwylm onfeng  
hilderince. (*Beowulf* 1492a- 1495a)

While Beowulf *efste mid elne* into the water, he truly does not have any other choice. Grendel's mother has attacked Heorot, and Hrothgar practically guilts Beowulf into the fight. The Geat has literally no option other than to plunge into the mere, otherwise his heroism might be doubted. This also creates a stark contrast to Beowulf's earlier fight with Grendel, which he entered without pressure and willingly. Through this narrative sequence the poet is able to begin setting up the *us/them* dichotomy by emphasizing the hero's positive traits.

Nevertheless, once Beowulf enters the mere, Grendel's mother and her sea-creatures usurp his power and control. He, like Judith, is thus brought to his enemy by an outside hostile force. As the earlier section allows the poet to highlight Beowulf, here the negativity and otherness of Grendel's mother are stressed.

[She] grabbed then towards [him]; battle warrior seized  
with [her] terrible clutches; none the sooner injured  
whole body; armor outside protected,  
so that she the war-garment pierce not might,  
locked limb-corselet [with her] loathsome fingers.  
Carried then the water-wolf, when she to [the] bottom came,  
the prince of rings, to dwelling of hers,  
so that he not might, no matter how brave he was  
weapons wield, but him weird creatures so many  
harassed while swimming, many a sea-beast,  
with battle-tusks, battle-coat tore,  
[they] pursued [the] formidable one.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Grap þa togeanes; guðrinc gefeng  
atolan clommum; no þy ær in gescod  
halan lice; hring utan ymbbearh,  
þæt heo þone fyrðhom ðurhfon ne mihte,  
locene leoðosyrca lapan fingrum.  
Bær þa seo brimwylf, þa heo to botme com,  
hringa þengel to hofe sinum,  
swa he ne mihte, no he þæs modig wæs  
wæpna gewealdan; ac hine wundra þæs fela  
swencte on sunde, sædeor monig

Grendel's mother is depicted as attacking Beowulf with *atolan clommum* and *laþan fingrum*. The emphasis on her claw-like hands establishes her as truly brutal and alien, which is further accentuated by her description as a *brimwylf* and by that of her kin as *sædeor* with *hildetuxum*. Just as Holofernes' men match their leader in description, so too do the sea-beasts echo the characteristics of Grendel's mother. Additionally, as in the direct comparison between Judith and Holofernes, the *Beowulf*-poet is able to underline the heroism of Beowulf with adjectives such as *modig* and *aglæcan*. So yet again, by having Beowulf forcibly brought to his enemy, the differences between Beowulf and Grendel's mother are accentuated.

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hildetuxum heresyrcan bræc,  
ehton aglæcan. (*Beowulf* 1501a-1512a)

## Curtain versus Mere

The second narrative similarity, that between Holofernes' curtain and the Grendel family's cave and mere, is not listed by Belanoff because it is not a direct parallel (curtain for curtain or lake for lake); however, as will be seen, the curtain and the lake illuminate each other's characteristics and separate the parallel feature from the rest of the world, yet nonetheless in the end do not provide protection from death. The connection, therefore, does exist, but is simply more metaphorical than the other parallels, since the poets use very different physical objects for one purpose. In *Judith*, the poet describes the curtain, translated often as fly-net from the Old English *flēohnet*, when Judith enters Holofernes' tent:

There was all of gold  
curtain beautiful and about the commander's  
bed hung so that the evil [one]  
might look through, warriors' lord,  
on each [one] that therein came  
[of] men's children, and on him no one  
[of] the race of men, unless the bold [one] someone  
[of the] malice strong [ones][to] him the nearer [should] command  
[of] warriors for private consultation to go.<sup>29</sup>

Interestingly, this description is “different from and far more intense than the ornate description of the *conopeum* in the Vulgate Judith.”<sup>30</sup> As such, the curtain is “an excellent example of the

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<sup>29</sup> Þær wæs eallgylden  
flēohnet fæger ond ymbe pæs folctogan  
bed āhongen þæt se bealofulla  
mihte wlītan þurh, wigena baldor,  
on æghwylcne þe ðær inne cōm  
hæleða bearna, ond on hyne nænig  
monna cynnes, nymðe se mōdiga hwæne  
nīðe rōfra him þē nēar hēte  
rinca tō rūne gegangan. (*Judith* 46b-54a)

<sup>30</sup> Berkhout, Carl, and James Doubledy. “The Net in *Judith* 46b-54a.” *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 74 (1973): 630-4. at 630.



means by which the poet strengthens the contrast between Judith and Holofernes.”<sup>31</sup> First, the gold curtain may be beautiful, but Holofernes erases any trace of positivity by using it for evil purposes. The *Judith*-poet is then able to project Holofernes’ evil character onto the curtain and it thus helps to characterize him as a “heathen idol” or “evil deity” by becoming “the trappings of an idol, a false god.”<sup>32</sup> In essence, Holofernes’ wickedness as a heathen or non-Christian, denounced before, is emphasized through the detailed description of the curtain. Second, Holofernes uses the curtain to distance himself from both his enemies and his followers, and consequently “separates himself socially and politically.”<sup>33</sup> The curtain is both a physical partition between him and his men, and a mental division. Since this “implies Holofernes’ suspicion and distrust of his men”, his dishonor and selfishness, very non-Anglo-Saxon, are revealed.<sup>34</sup> Lastly, while Holofernes seems to employ the curtain as protection, it fails to save him from Judith. In the Old Testament, where the Judith tale originates, nets are frequently used as a figurative device to represent the trapped trickster.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, Holofernes’ *flēohnet* foreshadows his future destruction by Judith and further distinguishes him as an *other*.

The same distinction is made in *Beowulf* through the description of the Grendels’ mere and cave, which are both quite unnatural and evil. Magennis explains that “Grendel and his mother are associated with the wilderness, the unknown and threatening world beyond the stronghold.”<sup>36</sup> This is clearly seen in the descriptions of the land surrounding the lake, as well as the lake itself:

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<sup>31</sup> Berkhout and Doubleday, 630.

<sup>32</sup> Berkhout and Doubleday, 630.

<sup>33</sup> Godfrey, 17.

<sup>34</sup> Berkhout and Doubleday, 631.

<sup>35</sup> Berkhout and Doubleday, 632.

<sup>36</sup> Magennis, 130.

They secret land  
 guard, wolf-slope, windy bluffs,  
 dangerous fen-path, where mountain stream  
 under bluffs' mists downwards departs,  
 water under earth. Not is that far hence  
 of measure by miles, that the lake stands;  
 over them hang frost-covered groves,  
 a forest firm [in its] roots water overshadows.  
 There may one each of nights fearful wonder see,  
 fire on water.<sup>37</sup>

The imagery of this location is not exactly positive. First, it is immediately associated with Grendel and his mother through the use of the word *wulfhleopu* because, as seen earlier, “wolf” is used to describe Grendel’s mother as well. Second, because the land is *dygel* and placed within a valley, it alienates the Grendel family from the rest of the world and forces them to remain “isolated from humanity.”<sup>38</sup> Third, between the *windige næssas*, the *frecne fengelad*, and the combination of both ice and fire, two of the harshest, yet opposite, elements, this place is shown to be extremely unwelcoming. By combining the traits, the poet is able to create a “hostile environment” and a “place of danger.”<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, like Holofernes’ curtain in *Judith*, the lake and its surrounding land separate the Grendel family from humanity while providing them with a

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<sup>37</sup>Hie dygel lond  
 warigeað wulfhleopu, windige næssas,  
 frecne fengelad, ðær fyrgenstream  
 under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,  
 flod under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon  
 milgearnearces, þæt se mere standeð;  
 ofer þæm hongiað hrinde bearwas,  
 wudu wyrtum fæst wæter oferhelmað.  
 Þær mæg nihta gehwæm niðwundor seon,  
 fyr on flode. (*Beowulf* 1357b-1366a)

<sup>38</sup> Chance, Jane. “The Structural Unity of Beowulf: The Problem of Grendel’s Mother.” *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature*. Eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen. Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1990. 248-61. at 257.

<sup>39</sup> Magennis, 132.

supposed layer of protection, which then allows the poet to highlight the extreme otherness of Grendel and his mother as opposed to Beowulf.

Grendel's lake serves to emphasize this *us/them* dichotomy with further descriptions of its unnaturalness and its inhabitants:

Water with blood boiled --- people saw ---  
with hot gore. Horn at times sang  
urgent army-song. Troop all sat.  
Saw then after [on] water serpent-kin many  
strange sea-dragons water explore,  
likewise on cliff-buffs sea-monsters lie,  
that in morning-time often undertake  
sorrowful journey on sail-way,  
serpents and wild-beasts.<sup>40</sup>

The image of a lake not actually of water, but boiling blood and gore, is extremely frightening, easily summed up as “the environs of hell.”<sup>41</sup> As if that were not enough to sway favor towards Beowulf, just knowing that the hero must enter such treacherous waters garners added sympathy for him. Orchard suggests, “that several of the physical features of the home of Grendel and his mother should match those of the Otherworld is scarcely surprising, given the poet’s constant identification of Grendel with demonic forces.”<sup>42</sup> In other words, these additions simply imply

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<sup>40</sup> Flod blode weol --- folc to sægon ---  
hatan heolfre. Horn stundum song  
fuslic fyrdleoð. Feþa eal gesæt.  
Gesawon ða æfter wætere wýrmcynnnes fela,  
sellice sædracan sund cunnian,  
swylce on næshleoðum nicras licgean,  
ða on undernmæl oft bewitigað  
sorhfulne sið on segrade,  
wyrmas ond wildeor.  
(*Beowulf* 1422a-1430a)

<sup>41</sup> Clemons, Peter. *Interactions of Thought and Language in Old English Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995. 25.

<sup>42</sup> Orchard, 39.

that the lake is even more supernatural, mysterious, and evil than was indicated before, but this is expected given the classification of the Grendel family as “other”. In addition, the *Beowulf*-poet is able to expand on the heathen character of the lake by adding *sellice sædracan*, *nicras*, *wyrmas*, and *wildeor*. Therefore, as before, the connection between the monsters and Grendel’s family is strengthened, clearly establishing them as other by the addition of the lake, just as the curtain in *Judith* isolates Holofernes.

## Incapacitation

The third shared feature in *Beowulf* and *Judith* that serves this function is what Belanoff terms the “inert” enemy.<sup>43</sup> *Judith*, Holofernes

Fell then [with] wine so drunk  
the powerful [one] in his bed in the middle as if he not knew of reasons not any  
in mind.<sup>44</sup>

He is so drunk that he cannot function, nor is even capable of defending himself against a woman. This stress the poet places on Holofernes’ inebriation highlights his position as the other. In Anglo-Saxon culture and literature, drinking is an important aspect in the image of the hall, which was a “place of feasting...drinking together and of the joys of society, connoting warmth, brightness and fellowship.”<sup>45</sup> However, while there was “no moral objection to drunkness,” most of the great heroes “are never shown as overcome by drink.”<sup>46</sup> Thus in *Judith* it is not the feast and the drinking that is problematic, but the *amount* consumed. Holofernes does not simply have a few drinks, he consumes so much alcohol that he is not in any right state of mind, and as such is not a true Anglo-Saxon because he dies drunk in bed without honor. At the same time, he is also not Christian because of his drinking: “Anglo-Saxon Christian teaching with regard to alcohol accepts the place of drinking in communal life but condemns excess.”<sup>47</sup> Consequently, “the general emphasis in Christian tradition...is on moderation...the sinfulness of

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<sup>43</sup> Belanoff, 254.

<sup>44</sup> Gefēol ðā wīne swā druncen  
se rīca on his reste middan swā hē nyste ræda nānne  
on gewitlocan. (*Judith* 67b-69a)

<sup>45</sup> Magennis, 43.

<sup>46</sup> Magennis, 51.

<sup>47</sup> Magennis, 53.

drunkenness...is unexceptionable.”<sup>48</sup> Combining Anglo-Saxon and Christian values, Holofernes’ drunkenness would be considered disgraceful and sinful.<sup>49</sup> So by creating a vulnerable and easy enemy, the poet is thus able to introduce Holofernes as distinct from Judith, distinguishing sharply between them.

In *Beowulf*, the inert enemy is Grendel, assumed dead after his battle with Beowulf. Interestingly, while Beowulf does, as Godfrey claims, “cut off the head of a corpse”, the description of the decapitation seems to indicate that there is one small, tiny spark left in the creature.<sup>50</sup> This is very similar to the almost-dead Holofernes after Judith’s first attempt at beheading him.

He him for that reward repaid,  
fierce warrior, to the extent that he in resting place saw  
battle-weary Grendel lie,  
lifeless, as him before had harmed  
battle at Heorot. [The] body widely burst open,  
when he after death blow suffered,  
sword-stroke strong, and [he] him then from head cut off.<sup>51</sup>

The translation here cannot clarify whether Grendel is actually dead because both adjectives, *aldorleasne* and *guðwerigne*, grammatically apply to Grendel and not Beowulf, who could technically also be weary from his battle with Grendel’s mother. Thus it is plausible that at this

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<sup>48</sup> Magennis, 57.

<sup>49</sup> While the attitude toward drinking is much harsher in the Vulgate because of Jewish culture, the disgust is retained because it works appropriately for the Old English poem as well.

<sup>50</sup> Godfrey, 21.

<sup>51</sup> He him þæs lean forgeald,  
reþe cempa, to ðæs þe he on ræste geseah  
guðwerigne Grendel licgan,  
aldorleasne, swa him ær gescod  
hild æt Heorote. Hra wide sprong,  
syþðan he æfter deaðe drepe þrowade,  
heorosweng heardne, ond hine þa heafde becearf. (*Beowulf* 1584b- 1590b)

moment, the poet intended Grendel to be alive, yet almost comatose. This then parallels *Judith* since both heroes decapitate their unresponsive enemies. Establishing this similarity is important because, as in *Judith*, the *Beowulf*-poet is able to comment on the otherness of Grendel through this description. Unlike Grendel, no human would have been able to survive the wound inflicted by Beowulf. And certainly no human would be able to make it all the way back home after having an arm torn off. This unnaturalness is further emphasized when Grendel's body, seemingly on its own, bursts open even after death. Moreover, as for Holofernes, Grendel's inertness also implies a dishonorable and cowardly death not during battle. Therefore, the narrative creation of a lifeless enemy allows the poet to highlight the differences between Beowulf and Grendel.

## Swords

The fourth parallel involves the weapons used to kill and decapitate Holofernes, Grendel's mother, and Grendel. These weapons do not belong to either Judith or Beowulf. As Belanoff notes, it is obvious that both employ "a sword in the possession of their antagonist."<sup>52</sup> This is a fascinating addition to the *us/them* narrative structure since Judith and Beowulf are unable to kill their enemies with weapons of their own. Granted, it would be highly unlikely for Judith to have been allowed to enter Holofernes' tent with a weapon; however, her use of his sword is still remarkable because there are other weapons she could have used to kill her enemy.

Seized then with braided hair  
Creator's maiden sharp sword,  
[from] battles hard, and from scabbard drew  
[with the] right hand;<sup>53</sup>

It is assumed that the *scearpne mēce* is Holofernes' because tradition dictates that he would keep his sword nearby for protection. Unfortunately, like his curtain which fails to protect him, his own sword hastens his demise and further emphasizes his otherness because only evil undoes evil. This conclusion is confirmed when the poet refers to Judith as *Scyppendes mægð* as she handles the sword. Judith is clearly under the protection and guidance of God, and it seems as if her action is quite literally guided by God, making a dramatic contrast with the passivity of her opponent.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Belanoff, 254.

<sup>53</sup> Genam ðā wundenlocc  
Scyppendes mægð scearpne mēce,  
scūrum heardne, ond of scēaðe ābræd  
swīðran folme; (*Judith* 77b-80a)

<sup>54</sup> This aspect of the Old English *Judith* is one that was not changed by the poet from the Vulgate. As stated earlier, the retention does not necessarily weaken my argument. Having Judith use Holofernes' sword instead of her own weapon distinguishes her Jewish self from the Assyrian general in the Vulgate



In *Beowulf*, there is an even stronger emphasis on the sword of the other because Beowulf's own weapon, Hrunting, lent to him by Unferð does not work during the fight with Grendel's mother. Luckily, or providentially, Beowulf discovers a sword:

Saw then among war-gear      victory-blessed sword,  
ancient sword formed by giants      [with] edges firm,  
warriors' heirloom;      that was of weapons choicest,  
except it was more      than any man other  
to battle-play      to carry would be able,  
noble and splendid,      giants' handiwork.<sup>55</sup>

This weapon, belonging to Grendel's family, is thus clearly associated with giants. In case giants were not otherworldly enough, the sword is also described as an object beyond what human craft can produce. And this unnaturalness continues when it melts after the hero kills Grendel's mother and decapitates Grendel. According to Orchard, this melting is described "in the same way that ice melts in the spring thaw by the authority of God...The notion that this sword-hilt, the work of giants, should be inscribed with the details of their demise can again be paralleled in patristic sources."<sup>56</sup> In other words, in early Christian writings, which often borrowed from the Jewish Old Testament, it was common to hear of evil creatures destroyed by an act of God. The *Beowulf*-poet therefore, while using a non-Christian source, incorporates his religion into the narrative through the weapon of an other, emphasizing further the difference between the hero and his opponents.

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with similar results to the Old English version. Thus it does not require any change, other than a stronger emphasis on Judith's Christian and Anglo-Saxon rather than Jewish nature.

<sup>55</sup>Geseah ða on searwum      sigeeadig bil,  
eald sweord eotenisc      ecgum þyhtig,  
wigena weorðmynd;      þæt wæs wæpna cyst,  
buton hit wæs mare      ðonne ænig mon oðer  
to beadulace      ætberan meahte,  
god ond geatolic,      giganta geweorc. (*Beowulf* 1557a-62b)

<sup>56</sup> Orchard, 66-7.

## Decapitation

Like the second similarity, the fifth parallel is not listed by Belanoff, but I find it useful in the comparison of the two poems: both Judith and Beowulf use their swords twice on their enemies. Judith strikes Holofernes twice before she succeeds in killing him:

Struck then braided-hair [one]  
the enemy [with] stained sword,  
hateful [one], so that she half cut through  
the neck [of]him so that he in swoon lay dead,  
drunk and wounded. Not was then dead still,  
entirely lifeless [one]; struck then earnestly  
woman courageous [a] second time  
the heathen dog so that [from]him the head rolled  
forth onto the floor.<sup>57</sup>

We notice the amount of description that the poet is able to include because the death scene is, one might say, repeated. This creates a further distinction between the *ellenrōf* Judith and the *heteponcolne* Holofernes, a *hæðenan hund*. Second, the two strikes reaffirm Judith's, and God's, power over Holofernes. By not killing him in one blow, the poet denies Holofernes an easy death. He is, instead, slaughtered, and experiences an end that is tortuous and not honorable. Additionally, with the immediate second blow, Holofernes is also denied the ability to speak before he dies—there is no chance for repentance. Third, Olsen argues that this extended death scene “shows that the poem is intended to galvanize the men into action by shaming those

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<sup>57</sup> Slōh ðā wundenlocc  
þone fēondsceaðan fāgum mēce,  
heteponcolne, þæt hēo healfne forcearf  
þone swēoran him þæt hē on swīman læg,  
druncen ond dolhwund. Næs ðā dēad þā gyt,  
ealles orsāwle; slōh ðā eornoste  
ides ellenrōf ððre sīðe  
þone hæðenan hund þæt him þæt hēafod wand  
forð on ðā flōre. (*Judith* 103b-111a)

noblemen in the audience.”<sup>58</sup> While she discusses primarily the overall decapitation and does not remark on the two blows, her claim still applies because Judith’s need to strike twice would highlight her innocence, with the same effect Olsen suggests. Judith’s innocence is emphasized because a lethal and trained warrior would have only needed one blow where she needs two, indicating that she is not a natural killer. Combined, these imply the segregation of Holofernes from the poet’s ideal cultural character.

On the other hand, in *Beowulf* there are two separate uses of the sword. First, Beowulf kills Grendel’s mother, and then he decapitates Grendel. Since I have already established that the possibly posthumous decapitation of Grendel increases the distance that separates him from Beowulf, this section will focus on the death of Grendel’s mother.

He seized then belted-sword hilt, bold man of Danes  
 fierce and deadly grim, ring-marked sword drew  
 of life despairing, angrily struck,  
 so that her her against neck hard struck,  
 bone-rings broke; sword fully went through  
 doomed body; she on floor fell dead,  
 sword was bloody, warrior in deed rejoiced.<sup>59</sup>

Just like Holofernes’ death in *Judith*, this narrative set-up allows the poet to focus on how different Grendel’s mother is. The imagery of her death is quite brutal in the description of her neck bones breaking and the bloody sword, yet Beowulf rejoices. With this action, it is clear that Grendel’s mother is not to be pitied despite being a female and a mother. This would be contrary

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<sup>58</sup> Olsen, 293.

<sup>59</sup>He gefeng þa fetelhilt, freca Scyldinga  
 hreoh ond heorogrim, hringmæl gebrægd  
 aldres orwena, yrringa sloh,  
 þæt hire wið halse heard grapode,  
 banhringas bræc; bil eal ðurhwod  
 fægne flæschoman; heo on flet gecrong,  
 sweord wæs swatig, secg weorce gefeh. (*Beowulf* 1563a- 1569b)

to the norm, and still is, because the killing of women, proper mothers and wives, would definitely not have been considered permissible—far less so than the killing of men, which was considered “normal”. As a result, it is clear that Grendel’s mother is to be considered wholly unlike the typical Christian Anglo-Saxon female. As with Grendel’s own unnatural death and decapitation, discussed above, the poet is able to stress the dichotomy between her and her killer.

## Return Home

The sixth common element occurs when Judith and Beowulf return to the Bethulians and Heorot, respectively. Both heroes do not carry the severed heads themselves. This action is delegated to others, Judith's handmaiden and Beowulf's servants/men, specifically lower-rank and unnamed. In *Judith*, once Holofernes is beheaded,

Then the wise woman quickly brought  
the warrior's head so bloody  
in the pouch in which her attendant  
fair-cheeked woman, [of] them both food,  
[in] traditional ways well-versed, thither brought,  
and it then thus gory [to] her in hand gave [back]  
[to the] prudent [one], home to carry,  
Judith [to] her younger [attendant].<sup>60</sup>

Instead of carrying the bag herself, Judith transfers this responsibly onto her *foregenga*. This change in social status devalues Holofernes since he was once quite rich and powerful—much more so at least than the handmaiden. Holofernes' status continues to be degraded when his head is placed into their food bag, indicating the objectification of the man even in death through the association of Holofernes with something that is simply consumed. Additionally, by switching carriers, the poet is able to place the characteristics of both Judith and her handmaiden in opposition to Holofernes. As established in my earlier discussion, the descriptions of Judith and Holofernes are in clear conflict with each other. So when the handmaiden enters the action, with adjectives such as *higeðoncolre*, it is as if Judith's heroism and virtue are now passed on and

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<sup>60</sup>Þā sēo snotere mægð snūde gebrōhte  
þæs herewæðan hēafod swā blōdig  
on ðām fætelse þe hyre foregenga,  
blāchlēor ides, hyra bēgea nest,  
ðēawum geðungen, þyder on lædde,  
ond hit þā swā heolfrig hyre on hond āgeaf,  
higeðoncolre, hām tō berenne,  
Iūðith gingran sīnre. (*Judith* 125a-132a)

merged with her handmaiden. Similar to the parallel characterization of Holofernes and his men, Judith's handmaiden echoes Judith's own noble virtues. This is also further stressed when Judith speaks to the Bethulians, yet has the handmaiden reveal Holofernes' head. So, yet again, with this narrative detail, the poet is able to emphasize the otherness of Holofernes from Judith and her handmaiden, the *us*.

While in *Judith* it takes only one to carry the head in place of the hero, in *Beowulf* it takes four. Initially, Beowulf swims from the cave back to the shores of the lake, towing the head behind him; however, from the lake to Heorot, this action is transferred to his retainers.

Journeyed forth thence on walking-track  
in hearts rejoicing, [they] earth-path traversed,  
well-known street; king-bold men  
from the ocean-crag head bore  
with effort for each of them  
very bold [ones]; four had to  
on the war-shaft with difficulty carry  
to the gold hall Grendel's head,  
until at once to hall came  
bold valiant [ones] fourteen  
Geats walking; man-lord with [them]  
courageous in crowd mead-place trod.<sup>61</sup>

First, very similarly to Judith and her handmaiden, this diminution in social status from the worthy and important Beowulf to his company of unnamed followers, emphasizes the

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<sup>61</sup>Ferdon forð þonon fepelastum  
ferhpum fægne, foldweg mæton,  
cupe stræte; cyningbalde men  
from þæm holmlife hafelan bæron  
earfoðlice heora æghwæþrum  
felamodigra; feower scoldon  
on þæm wælstenge weorcum geferian  
to þæm goldsele Grendles heafod,  
oþ ðæt semninga to sele comon  
frome fyrdhwate feowertyne  
Geata gongan; gumdryhten mid  
modig on gemonge meadowongas træd. (*Beowulf* 1632a-44b)

degradation of Grendel. This is an enemy who, as his decapitation already suggests, is not worthy of the hero or a procession—it is not a parade glorifying Grendel. Second, with the specification of the change in carriers, instead of just Beowulf returning with the head himself, the poet can stress the physical distance between Grendel's cave and Heorot. This separation increases Grendel's and his mother's otherworldliness, which is further highlighted by the number of men it takes to carry Grendel's head. It alone requires four men to haul it back to Heorot, a detail that can only be added once the poet passes the head from Beowulf to the men. The need for that many men clearly indicates how unnaturally large Grendel had been and as a result, how alien when compared to humans.

## Victory Speeches

The final common element appears in Judith's and Beowulf's addresses to their peoples, in the course of which they both display the severed heads, but never describe "the actual decapitation."<sup>62</sup> Judith, in the following speech, explicitly draws physical attention to Holofernes' head:

Here you all may openly, victorious warriors,  
people's leaders, on the most hostile  
heathen warrior's head gaze,  
[that] of Holofernes not living,  
who to us of men most of crimes brought about,  
of painful sorrows, and that more exceedingly still  
to increase wished, but him not allowed God  
longer life so that he with wrong us  
torment might; I him [of] life deprived  
through God's help.<sup>63</sup>

After this speech, in which she does not mention her beheading of Holofernes but still displays the result, Judith moves on to encouraging the Bethulians to go to war and retaliate against the Assyrians. Choosing not to remind her audience about what she had to accomplish physically, Judith is able to distinguish an *us*, Judith and the Bethulians, and a *them*, Holofernes and the Assyrians. In other words, she is allowed to exhibit the head because it is an object lesson, "an occasion for exhortation" while still demonstrating "rhetorical finesse" by not agitating her

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<sup>62</sup> Belanoff, 255.

<sup>63</sup> Hēr gē magon sweotole, sigerōfe hæleð,  
lēoda ræswan, on ðæs lāðestan  
hæðenes headðorinces hēafod starian,  
Hōlofernus unlyfigendes,  
þe ūs monna mæst morðra gefremede,  
sārra sorga, ond þæt swyðor gyt  
ycan wolde, ac him ne ūðe God  
lengran līfes þæt hē mid læddum ūs  
eglan mōste; ic him ealdor oðþrong  
þurh Godes fultum. (*Judith* 177a-186a)



listeners.<sup>64</sup> The intention is to provoke the Bethulians to fight and redeem themselves, rather than to proclaim triumph for Judith herself. This rhetorical device allows the *Judith*-poet to distance Holofernes as the evil other from Judith through physical sight, yet simultaneously to elevate Judith in her honorable and virtuous treatment of her people.

Beowulf follows the same speech pattern. He presents Grendel's head to Hrothgar and his people, yet never actually describes the decapitation. This omission is further emphasized when Beowulf tells of his fight with Grendel's mother but still does not mention beheading Grendel.

Lo, we to you this sea-booty, son of Healfdane,  
 leader of Danes, joyfully brought,  
 as a token of glory, which you here look at.  
 I with difficulty alive endured,  
 battle under water, deed dared  
 arduously; nearly was  
 battle ended, except [that] me God shielded.  
 Not could I in battle with Hrunting  
 not at all perform though the weapon is worthy;  
 but to me granted ages' Wielder,  
 that I on wall saw splendid hang  
 ancient-sword powerful --- often is guided  
 [the one] without protectors--- so that I the weapon drew.  
 Killed [I] then at the battle, when to me time [was] right  
 house's guardians. Then the battle-sword  
 was consumed, decorated [one], as that blood sprang,  
 hottest war-gore. I the hilt thence  
 from enemies carried off; crimes avenged,  
 the slaughter of Danes, as it fitting was.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Godfrey, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Hwæt, we þe þas sælac, sunu Healfdenes,  
 leod Scyldinga, lustum brohton  
 tīres to tacne, þe þu her to locast.  
 Ic þæt unsofte ealdre gedigde,  
 wigge under wætere, weorc geneþde  
 earfoðlice; ætrihte wæs  
 guð getwæfed, nymðe mec God scylde.  
 Ne meahte ic æt hilde mid Hruntinge  
 wiht gewyrcan, þeah þæt wæpen duge;  
 ac me geuðe ylða Waldend,  
 þæt ic on wage geseah wlitig hangian

As already seen in *Judith*, “many of the same strategies of selective elision [are] operative” in Beowulf’s recap.<sup>66</sup> This allows the focus to shift from the physical deed of decapitation to the “successful martial prowess against a vanquished enemy.”<sup>67</sup> By excluding this climax, the poet shifts the attention to the epitome of the hero—Beowulf. It downplays his opponent, Grendel, while accentuating the Geat’s daring vengeance, placing the two in direct opposition. Instead of retelling the beheading, Beowulf relates his fight with Grendel’s mother. This allows the *Beowulf*-poet to highlight the unnaturalness of that fight, as well as the she-monster’s wholly different nature. As in *Judith*, displaying the head, rather than speaking of it, draws a stronger emotional response from Beowulf’s audience. Consequently, this rhetorical omission in the narrative structure of *Beowulf* is able to establish the intended contrast between Beowulf and the Danes on one side and Grendel and his mother on the other that separates Christian Anglo-Saxon from non-Christian, non-Anglo-Saxon.

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ealdsweord eacen    –oftost wisode  
winigea leasum—,    þæt ic ðy wæpne gebræd.  
Ofsloh ða æt þære sæcce,    þa me sæl ageald,  
huses hyrdas.    Þa þæt hildebil  
forbarn brogdenmæl,    swa þæt blod gesprang,  
hatost heaþoswata.    Ic þæt hilt þanan  
feondum ætferede;    fyrendæda wræc,  
deaðcwealm Denigea,    swa hit gedefe wæs. (*Beowulf* 1652-1670)

<sup>66</sup> Godfrey, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Godfrey, 5.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the seven major narrative similarities between *Beowulf* and *Judith* discussed above serve as a template for a them/us dichotomy. Both poets use sources that are not Christian or Anglo-Saxon in origin and adapt them to define what creates a Christian Anglo-Saxon hero and what does not, as represented by Judith and Beowulf, and the heroes' enemies, respectively. Judith and Beowulf are heroic, holy, noble, and strong as opposed to the sin-invested, evil, treacherous, and ignoble Holofernes, Grendel, and Grendel's mother. But why does this *othering* occur? Why did the poets of two separate tales feel the need to alter or elaborate their sources to distinguish a Christian Anglo-Saxon identity?

To understand why an Old English poem would contain a *them/us* dichotomy, it is first important to recognize why people in general create an other. This concept of the creation of an other is found predominately in post-colonialism. Post-colonial theory mainly discusses the negative cultural and political legacies of colonialism and imperialism; however, for my purposes what is valuable is not the negativity but simply the creation of identity. Basically, we create an other on the basis of certain traits that we view as opposed to our own, and many different categories influence this creation. "Along with race, ethnicity, and sexuality, these categories [gender and class] interdependently organize social hierarchies, individual identities, and cultural relations of power."<sup>68</sup> Scholar Roy Liuzza takes a similar approach: "social groups, whether families, clubs, gangs, schools, ethnic subcultures, or nations, define their identity in various ways: kinships, rituals and religious practices, a shared language, common customs and

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<sup>68</sup> Lochrie, Karma. "Gender, Sexual Violence, and the Politics of War in the Old English *Judith*." *Class and Gender in Early English Literature*. Eds. Britton Harwood and Gillian Overing. Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994. 1-20. at 1.

traditions.”<sup>69</sup> His ideas can be echoed by medievalist Lisa Lampert-Weissig who cites historian Robert Bartlett and his book *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization, and Cultural Change, 950-1350* when she defines “race” as emphasizing “linguistic, legal, political, and cultural affinities over somatic features.”<sup>70</sup> In summary, people categorize themselves and others on the basis of a variety of different categories from race to language to traditions. And finally, these theories also resonate with what Anglo-Saxon scholar Nicholas Howe calls the migration, cultural, and origin myth. As he explains, this myth is “a remembered story that endures because it does not lose its hold over a people’s imagination.”<sup>71</sup> In a specific culture then, this story “inspires its [a culture’s] imaginative works” while creating a “belief that there is a vital connection running through the stages of a people’s history.”<sup>72</sup> It therefore stands to reason that oftentimes when an origin myth develops and defines itself, there are others who end up being excluded.

So how does this apply to medieval literature? According to Lampert-Weissig, “studies stretching back over decades have demonstrated that we can indeed identify conceptions of nation in medieval thought” despite the common belief that the concept of a nation is “a distinctly modern one.”<sup>73</sup> Thus it is possible to apply the creation of cultural and national identities to medieval society and literature. This then explains why Lochrie believes that “by intersecting the categories of gender and class,” and I would also add other important categories

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<sup>69</sup> Liuzza, 95.

<sup>70</sup> Lampert-Weissig, Lisa. *Medieval Literature and Postcolonial Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 2010. 69.

<sup>71</sup> Howe, Nicholas. *Migration and Mythmaking in Anglo-Saxon England*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1989. 4.

<sup>72</sup> Howe, 4.

<sup>73</sup> Lampert-Weissig, 15.

such as religion and customs, “we are also striving to make visible the regulatory effects of these categories of individual and collective identities.”<sup>74</sup>

Accordingly, one of the more well-defined medieval identities is that of the Christian Anglo-Saxon, which is most often found in the heroes of Old English literature. “The business of this poetry [Old English] was social continuity. It placed social action of the past in a general perspective in order to show its relevance in the present.”<sup>75</sup> This modification of the past came from multiple sources. For example, “Christianity seems have accommodated rural customs...fairly easily, simply by replacing older sources of symbolic power with new Christian ones.”<sup>76</sup> There is even evidence in Anglo-Saxon literature of a “deep, cultural consciousness of the Roman past.”<sup>77</sup> Anything that came before, whether Roman Christian, the Jewish Bible, or German/Norse warrior tradition, was therefore adapted and refined to create a literature that would resonate with the identity of the Christian Anglo-Saxon audience. Hence why Howe theorizes that “to study the Anglo-Saxon myth, then, is to examine both a culture’s re-ordering of its past and also some of the finest expressions of its imagination.”<sup>78</sup>

So how did the Christian Anglo-Saxon identity develop? Even though the Christian Anglo-Saxons were a “Christian people...the most ingrained, most resolutely remembered fact...was that the Anglo-Saxons were descended from Germanic tribes.”<sup>79</sup> This meant that poets had to merge all of these past identities, Christian, Roman, Germanic, etc., into one, and to do so,

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<sup>74</sup> Lochrie, 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Clemoes, xi.

<sup>76</sup> Liuzza, 102.

<sup>77</sup> Lerer, Sean. ““On fagne flor”: the postcolonial *Beowulf*, from Heorot to Heaney.” *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages*. Eds. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005. 77-104. at 78.

<sup>78</sup> Howe, 6.

<sup>79</sup> Howe, 12.

they needed a model. “For early medieval writers, both in England and on the continent, the favored model was to be found in the Old Testament history of the Jews.”<sup>80</sup> Old English versions of the Exodus story and the Judith tale, all from the Vulgate, are thus slightly, or significantly, edited and translated to better account for the Anglo-Saxon cultural and religious history with Christianity. In conjunction with the Christianizing of Germanic and Norse pagan myths, like *Beowulf*, the Christian Anglo-Saxon myth is then fully formed for its people. And, as a not-so-unexpected consequence of such an endeavor, *others* are created.

Essentially, the Old English poets created this self, and as an expected result, also produced the identity of the Christian Anglo-Saxon other. As result, in creating this “origin myth” they produce “an account of that ancestral past” which then in turn provides the Christian Anglo-Saxon with a “irreducible common identity.”<sup>81</sup> The other develops not out of the negative desire to demonize other cultures, nations, or peoples, but out of the positive desire to establish what comprises the Christian Anglo-Saxon versus what does not.

Returning to *Judith* and *Beowulf*, both poets in attempting to define the Christian Anglo-Saxon also create an other. The seven narrative parallels between the two poems can then be seen as a template that allows non-Christian and non-Anglo-Saxon sources to be adapted to reflect the values of the present culture. The similarities highlight the important values and beliefs of the Christian Anglo-Saxon in *Judith* and *Beowulf* because they construct characters different in nature from those who are devalued, Holofernes, Grendel, and Grendel’s mother. Thus this dichotomy helps the poets connect to their Christian Anglo-Saxon audiences through visualizations of specific national and cultural traditions, beliefs, and social customs.

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<sup>80</sup> Howe, 26.

<sup>81</sup> Howe, 5.

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