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Imagining the Monstrous: the Persistence of Alterity in Popular Culture

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These have been drafted, then peer-reviewed by fellows in the same seminar group, then revised and submitted under student number only for blind peer review by students from the *other* seminar group. Each group (one comprised of nine students, the other of ten) then assessed the submissions they had received, and spent a two-hour seminar discussion choosing six essays to form the issue of the student journal for which they were responsible. Final revisions were suggested for each submission, and the results appear below; the General Editor has standardized the appearance to a certain degree but has not altered the content or format of each submission. Ownership of this part of the course's work remains therefore with its students. To this end, issue title and introduction, and selection and sequence of its essays in no way represent "the best essays" in the course in the opinion of the course instructor, but instead are the result of deliberation, organization and responsibility for the process of creating a journal that belong to the students themselves.

For Issue One, see below. For Issue Two, click on this link.

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INTRODUCTION

The six studies included in this issue survey the ‘humanoid’ as ‘monster’ on popular culture, as part of a continuum of classical, early medieval and Anglo-Saxon sources influencing modern media. Christopher Gray blurs the distinction between the heroic and the monstrous by exploring the hero’s monstrous characteristics in *Conan the Barbarian* (1982) and *Beowulf*. Ashley Martin’s study of *The Onion Girl* (2001) blends ancient and modern images of the *cynocephalus* by examining the shifting border between dream and reality. *The Tempest*’s Caliban and *Beowulf*’s Grendel form the focus of Lyndsey Darling’s sympathetic look at kin-relations of monstrous figures. Chelsea Day’s essay sets modern aliens against ancient fears by examining *The War of the Worlds* (2005) within the context of fantastical travel literature. Melville’s classic adventure novel *Moby-Dick* (1851) is re-examined in terms of societal alterity through a variety of sources by Patricia Life. Finally, Erika Fagerdahl presents the Other as ‘saint’ by comparing the *cynocephalic figure* of St Christopher with the central character of the film *Powder* (1995), who both use their monstrosity for purposes of good, despite their oppression by a society which ultimately rejects and destroys them. This collection, as chronologically disparate as it may be, unifies issues of alterity across cultural boundaries of space and time.

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THE IDENTIFICATION OF ALTERITY THROUGH WORDS AND DEEDS
OR

Bæt word mara micle þonne se sweord

Christopher Gray
Champlain College

In this way the ego is for the first time confronted with an ‘object’, something that exists ‘out there’ and can be forced to manifest itself only through a particular action.

Sigmund Freud

How does one articulate alterity? In order to communicate this ‘otherness’ one needs words. These words may be descriptive, but, if there is going to be a story, there has to be some verbs. Therefore, alterity is made known through deeds and the words that describe them. However, through repetition, the words themselves become deeds.

Conan the Barbarian avails itself of the wealth of mythology and folklore that has come before it. It grows out of the age-old tradition of the warrior king, a tradition that celebrates deeds in the form of stories, in words. Although *Conan the Barbarian* pulls from many different sources, it is notably indebted to *Beowulf* and to the *Liber Monstrorum*. In certain passages of these texts it is difficult to discern the hero from the monster. Not only are both hero and monster uncommonly large, but both also commit savage acts of violence. If both hero and monster are large and violent, there must be a distinct difference that allows for the distinction between man and beast. It must be then, the execution of these deeds that is the difference.

Conan is orphaned as a small boy by the murder of his mother and father. He is enslaved immediately thereafter. Like Beowulf, Conan ‘ærest wearð / feascaft funden.’¹ They both grow into successful warriors and eventual kings, and their worthiness of kingship is proven through victories and brute strength. The common element of alterity displayed by Conan and Beowulf, what separates them from other warriors, is their tremendous strength and physical superiority. Conan is a ‘tall man, at once strong and supple,’² possessed of a ‘massive body’³ and ‘superior physical strength.’⁴ His size and strength attribute to his flawless record as a gladiator. That he never loses as a gladiator simply means that he was never killed in a match – he killed first. This physical superiority is achieved in the film by casting Arnold Schwarzenegger as Conan. At the time of the movie’s filming Arnold was a bodybuilder in peak physical condition.

Conan’s strength is made clear through his physique and by his many victories. So too is there frequent mention of Beowulf’s tremendous strength:

Se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest
on þæm dæge þysses lifes
*æbele ond eacen*⁵.

Beowulf is the strongest man alive, capable of great feats of strength and endurance. It is said:

¹ *Beowulf: An Edition*, ed. Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd., 1998), ll. 6b-7a: ‘first was / found a wretch.’ (All translations by the author).

² Howard, Robert, *Conan the Adventurer* (New York: Prestige Books, 1966), p. 23.

³ Howard, 34.

⁴ Howard, 36.

⁵ ll.196-198a: ‘he was of mankind, the strongest of strength, in the day of this life, noble and mighty.’

*þæt he þritiges
 manna mægen-cræft on his mundgripe
 heþorof hæbbe⁶.*

There is no explicit mention in *Beowulf* of Beowulf's size, however, there is evidence outside the poem and inference within it. Beowulf is a Geat, a thane loyal to the Geatish king Hygelac. Hygelac appears in the *Liber Monstrorum*'s first book: '*Et fiunt monstra mirae magnitudinis, ut rex Higlacus, qui imperauit Getis et a Francis occisus est, quem equus a duodecimo aetatis anno portare non potuit.*'⁷ That Hygelac is extraordinarily large, implies that the Geats are a large race. If this is true, there is no need to describe Beowulf as uncommonly large because size is implicit in his nationality.

The *Liber Monstrorum* further illuminates *Conan the Barbarian*. Monsters in the *Liber Monstrorum* are often enormous. Monsters pose a threat to humans because they are large and dangerous. So then, if monsters are large and dangerous, and Conan and Beowulf are large and dangerous, are Conan and Beowulf monsters? Given the phrase '*fiunt monstra mirae magnitudinis, ut rex Higlacus*,'⁸ it is very plausible that they are monsters. However, the *Liber Monstrorum* makes an important distinction between men and monsters: '*non tamen monstrum, sed homo monstruosa magnitudine fuit.*'⁹ A man may be of a monstrous size, but he still remains a man. So then, if Conan and Beowulf are arguably men of monstrous size, what separates them from 'monsters'?

The difference between heroes and monsters is displayed through *worda ond worca*.¹⁰ For Conan, what is best in life is 'to crush your enemies, see them driven before you and to hear the lamentation of the women.'¹¹ Fame is the desired ultimate goal:

*domes ær deaþe; Wyrces se þe mote
 unlifgendum þæt bið drihtguman
 æfter selest.¹²*

Heroism is in deeds, however, Conan's deeds are often violent, Beowulf's likewise. The monsters that Conan and Beowulf face also commit violent acts. Even though violent and savage acts are committed by both Conan and his enemies, by both Beowulf and his, there is a difference in the manner of execution. Quite simply, heroes are men that carry weapons while monsters are men that carry themselves as weapons. Conan's primary adversary is Thulsa Doom, the sorcerer who is said to be one thousand years old. The standard used by his cult is a black sun with two snakes gathered about it. Thulsa Doom is connected with night and darkness: 'Now they will know why they are afraid of the dark. Now they learn why they fear the night.'¹³ This directly connects with *Beowulf*, in which '*under mīsthleoþum / Grendel gonan.*'¹⁴ Grendel attacks Heorot at night. Thulsa Doom thrives under darkness. In the dark everything is unknown, everything is to be feared. Thus monstrosity is usually tied to darkness.

⁶ ll. 379b-381a: 'that he, the strength of thirty men, the brave in battle one has in his handgrip.'

⁷ Orchard, Andy, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the 'Beowulf' Manuscript* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1995), p. 258: 'And there happens to be monsters of extraordinary size, such as King Hygelac, who ruled the Geats and by the Franks was struck down, whom a horse was not able to carry from twelve years of his life.'

⁸ My emphasis.

⁹ Orchard 284: 'Nevertheless not a monster, but a man who was of a monstrous size.'

¹⁰ l. 289a: 'words and deeds.'

¹¹ *Conan the Barbarian*, (Prod. Constantine Conte. Dir. John Milius, Universal, 1982).

¹² ll. 1387b-1389: 'may he who can achieve fame before death; that is best to the warrior after the end of life.'

¹³ *Conan the Barbarian*.

¹⁴ ll. 710b-711a: 'under the misty slopes / Grendel walked.'

that, *'tantam vim eius uenenum habere arbitrantur, ut eo licet ferri acies intincta liquescat.'*²¹ Both heroes and monsters are big and both heroes and monsters kill. It is important then, that heroes bear weapons into battle. Weapons physically separate heroes and monsters – weapons keep the monster at a distance. Weapons are the last form of borders that the hero can impose.

The importance of borders is evident in *The Wonders of the East* and in Pliny's *Natural History*. The seventh book of the thirty-seven volume *Natural History* deals with the monstrous races of men. Herein monsters are typically introduced in terms of geography, most of them being located in Africa and India. Likewise, what is important about *The Wonders of the East* is that the title immediately places the wonders in far-flung regions, creating an object other of the East. This creates a comfortable distance, so that there is no immediate threat of danger. From this standpoint, a scientific study of monsters can be affected, one completely lacking moral judgement. The Roman can comfortably consider the strange races of men in India and Africa as having 'been made by the ingenuity of Nature as toys for herself and marvels for us.'²² Entertainments or curiosities that pose no immediate threat as the aspects of monstrosity

do not disgust him as they might have done earlier Greek writers; he has a Roman tolerance for and joy in human diversity, and seems in Book 7 to take a special pleasure in describing the monstrous races of men.²³

However, at the same time, the characteristics of these monstrous races of men

diverged sufficiently from Western men to evoke very little feeling of brotherhood or empathy. The sense of the alien or 'other' in the marvelous races of the East was so great as to disqualify them, in the Greco-Roman view, from the epithet 'men.'²⁴

This tolerance may be a product of the distance from the subject, at the same time, however, this distance divorces any sense of empathy leading to potential xenophobic sentiments. To further illustrate this, compare the Old English word *gist*²⁵ and the Latin word *hospes*²⁶. That which is other, unknown is either to be welcomed or feared, either stranger or guest.

The importance of borders grows out of a need for separation. Distance is a prerequisite to tolerance: when distance is removed, fear overwhelms all. Pliny writes with significant disgust concerning monstrous births that occur within the city. A child born with monstrous peculiarities was not allowed to 'touch Roman soil.'²⁷ Instead it was exiled and abandoned beyond the city walls. The monster must remain 'out there'. This means that there is an extreme level of discomfort when boundaries are broken down, once borders are transgressed. It is clear that there are xenophobic sentiments to these classical texts, and it is clear that some elements of monstrosity are carried on from generation to generation. It follows, then, that this xenophobia is also passed down and hence can be seen working in both *Beowulf* and *Conan the Barbarian*.

²¹ Orchard 300: 'so much strength they consider its poison to have, that even if the point of iron is dipped there, it melts.'

²² Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. Henry Rackham, 3 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), p. 527.

²³ Friedman, John Block, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 8.

²⁴ Friedman, 84.

²⁵ Mitchell and Robinson 264: 'stranger, guest.'

²⁶ *hospes*, itis **m a**) visitor, guest; **b**) entertainer, host; **c**) stranger, foreigner; **d**) one unacquainted with.

²⁷ Friedman, 179.

Conan is an orphan, but he can always identify himself with his homeland. He is not just Conan, he is Conan of Cimmeria. Likewise, Beowulf is not trusted until his ancestry is known. Beowulf is not allowed council with Hrothgar until after this announcement:

*Eow het secgan sigedrihten min
aldor East-Dena þæt he eower æpelu can
ond ge him syndon ofer sæwylmas
heardhicgende hider wilcuman.²⁸*

Identification discerns whether a *gist* is a stranger or a guest. *Conan the Barbarian* begins with Conan's village being ambushed and razed. The uninvited Thulsa Doom storms in, kills everyone and takes Conan's father's sword. When Conan is old enough to exact his revenge, he sneaks into Thulsa Doom's lair uninvited, upon which Doom remarks: 'You broke into my house, stole my property, murdered my servants and my pets. And that is what grieves me the most.'²⁹ As in *Beowulf*, conflicts do not happen on neutral ground. Grendel commits his atrocities within Hrothgar's hall, Heorot:

*Swa fela fyrena feond mancynnes
atol angengea oft gefremede,
heardra hynða, Heorot eardode
sincfage sel swearthum nihtum.³⁰*

Conflict follows the unannounced transgression of borders. Battles take place on either the hero's land or the monster's land. Since the territory upon which the battle unfolds shifts, neither the hero nor the monster is the sole transgressor. This recalls the importance of weapons. The weapon is an ersatz boundary: it is clear to an audience that the hero is the combatant wielding a sword rather than a talon.

The importance of weapons calls mind the Riddle of Steel discussed in *Conan the Barbarian*. As a child, Conan is told that the only thing in life that can be trusted is steel. It is apparent, however, that as trustworthy as steel can be, it can still let the hero down. Thulsa Doom tells Conan that 'steel isn't strong; flesh is stronger.'³¹ To illustrate this, Thulsa Doom coaxes a young girl toward him, leading her off of a cliff. He shows through this that real power is the 'strength and power of flesh. What is steel compared to the hand that wields it?'³² Important battles must be fought without weapons that artificially impose borders. Beowulf relinquishes his sword to demonstrate his power against Grendel:

*Hæbbe ic ac geahsod þæt se æglæca
for his wonhydum wæpna ne recceð.
Ic þæt þonne forhicge.³³*

Rather than strike at one that is impervious to weapons, Beowulf chooses otherwise:
ac ic mid grape sceal

²⁸ ll. 391-394: 'To you he ordered to tell, victorious lord of mine, lord of the East-Danes, that he knows your lineage, and ye to him, over the surging seas, brave minded ones, hither ye are welcome people.'

²⁹ *Conan the Barbarian*.

³⁰ ll. 164-167: 'And so many crimes, the enemy of mankind, terrible lone-walker, often performed, harsh humiliations; he occupied Heorot, the treasure-decked hall, in the dark nights.'

³¹ *Conan the Barbarian*.

³² *Conan the Barbarian*.

³³ ll. 433-435a: 'Also have I learnt, that the adversary, because of his rashness, cares not for weapons. I then disdain that.'

*fon wið feonde ond ymb feorh sacan,
lað wið laþum.³⁴*

Steel is powerful but, just as the Riddle of Steel says, it is the hand that wields the sword that is most powerful. Thus hand to hand combat is necessary. Much emphasis is placed on the power of the hand: Beowulf continually trusts the strength of his grip, and he also trusts that victory will go to the hand that deserves it:

*ond swa hwæþere hond halig dryhten
mærdō deme swa him gemet þince.³⁵*

Just as Thulsa Doom says, the power of the hand is more than just the hand, it is the power of the flesh itself. Before Beowulf's arrival, Grendel kills the young Hondscioh: '*Ðær was to Hondscio / hild onsæge.*'³⁶ The name Hondscioh means 'glove;' from this derives the modern German word, *handschuh*, also meaning 'glove.'³⁷ A glove is a covering for the hand, a covering for the flesh. Victory cannot go to a gloved hand; victory can only go to the bare hand of Beowulf.

However, this flesh against flesh contact poses a danger, that of the complete obliteration of borders. During these hand to hand battles it becomes hard to distinguish one from the other, such as in the fight in Heorot:

*nam þa mid handa Forð near ætstop,
rinc on ræste, higebihtigne
feond mid folme; him ræhte ongean
inwitþancum he onfeng hraþe
 ond wið earm gesæt.³⁸*

There is confusion in this passage as to who is who. The fight occurs in the dark, and the audience is also kept in the dark by the use of veiled personal pronouns. Beowulf recounts the episode as: '*Ðær unc hwile wæs / hand gemæne.*'³⁹ This suggests that during hand-to-hand combat there is a mingling of hero and monster by the use of the dual pronoun '*unc.*' This pronoun means 'we two.' Beowulf and Grendel herein equally occupy the same grammatical space, they are two sides of the same coin: it is as if one cannot exist without the other. The image of Beowulf and Grendel's oneness is furthered by the hand that they share being expressed as a singular noun. What an intense image!⁴⁰

Conan the Barbarian and *Beowulf* prove that boundaries are necessary to distinguish what is monster and what is (monstrous) man. Borders are threatened, transgressed and obliterated, but victory is nothing more than a violent reestablishment of these boundaries. This is a continual cycle of fame and

³⁴ ll. 438b-440a: 'But I with my grip shall, grapple with the enemy, and for life contend, foe against foe.'

³⁵ ll.686-687: 'and so to whichever hand, the holy lord may adjudge the glorious one, such as to him may seem fitting.'

³⁶ l. 2076: 'There was to Hondscio, the fatal attack.'

³⁷ *Beowulf*, trans. Roy Liuzza (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000), p. 116.

³⁸ ll. 745a-749: 'Forward, nearer, he advanced, then he took with his hand the strong-hearted warrior in his resting place, he reached against him, the foe with the palm of his hand; he took quickly, with hostile intentions, and pressed against the arm.'

³⁹ ll.2137: 'There was, for a while, our hands in common.'

⁴⁰ Stevens, Wallace, "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself", *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), p. 534: 'This is, therefore, the intensest rendezvous. / It is in that thought that we collect ourselves, / Out of all the indifferences, into one thing.'

glory. However, this examination of alterity within modern and ancient sources neglects something. It is a representation of the thing, but what about the thing itself? Heroes and monsters are defined by their deeds; if the deed is great enough, it becomes memorialized in words. But to what ends? For Conan, it is because of his victories that ‘honour and fear were heaped upon his name.’⁴¹ Similarly, Beowulf the King says of himself:

	<i>Ic ðas leode heold</i>
<i>fiftig wintra;</i>	<i>næs se folccyning</i>
<i>ymbesittendra</i>	<i>ænig ðara</i>
<i>þe mec guðwinum</i>	<i>gretan dorste,</i>
<i>egesam ðeon.</i> ⁴²	

Fame, then, is fear. A ‘god cyning’⁴³ is more than just a ruler, he is one who instills fear in others: a good king is one who is not attacked. This fear is the product of words, the telling and retelling of the deeds. In this way there is a transformation of words themselves into deeds, the telling of the deed is analogous to the deed itself. The spoken word carries as much gravity as the enacted deed. Shrewdness is a balance between words and deeds: neither brute strength alone nor intelligence alone are enough. Compare the following two passages:

	<i>Æghwæpres sceal</i>
<i>scearp scyldwiga</i>	<i>gescad witan</i>
<i>worda ond worca</i>	<i>se þe wel þenceð;</i> ⁴⁴

<i>þenden wordum weold</i>	<i>wine Scyldinga,</i>
<i>leof land fruma</i>	<i>lange ahte.</i> ⁴⁵

Conan the Barbarian does not put as much emphasis on the power of the word, but this is not to fault Conan. Conan is a noticeably inarticulate hero, but this is due to Schwarzenegger’s unfamiliarity with English at the time of filming. Conan’s intelligence is conveyed in other ways, such as the strategy employed during the preparation for the final battle, in which ‘two stood against many.’⁴⁶

In *Beowulf*, words are wielded just as weapons are. It is perhaps no surprise that the first word of the poem is ‘*Hwæt!*’⁴⁷ This is of especial importance when thinking about the actual act of speaking the poem. Do certain messages have a dual function, acting as an element to the story as well as a lesson to the audience? For example, note the following passage:

<i>Nu ge moton gangan</i>	<i>in eowrum guðgetawum</i>
<i>under heregriman</i>	<i>Hroðgar geseon;</i>
<i>lætað hildebord</i>	<i>her onbidan</i>

⁴¹ *Conan the Barbarian*.

⁴² ll. 2732b-2736a: ‘I have ruled these men, for fifty winters; there was not a folk-king, of neighbouring peoples, of any of them, that with swords dared to attack me, or threaten me with fear.’

⁴³ l.11b: ‘good king.’

⁴⁴ ll. 287b-289: ‘A shrewd shield warrior must understand each of the two, words and deeds, if he thinks well.’

⁴⁵ ll. 30-31: ‘As long as he controlled with his words, the friend of the Scyldings, the king of that dear land, ruled long.’

⁴⁶ *Conan the Barbarian*.

⁴⁷ ‘Listen!’

wudu wælsceaftas

*worda gepinges.*⁴⁸

The spoken word then, in and of itself, is a competitive deed. The competitor's stories were told by the *scops*. The *scop* is a very important figure. Throughout *Conan the Barbarian* there is narration, and throughout *Beowulf* the *scop* sings of deeds. It is possible that the *scop* learned the tales from being in battles himself. In some Anglo-Saxon literature

the scop is spoken of as a warrior, and it is probable that he upon occasion engaged in the battle side by side with those to whom he sang. It is quite likely that in the primitive society of the time of which we speak the profession of arms was by no means so clearly differentiated from that of song.⁴⁹

Anderson's thesis on the Anglo-Saxon *scop* goes on to detail the power the *scop* wielded with his words, 'that the singer exerted a powerful influence upon public opinion.'⁵⁰ The *scop* is both a poet and a warrior⁵¹; from this it can be inferred that the act of speaking is a battle in and of itself, and the victor is the one who could more successfully 'wordhord onleac.'⁵²

This creates another boundary. The *scop* has an esteemed place in society, he is raised above others. Therefore, he himself is a figure of alterity. Alongside the ability to 'spin a good yarn' is the divisive ability of literacy, the ability to write a story down and to read it later, to captivate and sway an audience:

I, the poet, prophet, pray'rful,
Weapons wield for warriors slaying:
Tell of triumph, laud forthcoming
Future fame in soaring story!⁵³

There are many layers to alterity. There is the required monstrosity as well as the subsequent representations of it. Through the telling and retelling of stories, mirrors are held up not only to ourselves, but eventually to the mirrors, creating a vortex of representation upon representation. These representations of alterity invest themselves further and further back into the mirrors, caching themselves into a cross-cultural consciousness. This constant manifestation of objects, confronting ourselves with something 'out there' allows us to exist happily right where we are.

⁴⁸ ll. 395-398: 'Now you may walk, in your battle-gear, under your army helmets, to see Hrothgar; let the war-shields, to await here these slaughter-shaft spears, the result of words.'

⁴⁹ Anderson, L.F, *The Anglo-Saxon Scop* (Toronto: Folcroft Library Editions, 1973), p. 26.

⁵⁰ Anderson, 35.

⁵¹ Anderson, 44: 'The scop is referred to again and again as a warrior, and, no doubt, was one.'

⁵² l. 259b: 'unlock his word hoard.'

⁵³ 'First Triumph-Song,' *Bards of the Gael and Gall: Examples of the Poetic Literature of Erin*, ed. George Sigerson (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1925), p. 111.

‘SOME POWERFUL MOJO WORKING IN THEM DOG BOYS:’
THE ROLE OF THE CYNOCEPHALUS IN CHARLES DE LINT’S *THE ONION GIRL*

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Charles de Lint’s *The Onion Girl* is an urban fantasy set in and around Newford, a fictional North American city. People in the novel are as likely to be fairies and magic-users as they are to be human beings and wait-staff. Much of the story takes place in ‘the dreamlands,’ the spirit world that exists parallel to the mundane world de Lint’s characters call the ‘World As It Is.’ The narrative point of view in *The Onion Girl* alternates between those of its three main characters: artist Jilly Coppercorn; her sister, Raylene Carter; or Joe Crazy Dog, a shape-changing friend to Jilly. The novel details Jilly’s path to recovery following her nearly fatal car accident, as well as Joe’s attempts in the spirit world to aid Jilly’s healing process. Jilly’s recovery is hindered by the emotional damage that she suffered as a child by an abusive older brother. Her estranged and vengeful younger sister also takes action to prevent Jilly’s rehabilitation. Raylene, who roams the dreamlands as a wolf, despises Jilly because she was left behind to suffer the same incestuous abuse that Jilly ran away from as a child. Each of these three characters occupies both the spirit world and the ‘World As It Is,’ moving across the boundaries in his or her own way.

While both Raylene and Jilly are human beings, Joe is not, though he often wears a human shape. Known as a ‘canid,’ Joe often appears as a man with a dog’s head. De Lint blends the aboriginal mythology of the fictional Kickaha tribe with mythologies from diverse cultures in *The Onion Girl*. While Joe is aligned more clearly with aboriginal North American mythology, his Germanic literary ancestry is of central interest to this paper. Joe’s primary ancestors in European literature are the *cynocephali*, a race of dog-headed people. The *cynocephali*, by some accounts, ‘live in the mountains of India. They communicate by barking. [They dress] only in animal skins, [. . .] live in caves and are fleetfooted hunters. [. . .] In the Alexander cycle the Cynocephali [*sic*] [. . .] have huge teeth and breathe flames.’⁵⁴ These monstrous creatures make numerous appearances in medieval literature, including in several Old English texts. The *cynocephali* are interesting figures because, despite their monstrous appearances, the most well-known *cynocephalus* is Saint Christopher, a *cynocephalus* who is granted speech and eventually martyred. Though Joe does not breathe fire, traces of the medieval understanding of the *cynocephalus* in general and the specific story of St. Christopher are nevertheless present throughout *The Onion Girl*. In this paper I argue that a complex balance of monstrosity and familiarity accounts for some of the lasting interest in *cynocephali* and for their success as benevolent actors in English texts.

The appearance of *cynocephali* in the *Beowulf*-manuscript indicates an Anglo-Saxon interest in these creatures. Their presence in these early texts demonstrates that the dog-heads have a long history in English culture and literature. One mention of the *cynocephali* is found in *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*. The narrator of the *Letter* writes of his encounter with some *cynocephali*:

Pa æfter þon gesawon we betweoh þa wudu bearwas 7 þa treo healfhundinga micle
mængeo, ða cwoman to þon þæt hie woldon us wundigan. 7 we þa mid strælum hie scotodon, 7

⁵⁴ John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*. (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University, 1981), p. 15.

hie sona onweg aflymdon ða hie eft on þone wudu gewiton.⁵⁵

It is noteworthy that the *cynocephali* here come from the woods, and to the woods return. In *The Onion Girl*, most of the regions of the spirit world that are explored, particularly those areas associated with the canids, are forests or wastes. Jilly's first appearance in the dreamlands is in an area with 'trees bigger and stranger than they have any right to be.'⁵⁶ Shortly after Jilly realizes that she is in the dreamlands, she encounters Joe, who she describes as having 'otherworld origins.'⁵⁷ His ease in the mysterious forests is clear; when narrating, he tells the reader that he '[doesn't] want to brag, but [he is] good at [. . .] navigating *manidò-aki*,⁵⁸ as he calls the spirit world. Joe's confident movement through these regions is in keeping with the historical relationship between *cynocephali* and the wild places they inhabit. In the *Letter* the dog-heads are creatures that live in an unknowable or unexplored forest region, much as de Lint's canid has strong ties to the wooded dreamlands. Though 'most people drift in and out of *mandiò-aki* at various times of the night [while dreaming],⁵⁹ few can recall this experience or have any control over their actions while in the dreamlands. Joe retains not only lucidity but physical solidity in the spirit world, as he explores it not in dreams but in the flesh. This underscores the ways in which the spirit world in *The Onion Girl* is the domain of only those select 'others' who are able to navigate its paths. In short, the dreamlands are as mysterious and unknowable to the normative explorer as the forests the *cynocephali* emerge from in the *Letter*.

The Wonders of the East, also in the *Beowulf*-manuscript, contains a description of another group of dog-headed people: 'eac swylce þær beoð cende Healfhundingas ða syndon hatene Conopoenas. Hi habbað horses manan 7 eoferes tucas 7 hunda heafda, 7 heora oruð byð swylce fyres lig. Þas land beoð beah ðam burgum[. . .].'⁶⁰ Similarly, the characters in *The Onion Girl* who access the dreamlands do so from urban centres such as Newford, Tyson, or Los Angeles.⁶¹ Isolated in Los Angeles, Raylene's serial dreams of the spirit world 'come back again.'⁶² Even Joe comes and goes between worlds from 'a basement apartment in the north end of Upper Foxville,'⁶³ an economically marginalized neighbourhood in Newford. These are only two of several examples of characters in *The Onion Girl* moving into the spirit world from the cities. Clarifying the association between the canids and the forests of the dreamlands, and the proximity of these territories to the spaces inhabited by humans articulates the ties between Modern English canid geography and Old English *cynocephalus* geography. It is necessary that the lands of the *cynocephali*⁶⁴ border on the cities without being part of the cities proper.

⁵⁵ Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1995), p. 244. 'Thereafter we saw among the wood groves and the tree a great many half-dogs that came [out] because they desired to wound us. And we then shot them with arrows, and they soon scattered away, they went back into the wood.'

⁵⁶ Charles de Lint, *The Onion Girl* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates LLC, 2001), p. 21.

⁵⁷ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 22. See also de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 401 for another character's comment on Joe's otherworldly origins: 'I think he was born there.'

⁵⁸ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 83.

⁵⁹ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 89.

⁶⁰ Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies*, p. 189. 'Also there are born half-dogs who are named *conopenæ*. They have horses' manes and boars' tusks and dogs' heads, and their breath is as fire's flame. These [their] lands are near the cities[. . .].'

⁶¹ Tyson, like Newford, is a city of de Lint's devising. Most accounts agree that Los Angeles is a real place.

⁶² de Lint, *Onion Girl*, 159.

⁶³ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, 84.

An Anglo-Saxon *Passion of St. Christopher* is included in the *Beowulf*-manuscript along with the two Old English texts previously mentioned. Clearly the *cynocephalus* was of interest to the Anglo-Saxon imagination. An exploration of the life of St. Christopher also reveals how the nature of the race of dog-heads is not always monstrous, as it is in the *Letter* and in *Wonders of the East*. However, that St. Christopher is a *cynocephalus* is integral to his martyrdom. The description of St. Christopher has much in common with the description of the *conopenae*⁶⁵ that is included earlier: ‘his head [is] terrifying, like that of a dog. His hair [is] very long, and gleam[s] like gold. His eyes [are] like the morning star, and his teeth like the tusks of a boar. Words are not sufficient to tell of his greatness.’⁶⁶ Throughout the events of the martyrdom of St. Christopher, his great and terrible appearance makes an impact in many ways. In multiple versions of the *Passion of St. Christopher* the saint’s appearance literally dethrones his adversary, the pagan ruler who ultimately martyrs St. Christopher. In *BHL 1764*, the early Latin *Passion* already mentioned, when the king ‘[sees] Christopher’s face [. . . he falls] off his seat.’⁶⁷ Similarly, in *BHL 1766*, a later Latin passion, the king, upon seeing St. Christopher ‘immediately [falls] down the stand on which he [is] sitting, since [Christopher is] huge.’⁶⁸ Each of these texts would have brought their influence upon any Anglo-Saxon version of the *Passion*. In this incident, Christopher’s status as a *cynocephalus* is both literally significant to the events surrounding his martyrdom – he likely increases the wrath of the king by humiliating him – as well as symbolically so. St. Christopher’s terrible otherness provides the initial catalyst by which the king is moved to make a martyr of him, as well as that which leads many people⁶⁹ to conversion. St. Christopher’s alterity is a source of strength for the figure

While Christopher’s monstrosity is, as I have argued, essential to his *acts* as a saint, it is humanity that allows him to be an accessible, successful Christianizing figure. Not only does he demonstrate an understanding of basic human needs, he also provides an encouraging example by which anyone is redeemable, no matter how deplorable they have been before conversion.

Regarding his appreciation of human desire and struggle, consider St. Christopher’s initial missionary success. In an act of great hospitality whose bounty appeals to a secular or pagan audience, as well as echoes one of Jesus Christ’s miracles, the dog-headed saint feeds a company of soldiers by miraculously extending their food supply, and in doing so gains their faith. In *BHL 1764*, the saint gains the attention of the soldiers with the promise of food: ‘[h]ear my words,’ he says to the soldiers, ‘and you will eat well.’ At this, the soldiers ‘[focus] their attention.’⁷⁰ Straightforward and unpretentious, St. Christopher gains the attention and respect of these soldiers by his understanding of people’s basic needs. Simply put, Christopher knows what it is to be hungry as well as he knows what it is to be wise, and gains the trust of other men by his serving of their material, as well as spiritual needs. In this act Christopher proves that, though he can be great and terrible, he can also be hospitable and human.

There is, of course, the most fundamental way in which St. Christopher is human: he is

⁶⁵ For the purposes of this paper and lacking contrary information, I will treat the *conopenae* as *cynocephali*, assuming that all of these dog-heads are related.

⁶⁶ David Woods, trans., *The Passion of St. Christopher (BHL 1764)* (Cork: University College Cork Online, 1999), <http://www.ucc.ie/milmart/BHL1764.html> (accessed October 30, 2005).

⁶⁷ *BHL 1764*, ch. 9.

⁶⁸ David Woods, trans., *The Passion of St. Christopher (BHL 1766)* (Cork: University College Cork Online, 1999), <http://www.ucc.ie/milmart/BHL1766.html> (accessed October 30, 2005), ch. 3.

⁶⁹ ‘1048 men and 111 souls,’ according to Woods, *BHL 1766*, ch. 16.

⁷⁰ Woods, *BHL 1764*, ch. 6.

capable of rational thought and speech, a notion defended in St. Augustine's *City of God*.⁷¹ Friedman relates a story with strong parallels to that of St. Christopher, from the apocryphal *Contendings of the Apostles*. In this story, a cynocephalus named Abominable⁷² encounters two Apostles, and is converted by an angel into a desire to be able to speak with them and follow the "right faith."⁷³ Just as Reprobis is later named Christopher after his baptism, so is Abominable baptized Christianus, and he is capable of rational thought and speech. St. Christopher's human intelligence is of as much significance to his popularity as his alterity; were it not for his ability to reason like a human being, he would be yet another cynocephalus, content to live in a cave, bark and eat flesh. Joe Crazy Dog, despite his name, is of the same temperate disposition as St. Christopher, a point which I will return to shortly.

The association of cynocephali with the unknown has persistent, ancient roots, according to David Woods: "[i]n brief, the civilised inhabitants of the Greco-Roman world had long been accustomed to describe those who lived on the edge of their world and beyond as the strange inhabitants of stranger lands, cannibals, dog-headed peoples and worse."⁷⁴ While it is easy to simplify the depiction of St. Christopher as a cynocephalus into a reference to his geographical foreignness, the details of his *cynocephaly* are integral to his status and potency as a saint. It is, however, equally necessary for Christopher to be recognizable as human not only in order to be holy, but also in order to be an effective missionary figure, just as it is necessary for de Lint's canids to be as approachable as they are formidable. St. Christopher is a saint and martyr who exploits his alterity in order to achieve his ends. He oversteps the bounds of earthly politics and law, aided by his physical difference and spiritual greatness. The relationship between monstrous cynocephalus and boundary-crossing saint is one which is decidedly at work in de Lint's construction of Joe Crazy Dog, and carries implications that concern the other alterity issues in the text.

We first encounter Joe Crazy Dog through Jilly. Jilly ventures into the spiritworld immediately after her accident to "find a guy [. . .] wearing jeans, scuffed work boots, and a T-shirt with faded writing on it that [she] can just make out. Oh, and he's got the head of a coyote or wolf."⁷⁵ Joe shares some other physical similarities with St. Christopher, as well: though he doesn't not have a mane, he does have "long black hair;"⁷⁶ he also shares St. Christopher's illuminated quality through "the weird lights that can dance in his eyes."⁷⁷ Though dressed in modern clothing and not "only in animal skins," Joe is clearly one of the race of dog-heads. Joe does not always keep this shape as he often appears in the "World As It Is" as a human. Though his ancestry is somewhat complicated in that "half of [his] family carries corbæ blood,"⁷⁸ Joe most often wears the shape of the *cynocephalus* in the spiritworld he is native to. He does not appear as a crow- or raven-headed man in *The Onion Girl* and even his name emphasizes his canine nature.

⁷¹ Augustine, in John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought*. "Whoever is born anywhere as a human being, that is, as a rational mortal creature, however strange he may appear to our senses in bodily form or colour or motion or utterance, or in any faculty, part or quality of his nature whatsoever, let no true believer have any doubt that such an individual is descended from the one man who was first created." p. 91.

⁷² Consider Christopher's pre-baptism name, Reprobis.

⁷³ Friedman, p. 70-71.

⁷⁴ David Woods, "The Origin of the Cult of St. Christopher" (Cork: University College Cork Online), <http://www.ucc.ie/milmart/chrsorig.html> (accessed October 30th, 2005).

⁷⁵ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 22.

⁷⁶ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 22.

⁷⁷ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 51.

⁷⁸ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 90. The corbæ are shape-shifters like the canids, but they take their animal forms from the genus *Corvus*.

Joe is not the only one of his kind in *The Onion Girl*. Joe also appears in the company of two other cynocephali, Whiskey Jack ('Jack') and Nanabozho ('Bo'). Jack is first described in a section of text that is narrated from Joe's point of view. He is 'tall and lean, dressed in jeans and cowboy boots, buckskin jacket' and he is 'dog-headed' like Joe. Joe remarks that it is possible to '[f]ollow the family tree and [. . .] find where [he and Jack] are related on the canid side of the family.'⁷⁹ Bo's appearance is similar, and Jilly tells the reader that '[t]here's something wonderfully strange about those lupine features looking out at [her] from under the flat-brimmed hat'⁸⁰ when she is first introduced to this other *cynocephalus*. It is arguable that Joe and Jack share a common literary ancestor as well as one within the novel – namely, the *cynocephalus*. Also, Jilly's comment that Bo's features are 'wonderfully strange' is quite telling, as it articulates the way that *cynocephali* have long been regarded. Though their dog heads may appear as something of an afterthought, the blending of the familiar and the exotic in the figures of the 'canids' is essential.

De Lint's canids, and particularly Joe can be likened to St. Christopher and distinguished from other *cynocephali* by their behaviour. They are definitely outsiders, but their behaviours are not those of monsters. Though appearance can be an indicator of a monstrous nature in *The Onion Girl*, behaviour is much more important. The 'canids' in de Lint's novel take it upon themselves to stop the dreaming actions of Raylene, who has been dreaming herself into the spirit world as a wolf. Though the wolf has a history of perceived contemptible behaviour⁸¹, a *cynocephalus* 'with the head of a coyote or wolf' is not likely to condemn the animal solely based on its appearance. Whiskey Jack, however, describes Raylene's horrible actions: Raylene has been 'killing [unicorns] [. . .] so she [can] bathe in their blood. Make herself young. Make herself high.'⁸² Since Raylene kills without consideration or need, her wolf-self is an abomination that the canids oppose. The nature of the canids' opposition to Raylene's mayhem varies. While Jack insists that Raylene was 'born bad'⁸³ and should be destroyed, Joe prefers 'to find solutions that aren't quite so final.'⁸⁴ He resembles Saint Christopher in this, because it is Saint Christopher that adopts speech in order to be rational, and maintains a calm demeanour throughout the events that lead to his martyrdom, though the king he opposes proposes increasingly horrible tortures.⁸⁵

I have already noted that Jilly, the story's clear protagonist, views Joe as a friend. While she perceives him alternately as a clownish figure and a wise man, she recognizes his value. Trapped in a paralyzed body, suffering memory loss, and in need of emotional healing as well, Jilly 'really [counts] on Joe to find a way out of all of [it] for [her]'⁸⁶. Jilly has no fear at all of Joe, because she understands his ability to work as a friend and comrade, and his agency in the dreamlands she explores. Just as St. Christopher is necessarily different in order to draw attention to his God and to lead to his martyrdom, so are Joe's "other" qualities essential to his role in saving Jilly. And there is no doubt that his potency is tied to his physical self. When Raylene, who has been serially visiting the

⁷⁹ de Lint., 90.

⁸⁰ de Lint., 184.

⁸¹ In *Andreas*, the story of St. Andrew, cannibals are referred to as 'heathen battle-wolves.' Trans. Charles W. Kennedy, *Andreas* (Cambridge, ON: In Parentheses Publications, 2000), p. 4. http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/Andreas_Kennedy.pdf (accessed February 24th, 2005).

⁸² de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 424.

⁸³ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 425.

⁸⁴ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 214.

⁸⁵ Woods, *BHL 1764*.

⁸⁶ de Lint, 209.

spirit world in dreams of being a wolf for some years encounters Joe, she seeks information on how to access the dreamlands in her physical, waking body. The advice that she receives from another one of ‘the People’⁸⁷ on crossing into the spirit world is that ‘drinking [one of the People’s] blood is mighty effective.’⁸⁸ This passage demonstrates to the reader that Joe –who has been clearly identified as an ancient being before – carries his abilities in his blood, in his physical self. Though Raylene perceives Joe as an antagonist and a threat to her existence in the dreamlands when initially presented with his physical alterity (he interrupts her wolf-pack’s slaying of a unicorn⁸⁹), she comes to realize through contact with him that she is also capable of being that kind of boundary-crosser.

The presence of the medieval *cynocephalus* is strong in *The Onion Girl*. As Raylene observes at one point, there is ‘some powerful mojo working in them dog boys.’⁹⁰ Joe is someone who is always ‘opening and closing doors of the spirit,’⁹¹ and in this he seems to resemble Saint Christopher more than the other canids who appear in the text. These characters share the ability to cross borders in the way that medieval *cynocephali* did, but their flexibility now empowers them to negotiate the ‘borderland [. . .] the natural home of heroes.’⁹² While the medieval *cynocephalus* may have been ostracized or even tortured for its difference, the contemporary canid has mastered the ability to exploit its alterity to benefit himself and his surroundings. As Joe says, he is ‘not some innocent mystery’⁹³ waiting to be victimized but an empowered and self-aware Other.

That each of these *cynocephali* has roots in aboriginal North American figures as well as in European monsters must be acknowledged. However, de Lint is vague at best concerning his North American source material, which indicates that he does not rely upon the reader having a very detailed understanding of the source material he uses. With that in mind, it is entirely likely that the image of the dog-headed man has entered *The Onion Girl* not only through the deliberate efforts of its author, but also via less definite cultural channels.

WHAT STRANGE FISH HATH MADE HIS MEAL ON THEE:
AN ARTICLE ON THE MONSTROUS IN *BEOWULF* AND *THE TEMPEST*

⁸⁷ ‘The People’ are the animal People that have existed since the beginning of the world, of which Joe is one.

⁸⁸ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 292.

⁸⁹ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 90-91.

⁹⁰ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 284.

⁹¹ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 217.

⁹² Kennedy, *Andreas*, 2.

⁹³ de Lint, *Onion Girl*, p. 90.

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What makes a monster monstrous? Many suggest that it is appearance, actions, or a quality of the unknown that makes a monster. Some believe that a monster has to be villainous or associated with a certain moral wrongness. There are many uniform qualities that can be pulled out of the aesthetic cauldron of monstrosity. However, the question lies in where these uniformities are found, how they came to be and where they came from. Looking at a more modern source, this article will uncover what has been thrown into our modern ideas of alterity and what has been taken out. William Shakespeare's infamous monster, Caliban, from his play, *The Tempest*, has roots which can be sourced back to *Beowulf*. In fact, Caliban is very similar to Grendel, the monster from *Beowulf*. Both monsters are "other" in appearance, and both have monstrous mothers who are defeated by the male "hero" of the story which signifies a switch from a matriarchal culture to a patriarchal one. As well, both of the monsters' stories contain a struggle between the perspectives of the monster and the hero - when boundaries are crossed, the question of who is monstrous must be posed. Finally, our concepts and associations with an oral culture and language add a contrast between the two monsters, for while Caliban has the use of language, Grendel does not, and this certainly affects his monstrosity. All these features demonstrate the probability of Shakespeare recycling the same ideas that were used hundreds of years earlier by the poet of *Beowulf*.

There is no question that in both *Beowulf* and *The Tempest*, Grendel and Caliban are "other" in appearance. In both works, it seems monstrosity means a deviation from the normal human exterior. Neither Grendel nor Caliban are described with specific detail; however they are depicted to be somehow different than other humans. Grendel is first introduced in *Beowulf* as someone who lives in a land of a 'fifelcynne.'⁹⁴ This race is that of the 'eotenas.'⁹⁵ According to the 'londbuend,'⁹⁶ Grendel 'wæs mara þonne ænig man oþer.'⁹⁷ Grendel, therefore, is obviously not really a human, but of a different species or race: he is larger and stronger than ordinary humans. Likewise, Caliban seems not to be of the human race either, or if he is, his appearance is deformed in some way. He is described as a 'freckled whelp... not honor'd with a human shape,'⁹⁸ a 'strange fish,'⁹⁹ and 'puppy-headed,'¹⁰⁰ just to name a few. When strangers, like Trinculo and Stephano, see Caliban for the first time, they are disgusted and confused by his appearance: 'Legg'd like a man; and his fins like arms!this is no fish, but an islander, that hath lately suffer'd by a thunderbolt.'¹⁰¹ Both Caliban and Grendel, although their appearances are not described in detail, are established as different species or at least a deformed human in Caliban's case, and this is very much part of the reason they are deemed to be monstrous. From the medieval ages to the days of Shakespeare, to be monstrous is to look different from a human being.

Another feature that Shakespeare used which can be sourced to the Anglo-Saxon period is the

⁹⁴ Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, *Beowulf: An Edition* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), ll.104b. ("monster-race").

⁹⁵ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 112a. ("giants").

⁹⁶ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 1345a. ("dwellers of the earth").

⁹⁷ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 1353. ("was greater/larger than any man other").

⁹⁸ William Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997), 1661-1688 at 1.2.283

⁹⁹ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 2.1.27.

¹⁰⁰ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 2.1.155.

¹⁰¹ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 2.1.33-37.

connection monstrosity can have to religious evil or immorality. Grendel and Beowulf are very much associated with evil or villainy in the Christian sense. As it turns out, Grendel's *'fifelcynne'*¹⁰² is traced back to an ancestry of religious evil: *'fifelcynnnes eard/ wonsæli wer weardode hwile/ siþðan him scyppend forscrifen hæfde in Caines cynne.'*¹⁰³ Cain, from the Bible, was a kin-slayer and consequently banished by God. His race was part of a religious "non-elect" and therefore because Grendel is part of Cain's lineage, he is considered to be evil and an outcast; he *'godes yrre bær.'*¹⁰⁴ Also, besides being described as a giant, Grendel is called such things as: *'manscaða,'*¹⁰⁵ *'scinna,'*¹⁰⁶ *'feond on helle'*¹⁰⁷ and *'grimma gæst.'*¹⁰⁸ Grendel *'fyrene fremman.'*¹⁰⁹ He was a murderer as well, and therefore not only is he a descendant of the evil Cain, but he is himself evil in his actions. He attacks Hroðgar's hall and kills many of his men. He is a *'wælgæst'*¹¹⁰ who many cannot defeat because of his monstrous strength.

Caliban is also linked to the Christian sense of evil. His mother, Sycorax, is a witch and his father, 'the devil himself.'¹¹¹ Both parents are viewed through a Christian perspective as evil. And, just like Grendel, not only is Caliban a descendant of evil, and not only is he established as a deformed creature, he is described as an evil character in himself: 'thou poisonous slave,'¹¹² 'an abominable monster,'¹¹³ 'misshapen knave,'¹¹⁴ and 'demi-devil.'¹¹⁵ In the beginning of the play, Prospero, Caliban's master and the man who took over Caliban's island, mentions Caliban's attempted rape of Prospero's daughter, Miranda: 'thou didst seek to violate the honor of my child.'¹¹⁶ To which Caliban responds: 'O ho, O ho, would't had been done!'¹¹⁷ Not only is Caliban the son of two very evil characters, he himself performs morally wrong actions. Both Grendel and Caliban are *'manscaðas.'*¹¹⁸ Grendel ravages men by murdering them and Caliban attempts to ravage Miranda. They are both 'villain[s] [no one] love[s] to look on.'¹¹⁹

In both pieces of poetry, neither the "narrator" nor any of the characters waste any time in letting the reader know that these two creatures are monstrous. They are "other" in appearance, they are the descendants of religious evil, they perform wicked deeds, and they are called by everyone in their respective works as villainous and monstrous. In fact, Caliban is called a monster in *The Tempest* more than forty times, and due to the abundance of apposition in *Beowulf*, Grendel is called monster and many other similar names as well. The authors of each work do not want the reader to forget that

¹⁰² Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 104b. ("monster-race").

¹⁰³ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 104b-107a. ("{the} unhappy man occupied for a long time {the} monster-race's homeland after the Creator had condemned him in Cain's race").

¹⁰⁴ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 711b. ("bears God's anger").

¹⁰⁵ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 713a. ("wicked ravager").

¹⁰⁶ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 939a. ("evil spirit").

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 101b. ("fiend from hell").

¹⁰⁸ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 102a. ("grim spirit").

¹⁰⁹ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 101a. ("performed crimes").

¹¹⁰ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 1331a. ("homicidal creature").

¹¹¹ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.319.

¹¹² Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.319.

¹¹³ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 2.1.158.

¹¹⁴ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 5.1.277.

¹¹⁵ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 5.1.272.

¹¹⁶ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.347-348.

¹¹⁷ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.349.

¹¹⁸ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 713a. ("wicked ravagers").

¹¹⁹ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.308-309.

these characters are considered monsters by everyone else. However, in both works, after all this evidence, one can still ask the question: who really is the monster? For despite all the descriptions, all the wicked ravaging these monsters do, there is something else; something that invokes in the reader a small feeling of compassion. There is something which makes the line between monster and hero fade. Grendel and Caliban are clearly established as monsters, but it is necessary to look at *who* has established them to be monstrous. There is the problem of perspective, of property and boundaries, and of language. All these things weaken the conviction one may have of the monster being absolutely evil and the hero being absolute good. It creates a sense of ambiguity between the monster and the hero. This feeling of sympathy towards the monstrous and this clouded line between hero and monster had to come from somewhere. So perhaps Shakespeare inadvertently traced this ambiguity of the monstrous all the way back to *Beowulf* where perspective and property are very significant in weakening what seemed like a clear separation between monster and non-monster.

Wonders of the East, another piece of medieval literature which is part of the *Beowulf*-manuscript, consists of many small tales of different monsters around the world. They are described, named, and are located by exact measurements: ‘stadia’¹²⁰ and ‘leuuae.’¹²¹ They are all somehow deformed in appearance, or are different species completely. What is most significant about the tales of each monster in this text is that they are all very far away. There are large boundaries separating them from regular humans. They are talked of, they are far away, and they look different. But eventually humans and monsters cross into each other’s boundaries and properties. This occurs in both *Beowulf* and *The Tempest* and consequently monstrosity becomes unclear with the presentation of different perspectives.

In both *Beowulf* and *The Tempest*, boundary lines are crossed and the monstrosity of Grendel and Caliban is established by Beowulf, the narrator and Prospero. However, one has to take into consideration the element of perspective: recognizing who is presenting their view and who is crossing the boundaries. A very good way of demonstrating this point is looking at the Old English word, ‘gist,’ which is used in *Beowulf*. This can mean either a stranger or a guest. However these are two very different words. ‘Stranger’ usually has a more negative undertone or connotation. A stranger is an outsider; someone who is not known or someone who is different. However, ‘guest’ is generally a person who is welcome; it has a more positive connotation. A guest is a visitor, somebody who *is* known, or someone who may have been invited. So like a ‘gist,’ perhaps a monster and a hero also have different meanings depending upon whose perspective is in the forefront. Perhaps the question: “who is the monster and who is not?” is similar to “who is a ‘gist’ [stranger or guest] and who is not?” Hroðgar could very well believe he is a guest and deserves to build his hall wherever he wants, but Grendel could believe Hroðgar to be a stranger and an intruder. Perspective can be just as ambiguous as the word ‘gist.’

In *Beowulf*, there is a prevalence of boundaries and boundaries being crossed by both Beowulf and Grendel. In the beginning of the poem, Grendel is listening to the ‘*hludne dream in healle*’¹²² while sitting in the ‘*pystrum*.’¹²³ He listens ‘*earfoðlice þrage gepolade*.’¹²⁴ The way Grendel is described here is very interesting. It suggests that the hall is disturbing Grendel. One has to wonder

¹²⁰ Andy Orchard, ‘Wonders of the East’, *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 184-203 at 185. (This is a type of measurement which cannot be translated because it has no modern English equivalent).

¹²¹ Orchard, ‘Wonders of the East’, 185. (“leagues”).

¹²² Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 88a-89b. (“loud revelry in the hall”).

¹²³ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 87b. (“darkness”).

¹²⁴ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 86b-87a. (“with difficulty/painfully {in a} time of distress suffered”).

why Grendel would be disturbed unless this hall is on his territory. The reader gets a sense that perhaps Hroðgar's hall has been built on Grendel's property. Grendel's suffering cannot be ignored; he is feeling pain and this naturally invokes feelings of compassion in the reader. He becomes more than just a gruesome creature because he has emotions which give him a relatable human quality. It is from his suffering that one could argue that it is not Grendel who invades Hroðgar's property but Hroðgar who invades Grendel's world; the crossing of boundaries could very well have been instigated by Hroðgar. This brings forth the question: who is the stranger and who is the guest and thus who is really the monster? If it is Hroðgar who has invaded Grendel's territory, Grendel might not be the monster. Perhaps Grendel can be justified in wanting his revenge on somebody who has forced him out of his home and disturbed him with their volume. Perhaps it is Hroðgar who is the stranger and not Grendel. Therefore, Hroðgar would be the monster according to Grendel. This, therefore, weakens Grendel's absolute monstrosity and neither Hroðgar nor Beowulf seem as superior.

The poem continues to have boundaries crossed back and forth and each time perspectives have to be taken into account. Guests, strangers, monsters, and heroes all cross boundaries. Grendel might be a dispossessed and sad creature who does not understand, or have the mental capability to understand why his territory has been invaded. This tension between perspectives is very much prevalent during the first battle between Grendel and Beowulf. When it is being described for the first time by the narrator, there is confusion as to who is striking who and who is receiving the blows. Names are not mentioned, it is just a jumble of actions being carried out by nominative and accusative pronouns. '*Forð near ætstop,/ nam þa mid handa higeþihtigne/ rinc on ræste, him ræhte ongean/ feond mid folme.*'¹²⁵ There is a sense of confusion here as the reader wonders who is reaching out with his hand, who is the man resting, and who is being called the enemy. The word '*feond*' is the same whether accusative or nominative so it does not give away any hints of whether it is Grendel or Beowulf completing the actions. In the darkness of the night, no one knows who is who; even the Hroðgar's men in the hall cannot distinguish which is Beowulf and which is Grendel. Beowulf and Grendel seem like the two halves of the same person. They are indistinguishable and even interchangeable and this represents the ambiguity between the hero and the monster. It also highlights the importance of perspective for in the darkness of the hall, when perspectives are indistinguishable, monster and hero fade away.

The emphasis on oral narrative in the poem also shows how significant perspective really is, for when Beowulf tells the story, he tells it differently from the narrator's description. Once again, one has to take into consideration who is telling the reader that Grendel is monstrous. From Beowulf's point of view, Grendel is monstrous indeed. However, if Grendel had a voice, he would voice his idea of Beowulf or Hroðgar being monstrous for disturbing his property. After all, the reader does get a glimpse of his suffering and pain when he is near Hroðgar's hall at the beginning of the poem. This reinforces the idea that the monstrous, like the '*gist*,' might rely on whose perspective is in the forefront. If one glimpses an emotional quality in Grendel, and recognizes the possibility of his property being dispossessed, one might consequently glimpse a shift in perspective.

Like *Beowulf*, *The Tempest* is also a tale of crossing boundaries and of the fine line between the dispossessed and the dispossessor, or the monster and the hero. One of the first things that Caliban says when he enters the play is: 'This island's mine by Sycorax my mother which thou tak'st from me.'¹²⁶ When it comes down to facts, Caliban is the rightful owner of the island that Prospero invaded. Prospero just arrived on the island and simply took over, making Caliban his slave. This is boundary

¹²⁵ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 745b-748a. ("Forward nearer stepped, took with his hand {the} strong-hearted man in resting-place, reached against him, the enemy with {his} hand").

¹²⁶ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.331.

crossing in its extremity. Prospero has completely dispossessed Caliban of his island and there is little wonder at how Caliban must feel about this. In fact, Caliban does tell Prospero and others how he feels. Like Grendel's vengeance on Hroðgar for taking over his property, Caliban's vengeance is the attempted rape of Miranda. He claims to do this so he can 'people the isle with Calibans.'¹²⁷ Caliban wants his island back and he believes that he can get it by creating more of himself or an heir to help him. But one has to wonder if Grendel's and Caliban's monstrous behaviour is a product of their treatment. If Prospero had not dispossessed Caliban of his island, Caliban may not have been "evil" in his actions. Similarly, if Hroðgar had not dispossessed Grendel of his territory, Grendel may not have murdered all his men. Once again, the idea of perspective is very dominant; even more so in *The Tempest* than *Beowulf* because Caliban actually has a voice whereas Grendel is not given the use of language. The fact that Caliban does have a voice is ironic because it is Prospero who teaches him how to speak which consequently offers a shift in perspective, thus weakening Prospero's heroic character.

Most of the narrative and information that the audience receives from *The Tempest* comes from Prospero. This, like Beowulf's version of the story, is a very good example of the monsters being monstrous only through the perspective of the non-monstrous. Both Prospero and Beowulf enjoy offering their own perspective through their abundant use of words; they more than willingly point fingers at the monsters and when this happens, one has to be suspicious. Their perspectives are exceedingly dominant and they overshadow any other possible perspective. However, Caliban does get his chance to speak. In fact, he actually uses beautiful language at times: 'This isle is full of noises, sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.'¹²⁸ This shows first, how important this island is to him and second, it lets the audience understand how he feels. Also, his use of beautiful and poetic language offers a softer, more human side to him. He seems less of a monster and consequently invokes a feeling of sympathy in the reader. Grendel, although he does not have the use of language, is given human qualities when the narrator tells the reader of his suffering. When these creatures' properties are being invaded, perspectives shift and one begins to see the monsters in a less monstrous light and perhaps see the heroes as dispossessors.

Another very interesting element which offers a strong correlation between *Beowulf* and *The Tempest* is the mother/son relationship and consequently their relationship with the "hero." Both works have something in common which is not very widespread in monstrous literature: a dominant female monster in the form of a mother. Grendel and Caliban both have mothers present who are powerful and monstrous. However, they are both defeated by the male "hero" of the story. Grendel's mother avenges her son's death by attacking the hall and killing one of Hroðgar's best men. She is clever by doing so and this shows how powerful she is. It also shows her understanding of human laws, as she abides by the men's principles of revenge. However, Grendel's mother is described in the same way Grendel is: 'mihtig manscaða,'¹²⁹ 'felasinnigne secg,'¹³⁰ and 'brimwylf.'¹³¹ She is associated with the same evil and monstrosity as Grendel and it seems she might even be just as strong and powerful as him, if not more so. However, Beowulf crosses into Grendel's mother's mere and soon defeats her. Once again, it is possible to see the mother's perspective: her son was murdered so she simply wanted to avenge his death. As well, when Beowulf crosses into her realm, there is a possibility that she is no longer the monster. It is her territory and thus Beowulf is the stranger and the

¹²⁷ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.350-351.

¹²⁸ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 3.2.135-136.

¹²⁹ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 1339a. ("mighty wicked ravager").

¹³⁰ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 1379a. ("very guilty man{woman}").

¹³¹ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 1506a. ("she-wolf of the mere").

monster. Similarly, Caliban's mother, Sycorax, is defeated by Prospero, the "hero" of the story. Both Prospero and Beowulf invade the monstrous mother's den. However, what occurs between Sycorax and Prospero is never seen; it happens before the play opens, and the audience only knows of it when Prospero tells the story.

Like Grendel's mother, Sycorax is very powerful. She is the ruler of the island and she is a formidable sorceress. She is also called by the same sort of names as Caliban: 'damn'd witch,'¹³² and 'blue-ey'd hag.'¹³³ Prospero reminds his servant, Ariel, of the story of Sycorax and how he came about her island. He saw that Sycorax was torturing Ariel, and so Prospero rescued him. He then took the place of Sycorax as the ruler of the island and made her son, Caliban, his slave. Like Grendel's mother, Sycorax is considered villainous and monstrous. However, one only comes by these facts through Prospero's story and as previously mentioned, one has to be suspicious of such a dominant, one-sided perspective. Grendel's mother kills men, while Sycorax tortures other creatures. However, they are both defeated, and their place of power is taken over by the two "heroes," Beowulf and Prospero.

This matriarchal configuration of the monstrous can also be seen in *The Wonders of the East*. There are women monsters who are described as 'huntigystran swiðe'¹³⁴ who have 'beardas swa side oð heora breost.'¹³⁵ There is another race of women who have 'eoferes tuxas 7 feax oð helan side, 7 on lendenum oxan tægl.'¹³⁶ These women are said to be 'preotyne fota lange'¹³⁷ and had 'æwisce on lichoman 7 unweorðe.'¹³⁸ These races of female monsters are just as fearsome and monstrous as the male monsters. This is just like Grendel's mother and Sycorax. They are depicted as powerful, monstrous and dreadful figures when seen through the eyes of the heroes. Also, it is quite significant that both Grendel's and Caliban's fathers are not prevalent or present. There is a suggestion that both of their fathers are devils or a 'dyrna gasta,'¹³⁹ however, they are only mentioned in passing; they do not have the significance and power that the mothers do.

It seems as though in the beginning of both works, it is a matriarchal world. The mother monsters are powerful and villainous and dominate in strength. However, there is an obvious tension between the feminine and masculine and with the death and defeat of these two matriarchal monsters, everything changes. Only males are left; their sons are left and the power is left in the hands of the male heroes. This could suggest a change in culture; a change from a matriarchal world to a patriarchal one. Perhaps, this tension and eventual overthrow of matriarchy in these two texts signifies the evolution that occurred hundreds of years earlier, when Christianity, and its male God, began to dominate over the old pagan beliefs where women were quite powerful. In this Christian culture, men are deemed the head or 'gods' of their families and the women are silenced; just like they are in both *The Tempest* and *Beowulf*. In these two works, all that is left is the male configuration of master and slave, or a sort of patriarchal hierarchy; all powerful women are suppressed. This proves to be a suggestion of the inferiority of women, especially powerful and matriarchal women, associating them with monstrosity and consequently suggesting that men must silence and dominate over these creatures.

¹³² Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.263.

¹³³ Shakespeare, 'The Tempest', 1.2.269.

¹³⁴ Orchard, 'Wonders of the East', 198. ("great huntresses").

¹³⁵ Orchard, 'Wonders of the East', 198. ("beards as widely until their breasts").

¹³⁶ Orchard, 'Wonders of the East', 200. ("boar's tusks and hair until heels widely and on [their] loins, oxen tails").

¹³⁷ Orchard, 'Wonders of the East', 200. ("thirteen feet long").

¹³⁸ Orchard, 'Wonders of the East', 200. ("indecent in body and vile").

¹³⁹ Mitchell and Robinson, *Beowulf*, ll. 1357a. ("mysterious demon").

Whether Shakespeare knew it or not, he recycled many ideas from the Anglo-Saxon period because the similarities between *Beowulf* and *The Tempest* are too apparent to be a coincidence. *Beowulf* throws villainous and deformed monsters, matriarchal monsters, concepts on perspective and boundaries, and ambiguity between monster and hero into a large vault, and Shakespeare, pulled them out more than 500 years later. Caliban's story is very much a Grendel "what-if?" If Grendel had a voice, the story would be even more similar to *The Tempest*. Either way, both poets offer moral conclusions. If one reads the stories superficially, one can see the immorality of Grendel and Caliban and conclude that evil actions and deformed appearances are monstrous. However, if one looks harder, and recognizes the boundaries being crossed and the suffering of the dispossessed monsters, it seems the poets are suggesting that morality exists more deeply than superficial absolutes. However, it depends on looking past biased perceptions and recognizing the validity of everyone's perspective.

‘FROM “OUT THERE” TO “OUTER SPACE”’: THE EVOLUTION OF ALIENS AS MONSTERS.

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The modern Western cultural media defines the *Other* as anyone who does not meet the stereotypical and socially acceptable norms through their beliefs, appearances or actions. This “Other” is often portrayed as a monstrous being to be afraid of and also to be fascinated with. Through humanity’s fear of these monstrous beings, they have been pushed out beyond our borders into the unknown. The ancient Greeks placed these monsters just beyond their borders in the land not yet explored. People then began to move beyond these borders and were unable to find these monsters. This however, did not diminish humanity’s fascination with these fearsome creatures. Instead, they were pushed farther and farther beyond our borders as new lands were discovered, until there was no longer anywhere for them to go but outer space. This is how the modern alien was created. Alien references are everywhere in society and it is difficult to go through one day without some mention of extra-terrestrial life forms. Think about waiting in line at the grocery store and looking over at the trusty Weekly World News to see the headline from a story about a woman who is having her alien lover’s baby. Turn on the television and you are bombarded with shows about aliens. Movie makers consistently create movies based on alien subject matter. Most recently, *War of the Worlds* made headlines with its tale of an alien monster invasion of modern day earth.

Through this continued obsession with aliens, one begins to wonder from where the modern media obtained the ideas for these creatures. Some might argue that Steven Spielberg’s creatures were based on H.G. Wells’ original creature concepts from his 1898 novel *War of the Worlds*. In fact the ideas that both Spielberg and Wells based their aliens on, have been carried through the centuries from ancient Greek and Anglo-Saxon monster tales to the present day.

Society’s fascination with creatures and beings from “out there” is nothing new. Tales of ‘alien’ contact can be traced as far back as Herodotus’ *The Histories*, which were written around 440 B.C.E. In his *Histories*, Herodotus describes the rise and fall of the Persian Empire. While recounting this history, he gives some of the first descriptions of creatures and races of men that appear foreign and, in many ways, monstrous. These descriptions are, some of the first ‘alien’ contact stories; such as encounters with Arimaspians, a tribe of one-eyed men who in other respects are like the rest of us;¹⁴⁰ goat hooped men living just to the north of the Arimaspians;¹⁴¹ and giant gold digging ants.¹⁴² Herodotus admits that he did not actually encounter all of these creatures and beings himself. In reality, many of them are second and even third hand accounts.¹⁴³ In a sense, Herodotus’ *Histories* acted as an ancient tabloid, relaying hearsay stories to a larger audience.

While Herodotus’ *Histories* was not completely factual, it would still become a reference for Anglo-Saxon scribes. One story from *The Histories* that is later echoed in the Old English translation of *The Wonders of the East*, is that of the gold digging ants. It is of great ants that live in the desert just outside of a city called Caspatyrus. These ants are close to the size of dogs and they

¹⁴⁰ Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt. (New York: Penguin, 1979) 250.

¹⁴¹ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 278.

¹⁴² Herodotus, *The Histories*, 246.

¹⁴³ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 273.

throw up sand that is full of gold. The Indians then go into the desert to collect this sand. The rider sits on a female camel tied to a male camel and leaves its young tied up behind. When the Indians reach the place where the gold is, they fill their bags with the sand, and ride away as quickly as possible. However, scenting them, the ants rush forth in pursuit. It is during this pursuit that the male camels, which are not as fast as the females, grow tired, and begin to fall behind. However, the females remember their young and are drawn to them and never slow down.¹⁴⁴ While this story is a translation of an old Latin text, it proved to be of such great interest to the Anglo-Saxon scholars that they deemed it worthy of translation into old English. The story remains quite similar to Herodotus' version, with only a few changes in detail; in *The Wonders of the East*, the place where these ants reside 'is haten Gorgoneus;'¹⁴⁵ the ants are also described as "syndon reades hiwes 7 blaces;"¹⁴⁶ and in the Anglo-Saxon translation, the ants deliberately dig up the gold, 'Pa æmettan delfað gold up of eorðan[.]'¹⁴⁷ Since the name of the city is changed, one can assume that by the time of the Anglo-Saxons writings Caspatyrus was either discovered to not exist or to not be the home of these giant ants. However, the overall meaning behind the tale remains the same and is passed on to a larger audience through this translation.

The Anglo-Saxon translation was not the end for these giant ants. Tales of these creatures have been passed on and continue today. In 1954, a horror movie entitled *Them* was created. It describes an army of giant ants that invade a small New Mexico desert town. They eventually make their way to the Los Angeles sewers where the American Army must decide between saving the local populace and saving the world.¹⁴⁸ Similarly a reference to giant space ants taking over the world made its way into an episode of *The Simpsons*, where there is concern that these creatures have taken over a space shuttle and intend to enslave the human race.¹⁴⁹ While these ants are not searching for gold, there is a fear of these creatures which fuels the retelling of these tales. Since we have discovered that neither Caspatyrus nor Gorgoneus exist, these creatures have been pushed well beyond the borders of our earth and into outer space. One begins to wonder if Herodotus ever realized that his tale of gold-digging ants would fascinate societies for thousands of years.

The story of the gold-digging ants is not the only tale from *The Histories* and *The Wonders of the East* that has been utilized by modern film creators. In Steven Spielberg's 2005 version of *War of the Worlds*, there are numerous echoes of ancient and Anglo-Saxon tales found in these two texts. After having looked at the details used to create the aliens for the film, one begins to see many similarities between the modern alien creatures and the strange monsters of the ancient Greek and Anglo-Saxon scribes.

War of the Worlds is a story about Ray Ferrier, who is a working class man living in New Jersey. He is estranged from his family and his life is a mess. His small town life is shaken violently by the arrival of destructive intruders: tripod aliens who have come *en masse* to destroy Earth. As they plow through the country in a wave of destruction and violence, Ray must protect his children from these monsters. Mankind must fend for itself against a new and advanced enemy not of this world and humanity must save itself from a far greater force than it has ever faced. In the end, it is not the human's weapons that defeat the aliens; instead they succumb to the bacteria

¹⁴⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 246-7.

¹⁴⁵ Andy Orchard, ed., *The Wonders of the East in Pride and Prodigies*. (Toronto: U of T Press, 2003) 184-203 at 190. My translation: "Is called Gorgoneus."

¹⁴⁶ Orchard, *Wonders*, 190. My translation: "Being red and black in colour."

¹⁴⁷ Orchard, *Wonders*, 190. My translation: "The ants dig up gold from the earth."

¹⁴⁸ *Them*, prod. David Weisbart, dir. Gordon Douglas, 1954.

¹⁴⁹ *The Simpsons*, Fox, 24 February 1994.

in earth's air.¹⁵⁰ This version was based on the original *War of the Worlds*, which was made famous by Orson Welles. He adapted the novel into a radio play that was performed as if it were a real radio broadcast on October 30, 1938. This broadcast sent the whole country into hysterics causing people to arm themselves with shotguns, hide in their basements, and pack the roads,¹⁵¹ which is exactly how the humans respond in Spielberg's version. Certainly, the ancient and Anglo-Saxon monster tales never quite created mass hysteria, but they instilled enough fear into people to keep the average person away from the borders of the unknown land where these monsters were believed to lurk.

One thing that the Anglo-Saxons seemed to be afraid of was being consumed by one of these mysterious beings. In *The Wonders of the East*, there is a tribe that is described as "hi beoð sweartes hiwes 7 hi syndan Hostes nemde. Cudlice swa hwylcne mann swa hi gefoð, þonne fretað hi hine."¹⁵² This idea of consuming humans is mirrored in *War of the Worlds*, when one of the tripod aliens is shown killing a man and then sucking the blood out of him.¹⁵³ While the aliens apparently do not need humans to sustain themselves directly, they do need human blood as a fertilizer for the red weed that begins to take over the land, which helps to nourish them. As humans had feared, the aliens really have no need to keep humans alive. The aliens actually have more use for them dead than alive. This fear of being consumed by a monstrous creature is nothing new to mankind. Occasions where humans have actually come into contact with unknown creatures or beings that wish to consume them are really extraordinary. It seems strange to think that there is such a great fear of being consumed by an unknown creature, yet the chances of someone dying from having been attacked even by a known creature, such as a bear, shark or lion are minimal.

While in *The Wonders of the East* there are many references to unknown creatures, one well known creature continues to reappear throughout these tales as well as in other ancient and Anglo-Saxon texts. This creature is the snake. The snake for some reason has frequently lent its name, habits, characteristics and movements to creepy monsters since the literature of the ancient Greeks. There seems to have always been a contrasting opinion of snakes; they have been held in high regard while feared and loathed at the same time. For example, in ancient Egypt, the snake was seen as both a protector of the king as well as a demon of the underworld.¹⁵⁴ In *War of the Worlds*, Spielberg decides to borrow many characteristics for his aliens from this widely feared creature. It has the look of a snake's skin which is shiny and reptilian-like. The alien designers were looking to create a reflective skin that would remind the viewers of this creepy creature.¹⁵⁵ Another snake likeness among the aliens was the lack of a nose, which was replaced by two tiny slits. A reference to beings like this was first made in Pliny's *Natural History*. He describes them as "a race among the Nomads of India that has only holes in the place of nostrils, like snakes...they

¹⁵⁰ *War of the Worlds*, prod. Paula Wagner, dir. Steven Spielberg, Paramount and DreamWorks, 2005.

¹⁵¹ *The War of the Worlds (Radio)*, Wikipedia, 8 February 2006

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_War_of_the_Worlds_%28radio%29>

¹⁵² Orchard, *Wonders*, 192. My translation: "They are black in colour and they are named Hostes. As it is known that as they catch a man, then they devour him."

¹⁵³ *War of the Worlds*, 1:29:05.

¹⁵⁴ Jimmy Dunn, "The Snakes of Egypt," *Tour Egypt*, 8 February 2006

<<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/snakesofegypt.htm>>

¹⁵⁵ "Designing the Enemy: Tripods and Aliens," *War of the Worlds* prod. Paula Wagner, dir. Steven Spielberg, Paramount and DreamWorks, 2005.

are called the Sciritae.”¹⁵⁶ The aliens are even given a forked tongue like a snake; it can be observed in one scene where an alien takes a drink from a dripping pipe.¹⁵⁷ The alien designers even wanted to give their alien creatures a fluid motion, as if they were walking across water, similar to the fluid motion of a snake.¹⁵⁸ It could be said that these snake characteristics are in fact, what led snakes to be considered so monstrous. In *The Wonders of the East* alone, there are three different tales involving snakes. These include the tale of a place called Medes, “Ðeos steow næddran hafað. Ða næddran habbað twa heafða.”¹⁵⁹ Throughout the ancient and Anglo-Saxon texts snakes are given the role of the monster, very rarely do you see the snake in a heroic light.

It is not only snake-like characteristics that can be perceived as characteristics of monstrosity. Unusual size is also a frequent trait of both the monsters of the ancient and Anglo-Saxon texts, as well as those of the modern media. Throughout *The Wonders of the East*, there are tales of races of extraordinary size. One tribe supposedly ‘beoð fiftyne fota lange.’¹⁶⁰ The size of these tribes eventually becomes a bit of a fish tale, in that every time the story is told the tribes keep getting taller. While the aliens are not fifteen feet tall in *War of the Worlds*, Spielberg was certain to make them taller than humans. If the aliens had been created smaller than humans, then they may have been seen as non-threatening rather than evil creatures out to take over the world.

While Spielberg did create his aliens to be sufficiently scary, he realized that there was a certain line that could be crossed. ‘We tried to make them recognizable, yet still very alien.’¹⁶¹ He accomplished this by using the same method that the ancient Greeks and Anglo-Saxons used, giving the monsters some human-like characteristics. Spielberg gave his aliens a human-like face: a neck with a defined head, two eyes, two ears, a mouth, a tongue, cheek bones, and teeth. The aliens had jointed fingers and toes so they were able to pick things up with their hands and feet. The aliens were even given eyelids so that they had the ability to blink. These human traits are further accentuated when the aliens exhibit a certain humanistic curiosity. When they enter the house that the family is hiding in, they look around, touch things, and explore. They spin a bicycle wheel hanging on the wall, they look at and lick a photograph, and as mentioned previously one of them even takes a drink of water from a dripping pipe. This curiosity shows that the aliens have intelligence and wish to understand more about their surroundings. The movie’s concept designer, Doug Chiang, said that they “had to make them so that they looked intelligent, they’re not just beasts.”¹⁶² The Anglo-Saxon scribes of *The Wonders of the East* also wished to make sure that their monsters exhibited intelligence beyond that of average beasts. They describe a “moncynn þæt is mid us Donestre genemned... 7 hig cunnon eall mennisc gereord.”¹⁶³ While the Donestre have a high level of intelligence they also partake in cannibalism: “him onfoð, 7 þænne æfter þan hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde.”¹⁶⁴ This shows that while the Donestre exhibit many human-like characteristics and are a highly intelligent people like the aliens of *War of the Worlds*, they are still perceived as a monstrous tribe. The alien creators of *War of the Worlds* were able to provide a

¹⁵⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1958) 7.25.

¹⁵⁷ *War of the Worlds*, 1:25:30.

¹⁵⁸ “Designing the Enemy: Tripods and Aliens,” *War of the Worlds*.

¹⁵⁹ Orchard, *Wonders*, 186. My translation: “This place has snakes. These snakes have two heads.”

¹⁶⁰ Orchard, *Wonders*, 186. My translation: “are fifteen feet tall.”

¹⁶¹ Steven Spielberg, “Designing the Enemy: Tripods and Aliens,” *War of the Worlds*

¹⁶² Doug Chiang, “Designing the Enemy: Tripods and Aliens,” *War of the Worlds*

¹⁶³ Orchard, *Wonders*, 196. My translation: “Tribe of men among us named Donestre... and they know all man’s language.”

¹⁶⁴ Orchard, *Wonders*, 196. My translation: “they catch him, and then after they eat him all except for his head.”

balance between being frightening and fascinating, just as the Anglo-Saxon scribes did so many centuries ago.

It is clear that in designing the aliens for his 2005 adaptation of *War of the Worlds*, Steven Spielberg was influenced by the stereotypical characteristics of monsters that began in the ancient Greek and Anglo-Saxon texts. So if these modern aliens are based on the ancient monsters, how is it that they are now seen as inhabiting outer space? Perhaps as we discovered more of our world and traveled further beyond our borders and did not find these monsters, they were pushed further and further out. Exploration continued to occur on earth until there was nowhere left undiscovered. We were still so fascinated with these creatures that we needed to keep them in our lives, so they were pushed off of the earth and into outer space to become what we now know as aliens. Originally they were as close as the moon or mars. However, as we have begun to closely explore these heavenly bodies and have not yet discovered any signs of intelligent life, they have been pushed further into the unknown parts of outer space. Who knows what the future might hold as we push the limits space discovery. Perhaps the monsters will come back to earth into the cyber world or blend in among us. There is no denying the similarities between our common conceptions of aliens and what had been considered monstrous in both ancient Greece and Anglo-Saxon England. One never knows, but maybe in a few thousand years our beliefs about aliens will be questioned, just as we question many of the ancient Greek and Anglo-Saxon's beliefs.

ANGLO-SAXON INFLUENCE ON *MOBY-DICK*

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Herman Melville's 1851 American novel, *Moby-Dick* tells a story which is representative of its own time and place but which is in part founded on early medieval attitudes towards monsters. The roots of the images of monstrosity found in *Moby-Dick* can be traced to Anglo-Saxon texts. On the surface, the novel is an exciting adventure story but Melville also takes the reader beyond superficialities into a study of the nature of alterity. At the outset of *Moby-Dick*, the character Ishmael introduces himself as the narrator and enlists as a crew member on an American whaling ship. Under the command of Captain Ahab, a hero in the classical tradition, the sailors embark on an epic quest to conquer the monstrous whale, Moby-Dick. Melville depicts two figures of alterity: the whale and a sailor named Queequeg who is portrayed as a monstrous, head-hunting 'savage'. As the novel progresses, the identification of the monstrous becomes problematic. Queequeg befriends Ishmael and neither the whale nor the captain remains clearly cast. The confusion Melville promotes is similar to the confusion regarding the identification of the monster and the hero in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. In both stories, thoughtful readers are left uncertain regarding the author's classification of the monstrous. In this article, an attempt will be made to trace the historical development of images of the monstrous and to expose the similarity between the themes chosen by two English-speaking writers whose works are separated by centuries of time.

The dark-skinned sailor Queequeg, is considered by Ishmael to be alien and frightening. Although they are both members of the same crew, Ishmael at first can only perceive the differences between them. On their first meeting, Ishmael says,

Such a face! It was of a dark, purplish, yellow color, here and there stuck over with large, blackish looking squares.... There was no hair on his head—none to speak of at least—nothing but a small scalp-knot twisted up on his forehead....[He] continued in the business of undressing, and at last showed his chest and arms. As I live, these covered parts of him were checkered with the same squares as his face; his back, too, was all over the same dark squares. Still more, his very legs were marked, as if a parcel of dark green frogs were running up the trunks of young palms. It was now quite plain that he must be some abominable savage...A peddler of heads too—perhaps the heads of his own brothers.¹⁶⁵

To Ishmael, Queequeg represents the monstrous unknown. The 'savage' comes from a different place and his appearance is different than that of normal men. Ishmael's metaphorical description of the 'frogs...running up...palms' suggests a jungle habitat and emphasizes the foreign nature of the sailor.

Monsters similar to Queequeg are described in the source materials reproduced in *Pride and Prodigies*. Although *Moby-Dick* is American, Melville and his characters have been influenced by these centuries-old materials. Ishmael's heritage has culturally prepared him to expect monstrosity in beings like Queequeg. Several of the *Pride and Prodigies* writers make assumptions

¹⁶⁵ Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002), pp. 33-35.

and offer extrapolations regarding people found in foreign lands. In the following passage translated from the Latin, the *Liber Monstrorum* speculatively describes black-skinned people of outrageous proportion: 'Also a race of people with huge bodies is born in the east of the river Brixontis, black in body, and who reach eighteen feet in height; and, so they say, when they catch folk, they eat them raw.'¹⁶⁶ The words 'so they say' admit the questionable veracity of the information presented. The writers are speculating tentatively on the monsters in other lands. In *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle*, foreigners are said to be 'swa wildeor' or 'as beasts'. Although the writer does not explicitly state that the foreigners are animals, the possibility is raised. It reads: '...7 wæpned men wæron hie swa ruwe 7 gehære swa wildeor. Wæron hie nigon fota uplonge, 7 they wæron þa men nacod 7 hie næniges hrægles ne gimdon.'¹⁶⁷ Description of black-skinned people can be found in *The Wonders of the East* as well. They are categorized with a number of other extraordinary-looking people. The writer questions whether these others are human:

*Dær mannkynn is þæt syndan sweartes hiwes on ansyne, þa man hated
silhearwan.*¹⁶⁸

*Dær beoð akende men, ða beoð fiftyne fota lange 7 hi habbað hwit lic 7 tu neb on
anum heafde, fet 7 cneowu swiðe read, 7 lange nosu 7 sweart feax.*¹⁶⁹

*Þas beoð menn gewenede.*¹⁷⁰

They are men 'gewenede'. Ishmael feels a similar confusion about Queequeg's identity. He is uncertain whether Queequeg is indeed a man.

It is easy to see how large quantities of information about 'monstrous' people might have influenced people in Melville's day. By the time Ishmael met Queequeg, these old stories and travel tales were probably an inescapable part of his cultural memory and of his expectations. Also described in *The Wonders of the East*, are natives who, like Queequeg, are head-hunters. The text reads, '...7 þænne æfter þan hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde 7 þonne sittað 7 wepað ofer ðam heafde.'¹⁷¹ The differences between the two sailors are so great, and Ishmael's cultural mind-set is

¹⁶⁶ Andy Orchard, ed., 'Liber Monstrorum.' *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 254-317, l. 33.

¹⁶⁷ Andy Orchard, ed., 'Letter of Alexander.' *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), p. 224-253, l. 29.
(...they were male persons, as shaggy and hairy as beasts. They were nine feet tall, and they were naked, those men, and they didn't care about clothes.)

¹⁶⁸ Andy Orchard, ed., 'The Wonders of the East.' *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 184-203, l. 32.
(There is a race of people that was of black hue in appearance, that men call Ethiopians.)

¹⁶⁹ Orchard, 'Wonders', l. 11.
(There are born men, that are fifteen feet long and they have white bodies and two faces on a single head, feet and knees exceedingly red, and long noses and black hair.)

¹⁷⁰ Orchard, 'Wonders', l. 12.
(...It is thought that they are perhaps men.)

¹⁷¹ Orchard, 'Wonders', l. 20.
(...and then after that they eat him all up except for his head and then sit and weep over the head.)

so negative, that Ishmael is unsure of his crew-mate's humanity.

Another Old English source, *Andreas*, tells the story of the Apostle Matthew's rescue by the Christian adventurer Andrew. The text is notable for the way in which it clearly differentiates between those blessed by God and those who are the heathen, cannibalistic enemy. God is on the side of Andrew and Matthew and definitely not on the side of the heathens. Conversion by bloodshed is depicted as not only condoned but blessed by God. The text reads:

And he beheld a band of heathen men gathered together before the fast-closed door, seven prison wardens standing. Death took them all, hapless they fell; sudden slaughter upon those men of blood. And the holy man gave thanks in his heart unto the merciful father...¹⁷²

They believed that God was responsible for their successful slaughter of the 'others' and should be thanked for His help.

The sources quoted above illustrate a blatant, assumed division between 'them and us.' Unfamiliar strangers are in each case assumed to be adversarial in position. When Ishmael encounters the unknown 'other' in the character of Queequeg, his preconceived attitudes cause him to react with animosity. Ishmael's initial response to Queequeg is inevitable due to his inherent ideology.

The novel *Moby-Dick* is based on the cultural tradition established throughout the centuries. Its story begins with a typical conflict between white man and 'savage', but it takes a significant step away from the ideologies expressed in the above-quoted texts. In *Moby-Dick* the unknown 'savage' becomes known and familiar. Queequeg is 'demonstrated' as he and Ishmael become friends. Melville explores an important evolution in cultural attitudes. If it could be said that Ishmael represents white America and Queequeg represents the many immigrants to America, the novel portrays the beginnings of a nation's process of assimilation instead of opposition. Ishmael departs from the 'them and us' attitude and learns tolerance. Melville writes, '[Queequeg] looked at me with a sort of condescending concern and compassion, as though he thought it a great pity that such a sensible young man should be so hopelessly lost to evangelical pagan piety.'¹⁷³ Ishmael begins to see the world from the perspective of the 'savage'. He understands that Queequeg sees him as a 'pagan'. They begin to celebrate their shared characteristics above their differences. Ishmael and Queequeg replace the animosity and distrust in their relationship with approval and appreciation.

In addition to the monstrosity of the 'savage' man, Melville also presents alterity in the form of the monstrous whale. He states: 'let me assure ye that many a veteran who has freely marched up to a battery, would quickly recoil at the apparition of the sperm whale's vast tail, fanning into eddies the air over his head.'¹⁷⁴ Of all these fearsome beasts, the great white whale known as Moby-Dick is the most fearsome. Melville describes him with the following words: 'unwonted magnitude...his remarkable hue...a peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidal white lump...deformed lower jaw, intelligent malignity.'¹⁷⁵ Although people who lived by the sea had known of the whale for centuries, even by Ishmael's time the whale was still a

¹⁷² Anon., *Andreas*. Trans. Charles W. Kennedy (Cambridge, ON: In parentheses Publications, Old English Series, 2000), p. 20. Jan. 30, 2006, <http://www.yorku.ca/inpar/Andreas_Kennedy.pdf>

¹⁷³ Melville, p. 83.

¹⁷⁴ Melville, p. 98.

¹⁷⁵ Melville, p. 155.

creature of mystery. Whales could be killed and viewed when dead but the actual living whale could only be seen in part. A blown spume, a surfacing tail fin or a brief leaping arch above the sea was all sailors could see at a given time. They knew that whales were big and frightening and that sailors were sometimes able to kill and harvest them but they could not eliminate all of the danger or completely understand the whales' underwater existence.

T. H. White's translation of *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts* provides a twelfth-century description of a whale:

There is an ocean monster which is...called a WHALE (cetus) because of the frightfulness of its body and because it was this animal which swallowed (excepti) Jonah, and its belly was so great that people took it to be Hell. Jonah himself remarked: 'He heard me out of the belly of Hell'.

The outlandish description, as it continues below, is reminiscent of the exaggerated stories in *Pride and Prejudices*:

This animal lifts its back out of the open sea above the watery waves, and then it anchors itself in the one place; and on its back, what with the shingle of the ocean drawn there by the gales, a level lawn gets made and bushes begin to grow there. Sailing ships that happen to be going that way take it to be an island, and land on it. Then they make themselves a fireplace. But the Whale, feeling the hotness of the fire, suddenly plunges down into the depths of the deep, and pulls down the anchored ship with it into the profound.¹⁷⁶

Long before Melville's novel was written, the whale's size and power had been inspiring awe. Because it could only be partially known, the whale was elusive and fascinating. Thus the early Anglo-Saxon church chose to use the whale to present some of their teachings. People craved answers to their questions. Understanding that people needed to believe that their authority figures understood the world and could be trusted as leaders, the church changed mystery to allegory. It explained that, since the mysterious whale lured men to their death, it must be associated with demons who similarly lead men to ruin. The text of *The Exeter Book* makes use of the whale as a teaching device. It reads:

Similarly it is the custom of demons, the practice of devils, that while they exist they ensnare multitudes by their mysterious power, and persuade them to the ruin of good deeds, purposely entice them, so that they seek support and comfort from fiends, until they firmly choose a habitation there with the devil.¹⁷⁷

The text goes on to explain the technique by which the whale entices fish and compares it to the way in which man carelessly chooses the pleasure of the world above God:

A pleasant smell comes from within him, so that other kinds of fish are entrapped by means of it....They enter there in an unwary crowd, until the wide mouth is filled; then suddenly he clashes together his grim jaws around his plunder. So it is with any man who very often during this fleeting time takes but careless regard of his life, who lets vain desire delude him by its sweet smell, so that he is,

¹⁷⁶ T. H. White, *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1960), p. 197.

¹⁷⁷ Anon. *The Exeter Book Part II*. Ed. W. S. Mackie (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 69.

owing to his vices, hateful to the King of glory.¹⁷⁸

Church leaders could ease their followers' spiritual and intellectual curiosity by attributing a religious meaning to the whale. The creature was so magnificent that it was able to act as a vehicle through which life's mystery could be explained. The whale was also sufficiently intriguing to hold the people's attention.

In Melville's novel, the whale Moby-Dick is assigned weightier significance than the monster, Queequeg. Ahab lost his leg to the flesh-and-blood individual, Moby-Dick, but the whale comes to represent more than a mortal monster. He assumes an archetypal role, similar to that described above in *The Exeter Book*, as the evil seducer of mankind.

Yet as the novel progresses, Ishmael prompts the reader to consider the white whale in depth. The narrator speculates for an entire chapter on the meaning of whiteness in relation to blackness. Melville departs from didactic Christian teachings. Although the narrative does not make blatant statements, the author may be suggesting that the whale simply represents 'Other'. Are good and evil two sides of the same coin? Is the concept of evil as expressed in Christian teachings an oversimplification? Melville provides the following extracts from the Bible in the introduction to *Moby-Dick*:

'And God created great whales.'	Genesis
'Leviathan maketh a path to shine after him; One would think the deep to be hoary.'	Job
'Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah'	Jonah
'In that day, the Lord with his sore, and great, and strong sword, shall punish Leviathan the piercing serpent, even Leviathan that crooked serpent; and he shall slay the dragon that is in the sea.'	Isaiah

Since the author himself has provided readers with this biblical evidence of conflicting attitudes towards the whale, readers would be advised to consider its implications. In Christianity's source literature the whale is described as evil but also as a great creature under the control of the Lord. The inclusion of these contradictory descriptions in the introduction may serve to alert the reader that Melville did not intend readers to perceive *Moby-Dick* as an action-adventure story.

The adventure story model veers further from its course as Melville reverses the roles of monster and hero. As the novel progresses, Ishmael's respect for Moby-Dick increases, while conversely, his regard for the captain decreases. Although Ahab is originally presented as the hero, the captain becomes fanatical in his pursuit of the whale and in Ishmael's eyes loses credibility as a trustworthy leader. Ahab wears a prosthetic leg made from whale bone as a replacement for the leg bitten off by Moby-Dick. The leg metaphorically blends the monster and the hero until the roles have become blurred and the binary inverted. Ahab becomes obsessed with being great. He says, 'In the midst of the personified impersonal, a personality stands here.'¹⁷⁹ In response the lead sailor says, "'God, God is against thee, old man; forbear! 'tis an ill voyage! ill begun, ill continued.'"¹⁸⁰ When Ishmael becomes aware that Ahab is leading the crew towards doom, he opts out of the battle. He chooses domesticity over warfare. As a result, when the ship and entire crew are destroyed by the whale, Ishmael is rescued.¹⁸¹ Although the narrator makes no clear statements, by looking through his eyes, the thinking reader is led to query the identification of the monsters in this tale. Readers should not complacently assume that Melville is recording the moral evolution of

¹⁷⁸ Mackie, p. 71.

¹⁷⁹ Melville, p. 382.

¹⁸⁰ Melville, p. 383.

¹⁸¹ Melville, p. 396.

man, brought about by the great leadership of those of us in the New World. Attention must be paid to the remarkable similarity between the ideology expressed by the medieval *Beowulf* poet and that presented by Melville.

Laudably, Melville departs from the standard depiction of 'savages' in *Pride and Prejudices* by establishing a friendship between Ishmael and Queequeg. He also questions the dogma expressed by the church in *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts*. It could be argued that *Moby-Dick* marks a literary turning point in its profound advocacy of tolerance. However that argument has to be countered by a consideration of the subtle message placed between the lines by the *Beowulf* poet. Both authors present pairs of enemies whose identities become confused. Both authors suggest that the difference between enemy and hero may be problematic. Beowulf and Grendel become interchangeable in the same way Ahab and Moby-Dick do. Through the manipulation of his writing style in the first fight scene, the *Beowulf* poet withholds the identity of the 'feond'/monster/enemy, thereby suggesting that the text could equally easily be describing Beowulf as Grendel. The poem reads:

<i>nam þa mid handa</i>	<i>Forð near ætstop,</i>
<i>rinc on ræste,</i>	<i>higeþihtigne</i>
<i>feond mid folme;</i>	<i>him ræhte ongean</i>
<i>inwitþancum</i>	<i>he onfeng hraþe</i>
	<i>ond wið earm gesæt.¹⁸²</i>

Both authors confuse the identity of the monster, thereby inverting the binary of hero and monster. For this reason, tolerance cannot be credited solely to the modern author.

There is a further similarity. Melville prompts readers to look beneath the superficial level of his story. The unknown Queequeg becomes known and is held up as a mirror to direct the reader's attention to the unknown monstrous which remains unknowable. He writes (in Ahab's words),

"All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me...be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him."¹⁸³

The medieval bestiary attempts to answer the questions of Christians by providing religious codes of belief. Most medieval people probably believed the message literally but there is cause to believe that some might have received the metaphor as a simple representation of a complex mystery. The skill of the *Beowulf* poet illustrates that readers should not assume that the term medieval is synonymous with unsophisticated thinking. Melville unpacks the allegory and forces readers to face the message behind it. Yet it can be said that the bestiary writers and the *Beowulf* poet also hint that we should look behind the 'mask.'

The *Beowulf* author presents a similar metaphor to Melville's 'mask' in the character of

¹⁸² Bruce Mitchell & Fred C. Robinson, ed., *Beowulf* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), ll. 745-50. (He stepped forward and near and then seized in his hand the strong-hearted warrior who was at his rest; the enemy reached out against him with his hand; with an evil intent, he grasped quickly and he sat up against his arm.)

¹⁸³ Melville, p. 140.

THE PASSION OF ST CHRISTOPHER AND POWDER:
AN EXAMINATION OF 'GOOD' MONSTERS

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“All monstrous forms fascinate and terrify because they challenge our understanding, showing the fragility and uncertainty of traditional conceptions of man”.¹⁸⁵ Monsters intrigue the human mind when kept at a distance. It is easy to feel a sense of control and stability when what one fears is beyond familiar territory. However, when one unexpectedly discovers *the Other* within one’s own borders, one’s template for understanding humanity is shattered as revelations are made about one’s misjudgment of the monstrous. The storyline from the movie *Powder*, a 1995 film directed by Victor Salva, is distinctly parallel to the Old English version of *The Passion of St. Christopher*. The monstrous characters in these two stories are very different than other figures of alterity. They possess characteristics that encourage the audience to respect them and become better human beings because of them. These characteristics include the desire to become socialized, a twofold persona of being both the monster in appearance and the hero in character/actions, and a longing to make the journey to their home. The monsters in these sources can also be linked back to monstrous figures described in *Wonders of the East*. This suggests that the idea of “good monsters” is not a recent one, but one that is evolving from an ancient concept.

The Passion of St. Christopher tells the story of a monstrous dog-headed figure who is brought into civilization. Other “dog headed” creatures are spoken of in early pieces of medieval literature as well, such as *Wonders of the East*; ‘*Eac swylce þær beoð cende Healfhundingas ða syndon hatene Conopenas*’.¹⁸⁶ It is evident that having dog-like physical characteristics classify a creature as monstrous in the eyes of humans. In the *Passion of St. Christopher*, the main character is captured in war and taken to a land governed by the pre-Christian Roman Empire.¹⁸⁷ He encounters an angel who encourages him to convert to Christianity and he asks God to give him the ability to speak the language of the people around him. Once given this ability, Christopher speaks the message of God to all with whom he interacts, and many become believers in Christ because of his words and actions. Christopher shares his faith in God with others, revealing the discriminatory beliefs of many and helping them to see that God’s grace is available for those of every race and nation. The king at that time grows furious with Christopher’s evangelism and eventually Christopher is tortured and martyred.

The composer of this story is unidentified and little is known about the previous life of the man called Christopher, a name given to him after his baptism, which means “bearer of Christ” in Greek.¹⁸⁸ This lack of knowledge about Christopher’s life prior to his conversion,

¹⁸⁵ Friedman, John Block. *The monstrous races in medieval art and thought* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 3

¹⁸⁶ There also are born a kind of half-dog called Conopenae. Orchard, Andy. *Wonders of the East, Pride and Prodigies: studies in the monsters of the Beowulf-manuscript* (Cambridge; Rochester, N.Y., 1995), p. 189

¹⁸⁷ Woods, David. *The Passion of St. Christopher* (translation) *BHL 1764*.

(<http://www.ucc.ie/milmart/BHL1764.html>, July, 1999)

¹⁸⁸ Woods, *BHL 1764*

combined with the fact that there is no known burial site for this Saint (which is very unusual for a martyr), suggest that this story contains more fiction than fact. This leads one to question the social pressures which possibly led to the creation of such a story at that time. The composer must have felt that it was necessary to tell a tale about the powerful conversion of a monstrous figure. It is likely that the reason behind the creation of this story is linked to the fact that the Church had a great influence over society and the way people chose to live their lives at that period in history. This story could very well have been written to promote the idea that God cares for and loves all of His creation, and that He is even able to work through those who are monstrous in appearance in order to accomplish His purpose for good. It may also have been written to encourage missionary activity outside of the Roman Empire; if a dog-headed man could be used by God to convert people, it is possible that anyone could be a missionary.¹⁸⁹

Upon examining the possible social pressures that may have impacted the composing of *The Passion of St. Christopher*, it is noted that many modern pieces of literature and popular films contain similar storylines. The movie *Powder* is an excellent example of a storyline which is comparable to *The Passion of St. Christopher*.¹⁹⁰ *Powder* begins with a scene in a hospital which shows an albino baby who has been delivered after his mother had been struck and killed by lightning. His father disowns him because of his appearance. Extreme whiteness of skin was seen as a monstrous attribute in medieval times as well. *Wonders of the East* offers an example of this: ‘*Dær beoð akende men, ða beoð fiftyne fota lange 7 hi habbað hwit lic...*’¹⁹¹ The story of *Powder* advances ahead approximately sixteen years, and the same albino boy is found by the police in the cellar of his grandparents’ house after the death of his grandfather. His name is Jeremy Reid, but he refers to himself as “Powder”. The police, along with a social worker, encourage him to leave the farmhouse he has inhabited since he was a baby. He initially is taken to a juvenile detention centre, and eventually transfers to a public high school. It is revealed that he has special powers, such as the ability to conduct electricity and magnetize things, as well as the ability to read thoughts and allow people to read the thoughts of others. As the story progresses, Powder teaches the people he comes in contact with about being honest with each other, and encourages them to consider the impact of their actions. However, although he is helping others, he is frustrated with the society in which he lives. He feels that people do not care enough about each other and his dissatisfaction leads him to desire to go “home”. In the end of the film, he runs into a field toward a thunderstorm and with a sudden surge, he is struck by a bolt of lightning which appears to absorb his earthly body.

There are many ways in which the monstrous character in the film *Powder* holds a strong similarity to the figure of alterity in *The Passion of St. Christopher*. The first of these is their desire to become socialized within the community in which they are placed. Both characters are foreigners of another race – races which are characterized with human-made terms: dog-heads and albinos. Christopher finds himself in a new territory after being captured as a prisoner of war. However, instead of secluding himself or trying to discover a means of escaping and returning home, he decides to listen to the message which is brought to him by an angel of the Lord, and accepts his duty of proclaiming the Word of God to everyone he meets. Not only does he talk to them about what he believes, but he builds relationships with them and shows them kindness that is not always shown to him in return. In the same way, Powder (although he is slightly reluctant at first) decides to accept the offer that the social worker gives him, and he allows her to take him to

¹⁸⁹ Woods, *BHL 1764*

¹⁹⁰ Salva, Victor. *Powder* (Buena Vista Pictures Distribution, 1995)

¹⁹¹ There are people who are fifteen feet tall and they have white bodies... Orchard, *Wonders*, p.191

live in a juvenile detention centre. After he grows more comfortable being in the company of other people, he is transferred to a public high school. In both places, he builds relationships with those around him, and he teaches them about honesty and compassion. These monstrous characters have the desire to become socialized into a society that views them as repulsive outsiders. There must be some aspect of goodness within them that allows them to find their purpose in presenting humans with a better perspective of humanity. This goodness within them seems to be united with an understanding about the importance of their individual message as well as a determination to spread their beliefs and values despite the negative assumptions that people in their communities have made about them. Their desire to be socialized is not driven by the hope of being accepted, but rather the compulsion to share what they believe others need to hear. This idea of a “good” monster is also seen in *Wonders of the East*: ‘*Dis mannkynn lifað fela geara, 7 hi syndon fremfulle menn...Se macedonisca Alexander, þa ða he him to com, þa wæs he wundriende hyra menniscnysse, ne wolde he hi cwellan ne him nawiht laðes don.*’¹⁹² As further illustrated in this example, it is their humanity which allows the monstrous creatures to be social, suggesting that humanity and sociability are co-dependent.

Another characteristic of both Powder and Christopher is a contradictory persona. Although they are monstrous in appearance (and are often treated as such), they are good and kind in spirit. Their characters are simultaneously monstrous and heroic. Appearance is generally the first thing that one notices, and it can have a strong effect on one’s overall impression of another. Often it may cause impressions about the observed one’s inner self to be biased in a certain direction. Christopher is said to be a cynocephalus – a dog-headed man. He is also described as being extraordinarily large in size. “His head was terrifying, like that of a dog. His hair was very long and gleamed like gold. His eyes were like the morning star, and his teeth like the tusks of a boar.”¹⁹³ Powder is an albino, which means that he has pale skin and pale eyes (which are sensitive to light). In addition to his albinism, he also has a complete lack of hair on his body. Although Christopher and Powder may differ in appearance from the people around them, they also have human characteristics. Perhaps this was even more terrifying for people than if they had been visited by a creature whose outward appearance was entirely different from that of a human. The fear of monsters with physical human characteristics may be more prominent than the fear of other monsters because one feels as though they have little control over them. Humans seem to be able to control most things that are not human, but when faced with a creature that exhibits human characteristics, it is difficult to define the degree to which they are human. The creature is negatively labeled in an attempt to maintain even a small amount of control. It seems clear that in both the past and the present stories, figures of alterity do not always have to be evil and monstrous in character for people to believe that they are, based on appearances. Even pure morality in a monstrous form can be overlooked, or even regarded negatively if one allows appearance to overshadow the condition of the spirit.

In *The Passion of St. Christopher* and *Powder* the monstrous characters are kind in spirit and each has a moral purpose. Both characters have special powers, and each chooses to use his own powers to benefit the lives of those around him. It is interesting that a character seen as a monster, and one who is so obviously rejected and outcast, would choose to use his powers for the good of those with whom he comes in contact and to help those in need – even those who reject him. Christopher recognizes the sin in the world around him and makes it his mission to serve

¹⁹² This race has lived for lots of years, and they are generous people...Alexander of Macedon went there and he was astonished at their humanity and he would not kill them or harm them. Orchard, *Wonders*, pp.200-203

¹⁹³ Woods, *BHL 1764*

others and to tell them about Christ and His sacrifice. At one point in the story, the king sends two prostitutes into a locked room with Christopher, ordering them to seduce him and cause him to be lustful. But instead of tempting him into evil desires, the two women are convicted of the sin in their own lives. Christopher speaks with them and prays for them, and they become believers. In this example it is evident that Christopher clearly knows his purpose and will not conform to the ways of the world. In a similar way, Powder saw the inhumanity and hatred around him and sought to change the hearts of those people by showing them how they made others feel. In one scene in the modern film, a man kills a deer just for the thrill of it. Powder witnesses this, and approaches the man. As the deer is lying on the ground suffering, Powder takes the hand of the hunter and places it on the deer. Bystanders stand close to the scene and watch as the face of the hunter turns from an expression of confusion to that of intense discomfort and pain. The man writhes in agony, as he and some observers scream for Powder to let go of him. Later, the audience learns that Powder was able to allow the man to feel exactly what the deer is feeling as the animal is suffering. The man feels as though he no longer can pick up his hunting rifle without remembering the experience and feeling guilty about it. Not only does this scene change the attitude of the hunter, but it also causes the audience to contemplate common injustices that may be socially acceptable or perhaps regarded indifferently in our society. It allows the audience to see the unique perspective of the monster – an outsider who is not influenced or conditioned into believing that certain practices are moral and right just because they have become traditionally acceptable. This perspective forces the audience to re-examine their moral standards as well as their beliefs about what is right and wrong.

Even as characters which are monstrous in appearance, Christopher and Powder definitely have the ability to change the lives of those with whom they interact. In both stories, the main character eventually attracts a following of people – individuals who are able to see past the monstrous appearance and desire to learn more about the standards of morality that these characters propose and live out in their daily lives. People begin to trust Christopher and to believe in God based on what he has told them and because of the miracles that he has performed through the power given to him by God. Powder changes the way people think about their actions, and causes those around him to contemplate the way that they are connected to their community, and the impact they have on the lives of others. These examples give evidence of a craving for morality, even when it comes in the form of a seemingly terrible figure.

The third similarity between the monstrous characters of Christopher and Powder is their desire to return to the place they call home. Interestingly, the “home” of which each of them speaks is somewhere that they have never before seen, and somewhere that they do not explain to the audience. Therefore, based on each storyline, it is deduced that Christopher is referring to heaven when he speaks of “home”, and when Powder speaks of being “home” he is referring to being dispersed throughout the electrical energy in the atmosphere. It seems that these particular monstrous figures choose domesticity over seclusion and acceptance over segregation. They long for the place where they will not be considered to be monstrous. It is interesting that although they feel such a strong desire to dwell in their respective “homes”, they are still able to recognize their purpose for the time and place in which they currently find themselves. They are focused on the fulfillment of these purposes, both to bring a positive change to humanity (mostly on an individual basis), and to have the long awaited opportunity to be taken to the place they desire to reside in – a place that is better for them than this world.

The Passion of St. Christopher and *Powder* are both stories that give a powerful narrative about a monstrous character whose beliefs and moral purpose change the lives of those

with whom they came in contact. These characters stand out from other monsters because of their desire to be socialized into a new and foreign community, their twofold personas, as well as their longing to make the journey to their respective homes. In both storylines, the monster offers an outsider's perspective on the inner-workings of society, and their function is ultimately to humanize humanity. *The Passion of St. Christopher* was originally composed in the medieval time period, and was likely influenced by previous works such as *Wonders of the East*. Although it was a piece of literature used to encourage missionary activity and the idea of equal access to God's salvation, its basic storyline has been continually replicated. People have a longstanding fascination with monstrous characters who display great morality. The intrigue is found in the challenge they offer us – a challenge to put aside a set of traditional social norms and to break the mold in order that we might live in such a way that brings the most good to the lives of those around us. It is clear that the society in which we live has many monstrous characteristics of its own because we are in need of “good” monsters to teach us true kindness and compassion.