

Here There Be Monsters: Mapping The Hero's Journey of Beowulf, and its Implications on Understanding the Thresholds and Narrative Cycles of the Epic

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MÁSTERES
DE LA UAM
2018 – 2019

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras

Departamento Filología Inglesa

Master Universitario en Estudios Literarios y Culturales Británicos y de los Países de
Habla Inglesa

Trabajo de Fin de Master

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June, 2019

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Abstract

Beowulf might be the earliest, complete written form of English literature, but its roots run deep in oral mythic tradition, grounding it in Scandinavian and Teutonic folktales. Originally sung in a variety of forms, its transcription is the only surviving attempt we have by an anonymous author to solidify the work as a single, fixed narrative. However, due to the culture of the time in which it was written and the structure and style of the work, some scholars have found problems in attempting to analyse it vis a vis traditional literary theories. Nevertheless, there is one theory that can be of great use to us as investigators of literature; because the structure of the Western Epic roots itself in myth, Joseph Campbell's theory of Monomyth is an effective and illuminating tool by which we can critically understand Epic texts.

Mapping the Hero's Journey of *Beowulf* is not a simple process, but it is of great interest for two reasons. First, that it shows the boon of information that Monomyth can yield when applied to Epics, as Monomyth provides an excellent scaffold for comparison between stories of this kind. Second, it shows the ways in which *Beowulf* itself diverges from its root myths and other narratives of its time period, and the way in which it defines itself within its genre.

Monomyth is a map of a hero's journey from this world to a liminal space of change and growth, and back again with newfound knowledge. *Beowulf* is no different in structure and fits the steps of Monomyth, but the way in which Beowulf as a character reacts to these steps, and the way in which the liminal space of change, which we will call the Otherworld, interacts with the story, are both quite unique. We will see this by drawing the map and charting a course through *Beowulf's* Otherworld, but carefully so, for here, there be monsters.

I. The Journey and the Man: An Introduction

In the early days of map making the world was a small place with roughly defined borders, which separated the known world from a vast and almost incomprehensible other. The Known was a point of light surrounded by a dark Unknown; here, the cartographers wrote in the deep and murky edges of the oceans and distant Thules, there be monsters. Even on a smaller scale, forests, swamps, meres might be marked on maps as borders between Here and a very frightening and nebulous There. In a time when the known world was often juxtaposed against an encroaching otherworld, it is no surprise that literature of its day also revolved around this dichotomy.

Beowulf, the earliest and most definitive example of the English Epic, is no exception to this idea. Steeped in the myths that came before it, it serves as a bridge between the oral traditions of its time and the burgeoning field of written literature, which was only just beginning to take root. However, due to its unique nature some scholars (Swanton, 9) have claimed it is difficult to find a theoretical framework with which to analyse *Beowulf*.

Yet what are literary theories but photographic lenses? All of them will give us a picture of whatever is in front of the camera, but different ones will bend, highlight, and foreground different aspects of our composition. None are better nor worse, but simply give us many different photos of the same subject. However, some lenses might fit more comfortably, or give us clearer or more useful images of some types of compositions. Depending on the dominant features of those compositions, certain theories are designed to highlight the social, philosophical, or linguistic aspects that a given narrative is trying to express (e.g. Marxist criticism and analysis fits comfortably with the political fiction of Orwell or Palahniuk, just as Feminist analysis highlights the intentions and dominant aspects of Atwood).

In this case, Joseph Campbell's theory of Monomyth is the lens that best fits with Western Epic, because the Western Epic is inherently about a journey of a hero. Campbell's model is designed to highlight the changes in a protagonist from mundane to hero status by his or her journey through an otherworld, but also to explain and analyse how and why these changes happen. Thus, the Monomyth gives us a tool by which to measure a hero's growth across his or her narrative arc. Furthermore, Western Epics are based mostly in oral folkloric tradition and are amalgamations of many, many iterations of myths told over large spans of time (Swanton, 8, Sullivan 1). Many Epics may even share roots in the same myths, but grow out in different directions from these common centres. This is the second critical use that Campbell's model provides as a literary lens: the ability to compare compositions with a single, applicable set of parameters, and see how protagonists react within or against them. This paper will prove firstly that the case of *Beowulf* is no exception; it is the story of a hero that rises and ultimately falls according to Campbell's steps of the Hero's Journey. Secondly, what's more, by applying Campbell we learn critical information about how *Beowulf* utilizes universal narrative processes, and how it differs from its root myths and other narratives from its time.

There are several aspects of *Beowulf* that are critical when understanding the full importance and message of the text: the conflict between its dual Christian and Pagan nature, the appositive style, and the poetic structure itself. However, I will not be dealing with these aspects here. This is because they do not bear directly on an application of the Monomyth to a text (the Monomyth is not bound by any specific religion and is not dependent on style). The only aspects that will be dealt with are the cycles which can be identified, the way in which Beowulf takes his Hero's Journey, and the language that marks liminal areas and thresholds which are important to Campbell's model, as I will explain presently.

This paper will utilize Michael Swanton's translation as the primary translation of the text. However, when comparison between translations is necessary, I have cross referenced with the translations of Chickering, Porter, and Tolkien.

A. Mapping the World of *Beowulf*

Despite the fact that the text comes across as riddled with digressions, historical anecdotes of seemingly little consequence, and protracted speeches, *Beowulf* at its core is a fairly simple story; it is about a man who becomes a hero by fighting back a dark and liminal presence that threatens to destroy his world. It is a three part narrative that moves in cycles, as we are about to see. It illustrates the forging of a king, the rise and fall of the great Geatish empire, and also, the tale of a man bold enough to brave the dark and unknown in order to dispel evil forces from a haunted land.

Beowulf is based in quite a number of Scandinavian and Germanic myths from the *Grettis Saga* to the legends of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer (though it differs from them in crucial ways, which will be gone into later). These are background stories that the audience would have been well aware of (Olsen, 354, Swanton, 7), as a modern English speaking audience is aware of Cinderella and Little Red Riding Hood. They were tales woven into the culture and served as points of reference that *Beowulf* draws on at almost every turn in order to make the hero a recognisable force within the story. It's critical we understand the audience and its culture if we are going to understand the manner in which *Beowulf* was written, and how the title character interacts with the parameters set by the Monomyth.

Beowulf was likely written in the late 8th century, though the exact date is debated (Swanton, 5-6). This was just after the end of a period in European history called The Great Migration, where tens of thousands of people migrated across Mongolia, Russia, Scandinavia, and Western Europe, creating settlements wherever they landed (Halsall, 119-121). This resulted in large numbers of peoples from within these groups creating and maintaining settlements in the British Isles. Though they were on British soil, their background cultures were still essentially Teutonic and Scandinavian. During this period, which spanned roughly from the year 400c.e. to 750c.e., there was no such thing as an "English" identity, and it was not until fifty to a hundred years after the migration ended that the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms began to form collective identities based on shared values, religion, and language. Also, the landscape was not only ever changing but often violent; raids by nearby earls or kings or foreign visitors were frequent (Keynes, 48), blood grudges were the norm, and political landscapes were as changeable as they were brutal (Swanton, 5). By the time *Beowulf* was written down, the living and cultural situation in the British Isles had finally begun

to settle. This is important to understanding *Beowulf* because the poem comes on the cusp of many things: the unification of many different cultures into one by means of shared past and a shared physical living space, the dawning of an era of stability in a region that had not seen it in many centuries, and the seedling start of literature moving from an oral tradition into a written one.

The values of such a society going through these rather large transitions are directly reflected in the text, and will be examined as we come to them. It is also important we understand the nature of how *Beowulf* was imparted to its audience: while it was, in one version, written down by an anonymous poet¹, it was still likely meant to be sung to an audience, which influences where the cycles break off and begin (Olsen, 353). Historical notes of interest are included as intro and outro to the cycles, which is quite common for Epics. Context for the listening audience, who had no access to public school, mass printed textbooks, or even general information from outside their towns and villages, was critical.

This is also a society that spent a considerable amount of time in darkness; electric lights have all but eradicated darkness from our lives, especially in cities, but our ancestors would have spent half their living moments after sunset huddled around fires or torches that did not illuminate as far as we'd like to think. Darkness brought with it the unknown - animals, raiding parties, and creatures of legend lurked in the black of night. As the popular book series *Game of Thrones* put it, the night was literally dark, and literally full of terrors. The schism between light and dark, the idea of light being what is known and dark being the realm of all that is unknown, is also heavily threaded through *Beowulf*. Colour representation of the two worlds is constant (Hengen, 171). We will explore this more later.

As a final point to the background of the poem, we should point out that *Beowulf* has many elements of horror in it, and horror often reflects the cultural anxieties of its age (Ruthner, 58). Vampires, for instance, see popularity booms during times of plague or when mortality is of interest to the reading population, zombies during times where immigration is high or a population feels a threat to its identity (ibid). So too the liminal humanoids of *Beowulf*, the *mearcstapa* Grendel and his monstrous mother, reflect the societal fear of destruction and instability. After all, what came from beyond the borders could have easily thrown said society back into violence and chaos. Therefore, *Beowulf*

¹ The idea of multiple poets was explored at length and ultimately dismissed as historically ludicrous (Bonjour, xiv)

as a hero acts as catharsis for the audience to ease this fear; he is the force that will stop destruction and instability from re-invading the fragile peace that Anglo-Saxons had so newly established. This will come to bear strongly on the way in which Beowulf confronts the parameters of his Hero's Journey.

B. Understanding the Monomyth

Then, what is the Monomyth? It's Campbell's assertion that all stories stem from the same story - rather, that all stories have the same base elements - and these are explained by a process Campbell calls The Hero's Journey (Campbell, 28), and that Journey moves in a Cycle. Stories, he says, are about a hero being called on a type of adventure, and the stages that hero goes through in order to fully realise their potential, obtain knowledge or boons of a physical or metaphorical nature, and return to their home world enlightened and endowed in some way. The Monomyth thoroughly and systematically catalogues secondary and tertiary character types, thresholds and dividing lines between spaces, and obstacles the hero is likely to meet and interact with. This makes it a useful tool for comparative work. It's also concerned with thresholds, or demarcations of stages of the Hero's Journey, which serve as signals for when the hero grows or changes as a result of his or her actions and experiences.

In short, it analyses stories, and shows that there are infinite permutations and combinations that can come from the base concepts that the Monomyth lays out. Originally, Campbell had dealt specifically with myth and myth based stories, which is what makes it such an easy fit for a story like *Beowulf*. However, broader analysis showed that Monomyth could be quite handily applied to a variety of different types of stories (Phillips, 1).

The Monomyth is changeable and variable, as Campbell points out (Campbell, 212): "The changes rung on the simple scale of the monomyth defy description. Many tales isolate and greatly enlarge upon one or two of the typical elements of the full cycle (test motif, flight motif, abduction of the bride), others string a number of independent cycles into a single series (as in the *Odyssey*). Differing characters or episodes can become fused, or a single element can reduplicate itself and reappear under many

changes.” If the Monomyth is a reflection of all stories that come from the human existence, then we must expect it to be variable, because life is variable. Some people age more quickly than others, some people are killed at thirteen while others die in their beds at ninety. Some people marry, some don’t, and the same people can have different roles or serve different purposes over the course of a life or story. Monomyth acknowledges that there is a system with logic inherent to it, but also that reality will always impose itself and change the speed or organization of the narrative, as it does with life.

This works beautifully in tandem with *Beowulf* precisely because the poem is a bridge between oral and written traditions (Olsen, 351): as Lord points out (101) “our greatest error is to attempt to make ‘scientifically’ rigid a phenomenon that is fluid”, and by a phenomenon here he is referring to oral tradition and the iterations within it.

There are, of course, flaws and counterpoints to be made when it comes to the Monomyth - no theory is without them. We will look at those towards the end of the paper, but suffice to say none of them detract from the gain we can get from using Campbell as a lens to the literature of our past.

This is not the first time someone has attempted to apply theory to the poem. Noted scholar Thomas Shippey successfully applied Propp’s Model for Wondertales to *Beowulf*, a strict and formal sequence of events, and did not in any way walk away empty-handed from the attempt. Their contribution to the field shed a lot of light on the unknown sources of the Epic and also the “unconscious conditioning” of the poet himself (Shippey, 3), (e.g. the horizon of expectation of the audience, the poet’s cultural background, narrative conventions of the time, etc.). But, as we will see the Monomyth gives us even more and varied information, as *Beowulf* is more than only a wondertale (though wondertale underpinnings it certainly has). We’ll go into this further at the end, but this paper posits that the Hero’s Journey is a more informative structure, as it examines more than mere action, but also the characterization, ambience, etc. of the work. Thus, this model may work better with different types of stories, but this paper asserts it is the best fit for studying the Western Epic.

C. A Look at Liminality and Thresholds

The Monomyth revolves around the thresholds it identifies. Campbell names two of his seventeen stages as "crossing of thresholds" - there is the Crossing of the First Threshold in Departure (which implies Campbell expects others), and a Return Across the Threshold in Return. Further, in Initiation, which is where most of the change-based action happens, the language used to define The Meeting with the Mother, Atonement with the Father/Abyss, and Apotheosis is very much tied to a spiritual or enlightenment-based transfiguration of the hero or his/her mind-set (Campbell, 91-145). Thus, change, or all the good stuff we expect from a story, can only happen once thresholds are crossed, according to Campbell.

So in effect, though Campbell does not expressly say this in so many words, we're dealing with an otherworld; a space that is demarcated as separate from our reality that only aspiring heroes will enter. This otherworld is a shifting space that could be anything from "the realm of night" that Campbell often and fondly cites, to a journey into one's own subconscious, to dreams, to anything in between. It need not be physical, though in the case of *Beowulf* it most certainly is.

Campbell does not specifically mention liminality; the closest he comes is speaking about Van Gennep's concept of rites of passage (Campbell, 6). The discussion of the liminal nature of the otherworld and the creatures from it is my own. In that vein, however, Campbell frequently dances around the idea of the liminal regardless of his wording: once the hero crosses the first threshold he is in what Campbell calls "an initiation" - into hero status. This part of the cycle is where the hero gains power by fighting or overcoming obstacles that force him or her to grow in order to realise their full potential, or grow enough that they are able to incorporate knowledge or power that they could not before. But, during this stage they are neither fully realised nor completely mundane. They are liminal. Campbell's thresholds mark the places in the hero's life where he or she is part of one world or another, incipient, or grown, depending on what side of the threshold they are on.

In *Beowulf* these thresholds are often physical. Curiously, there is ambiguity even in this; sometimes a threshold appears to be in a fixed location, such as the entrance to Grendel's mere² and sometimes the threshold is mobile, flowing over spaces

² If the apocryphal tale is true that the Eskimo have twelve words for snow, the Anglo-Saxons have twelve words for watersheds. The mere, a deep-water, non-woody plant infested watershed, plays a central role in this poem.

such as Heorot only to ebb once the driving force behind it has been defeated. These thresholds mark critical areas and moments in *Beowulf*, where our hero must leave behind outside aid, the protection of his comitatus³, and in fact the world he knows.

D. A Special Note on the So-Called “Digressions”

As I have already said, there are many historical notes and other, sometimes seemingly irrelevant stories that are in the text of *Beowulf*. Some scholars have called these “digressions”, as their sudden appearance can feel jarring and disruptive to the poem’s flow. These so-called “digressions” have been exhaustively analysed throughout the history of *Beowulf* scholarship, and so to debate here whether they are or are not disruptive or necessary is not in our best interest, or needed. However, no self-respecting paper in the field could get away without addressing them, so I will do so briefly. These digressions, in the opinion of Bonjour (57), may not be beautiful, but they do serve proper narrative functions. They serve as threads to run the overall themes of the poem (the problem of violence and vengeance in the landscape, the ultimate tragic results of tribal enmity, etc) throughout the tale. They do not actually detract from the poem at large but rather seek to unify it, therefore, we will refer to them instead as “episodes” instead of “digressions”. What I will focus on in this paper is how they interact with the Campbellian cycles I identify, and how they identify other cycles which come to bear on the main narrative of Beowulf himself. It’s important to point out here that these episodes never interrupt a Campbellian cycle, and some cease to *be* episodes entirely because they serve a Campbellian purpose.

In fact these episodes come only at the beginning and ends of the Campbellian cycles, and given the nature of Epics, this is not out of place. In accordance with the laws of opening and closing, it was only natural for stories of this kind of gravitas to have capstones on the ends of their cycles (Olorik, 131-132). I will go into greater detail on these episodes as we meet them, and then provide a deeper analysis in the conclusion of the paper.

³ In Germanic and Scandinavian culture, this is a war band who have sworn a loyalty oath to their leader.

E. A Note on the Hero's Journey as Beowulf Travels it

As aforementioned in section B of this part, not all steps of the Journey may happen, and the Journey might still be complete. Likewise, some steps might be longer or shorter than others. *Beowulf* is definitely lacking in certain steps that may seem vital to the model, but are not necessarily so - specifically, we do not encounter steps seven through ten. This is because these steps (The Meeting with the Mother, Woman as a Temptress, Atonement with the Father/Abyss, and Apotheosis respectively) generally deal with otherworldly entities or deities. While they can be metaphysical or even metaphorical, very often in myth they take the form of patron Gods or beings of power who are there to test or endow the hero in some way (Campbell, 91, 110, 135, et al). Beowulf, however does something very surprising: or rather, he *doesn't* do something surprising. He never encounters nor confronts any deities, because in this story they do not exist. There are monsters, but they are shown to be mortal, unnatural as they are. Beowulf's story is one ostensibly blessed by God in the Christian sense, but not ever truly interfered with by any deities of any known quadrant. This is a direct departure from other stories of its kind, including the ones upon which *Beowulf* is partially based.

The supposition as to why, if I may digress myself for a paragraph, is both a thematic and an historical one: Thematically, *Beowulf* is a tragedy - this has been proven time and time over (Klaeber, xxxiv, Bonjour, 24, 45, et al) and it does not benefit us to deeply explore the idea further here. The point is, while it has its victories and moments of humour and extreme joy, these are always immediately tempered by the shadow of tragedy to come. Ultimately, it's the story of the fall of the greatest man that ever lived (from an Anglo-Saxon perspective). As Klaeber puts it, this poem is about how "tribal enmity sooner or later sweeps aside with its imperative all human attempts at compromise" (Klaeber, p xxxvi) - something that was a clear reality at the end of the Great Migration. And because of this, the story is incredibly human. In contrast to the violent world around him, Beowulf is not only consistently gentle, but also escapes many possible human-derived conflicts by simply refusing to engage with them until he has to. He's willing to let verbal slights of a significant nature go by him (as in the case of Unferth), and preaches against giving in to the pain of old wounds (as in the case of the Frisians). He is the one trying to progress forwards towards peace and stability in a very aggressive but very human world. The poem itself makes this clear:

*cwaédon þæt hé waére wyruldcyning, manna mildust ond monðwaérust (Beowulf,*⁴
3179-3181)

“They said that among the world’s kings he was the gentlest of men and the most courteous” (Swanton, 187).

Thus, as a hero facing realistic human problems in a very human age, his tale has no room for deities. The pain inflicted by what this poet and his audience would have considered the natural world (monsters), and the pain caused by the evil doings of men were more than enough.

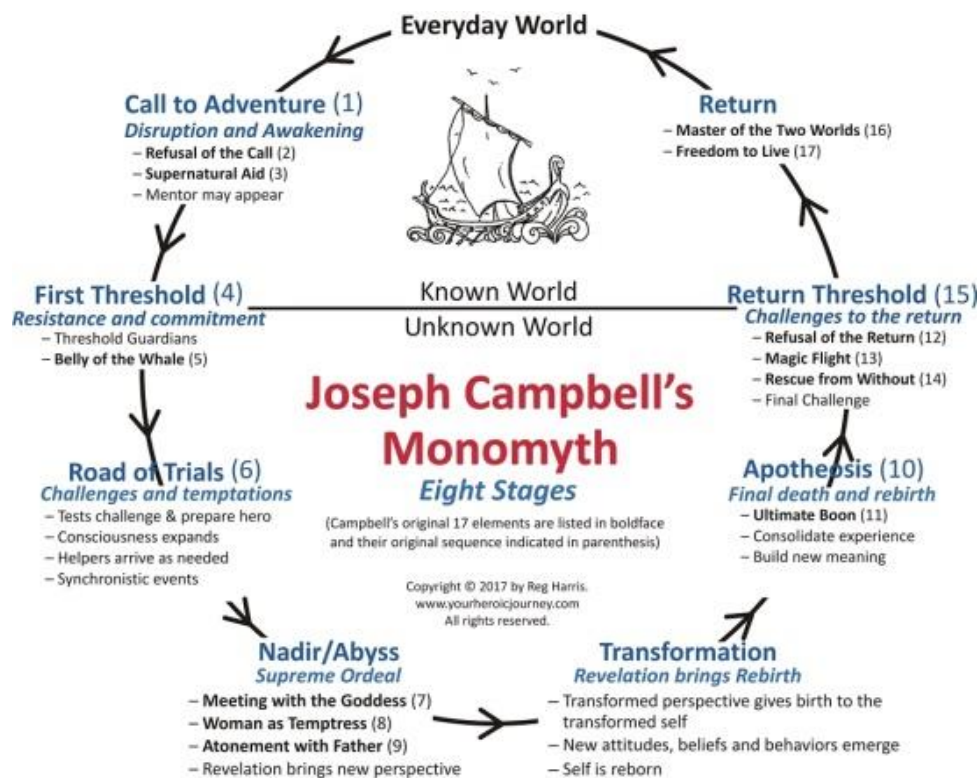
Further exploration of this topic, however, is a story for a different time.

⁴ Please note that the original Anglo-Saxon is provided and cited by line number of the poem, while the translation into modern English is cited by page number of that translation.

II. Into the Belly of the Whale: Campbell's Model Applied to *Beowulf*

A. The Stages of the Monomyth

Before beginning our Journey, it is best to have the stages of Campbell's Monomyth outlined here for easy reference. The seventeen stages are split into three larger sections: Departure (where the hero transitions from his or her known world to the otherworld), Initiation (the trials of the hero within the otherworld), and Return (the arduous task of coming back across a threshold to what was once known). It is also of interest to note here that Campbell does not envision this journey as linear but rather circular, a true cycle, that can happen over and over again. See below:



(Gunn Center for Science Fiction, 1)

Seven of the seventeen stages never occur in *Beowulf*'s story (the four Initiation steps previously mentioned, steps twelve and thirteen (the Refusal of Return and the Magic

Flight) as they are not relevant, and step two, the Refusal of the Call. Beowulf does not turn down his adventures, even when he knows they will end tragically). Some steps happen in some cycles of the poem, but not in others. The cycles mirror each other but are different from each other in scope and knowledge or power gained during the Initiation. And now, onwards - to the Hero's Journey.

Step One, The Call to Adventure: "This first stage of the mythological journey -- which we have designated the "call to adventure" -- signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his⁵ spiritual center⁶ of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented: a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves, or above the sky, a secret island, lofty mountaintop, or profound dream state; but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous beings, unimaginable torments, super human deeds, and impossible delight" (Campbell, 48). Campbell goes on to say that the hero's engagement with this adventure could be voluntary, it could be mere blunder, he or she could be a victim of circumstance, or perhaps the hero simply wanders into the adventure because it caught his or her eye.

Step Two, The Refusal of the Call: "Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered: for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests. Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or 'culture,' the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved" (Campbell, 49). There are a number of reasons a hero might refuse a call, ranging from obligations to fear to self-serving interest, but reliably, the call comes regardless of what the hero wants. Note: this step is not present in *Beowulf*, but it has still been described here because the lack of it illuminates aspects of Beowulf's character.

Step Three, Supernatural Aid: "For those who have not refused the call, the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure ... who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (Campbell, 57). Supernatural

⁵ It should be noted here that Campbell often talks about the hero as "he" in these stages. However, his examples throughout the book do feature women and non-gendered entities, and the Hero's Journey can be equally applied to all heroes regardless of sex or gender. I have chosen to use more inclusive language in my own analysis, but I have quoted Campbell directly and accurately, and this is why there is a difference in pronoun usage throughout these passages. It is likely that, given the time at which Campbell was writing, "he" was the default third person singular "neutral", which has now been replaced in the modern language by the singular "they".

⁶ Spelling within the quotes is American, while the paper itself is written in British English. Hence, there will be discrepancies in spelling.

aid strongly resembles the Donor figure in Propp's schema; this figure will not always give the hero a physical object, but sometimes verbal information or advice.

Step Four, The Crossing of the First Threshold: "With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the "threshold guardian" at the entrance to the zone of magnified power. Such custodians bound the world in four directions, also up and down, standing for the limits of the hero's present sphere, or life horizon. Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger" (Campbell, 64). Once this threshold is crossed, it's clear where the hero will go. And very often we find that the hero must go alone, as is the case in *Beowulf*.

Step Five, The Belly of the Whale: "The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died" (Campbell, 74). The Belly of the Whale is the moment of final and decisive separation from the home, known world of the hero. This is when the metamorphosis can begin, when he or she is subsumed by the otherworld and cut off from what they knew before.

Step Six, The Road of Trials: "Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals." (Campbell, 81). The Road of Trials, as Campbell says, can literally be anything, and is usually packed with challenges and obstacles to overcome, helpers to aid the hero, and chance encounters of any nature imaginable.

Steps Seven through Ten, The Meeting of the Mother, Woman as a Temptress, Atonement with the Abyss, Apotheosis: As it was stated before, these sections do not appear in *Beowulf* and therefore will not be addressed here other than to give a brief overview. Some discussion, however, will happen in the section of this paper aimed at addressing the limitations and criticism of Monomyth. These four steps are chiefly concerned with the hero's transfiguration in mind or in body, the opening of the hero to new sources of knowledge or power, and the reconciliation that the hero has with his or her own mortality and the fact that there are powers greater than him or her. They are often seen as spiritual awakening, mental awakening, or the gain of knowledge or power from an otherworldly source. Suffice to say, *Beowulf* has enough on his hands even without these steps.

Step Eleven: The Ultimate Boon: “What the hero seeks through his intercourse with them [the gods] is therefore not finally themselves, but their grace, i.e., the power of their sustaining substance. This miraculous energy-substance and this alone is the Imperishable; the names and forms of the deities who everywhere embody, dispense, and represent it come and go. This is the miraculous energy of the thunderbolts of Zeus, Yahweh, and the Supreme Buddha, the fertility of the rain of Viracocha, the virtue announced by the bell rung in the Mass at the consecration, and the light of the ultimate illumination of the saint and sage. Its guardians dare release it only to the duly proven” (Campbell, 155). That is to say, the Boon which the Hero receives is that power, whatever the point of the story is, whatever the power that will aid his home world with its dire problem. It could be a physical object, an actual elixir, it could be symbolic, it could be information. As Campbell points out, its form will depend on what the story is about.

Step Twelve, The Refusal of Return: Sometimes, a hero does not wish to return from the incredible world he or she has discovered. However, that is not the case in *Beowulf*, as the otherworld Beowulf discovers is as evil as it is terrifying, so this point need not be discussed.

Step Thirteen, The Magic Flight: Some myths require the hero to flee the otherworld before the powers that be can stop him or her, e.g. in Jack and the Beanstalk. Perhaps there has been a miscommunication, or perhaps instead of being given, the Ultimate Boon has been stolen and the hero must go as fast as he or she can. This is not the case in *Beowulf*.

Step Fourteen, Rescue from Without: “The hero may have to be brought back from his supernatural adventure by the assistance from without. That is to say, the world may have to come and get him” (Campbell, 178). This does not strictly occur in *Beowulf*, however it is attempted, which is worth noting.

Step Fifteen, Crossing the Return Threshold: “The returning hero, to complete his adventure, must survive the impact of the world. Many failures attest to the difficulties of this life-affirmative threshold. The first problem of the returning hero is to accept as real, after an experience of the soul-satisfying vision of fulfilment, the passing joys and sorrows, banalities and noisy obscenities of life” (Campbell, 189). Some heroes survive this better than others, but this stage is essentially the hero’s last test, to reconcile the new wisdom and understanding of the world with the mundane banality of the world he or she came from to start with. Often this step is full of false starts or

problems for the hero being identified by his or her own people. Then again, some heroes simply walk back home with no difficulties whatsoever, even if they have changed within.

Step Sixteen, The Master of Two Worlds: “Freedom to pass back and forth across the world division, from the perspective of the apparitions of time to that of the causal deep and back -- not contaminating the principles of the one with those of the other, yet permitting the mind to know the one by virtue of the other -- is the talent of the master” (Campbell, 196). The idea of the Master is that he or she is no longer beholden to limiting parameters or beliefs that confine us to one world or the other. And, now that a metaphorical or perhaps literal rebirth or transformation has occurred in the otherworld, the Master is complete. Lastly, they have realised that the two worlds are actually just two faces of the same world.

Step Seventeen, Freedom to Live: “What, now is the result of the miraculous pass and return? The battlefield is symbolic of the field of life, where every creature lives on the death of another” (Campbell, 205). “The hero is the champion of things becoming, not of things become, because he is. ‘Before Abraham was, I AM’ He does not mistake apparent changelessness in time for the permanence of Being, nor is he fearful of the next moment (or of the ‘other thing’), as destroying the permanent with its change. ‘Nothing retains its own form; but Nature, the greater renewer, ever makes up forms from forms’” (Campbell, 209). This is all to say that the hero is released from the fear of death. Lack of limiting fear of the world around him or her allows the hero freedom to live each moment to the fullest, no matter which side of the world they are on. All of the unknowns the hero may have feared at the crossing of the first threshold are now knowns, and life is ripe for the picking.

And thus ends the journey of the hero. That is, of course, until a new adventure into a new otherworld begins. Campbell specifically highlights that these cycles can be reoccurring or stackable, happening back to back, or at various points across a hero’s life. This is precisely what we will see in *Beowulf*.

As a curious aside, of the hundreds of myths and legends that Campbell used to create not only the Monomyth but also his compendium volumes called *The Masks of God*, he never applied his own model to *Beowulf*. There is no clear reason why this was the case, but other Dragon Slayers get plenty of attention in his books. Well, now, *Beowulf* gets his day.

It is worth noting here that many scholars have seen *Beowulf* as a two part narrative, with the attack by Grendel, and then by Grendel's mother to be part of one story, the Dragon narrative the second. It's an interesting view which led to many discoveries about the themes of the narrative, specifically the rise and fall of Beowulf himself as a symbol for the rise and fall of the Geatish kingdom. However, there is equally as much to be gained by looking at the text as a set of three narratives. Several scholars have also pointed out that events and otherworldly entities in *Beowulf* come comfortably in threes. Also, the challenges faced by Beowulf become progressively more difficult. As Orchard says, "Beowulf's battle with Grendel is a one fall, one submission, and one knock out bout, whilst the fight with Grendel's mother has quite a different pace... ..Here we have a two fall fight... ..Likewise Beowulf tries two swords, and Grendel's mother two weapons also, her cruel knife and her hideous nails. The dragon-fight, by contrast- is in three rounds clearly marked off by narratorial enumeration of each phase of the attack as the dragon surges forward a second time, and a third" (Orchard, 28-29).

The nature of Campbell's model naturally highlights this tripling, as we will see. Three is the number in folktales that most often represents stability of form and also plurality (Lüthi, 33). One is solitary, two is dual and invites comparison, but three is the first representation of "many". This is central to the idea of Monomyth and the cycles it identifies; the Hero's Journey doesn't happen in a vacuum. That is to say, it affects and is affected by other cycles and events that surround it. And, cycles often repeat. As we see in the Theory of Systems, even in literature a trait from one time period can be carried over multiple subsequent periods (Zepetnek, 1). The cycle continues to happen, albeit altered, adapted, updated. This is all to say that Monomyth has an inherent understanding of its recurrent and continuous nature, which is expressed better by the plurality of three than the duality of two. That is why this paper favours looking at *Beowulf* as a set of three narratives in lieu of two.

B. The Grendel Cycle

The poem begins, as we have said in Part I, letter D, with an opening which provides historical and cultural context for the story. Here we have the story of Scyld Scefing⁷, a legendary Danish King who brought the kingdom together after the dark and terrible rule of his predecessor Heremod. Swanton points out this provides a *leitmotif* for the entire poem (Swanton, 15): it tells of a unifying, much beloved king who was able to create a strong and prosperous kingdom, even in the wake of tragedy and misrule. It also localises the audience with a well-known time and place - Scyld was a prominent historical figure and doubtless the Anglo-Saxon audience, having originated in Danish, German, or Frisian lands at some point, knew his name.

It does something else which is crucial for the poem's impact: it establishes Scyld as a battle hardened, wise ruler, and thus lends a type of credence to King Hrothgar, Scyld's grandson, who is the ruler of the Danes when *Beowulf* takes place. Hrothgar is not to be taken lightly - he is aged now but in his youth he was a great warrior and wise leader as his grandfather was. The fact that his lands are beset by the shadow of Grendel's terror is not due to weakness on Hrothgar's part, the poem is telling us. It is that Grendel, that beast from beyond, is a terrible and mighty foe. Only the smartest and strongest of heroes, in their prime, would stand a chance of beating him.

Also, it gives us a picture of Hrothgar as a leader and sets us up for later historical episodes which will thread unifying themes throughout the poem; it shows that Hrothgar is a good king, descended from a good king, and that this has been a period of relative stability, something that is a rare commodity in 6th century Scandinavia. This hard won stability in an era of constant war is what Grendel is going to destroy, which gives us an idea of just how terrible and great the threat of him is.

From this historical localisation and contextualisation, we move into the narrative cycle. The scene is set before us; a shadowed and beleaguered Heorot, the once-mighty hall of King Hrothgar of the Danes, suffers regularly at the vicious hands of a monster called Grendel. It is not entirely clear what Grendel is, but what we do know is that he is an efficient and utterly merciless killer. Render, tearer, clawer, slasher, he sees the joy of men making merry in the mead hall of Heorot and comes

⁷ To help keep the names straight, a genealogy chart has been provided in Appendix 2.

nightly to destroy the happiness he sees. It is said that he is a descendent of Cain, some forgotten and evil creature twisted by his time set apart from humanity, doomed to wander at the edges of the world. Grendel lives in a mere, as we have noted earlier in this paper. He lives with his mother who is named, creatively enough, Grendel's Mother. What is notable about the mere is how it would have related to an Anglo-Saxon audience. Water in the Anglo-Saxon world was central in terms of living, eating, travel, and commerce, but in Anglo-Saxon poetry and literature it is *far* from a friendly element (Frederick, 17). "The corpus of Old English poetry contains many passages describing the terrifying quality of water, and the potential doom waiting anyone brave - or foolhardy - enough to venture out onto waters. They [the poems] speak profoundly on a metaphorical and symbolic level, representing the waters both as figurative boundaries between the natural world and the otherworldly, and channels to the otherworld." This is to say, bodies of water for the Anglo-Saxons were literal doorways to this otherworld, and that place was a dark and frightening one. The mere is indeed a channel to the otherworld as Frederick says, and exists in the otherworld as well as this one.

Grendel is not only from a liminal otherworld, but is also liminal himself. The words to describe him in the text most frequently are *ellorgast* and *mearcstapa* - which are often translated as "alien, demon, or spirit" and "wanderer" or "stalker" respectively (Swanton, 99, Chickering, 55, et al). These are not incorrect, but there are nuances we should explore here. *Ellorgast* is a compound made from the words "*ellor*" or "elsewhere" and "*gaest*" or "*gast*" which is specifically a spirit in flesh form. It is not a spirit which possesses someone, but is simply a creature from "elsewhere" meaning the liminal other, the unknown, that walks, talks, and in this case, tears the still beating hearts out of noble Danish chests. *Mearcstapa* translates literally into "march stepper". Marches in English culture typically either represent border zones between nations, kingdoms, or demarcate spaces between this world and "over there" - whatever over there, the beyond, might mean. Thus, Grendel is damned to walk the border between this world and the otherworld. This becomes important because the liminal otherworld in *Beowulf* is anything but static: it is stretching and claiming territory. Wherever Grendel goes a-march-stepping, he brings the influence and the border of the otherworld with him. By the time Beowulf arrives on the scene, Heorot has already almost been swallowed by the liminal space's influence.

This liminal space is also delineated by the poet's use of colour, specifically when it comes to light versus dark. That which is the realm of men, created by a benevolent God, is always cast in light, and Heorot is similarly cast in terms of light and gold, e.g. *hof módigra torht getaélhte* (311-312), "Splendid bright dwelling" (Swanton, 49). We can see that Heorot is a symbol for the world of men at large, and is epitomical as far as dwelling places of mankind go.

*cwæð þæt se ælmihtiga eorðan worhte, wlitebeorhtne wan, g swá wæter bebúgeð,
gesette sigehréþig sunnan ond mōnan léoman tó léohte...* (Beowulf, 92-95)

"He told how the Almighty made the earth, a bright-faced plain which the waters encircle, set up in triumph the radiance of the sun and moon as light..."⁸ (Swanton, 39).

*guman ónetton, sigon ætsomne, oþ þæt hý sæltimbred geatolic ond goldfáh ongyton
mihton* (Beowulf, 306-308)

"The men hastened, moved onwards together until they could see the timbered hall, splendid and decked with gold" (Swanton, 49).

In the above quotes we can see the resemblance the poet makes between the radiance of the sun shining on the bright world, and the splendid golden halls of Heorot, a modern and human addition to God's world. Grendel, however, mass murdering demon spawn that he is, is described in terms of shadow, darkness, mist, and water. He comes always at night, when his power waxes, and the light and power of Heorot wanes.

Dá wæs on úhtan mid aérdæge Grendles gúðcræft gumum undyrne (Beowulf, 127-128)

"Then in the half-light before dawn, Grendel's war-strength was revealed to men." (Swanton, 41).

*Ac se aéglæca éhtende wæs, deorc déapscua dugupe ond geogope, seomade ond
syrede; sinnihte héold mistige mōras.* (Beowulf, 159-162).

"But the monster, dark shadow of death, went on persecuting both tried warriors and youths, lay in wait and ensnared them; in perpetual darkness he ruled the misty wastelands" (Swanton, 42-43).

Likewise, Heorot itself becomes bereft of life and power as soon as darkness settles over the land.

⁸ These "..." are used to show where the text has been cut in the middle of a line, and inserted by me. They do not appear in the original translation nor in the original manuscript.

*secgað saélíðend þæt þæs sele stande, reced sélesta, rinca gehwylcum ídel ond unnyt,
siððan aefenleoht under heofenes hádor beholen weorþeð. (Beowulf, 411-414)*

“Seafarers say that this hall, the best of buildings, stands empty and useless to all warriors once the evening light is hidden beneath heaven’s firmament” (Swanton 54-55).

At this point, Beowulf, who across the sea in Geatland has heard of Hrothgar’s troubles, assembles himself a ship and a crew, gathers his comitatus, and goes to see his father’s old friend. Immediately upon his entrance we know that he is going to be a hero and a representative of humanity, as he⁹ is marked out by the light imagery, and gold, the colour of the world of humans is liberally employed:

*Pá of wealle geseah weard Scildinga, sé þe holmclifu healdan scolde, beran ofer bolcan
beorhte randas (Beowulf, 229-231)*

“Then from the rampart the Scyldings’ watchman, whose duty it was to guard the sea-cliffs, saw bright-shields carried over the bulkhead” (Swanton, 45).

*eoforlic scionon ofer hléorberan, gehroden golde; fáh ond fýrheard, ferhwearde héold.
(Beowulf, 304-305)*

“Above their cheek-guards, adorned with gold, shone the boar image; bright and fire-hardened, it stood guard over men’s lives” (Swanton, 49).

What we are seeing here is the Call to Adventure in action: the Adventure Calls, in this case word reaches the hero that a situation demands his attention. The herald of the adventure in this case is the unknown messenger who told Beowulf of Heorot’s unfortunate position. Last, the hero responds to the Call; he may either accept or refuse, and Beowulf always accepts, Though we will see the first times he does so are less lengthy than the last of the three. But, back to the story.

Beowulf stands before Hrothgar and makes the opening declaration that he is here to kill Grendel and *Heorot faélsian*¹⁰ (432) “cleanse the hall of Heorot” (Swanton, 55). By arriving and being willing to set foot in the mead hall to begin with, Beowulf is heeding a Call to Adventure. We also get something of his reasons for doing so; his

⁹ The comitatus is also marked out, but in this type of story the comitatus and Beowulf are seen as one functioning entity. See: *Wedera léodum, frófor ond fultum, þæt hie féond heora ðurh ánes cræft ealle ofercómon, selfes mihtum. sód is gecýped, þæt mihtig god manna cynnes weold wideferhð* (697-702), “But to these, the people of the Weders, the Lord granted comfort and support, success in battle to be woven into their destiny, inasmuch as through the might of one man, his soul powers, they all overcame their foe” (Swanton, 67).

¹⁰ Means “cleanse” in the sense of “purify”- furthering the idea that the poet sees the liminal encroachment as a spreading contamination of some kind.

father, Ecgtheow, was treated well by Hrothgar many years ago when Hrothgar gave him shelter. Beowulf sees this as an old debt he is honour-bound, but happy to repay.

Mé wearð Grendles þing on mínre épeltyrf undyrne cúð: ...Þá mé þæt gelaérdon léode mine, þá sélestan, snotere ceorlas, þéoden Hróðgár, þæt ic þé sóhte for þan hie mægenes cræft míne cúþon. (Beowulf, 409-410, 415-418).

“The affair of Grendel became well known to me on my native soil; ...Thereupon my people, the noblest, wise men, advised me that I should seek you out, Prince Hrothgar, because they knew the power of my strength” (Swanton, 55).

At this point, warm greetings are exchanged, but Beowulf mentions on his own that he has heard the monster Grendel cannot be harmed by mortal weapons. As he came here with the information already in hand, and there is no offer of weapon or further advice, Beowulf receives no Supernatural Aid¹¹ for this cycle either.

The next stage of the cycle comes at the famed Unferth Intermezzo. Unferth is Hrothgar’s chief advisor, though his name literally means “discord” and he embodies the principle. Once Beowulf has made his declaration that he will end the monster’s reign over the Danish kingdom, as well as giving a curriculum vitae of many other like-monsters he has already killed, Hrothgar’s advisor takes it upon himself to put Beowulf to a test. He calls out Beowulf for having failed at an ocean swimming contest with another young nobleman, Breca son of Beanstan, and asks how someone who can’t even win such a childish competition could hope to take on Grendel, as so many other warriors have failed to do.

‘...né inc aénig mon, né léof né láð, beléan mihte sorhfullne síð, þa git on sund réön.... sunu Béanstánes sóðe gelaéste. Ðonne wéne ic tó þé wýrsan geþingea, ðeah þú heaðoraésa gehwaér dohte, grimre gúðe, gif þú Grendles dearest nihtlongne fyrst néän bíðan.’ (Beowulf, 510-512, 524-527).

“Nor could any man, neither friend nor foe, dissuade the both of you from that disastrous venture when you swam out to sea. ...The son of Beanstan in fact accomplished all he had boasted against you. So although you have been successful everywhere in the onslaught of battle, in grim warfare, I imagine the outcome will be the worse for you, if you dare wait all night long near at hand for Grendel” (Swanton, 59).

Unferth is attempting to discredit Beowulf and drive him away from the scene. As the mead hall itself becomes a liminal space with the coming of Grendel each night, we can view Unferth as a threshold guardian: though he is a cruel and discordant

¹¹ Just as we have said that most of the steps regarding deities are not present in this tale, so this step becomes more of “natural aid” than supernatural. Beowulf will eventually receive aid from various helpers, but it will not be in the form of any kind of blessing or preternatural boon.

person, Unferth is giving Beowulf the opportunity to overcome opposition and reinforce his status as a hero. Which Beowulf handily does, by explaining that not only had he and the other young man already been swimming for night on five days straight, but that a storm suddenly blew in, stirring up some dreaded *nicor*, or sea-monsters, which dragged him to the bottom of the sea. There he fought them off, about nine in total, before falling unconscious and washing up on the shores of Finland. He then effectively and decisively silences Unferth by reminding him that no one sings such tales of Unferth, only that Unferth had in fact killed his own brothers.

Nó ic wiht fram þe swylcra searonið secgan hýrde, billa brogan. ... þeah ðú þinum bróðrum tó banan wurde, héafodmaégum; þæs þú in helle scealt werhðo dreogan, þeah þín wit duge! (Beowulf, 581-583, 587-589).

“I have never heard ought of such skillful conflicts, such terror of swords, told about you. ...although *you* became the slayer of your brothers, your closest kin; for that you shall suffer damnation in hell, clever as you are!” (Swanton, 61-63).

There is a sort of gentleness in this response; though Beowulf’s words have bite to them, he is choosing not to answer this rather grievous disrespect with any kind of violence, which would have been commonplace. In fact, this response only serves to heighten the overall theme of the poem; kinslaying and blood feuding, as we have stated, were par for the course. Everyone in the poem seems to either partake in or be sucked into petty wars, except Beowulf. He is the only member of the cast who sees the forest for the trees and intentionally rejects engaging in this behaviour until he’s absolutely forced to.

Instead, he handles Unferth verbally, and then ends his speech with a note of positivity, reiterating how he will slay Grendel, and the Danes cheer him for it. And so, the threshold guardian is dealt with; Beowulf is free to begin his traversing of the bounds of the otherworld.

This tall tale also serves a crucial purpose of foreshadowing: as we’ve already seen, waterways for the Anglo-Saxons are inherently liminal and home to all manner of liminal being. This passage tests Beowulf’s ability to persuade his constituency that he is capable of traversing the liminal space, but also sets him up to later gain mastery of both worlds; he is now established as a slayer of creatures from water based arenas, and also, as a very strong swimmer. He will need this strength and previous experience if he is going to survive the battle to come.

And so the night comes on. Beowulf announces again that he is stalwart in his intention to stay and meet Grendel, and will even do so on the monster's terms. As Grendel cannot be harmed by mortal weapons, Beowulf declines to use swords or armour, deciding that brawling hand to hand will be more useful, but also more honourable.

'Nó ic mé an herewæsmun hnágran talige gúþgeweorca þonne Grendel hine; forþan ic hine sweorde swebban nelle, aldre benéotan, þeah ic eal mæge.... ac wit on niht sculon secge ofersittan, gif hé gesécean dear wíg ofer waepen. (Beowulf 677-680, 683-685).

"I do not reckon myself inferior in warlike vigor, for deeds of battle, than Grendel does himself; therefore I will not put him to sleep, take away his life, with a sword, although I easily could. He knows nothing of such noble matters... In the night we both shall dispense with the sword, if he dare seek a fight without weapons" (Swanton, 67).

This is the moment when Beowulf crosses the threshold. Now, regarding the threshold itself, as we've already seen, waterways are inherently liminal to the Anglo-Saxon audience and writers. However, the characters are not physically anywhere near the mere at this point. Regardless, we are reminded that Grendel has the power to bring the otherworld to us. Perhaps twelve years ago, before all of this began, we can imagine that his stalking was limited to the mere and its physical edge, but by now he has "march-stepped" in greater and greater circles, bringing the contamination and darkness of the otherworld with him. In this case, the otherworld has *layers*; the mere, the darkest, deepest part of the otherworld we might call an umbra¹², while the spreading influence of that darkness we could see as a penumbra. This means that Heorot is, in effect, Schrödinger's Mead Hall - it exists both in the ordinary world and inside of the penumbra of the otherworld's shadow depending on if Grendel seeks it that night or not. Thus, at this point in the tale as night falls and the penumbra around Heorot grows stronger, when Grendel does make his appearance, Beowulf enters the fifth stage, the Belly of the Whale.

Hylde hine þá heapodéor, hléorbolster onféng eorles andwlitan, ond hine ymb monig snellíc saérinc selereste gebéah. Naénig heora þóhte þæt hé þanon scolde eft eardlufan aefre gesécean... ac hie hæfdon gefrúnen, þæt hie aér tó fela micles in þaém wínsele wældéað fornam, Denigea léode. (Beowulf, 688-692, 694-696).

"The battle-brave man then laid himself down, a pillow received the hero's cheek, and around him many a bold seaman sank to his couch in the hall. Not one of them thought

¹² An umbra is the astrophysical term for the darkest part of a shadow, when cast by an opaque object without diffraction. The penumbra is the miasma of partial shadow where only some light is obscured by the occluding body.

that he would ever return from there to seek out his beloved country... for they had heard that deadly slaughter had already carried off all too many of the Danish people in that wine-hall” (Swanton, 67).

The presumption of the comitatus, though perhaps not Beowulf himself, is that they might well not make it out of this one. However, they still elect to wait with their war-chief, for the monster to come.

Grendel does not fail to deliver on this night. He shambles along the marches and all of the way to the fire-lit hall, swelling with rage. By the time he arrives, he’s frenzied and eager to glut himself on the blood of some insolent Danes who dared to seek joy in the hall that Grendel feels he has marked and claimed. His first act is that of violation:

Duru sóna onarn fýrbendum fæst, syððan hé hire folmum gehran; onbraéd þá bealohýdig, ðá hé gebolgen wæs, recedes múpan. (Beowulf, 721-723).

“The door, fastened with fire-forged bars, gave way immediately once he touched it with his hands; intent on evil, swollen with rage, he thrust open the mouth of the building” (Swanton, 69).

Beowulf transgressed by crossing the threshold into Grendel’s world, and Grendel transgresses right back, with a vengeance. He wastes no time searching for a meal, and rends one of Beowulf’s men in half.

ac hé geféng hraðe forman síðe slaépendne rin, c slát unwearnum, bát bánlocan, blód édrum dranc, synsnaédum swealh (Beowulf, 740-742).

“He quickly seized a sleeping warrior, tore him apart without resistance, bit into the bones’ links, drank the blood from the veins, swallowed great chunks” (Swanton, 69).

This poor soul serves as a surrogate for our hero, who is now wide awake and aware of what is happening. The second time that Grendel reaches down onto the couches to find another victim, what he finds instead is an iron grip that digs into his shoulder and refuses to let go. At this point, Grendel, for the first time in his life, feels fear.

The fight which ensues is terrifying in its violence; beams and benches are smashed, support struts for the mead hall are very nearly compromised, men are trampled, tables splintered. Grendel and Beowulf are locked in mortal combat, Grendel wildly swinging the hero around attempting to crush the life out of him, and Beowulf staunchly refusing to let go of Grendel’s arm. But, it doesn’t take long before a victor becomes clear.

*...lícsár gebád atol aéglaéca; him on eaxle wearð syndolh sweotol; seonowe
onsprungon, burston bânlocan. (Beowulf, 814-817).*

“..The dreadful monster suffered bodily pain; a huge wound appeared plain on his shoulder; sinews sprang apart, the bones’ links broke” (Swanton, 73).

Beowulf tears the arm clear free of Grendel’s shoulder in a shocking display of gore. Fatally wounded, Grendel flees, shrieking, into the night. In this moment, as the blood leaves him, as Grendel’s power wanes, so too does the power of the otherworld’s penumbra. Heorot exits the liminal space and is immediately pronounced cleansed (*gefaélsod*) of otherworldly contamination.

*...hæfde þá gefaélsod... sele Hróðgáres... þæt wæs tæcen sweotol syððan hildedéor hond
álegde, earm ond eaxle ...under géapne hróf. (Beowulf, 825-826, 833-836).*

“[Beowulf] had thus cleansed Hrothgar’s Hall ...It was manifest proof when the battle-brave man set the hand, arm and shoulder... up there under the curved roof” (Swanton, 75).

Like a talisman to ward off Grendels of all kinds, the arm and shoulder are nailed to the golden lintel of the great hall. At first light, a company of men goes tracking the blood trail back to the mere, only to find that there is so much gore, it’s impossible that the fiend survived the night.

*... geflýmed feorhlástas bær. Ðaér wæs on blóde brim weallende, atol ýða geswing eal
gemenged háton heolfre, heorodréore wéol. (Beowulf, 845-849)*

“He left traces of his life-blood from there all the way to the water-monsters’ lake. There the water was welling with blood, the dreadful swirl of waves all mingled with hot gore” (Swanton, 75)

This passage is particularly telling for another reason: it is one of many instances of the poet’s skilful use of foreshadowing. The mere has now been polluted. Beowulf has driven back the forces of the darkness and threatened his world. This is the first significant blow that the forces of humanity have been able to land against these agents of death and chaos. The end of this stage shows us more about Beowulf as a hero – he is reactive not active, almost like a man who has been dared to stay overnight in a haunted house to see whether or not a ghost appears. He is dispelling a haunting, but once he is satisfied that Grendel has fled with a mortal wound, Beowulf retires, seeking no further treasure or gain from the situation.

And, as for Heorot, it was cited above that the great hall had long been standing empty and friendless in the wake of Grendel's unceasing attacks. Now we see the hall fill with Danes anew, as they are able to reinhabit the bastion of humanity. Beowulf, champion of that humanity, is given gifts that bear the colours and images which represent the world of men.

Heorot innan wæs fréondum áfýlled; nalles fácenstafas Þéod-Scyldingas þenden fremedon. Forgeaf þá Béowulfe brand Healfdenes segen gylденne sigores tó léane, hroden hiltecumbor, helm ond byrnan; maére máðþumsweord manige gesáwon beforan beorn beran. ... madmas golde gegyrede... (Beowulf, 1017-1023, 1027).

“Heorot was filled with friends; in no way, as yet, did the race of Scyldings practise treacherous arts. Then, as a reward for victory, Healfdene's brand presented to Beowulf with a golden banner, decorated war-standard, a helmet and coat of mail. ... treasures decked with gold” (Swanton, 83).

This is where the cycle ostensibly ends; Beowulf has, in the eyes of the Danes, obtained the Ultimate Boon of safety in the form of Grendel's severed arm. By Olrik's aforementioned Laws of Closing, the ebbing of the action may now commence, and it does so by offering more episodes like that of Scyld, which we saw in the beginning of the Grendel Cycle. These episodes have two purposes: first is to reinforce and echo themes that have been presented in the cycles themselves (e.g. in the first cycle Beowulf is seen to be an honourable and brave man; he is willing to come to Hrothgar's aid based on an old debt between Hrothgar and his father. Therefore, the songs of Sigemund and Heremod are presented at the end of this cycle to reinforce Beowulf's honour and bravery by comparing and contrasting him to these other figures.) Second, they serve as transitions which carry over themes and action from one cycle to another and foreshadow the fate of our hero. The same as any modern television serial might end with a teaser (“Next week, on *Beowulf*!”) with scenes to come in the next episode, so too our poet gives hints of both events and themes that will become important in the next instalments.

The poem here includes three short stories at the end of our first cycle. A bard lauds Beowulf by comparing him to the dragon slayer Sigemund¹³; not only is this high

¹³ This version of the story of the children of Völsung seems to conflate Sigemund and Fitela, his nephew, with the story of Sigurð from the *Prose Edda* and *The Saga of the Völsungs*; in *Beowulf*, Sigemund and Fitela (who we suppose is the Sinfjötli of the *Völsungs*) fight and kill a dragon, which is not mentioned in the *Völsunga Saga*, nor the *Prose Edda* (Magnússon, 35-50, Sturluson, 95-99). It is Sigurð, Sigemund's son, who slays the dragon Fafnir. This is important to point out because the *Völsunga Saga* is clearly one of stories on which *Beowulf* is based, though which version of the saga remains unclear.

praise from a crowd of this demographic, but it also foreshadows both Beowulf's ultimate fight against his own dragon, and his tragic demise in the third cycle (as it was for Völsung's kin.) The bard goes on to mention Heremod, Scyld's unjust and paranoid predecessor who nearly ran the kingdom into the ground. This is simply another outro, a story within the story to set up the rise of Beowulf as a good and righteous king by comparison; he is as strong as Sigemund, hopefully opposite in morals from Heremod. It makes sense that this bard needs to sing the praises of another hero who bears a likeness to Beowulf; after all, it's clearly not possible to compose a ballad *about* Beowulf the very same day that Beowulf defeats Grendel.

While he has the audience's attention, the bard goes on to sing the story of the Battle of Finnsburg¹⁴. This is a tale of vengeance and tragedy, and it is a deft allusion to another tale of like tenor, which will begin the third cycle. Finn's story is told to remind us of the central theme and plot of the poem: that no matter what good deeds he does or how noble a man Beowulf is, this is a hostile world rife with anger and old wounds that he cannot protect us from forever (Tolkien, 260). However, we need not summarise this retelling of Finn's legend here, as it serves a thematic purpose, but does not influence Beowulf's reactions to action within his story.

For the characters in the here and now, the Danes believe they have Freedom to Live, their hall is cleansed, their hero is intact, and as for Grendel? Well, no one in the history of literature has ever paid such a hefty price for losing an arm wrestling competition. All is as it should be.

C. The Cycle of Grendel's Mother

However, all is *not* as it should be. Here, the second cycle begins. No introduction or opening episode is provided because the scene has not changed and the

¹⁴ This is a curious retelling and much more focused on the humanity and sentiment of the battle and its combatants than the well-known *Finnsburg Fragment*, which also tells the story of Finn's fight with Hnaef the Dane. It likely focuses on this human element of the betrayal of Hnaef and then Finn in turn in order to heighten the effect of the poem's central theme of the perils of tribal enmity (Bonjour, 58).

poet was able to amply set up the next stages of his tale in the previous closing. This time, we go straight to the action.

Night falls on a relieved and peaceful Heorot, where the Danes and their Geat friends have exhausted themselves in celebration over their new found freedom. But, the mere, the channel to the otherworld, has been violated; it must return the favour. Grendel's Mother, at the sight of her fallen son, flies into a wicked rage and makes for Heorot under cover of darkness.

She bursts forth into the damaged hall, easily surpassing any barriers, as the fight with Grendel all but dismantled the structure the previous night. There, she lays waste to several sleeping warriors before the remaining manage to wake up and arm themselves.

Cóm þá to Heorote, ðaér Hring-Dene geond þæt sæld swaéfun. þá ðaér sóna wearð edhwyrft eorlum siþðan inne fealh Grendles módor... héo wæs on ofste, wolde út þanon, féore beorgan þá héo onfunden wæs. Hraðe héo æþelinga ánnæ hæfde fæste befangen, þá héo tó fenne gang. (Beowulf, 1279-1282, 1292-1295).

“She came then to Heorot where the Ring-Danes slept all around the hall. Immediately, then there came a reverse for the warriors, once Grendel's Mother made her way in. ... She was in a hurry, she wanted to be gone from there, to save her life now she was discovered. Swiftly she had taken firm grasp of one of the princes as she went towards the swamp” (Swanton 95-97).

As it turns out, the man she took, another surrogate for Beowulf, was Æschere, one of Hrothgar's most beloved friends. He is gone and Hrothgar's hall is once more left in terrible carnage. The Call to Adventure comes anew, by virtue of this new savagery. The re-contamination and transgression of the Hall demands an Answer. Hrothgar, in dire grief over his friend and the safety of his people, becomes the herald of the Adventure. In an emotional plea, he begs Beowulf to perform one more miracle for him.

Nú is se raéd gelang eft æt þé ánum. Eard gít ne const, frécne stówe ðaér þú findan miht felasinnigne secg; séc gif þú dyrr! Ic þé þá faéhðe féo léanige ealdgestréonum swá ic aér dyde... gyf þú on weg cymest.’ (Beowulf, 1377-1380).

“Now once again help depends on you alone. You do not yet know the region, the dangerous place where you might find the deeply sinful creature; seek it out if you dare! I will recompense you for the quarrel with money as I did before... if you make your way back again.”

As before, Beowulf meets that call firmly and resolutely. His acceptance speech is slightly longer, but still direct.

Íc hit þé geháte: nó hé on helm losað, né on foldan fæþm, né on fyrgeholt, né on gyfenes grund, gá þaér hé wille. (Beowulf, 1384-1385, 1392-1394).

“...I promise you this: she will not escape under cover, neither in the bosom of the earth, nor in the mountain forest, nor at the bottom of the ocean, go where she will.” (Swanton, 101).

Once again, Beowulf answers as a matter of honour: he asks no recompense, and his words are enough to tell us he feels this is a matter of doing the right thing, not personal gain. This is a thread throughout his answers to all three calls, as we will see – the attitude of “common good comes before the self” will culminate in the Call of the third cycle.

Beowulf, his company, and some of Hrothgar’s men set out to find the mere by tracking the trail of gore left behind by the wicked she-monster. They compass the land, navigating dark swamps and vast, desolate moors until they come to the great mere. The waterline is the next threshold that Beowulf must cross. The mere is described in the same liminal terminology we’ve seen before, and it seems a dreadful and foreboding place that would surely take the life of any man who enters it. Specifically the lines highlight that the water is under the earth, black and hostile, demarcates it as the umbral edge.

Híc dýgel lond warigeað, wulfhleopu, windige næssas, frécne fengelád, ðaér fyrgenstréam under næssa genipu niþer gewíteð, flód under foldan. ... þæt se mere standeð; ofer þaém hongiað hrinde bearwas, wudu wyrtrum fæst wæter oferhelmað. Þaér mæg nihta gehwaém niðwundor séon, fýr on flóde. Nó þæs fród leofað gumena bearna þæt þone grund wite. ... Þonon ýðgeblond úp ástígeð won tó wolcnum, þonne wind styreþ láð gewidru, oð þæt lyft drysmaþ· roderas réotað. (Beowulf, 1357-1361, 1362-, 1373-1376)

“...a secret land, wolf haunted slopes, windswept crags, water under the earth. ...the lake stands; over it hang frost covered groves, trees held fast by their roots overshadow the water. There each night there may be seen a fearful wonder -- fire on the flood. No one alive among the children of men is wise enough to know the bottom. ...From it a surging wave rises up, black to the clouds when the wind stirs up hostile storms, till the air grows dim, the skies weep” (Swanton, 99-101).

As they reach the mere, they see the head of Æschere posed on the edge of one of said crags, causing his fellows to weep with rage. However no one dares enter the mere because it is full of dreaded *nicor* and other terrible creatures. Beowulf shoots an arrow into one of them to test their strength, and as it bleeds out, the others come and drag it below the waves, consuming it.

No one is prepared to enter the water except Beowulf; even the comitatus seems ready to stay behind and wait. Our hero dresses in the appropriate armour to shield himself from the grip of such creatures. This time, the aid of a helper (what passes here for Supernatural Aid) does come to Beowulf. As Beowulf has already defeated him as a threshold guardian, Unferth, either humbled by or not remembering the events of the previous day, becomes a willing donor and man of aid. He offers Beowulf his father's sword, for it is a good blade. Beowulf, true to his inner gentility and courtesy, accepts the gift without hard feelings.

Dyle Hrōðgáres; wæs þaém hæftméce Hrunting nama; þæt wæs án foran ealdgestréona; ecg wæs íren, átertánium fáh, áhyrded heaposwáte. ...Béowulf maðelode bearn Ecgbéowes: '...Ond þú Unferð laét ealde láfe, wraétlic waégsweord, wídcúðne man heardecg habban; ic mé mid Hruntinge dóm gewyrce, oþðe mec déað nimeð.' (Beowulf, 1455-1459, 1473, 1488-1491).

"Hrothgar's spokesman lent him in his need a hafted blade called Hrunting; it was foremost among ancient treasures; the edge was iron marked with poisoned stripes, hardened in the gore of battle. ... Beowulf, the son of Ecgtheow spoke: ... And let Unferth, a man widely known, have this old heirloom, my beautiful wave-patterned sword, hard of edge. I shall achieve fame for myself with Hrunting, or else death will take me" (Swanton, 105).

And with these words, he Crosses the Threshold by diving headfirst into the mere. At the same moment, as he becomes cut off from the known world and any aid completely, he also enters the Belly of the Whale as he disappears into the deep and loathsome dark.

... efste mid elne, nalas andsware bídán wolde; brimwylm onfeng hilderince. (Beowulf, 1493-1495).

"[Beowulf] turned away boldly, would wait for no reply at all; the water's surge received the warrior" (Swanton, 105).

As his previous battle with Grendel was penumbral in nature, it stands to reason that Beowulf would now finally arrive at the Road of Trials because he has entered the true umbra of the otherworld. The swimming costs him time and strength, as it takes him almost a day to reach the bottom of the fiery lake. And, of course, Grendel's Mother is not unaware that her hunter has arrived in her hall. She has a territorial advantage, and immediately seizes him, drags him across the bottom of the lake so that he cannot even loose his weapon. However, when she finds that the chainmail he's wearing stops her from tearing his heart from his chest, she drags him along the bottom to be harried by the plethora of water-monsters who are hungrily waiting their turn. Just

as in the story of his contest with Breca, Beowulf is left alone in the dark, without breath in the watery depth, surrounded by enemies.

Ðá wæs hwíl dæges, aér hé þone grundwong ongytan mehte... Gráp þá tógéanes, gúðrinc geféng atolan clommum... Bær þá séo brimwylf, þá héo tó botme cóm, hringa þengel tó hofe sínum, swá hé ne mihte, nó hé þæs módig wæs, waépna gewealdan; ac hine wundra þæs fela swecte on sunde, saédéor monig hildetúxum heresyrcan bræc, éhton ágláecan. (Beowulf, 1495-1497, 1501-1502, 1506-1512).

“It was part of a day before he could catch sight of the level bottom. ...Then she clutched at him, seized the warrior in a dreadful grip... Then, when she came to the bottom, the water-wolf carried the commander of rings into her lair, so that- no matter how resolute he might be- he was unable to wield his weapons; and a host of weird creatures harried him in the deep; many a sea-beast tore at his battle-shirt; monsters pursued him” (Swanton, 105-107).

But, Beowulf manages to wrest himself free from their evil clutches, and suddenly, in a watery escape, he finds himself inside of a hall of some sort where the water no longer penetrates. Interestingly enough, there is light down here, but it is not described in the warm or shining sense of Heorot’s fires, but as a strange pale flame instead.

...fýrléoht geseah, blácné léoman beorhte scínan. (Beowulf, 1517-1518)

“He saw fire-light, a pale gleam shining brightly” (Swanton, 107).

In this moment he sees the lake-wife waiting for him; she springs at him, and he heaves his blade forward, but to his surprise and misfortune, the blade will not cut her. Beowulf is now forced to discard Hrunting as it does no good against a monster such as this. He and the she-monster wrestle hand to hand, him trying his patented shoulder-rending move, and she trying to claw off his chainmail shirt, but to no avail. Without further aid, they appear to be locked in a stalemate. Fortunately for Beowulf, Grendel’s Mother’s lair is a rich cornucopia of treasure, armour, and weapons that she has been hoarding after dispatching their previous owners. Among these artefacts is one in particular which he recognises will Aid him, and so Aid comes a second time.

Geseah ðá on searwum sigeéadig bil, ealdsweord eotenisc ecgum þýhtig, wigena weorðmynd (Beowulf, 1557-1559).

“Then he saw among the armour a victory-blessed blade, an ancient sword made by ogres, firm in its edges, the pride of fighters” (Swanton, 109).

He seizes the blade, though it ought to be too heavy for a normal man to carry, and swings it fiercely at her neck, cleaving her in twain. She falls dead on the floor, and the threat is ended. The otherworld is still.

After this a bright light akin to a shaft from heaven shines down into the cave, as if blessing this event. This sequence of events is based on a long history of troll tales, but the *Beowulf* poet does something here of interest: it is normal for trolls to live in watery caverns and also to have the only object which might bring about their death near at hand within their dwelling. However, in most stories (Swanton 10-12) the light shines *before* the monster can strike a killing blow, which effectively distracts it, as trolls are particularly vulnerable to light. In this case the poet has the light shine *after*, yet another manner in which Beowulf's Hero's Journey is marked out by light and shadow.

Líxte se léoma, léoht inne stód, efne swá of hefene hádre scíneð rodores candel.
(*Beowulf*, 1570-1572).

"Light shone, brightness gleamed within, just as the candle of the sky shines clearly from heaven" (Swanton, 109).

The light coming after signifies the Road of Trials has been completed; now the Hero has been recognised as an augmented champion of men. The sword itself, having outlived its usefulness, falls prey to the burning and poisonous blood of Grendel's Mother. The blade melts away, leaving only the beautifully jewelled hilt behind.

While in the cave, Beowulf discovers the corpse of Grendel, and is able to confirm that both foes have now been overcome. Triumphant, he removes Grendel's head so that he may prove to his fellows that the fiend has been vanquished. But, on the surface, all is not well. The water is now welling with blood and gore and the Danes fear that Beowulf has fallen in battle to the lake-wife. They turn away in sorrow and fear, leaving only Beowulf's comitatus to stand vigil and wait. This is a prelude to the Return phase; the Danes, who represent the ordinary world of men, despair too much to stay at the threshold. They fear the water, the otherworld, and dare not enter it nor wait near it once it becomes turbulent and bloody. Therefore when Beowulf does return, he will have to journey more or less alone¹⁵, back across an extended series of thresholds

¹⁵ It is true his small retinue of loyal Weder-Geats remain and will provide some company and protection. However, we have already seen that the poem treats the comitatus as one entity, almost an extension of Beowulf himself. So we can reasonably state here that the journey back across unknown terrain will still be solitary and difficult.

(first the waterline of the mere, second the treacherous marches that lead back to Heorot), before he can rejoin the Danes in their mead hall, and thus regain the world of men.

Meanwhile, Beowulf takes note of the fact that Grendel's mother's lair has a great many treasures in it. However, though he is at the stage of the Ultimate Boon where he has conquered his foe and may reap his reward, yet he does something unexpected.

Ne nóm hé in þaém wícum, Weder-Géata léod, máðmaéhtha má, þéh hé þaér monige geseah, búton þone hafelan ond þá hilt somod, since fáge (Beowulf, 1612-1615).

"The prince of the Weder-Geats took no more precious possessions from that dwelling, although he saw many there, but only the head together with the hilt, shining with treasure" (Swanton, 111).

Why he does this, the poem does not say, but this is a direct divergence from myths on which *Beowulf* was based; the hero often loots the dwelling of the villain after dispatching them, and we will explore this in greater detail later on. Suffice to say, it shows us that Beowulf is not particularly concerned with treasure, at least perhaps not the kind he sees as sullied by the foul hands of monsters such as these¹⁶.

He makes his way back to the surface, and it's now been about nine hours since he disappeared. The poem makes no mention of our hero being harried by more monsters; they seem to have prudently given up on making him their dinner. However, the poem does note that the mere is cleansed now, with the passing of Grendel's Mother. Again we see the use of *gefaélsod*, relating to cleansing and purification.

Waéron ýðgebland eal gefaélsod, éacne eardas, þá se ellorgást oflét lífdagas ond þás laénan gesceaft (Beowulf, 1619-1622).

"The currents, vast tracts, were all cleansed when the alien demon¹⁷ gave up the days of her life and this transitory state" (Swanton, 111).

Again we see the use of *gefaélsod*, relating to cleansing and purification. This leads us to believe that the source of the pollution, the otherworldliness, may have been Grendel's Mother. With the hellish creatures gone, perhaps the mere will return to

¹⁶ We know that he could have carried it back if he had wanted to; it isn't as if the swimming or the water were an obstacle. After all, later in the poem he is said to have swum across an ocean carrying the armour of thirty warriors under his arm: *þonan Bíowulf cóm sylfes cræfte· sundnytte dréah· hæfde him on earme eorla þritig hildegeatwa þá hé tó holme stág· (Beowulf, 2359-2362)*, "Beowulf came away from there [Frisia] by his own strength, engaged in a feat of swimming; he held in his arm the battle-gear of thirty warriors when he turned to the water" (Swanton, 147).

¹⁷ Again, she is referred to as "elsewhere spirit", *ellorgást*.

being only a mere. Regardless, the liminal influence that had previously spread from it, pushing outwards across the marches towards Heorot, is now gone.

Beowulf breaks the surface of the water, Returning across one Threshold, and rejoins his men who are overjoyed to see their friend and saviour alive. He presents them with the incredibly large head of Grendel, which takes four of them to carry on stakes. This, and the jewelled hilt, are the Ultimate Boon which Beowulf must confer on the Danes: these items are symbols of safety, they are the knowledge that Grendel and his kind are no more. The comitatus undertakes a trek back to the mead hall, though they are high in spirits.

Opðæt semninga tó sele cómon ... gumdryhten mid módig on gemonge meodowongas træd. (Beowulf, 1642-1643).

“until presently they came striding to the hall, among them the leader of men, proud in their midst, trod the fields by the mead-hall” (Swanton, 113).

And so the second Threshold is Crossed and Beowulf returns to the land of men. He then rolls the head into the hall and presents it directly to Hrothgar: the Boon is conferred upon the people.

'Hwæt, wé þé þás saélác, sunu Healfdenes léod Scyldinga, lustum bróhton tíres tó tácne þé þú hér tó lócast.' (Beowulf, 1652-1653).

“Well, son of Healfdene, prince of Scyldings, we have gladly brought you this sea-plunder which you look on here, as a token of success,” (Swanton, 113).

Beowulf then goes on to explain what happened to him in the mere, and through his telling, identifies himself as the Master of Two Worlds. It is not stated outright, but in his words we can see the following elements: first, that he was in the otherworld, the underwater place. Second, that a power was conferred on him of some sort (or so he believes), by God. Marked as he was, he was able to not only survive, but gain control of the situation. Third, by slaying the guardian of the otherworld who actually dwelt there, and within her own territory, he gained control over that realm, as well. He has shown that he knows exactly how to compass battles with monsters related to water and that their realm is no secret to him anymore. What is most important here, is that now everyone *else* is also aware of this mastery, and it will be his legacy among the Danes.

Ic þæt unsófte ealdre gedígde, wigge under wætere ... ætrihte wæs gúð getwæfed nymðe mec god scylde... þæt ic ðý waépne gebraéd. Ofslóh ðá æt þaére sæcce, þá mé saél ageald, húses hydras. ... Ic þæt hilt þanan féondum ætferede, fyrendaéda wræc (Beowulf, 1655-1659, 1664-1666, 1668-1669)

“I hardly came through it alive, the underwater conflict... the battle would have ended at once had God not shielded me. ...I struck down the guardian of that house. ...I have brought back the hilt from the foes, avenged the evil deeds” (Swanton, 113-115).

It is critical at this point we examine what Mastery of the Two Worlds means and what this will do for the rest of the poem. After all, rather than obtaining it at the end, Beowulf is obtaining this status in the middle of his story, and it will undoubtedly play a central role in the next story to come. For Campbell, as we saw in the introduction of the Monomyth at the beginning, Mastery means the “freedom to pass back and forth across the world division...not contaminating the principles of one with those of the other” (Campbell, 196). This does not mean simply traversing thresholds; to slip back and forth between the worlds *without contaminating them* is the key here. Grendel traversed the two worlds but brought a pollution with him that needed to be cleansed. Beowulf may have slain Grendel’s Mother in repayment for her transgressions, but otherwise leaves the monstrous mere intact, not seeking to change it nor colonise it, only to escape from it. Now that the otherworld has been conquered, as the above quote illustrates, Beowulf is free to traverse in and out of it.

That is the physical aspect of Mastery, but what is more, there is a psychological aspect. Campbell is careful to differentiate the vehicles of this stage from its tenors – in this case the waterways are vehicles and we can analyse Beowulf’s Mastery on that level, but we must also do so on the level of the tenor, which is whatever the waterways are attempting to represent. They are death, they are the warped almost-but-not-quite human shapes of creatures of great potency and longevity, and they are power that cannot be countered by mere mortal magic. For Beowulf, however, he has the knowledge of the water as water, the monsters are mortal, and the power to counter them lives within him. This world is no longer an unknown to him, and so in this psychological sense, he is not blocked by it nor is he afraid of it. He understands it simply as an extension of his own world that the other people around him cannot understand or compass, and it is up to him to use his unique knowledge for the betterment of the world as a whole. As Campbell says, “the heavenly land beyond, above, and below the confines of the world, are one and the same” (Campbell, 77).

The natural extension of possessing Mastery is Freedom to Live, which carries minor and major senses. While it can mean, of course, that the threat has been dealt with, and so there need not be fear of the *threat* consuming any further lives, this is only

the minor and more immediate sense. The major sense is that of a release from limitation, as we saw in the opening section of this part of the paper. Freedom to Live is a freedom of fear of death and the willingness to let life go where it takes you regardless of the result. Without the psychological oppression that comes with a fear that any move might result in disaster, the hero finds a far greater range of action now open to him or her, and this is the case with Beowulf. However, we will not see the full effect of Freedom to Live on him now. That will come in the beginning of the third cycle.

Thus, Beowulf bestows Freedom to Live, in the minor sense, on the Danes, which is critical: the world of men now has Freedom to Live and Beowulf, as the representative of the world of men against the forces of darkness, inherently must have it as well.

'Ic hit þe þonne geháte þæt þú on Heorote móst sorhléas swefan mid þínra secga gedryht ond þegna gehwylc þínra léoda, duguðe ond iogoþe, þæt þú him ondraédan ne þearft, þéoden Scyldinga, on þá healfe, aldorbealu eorlum, swá þú aér dydest.'
(Beowulf, 1671-1676)

"I promise you, then, that you may sleep in Heorot free from care, with your band of men and everythane of your people, tried warriors and youths-- that you need not fear deadly injury to your soldiers from that quarter, as you did before" (Swanton, 115).

This time, the Freedom to Live is real, as the umbra of the otherworld has been breached and conquered by our hero. The second cycle now ends, and the closing/outro commences. The Danes make merry and here Hrothgar praises dearest Beowulf for all he has done. But, he also offers tales of caution: a retelling of the story of Heremod who appeared in the closing of the first cycle. Heremod, as a young king, had done glorious things and acquired great power, but then turned cruel and brutal. This not only led to a host of ills for the Danish people, but also set up some of the conflicts that would continue to plague the land for generations to come. Hrothgar further goes on to say that Beowulf may well be king one day as it would be in Geatland's best interest to consider him, but that he should be mindful not to squander the glory he has gained, as Heremod did. He also reminds Beowulf that strength is fleeting; no man lives forever, so he should continue to make his youth and prowess count where he can. This speech serves as our transition element for the next cycle; we have a prediction of Beowulf as king, which he will become, and the prediction of his eventual decline with age, which plays heavily into the third cycle. Lastly, this transition reinforces the central theme, as well as highlights the nobler aspects of Beowulf's second cycle. Particularly, as Beowulf

once again chose to heed his Call for honourable reasons and declined to take treasure from the cave, instead delivering safety to the Danes, he's markedly contrasted against the greedy and violent Heremod.

After much joyful celebration and the natural relaxation that comes at the end of a great adventure, Beowulf announces to his Dane friends that he's ready to go home, eager to seek out his own king and see his native soil again. With his heart full of the satisfaction of a job well done, Beowulf, the Master of Two Worlds, once again takes to the sea so that he may return to his people at the peak of his ability and power.

We leave a joyful and now-cleansed Heorot, and Denmark, behind us.

D. The Dragon Cycle

The next section of the poem opens with several episodes in quick succession. It opens with Beowulf's boat finding its moorings in Geatland and introducing the next set of characters to us; these being Hygelac, King of the Geats, and his young but generous and fair tempered wife, Hygd. Immediately, this sets off another transition story of Thryth, who had been a queen of an unidentified land in antiquity. Notoriously vicious and cruel, she was shipped from an unknown place to the Anglo-Saxon lands and married off to the noble king Offa, where she subsequently turned over a new leaf and became a generous queen. This is perhaps the most jarring of the episodes because it comes with little context for the reader, however, there is a clear reason it is here, and fits the Campbellian cycle process rather well. As I have said, Campbell's cycles do not happen in a vacuum, and the cycles have a character of continuous recurrence.

Beowulf's cycles are influenced by those narratives happening around him, and the episodes provide us context and understanding of the greater cycles at work. These episodes do serve as bookends for Beowulf's stories, but also serve to remind us that Beowulf's life is part of a greater series of cycles about the war torn century he's living in. As well, it is not only Denmark or Sweden alone whose cycles matter to the tale - Thryth's story takes her to Mercia, where the poem of *Beowulf* would be sung, hundreds of years later. Thryth, coming from a time of great upheaval, instability, and tribal

infighting, becomes a vehicle to link the period and setting of the Swedish-Geatish and Dano-Frisian wars to the poet's modern day. As we have said, the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms were in only slightly better shape than the kingdoms of 6th century Scandinavia when it came to a unified and stable living situation. This is the poet's way of holding up a mirror between the two epochs, and tying the story of Offa, a great and beloved ruler of Mercia, to the story of Beowulf.

Thematically, Thryth's story echoes that of Heremod (Bonjour, 57), but her trajectory is the reverse of his. While Heremod starts out from a position of glory and strength, Thryth goes from cruel to generous in her power. The theme is, power can be either dangerous or beneficial, depending on the choices one makes. Which choices, the poet is subtly asking, will Beowulf make, now that he has been properly imbued, and realised his full potential in the previous cycle?

The next episode is back in the present where Beowulf enters the hall of his beloved King and kinsman¹⁸, and proceeds to recap everything that just happened regarding the cycle of Grendel and his Mother. Recalling that this poem may have been written down but was also likely meant to still be sung live to audiences, it's more than possible that it could have been "delivered in three sittings" (Whitelock, 20). Seeing as the cycles serve as natural serving sizes, this recap comes at a good spot to remind the audience of what was sung on the previous nights. Also, as halls tended to be busy places with people coming, going, leaving early, and arriving late, it was a good way to catch up anyone who may have missed portions of the previous cycles.

With the first two cycles summarised, Beowulf inserts an episode himself; he gives Hygelac a little gossip from Hrothgar's hall, saying that he heard Hrothgar had planned to marry off his daughter to the heir of the Heathobard clan. This seems a wise enough move seeing as previously Hrothgar and the Danes had been fighting a long and bloody war with the Heathobards, which resulted in little gain for either side. However, Beowulf does not think that this marriage will ease the tension for long; he explains that when the Danes go to visit their sister and daughter in her new hall, they'll likely be wearing swords and treasures taken from fallen Heathobard enemies, grim reminders of old wounds. Beowulf predicts that the amnesty will not last more than a year. This episode is directly linked to the first cycle's story of Finn, in which Frisian Finn and Danish Hnaef find themselves in a very similar situation of fragile peace that eventually

¹⁸ Beowulf is Hygelac's nephew, which is relevant because it means that Beowulf does have royal blood and thus may eventually ascend to the throne

sours. Once again, the central theme of the poem is reinforced, but this time, it's Beowulf himself reciting the lesson, as though it was learned from his time in the first cycle. This is foreshadowing that Beowulf is aware of these tribal issues and has the foresight to avoid them if he can, thus, we can predict that he will continue to confront the steps of his Hero's Journey as nobly as he did before.

Finally, Beowulf is rewarded for all of his trouble and we move into the next episode, the fall of Hygelac. The poem summarises for the moment, letting us know that Hygelac falls in a battle with the Frisians, and with a heavy heart, Beowulf takes the throne.

Next comes the episode called the Elegy of the Last Survivor - we move to a different cycle completely that preceded this story by almost three centuries. A crew of warriors is slain, and the last of them, in mourning, buries the treasure they had earned inside of a large barrow-mound containing a deep stream, which empties out into the sea. A hoard of treasure this large, however, is bound to attract the attention of things that love gold, and one such thing exists in Geatland. A hideous Dragon, poisonous *wyrmkin*¹⁹, scourge of men finds the hoard and makes his nest inside the barrow, greedily guarding it for three hundred years. We flash forward to the present when a poor, escaped slave unwisely removes a cup or some such trinket from the cave, which in turn wakes the Dragon. The Dragon, enraged by this theft, flies forth and begins to lay waste to the country from the seaboard to the interior. For its last act, it attacks Beowulf's hall. It does so much damage that it literally melts the throne with its fire, and here the cycle officially begins.

Traditionally in such tales, trolls and trollkin are watery creatures, living around meres, marshes, or waterfalls, but dragons are land based, preferring mountains and caverns. This would make the Dragon seem dissonant considering that Beowulf's otherworldly powers are based on the fact that he has traversed a waterway in order to slay a monster at least twice that we know of (first the *niceras* and second Grendel's Mother). However, there are two things to note here from the text which make the Dragon more akin to Grendel than we might initially realise. First is that the Dragon appears to be a night-bound creature, as Grendel and his Mother were, only exiting its cave to fly to "*ongan deorcum nihtum*" ("hold sway on dark nights", Swanton 141) . It

¹⁹ Anything relating to dragons or dragon-like species.

also eschews the light and the day in favour of the dark, which is what marked out the two trollkin in Denmark.

hordweard onbád earfoðlice oð ðæt aefen cwóm... Þá wæs dæg sceacen wyrme on willan; nó on wealle læg... (*Beowulf*, 2302, 2305-2306).

“With difficulty, the guardian of the hoard waited until evening came... Then to the serpent’s gratification, the day had passed, it would not stay longer within the walls” (Swanton, 145).

hord eft gescéat, dryhtsele dyrnne aér dæges hwíle (*Beowulf*, 2319-2320)

“It darted back to the hoard, its secret, splendid hall, before daytime” (Swanton 145).

Second is that this barrow is actually set at the mouth of the sea, and the sea-swell enters it through an inlet. We learn later on, when Beowulf approaches the mound, that he must wade up a deep stream to get to it.

Beorh eallgearo wunode on wonge wæterýðum néah, níwe be næsse, nearocraeftum fæst. (*Beowulf*, 2241-2243)

“A barrow stood all ready on open ground near the sea-waves, new by the headland, secure in its powers of confinement” (Swanton, 141)

Hlaew under hrusan holmwylme neh, yðgewinne... (*Beowulf*, 2411-2413)

“A mound covered in soil near to the surging water, the tumult of the waves...” (Swanton, 149).

Given that the entrance to this mound, which can be considered the liminal otherworld, dwelling place of monsters, is once again surrounded by dangerous waters which must be traversed in order to reach it, it makes sense that Beowulf’s previous experiences would make him uniquely equipped to take on such a creature.

Beowulf is made aware of the Dragon by a messenger who acts as the herald for this Call to Adventure. Beowulf begins his preparation to answer the Call and commissions a shield of iron to be made. He also declines to take a large troop of fighting men, unwilling to condemn them to die when he knows that he alone has the power to defeat the creature.

*heht him þá gewyrcean, wígendra hléo eallírenne, eorla dryhten, wígbord wraétlíc·
wisse hé gearwe þæt him holtwudu helpa ne meahte lind wið líge. Sceolde lípenddaga
aþeling aérgód ende gebídan worulde lífes ond se wyrm somod. (Beowulf, 2307-2312).*

“The defence of fighting men commanded to be made for him a wonderful war-shield all of iron; he knew very well that the forest wood could not help him--limewood against flame. The seafarer, a prince of proven merit, had to meet the end of his days, his life in the world--and the dragon as well” (Swanton, 147).

What follows appear to be episodes which digress away from the story, but they do not actually interrupt Campbellian action - in fact, they augment it. At this point, Beowulf is an old man. He's been ruling for fifty years, and other than the fact that these have been fifty years of great peace and prosperity, we don't have any idea what has happened to him since his exploits at Heorot. As he is calling for a new shield and preparing himself in mindset to meet the Dragon, Beowulf recounts the other adventures and other cycles that have brought him here since Heorot. This is an extended answer to his Call to Adventure, and an emphatic one. Beowulf is reminding us of all the other challenges he rose to meet, and this one shall be no different. This speech, if nothing else, is identifying the many other Hero's Journeys he undertook, and his reactions to them. This Call to Adventure against the Dragon therefore represents all Calls to Adventure from Heorot forwards.

There is another factor that plays into the speech which is very important to the Campbellian structure: Beowulf has *already* gained Mastery of the Two Worlds. We know that he can move in and out of the otherworld without disturbing it, and he utilises this talent to serve his people. This is highlighted in the telling of his swim to Frisia and back; he uses the waterways to guide him from one part of his own world to the other, coming in and out of the otherworld as is natural for an imbued hero (imbued meaning infused with power from an outside source).

*Nó þæt laéset wæs hondgemóta, þaér mon Hygelác slóh... þonan Bíowulf cóm sylfes
cræfte, sundnytte dréah; hæfde him on earme eorla [xxx]²⁰ hildegeatwa þá hé tó holme
beág. ...lýt eft becwóm fram þám hildfreca hāmes nīosan. Oferswam ðá sioleða bigong
sunu Ecgðéowes earm ánhaga eft tó léodum... (Beowulf, 2354-2355, 2365-2368).*

“Not least of these hand to hand encounters was that where they slew Hygelac... Beowulf came away from there by his own strength, engaged in a feat of swimming; he held in his arm the battle-gear of thirty warriors when he turned to the water. ...few came back from that battle-fighter to seek out their homes. Then the son of Ecgtheow, a wretched solitary, swam over the expanse of tides back to his people” (Swanton, 147).

²⁰ Word is illegible in the original manuscript.

But this is only the physical level of Mastery and its partner stage, Freedom to Live. As Beowulf has attained both, he has the wisdom necessary to rule well and act for the betterment of his world. “His personal ambitions being totally dissolved, he no longer tries to live but willingly relaxes to whatever may come to pass in him” (Campbell, 205). In Beowulf’s context, we can understand this quote to mean Beowulf understands the greater world around him: personal gain and personal deeds matter, but only insofar as they do not grate against the common good. He is not struggling to be set apart by man’s metric for greatness, he is not limited by small, mundane measures of triumph, he performs actually great deeds when the universe calls upon him to do so.

We see this in his reaction to the fall of Hygelac. The throne now falls to Heardred, the son of King Hygelac. Beowulf is offered the throne himself but refuses to take it on a basis of honour - he is after all the King’s nephew, not his son. Instead, fulfilling the outer cycle of the Heremod tragedy, Beowulf comports himself morally and stays as an advisor to Heardred until the latter’s untimely death at the hands of the neighboring and violent Swedes. The story gives us two small mentions of Beowulf defeating said Swedes in battle, and convincing them to form a tense but somewhat stable peace instead of continuing bloodshed. Thus, Beowulf ascends the throne, having answered three other Calls to Adventure, and he continues answering them now.

Now is when Beowulf finally answers his Call. “*Gewát þá twelfa sum ... dracan scéawian*” (2401) (“He went as one of twelve to view the dragon”, Swanton, 149). What happens when he answers this call is different in some ways from his previous responses. He gives a speech affirming that he will go to fight the Dragon, because he has never shied away from an Adventure in the past, but this long, elegiac monologue is also a final farewell – and an acceptance. The effects of Mastery of Two Worlds and Freedom to Live now culminate here; all of his previous encounters, the knowledge gained, the freedom from fear of death all build toward a man that is ready. Ready, in this sense, means ready for whatever Campbell’s “universal plan” has in store for him, even if it means his death.

His speech is haunting, speaking of the loss of friends, the sorrow that endures long after they are gone, and the deeds he committed all for the betterment of his people. As he knows he is going to his death, he is looking back on his life and recounting what he can. This is not mere boasting, and it is not action, either. It is

reflection. This is what Mastery and Freedom to Live truly give him: as they represent the full maturity of a hero who has passed Initiation, they give him the capacity to reflect and take good account of himself. What is new here is that before reflection did occur on a smaller scale, but only when provoked by a Threshold Guardian (as was the case with Unferth), or given to him by another character (as was the case with Hrothgar's final advice). But here, Beowulf self-reflects all on his own, calmly, and *waéfre ond wælfús* (2420) ("Restless, and ready for death", Swanton, 151).

At the end of the speech, he speaks his final declaration of intent.

'... faéhðe sécan, maérðum fremman, gif mec se mánsceaða²¹ of eorðsele út geséceð!'
(*Beowulf*, 2513-2515).

'...I will seek out the feud, achieve a deed of glory, if the wicked ravager will come out of the earthen hall to meet me!'" (Swanton, 155).

The Call has now been well and truly answered and Beowulf marches forward towards his doom, bidding his warriors to stay behind and leave the Dragon to him. He has his iron shield, but otherwise no Aid at this point is given, and here it makes sense; he is the Master of Two Worlds, the company he has brought with him is not. This is the point where Beowulf and his comitatus split and no longer function as a unit. Grim and ready for war, Beowulf is alone.

He arrives at the stone arches, carved by giants, which leads into the inlet that runs out of the barrow-mound. This is the Threshold, for once into the stream he risks alerting the Dragon that he is at its front door. And once beyond the arches, there's nowhere to hide.

*...stóðan stánbogan; stréam út þonan breccan of beorge; wæs þaére burnan wælm
heaðofýrum hát* (*Beowulf*, 2545-2546)

"...then he saw arches of rock standing in the rampart through which a stream gushed out of the barrow, the surge of that brook was hot with deadly fire" (Swanton, 157).

Unfortunately for Beowulf, the water is again quite harmful. Though this time it is not full of sea-monsters, it is mixing with the poisonous, liquid flame of the Dragon's breath. However, Beowulf is stalwart and Crosses the Threshold regardless. The Dragon is deeply unhappy about this further transgression and responds by spewing fire at our

²¹ Grendel is referred to in these same terms, cf line 736.

hero-prince. The fight begins. Far from the warrior he used to be, Beowulf engages with the Dragon, receiving burns and finding that his fine sword does absolutely nothing against the Dragon's scales. Things are not looking good for the hero. And, they're about to get worse.

Here we come to the Belly of the Whale once more, where the hero is left alone inside the arena of the monster. Much to the horror of the audience, Beowulf loses his followers. Instead of coming to his aid when his sword bounces off the dragon's skin, they turn and flee into the woods, leaving Beowulf effectively alone.

Nealles him on héape handgesteallan, æðelinga bearn ymbe gestódon hildcystum, ac hý on holt bugon, ealdre burgan. (Beowulf, 2596-2599).

"In no way did his close companions, sons of princes, take up a stand in a band around him with the honour in battle, but they turned to the wood, saved their lives." (Swanton, 161)

That is, alone save one man brave enough to stay behind. He is Wiglaf, Beowulf's second cousin. Something curious happens here; Wiglaf is of the realm of men, but he faces his own Call to Adventure here. It is the first time he's been truly tested in battle, but he also Crosses the Threshold and wades into the deadly firewater to aid his failing prince. Wiglaf has begun his own cycle, and it's intrinsically tied to Beowulf's. The Call comes, Beowulf is its herald, and Wiglaf has to answer:

Nú is sé dæg cumen þæt úre mandryhten mægenes behófað, góðra gúðrinca. Wutun gongan tó, helpan hildfruman... Wód þá þurh þone wælréc, wígheafolan bær fréan on fultum (Beowulf, 2646-2649, 2661-2662).

"Now the day has come when our leader of men has need of the strength of good warriors. Let us go forward, assist the battle-leader...' Then he advanced through the deadly smoke, carried his war-helmet to the aid of his lord" (Swanton, 161).

The Dragon, however, is still having none of this and the second round of the fight begins. As we saw before, Grendel is a one strike match, and is the first cycle. Grendel's Mother is a two strike, and the second cycle. Fittingly, the Dragon will be three, and it will be the crossing point of the cycles of both heroes: the old, and the new. The Dragon sprays fire, disintegrating Wiglaf's shield, but the iron one of Beowulf protects them both. Beowulf now strikes out again, but the great sword Naegling shatters as it hits the angry serpent's scales.

A third time the creature attacks, and this time it finds its mark: It bites Beowulf in the neck and shoulder, momentarily crippling him. Wiglaf's moment has come. Inside the Belly of his own Whale, he sinks his sword into the beast.

..þearfe gefrægn þéodcyninges andlongne eorl ellen cýðan... þæt he þone niðgæst nioðor...þæt ðæt sweord gedéaf, fáh ond faéted, þæt ðæt fyr ongon sweðrian syððan. (Beowulf, 2694-2695, 2700-2702).

“...at the need of the nation's king the warrior by his side displayed courage... by striking the spiteful creature... so that the sword, shining and plated, sank in, so that thereupon the fire began to abate” (Swanton, 163).

This gives Beowulf the moment he needs to collect himself. It also provides a handy point of entry for Dragon-slaying; with a knife, Beowulf slides beneath the great beast and slices it open, ending the Belly of the Whale... or the Belly of the Dragon, whichever you prefer.

Þá gén sylf cyning gewéold his gewitte, wællseaxe gebraéd, biter ond beaduscearp, þæt hé on byrnan wæg; forwrat Wedra helm wyrm on middan. (Beowulf, 2702-2704)

“Then the king himself, again in control of his senses, drew the deadly knife, keen and battle-sharp, that he wore on his mail; the protector of the Weders cut the serpent open in the middle.” (Swanton, 163).

The Dragon is dead, the heroes are alone in the Threshold, but this is not a place that Beowulf can return from. Not this time.

Ðá sío wund ongon, þé him se eorðdraca aérgeworhte, swelan ond swellan; hé þæt sóna onfand, þæt him on bréostum bealoníð wéoll attor on innan. (Beowulf, 2712-2715)

“Then the wound which the earth-dragon had inflicted on him earlier began to burn and swell; straight away he found that the poison within welled up with deadly evil in his breast” (Swanton, 165).

Beowulf returns to a reflective mood here and elects to sit upon the rampart which is symbolic. The rampart is attached to the arches, it is the literal border between the liminal space where Beowulf fought his last monster, and the world from which he came. He straddles it now, sitting between the two but given to neither, and looks out at the sea. He is dying, and he knows it. However, as we have established, he's ready to calmly embrace that.

Đá se æðeling going, þæt hé bí wealle, wíshycgende gesæt on sesse; seah on enta geweorc, hú ðá stánbogan stapulum fæste éce eorðreced innan healde. (Beowulf, 2715-2719).

“Then thinking deeply, the prince went til he sat on a bank by the rampart; he looked at the giant’s work- how the enduring earthen hall held within it stone arches fast on pillars” (Swanton, 165)

Wise as he has ever been, Beowulf knows it is time for a new hero to take his place. The cycles cross again as Beowulf gives to Wiglaf all his war mail, again, spoken of in all gold imagery, the colour of humanity.

Dyde him of healse hring gylденne þíoden þrísthýdig, þegne gesealde, geongum gárwigan, goldfáhne helm, béah ond byrnan, hét hyne brúcan well... (Beowulf, 2809-2812).

“The valiant prince took the golden collar from his neck, presented to the thane, the young spear-fighter, gold-adorned helmet, ring and coat of mail, bade him make good use of them...” (Swanton, 169)

However, the Ultimate Boon, the Dragon’s hoard of gold, is still there. It will fall to Wiglaf to return from the otherworld with this treasure for the benefit of his (and Beowulf’s) people. It is also worth noting here that Beowulf expressly says it’s for his people’s welfare, in keeping with his earlier actions in previous cycles. He himself does not seek treasure or glory for its own sake, but always for the sake of the people he represents. His final speech also brings to a conclusion all the outer cycles posed by the opening and closing episodes: he goes to his death having avoided all the perils that Finn, Heremod, Ongentheow, Onela, Hygelac, and Heardred had fallen prey to. He is passing this wisdom, along with his armour and neck ring, over to the new generation. Finally we reach the last phase of this cycle for Beowulf, Refusal of Return.

‘Ic ðára frætwa Fréan ealles ðanc, Wuldurcýninge, wordum secge, écum Dryhtne, þé ic hér on starie, þæs ðe ic móste mínum léodum aé swyltdæge swylc gestrynan. Nú ic on máðma hord minne bebohte fróde feorhlege, fremmað géna léoda þearfe; ne mæg ic hér leng wesan! (Beowulf, 2793-2801).

“: ‘I give words of thanks to the Lord of all, the King of Glory, eternal Ruler, for these adornments which I gaze on here, that I was able to acquire such things for my people before the moment of death. Now that I have paid for the hoard of treasures with the life allotted me, you must attend to the people’s needs henceforth; I can remain here no longer...” (Swanton, 169).

And with this last breath, Beowulf bestows the final blessing upon Wiglaf before giving up this mortal earth.

Wiglaf's cycle continues. After Beowulf passes away in his arms, he stays with his fallen king, sending a messenger to rouse the others. The treasure is taken from the cave, the Dragon's body is rolled off the cliff into the sea, the land is cleansed. Wiglaf addresses those warriors that fled in Beowulf's hour of need and condemns them for their cowardice, before stepping up and taking his place as the King. One cycle completes, another begins. And so, the story goes on.

We do hear from the closing episodes here that the cycle of Wiglaf is not likely to be any less tragic than Beowulf's; enemies from all sides are waiting to hear of the death of the great king. Due to the wars of Hrethel, Hygelac and Headred, armies of Frisians, Franks, and Swedes are amassing in the shadows just beyond Geatland's borders. Beowulf was the only thing keeping them at bay; with him gone, Geatland is about to make its last stand. So ends the story of Beowulf; with his own death, and that of the humanity he strove to protect.

III: A Hero's Tale: Analysis and Conclusions

We can see how the Monomyth gives us a fine structure to analyse this style of literature, not only because it follows the natural cycles of such stories, but also gives us insight into why characters behave in certain fashions. One of the greatest takeaways of the application of the Monomyth to *Beowulf* lies in its comparative nature: now we can examine a few examples of related stories and see where *Beowulf* diverges from its roots.

A. What We Learn About Beowulf as a Character and *Beowulf* as a Story

The assertion at the beginning of this paper was twofold: first that the Monomyth provides the clearest and most useful lens to understand *Beowulf* and other stories like it, and second that the Monomyth provides a critical comparative function. I'll address the first point first.

Epics are myth based, as we established, so it seemed only natural that someone would attempt to apply Propp's Model for Wondertales to such a text. Shippey did apply it to *Beowulf*, and with great success. However, they admitted that "to analyse *Beowulf* in Propp's terms is of little help for the literary critics" (Shippey, 10). His study did highlight a number of aspects of *Beowulf*, namely that the fairytale structure of the poem (first posited by Panzer), is indeed there and intact, but *Beowulf* deviates away from fairytale in a few key ways such as the lack of magic involved whatsoever, and the tragic ending. These findings are not small gains in terms of understanding the poem,

but if we are to extrapolate from what Shippey says in the above quote, it seems that Propp's model has a limit to what it can explore.

And herein lies the difference between Campbell's model and Propp's: they are *very* similar in structure and timeline of events within the narrative, but whereas Propp is concerned with the nitty-gritty moving parts, the actions of the tale, Campbell is more concerned with why they happen. Several of the stages in Campbell's model are distinctly philosophical or psychological; Mastery of Two Worlds, the idea that one can know the unknown and come to a rational understanding of it, or Freedom to Live, meaning a release from a fear of death, do not appear in Propp's schema. How could they? The fairytale is about action and action alone. Why these actions happen is completely immaterial, and normally the answer is: they happen because fairytale structure demands that it happen. The ability to reflect on one's actions, distinct characterisation, and socio-political influences on the story are not part of fairytale structure - yet these are things we encounter consistently in *Beowulf*. So, while Propp's approach was useful to prove the fairytale underpinnings of this poem, we need a more sophisticated model to handle the parts of *Beowulf* which diverge from or supersede its fairytale roots.

Campbell's model has done this beautifully, including reconciling some aspects of the poem which Shippey struggled to reconcile with Propp's model (such as the appearance of Unferth and his quick turn around from being a hostile force to a willing donor). Elements of the historical and mythological episodes become clearly Campbellian as well, giving them not only the thematic purpose already explored by Bonjour, but now also a narrative purpose as well. *Beowulf*'s ability for internal reflection and self awareness is explained via the psychological understanding of what it means to conquer an unknown and grow from the experience.

Finally, we must remember that Epics have one thing that fairytales do not, which is a sense of memory; they remember what came before each episode, either within the story, or macrocosmically without. That is to say, with *Beowulf* as an example, the cycle of Grendel is recalled by the story itself in the cycle of his Mother and that of the Dragon, and the cycles of previous Kings also inform on the course of the story. Fairytales cannot remember; they are out of time and apolitical, and so Propp's model need not concern itself with the process of memory within a text. Propp does allow for repetition of steps and sequences within a text, acknowledging that some patterns repeat, but this is different from the cycle that the Hero's Journey takes. The

Hero's Journey is inherently about gaining knowledge and coming to a greater understanding of unknown quadrants of the world around the hero - and it is inherently about continuity. The story continues, and *Beowulf* is a prime example of how previous explorations and cycles shape the life of a hero. Therefore, we can look at it like this: Epics of this time period are bridges between mythic or fairytale roots and narratives, so we need a model that can handle both sides of their nature. Campbell's model also starts from myth as a base and seeks to explore the whys and hows of the actions which it maps. Because of this, it is able to handle more of the narrative elements of Epics, including social setting, characterisation, and internal or psychological change and growth. The Monomyth itself is sort of a bridge in this way, which makes it a perfect pairing for Epics of this nature.

Regarding the second point, Campbell, like Propp, also provides a wonderful tool for comparison between stories. There is not time and space enough here for a detailed analysis of all the myths and stories related to *Beowulf*, but we may look at a few clear examples so that we may see the benefit of the Monomyth as a lens.

There is no doubt that *Beowulf* is closely related to the *Grettis Saga*, or the story of Icelandic hero Grettir the Strong (Chambers, 51). In fact, it's most often posited that one story did not come from the other, but rather both were divergent iterations from the same source myth (ibid). And they do bear striking similarities, from two fights with trolls that mirror one another strongly (Chambers, 50, Hawes, 28), to passage-crossing into liminal spaces associated with their peoples and enjoying a liminal person status (Hawes, 30). However, the way in which they confront their Calls and Threshold Guardians is very different: While Beowulf hears of horror and goes directly to confront it because he feels honour-bound to do so, Grettir often stumbles on his Adventures, or them on him. Grettir also answers Calls in a noticeably violent fashion; in fact the first Call he answers results in an unjust slaying of a farm boy which requires Grettir to become an outlaw, sent away from his lands (Magnússon, *Grettir*, 37-39). Later on, he slays two more people in the new land he's settled in, resulting in further banishment and new Adventures arising from it (Magnússon, *Grettir*, 71-74). This is in direct opposition to Beowulf, who expressly states he avoided any unnecessary slaying. Further, when it comes to insults and tests put forward by Threshold Guardians such as Unferth, we see that Beowulf answers these challenges with great courtesy; however, Grettir tends to end them with fatal blows more often than not (at least in the case of Gunnar, cf Magnússon, *Grettir*, 74-75). Lastly, we have one of the liminal fights in the

world of shadow which Grettir faces: the famed fight with Glámr. In this case, unlike Beowulf, Grettir fails to obtain the Ultimate Boon or any blessings attached to it. While he does defeat Glámr after a fashion, the demon spirit curses him to terrible luck for the rest of this life. Grettir never becomes stronger, becomes afraid of the dark (a liminal space which he subsequently fails to conquer), and his cycle takes on an altogether different ambience and trajectory from Beowulf's.

Whatever the root myth they shared, clearly these two heroes walked very different paths away from it. Would that there were time and space in this paper to explore it further.

Also among similar tales and possible root myths for *Beowulf* is the tale of Sigurð (or Sigurd) the Dragon Slayer. It is, after a fashion, even referenced in the text. As we saw in the end of the first cycle of *Beowulf*, the man himself is compared favourably to Sigemund, son of Völsung. It is said that he and his nephew Fitela fought and killed a dragon. In other surviving renditions of the Scandinavian myth, it is Sigurd, Sigemund's son, who confronts and slays the wicked dragon Fafnir. Sigemund and Sinfjötli (the Fitela of *Beowulf*), confront many creatures on a streak of vengeance against an evil king, but according to the *Saga of the Völsungs*, no dragons (Magnússon, *Völsungs*, 35-59, Ashliman, 1). We can assume that if there was a story of Sigemund and his nephew on a dragon slaying kick, it is lost now. However, the story of Sigurd (also known as Siegfried, popularised by Wagner's *Ring Cycle*), bears a striking resemblance to the story of Beowulf. It is possible the *Beowulf* poet conflated Sigemund and Sigurd, or that they had already become conflated in an earlier time before arriving in Anglo-Saxon lands. Thus, it's probable that the story referenced in *Beowulf* is that of Sigurd and Regin, or something close to it. Sigurd, like Beowulf, is also called forth to slay a poisonous dragon, though he does so for the treasure that it's hoarding (Sturluson, 96-99, Magnússon, *Völsungs*, 77-80). The response to his Call to Adventure is self enrichment, something that Beowulf pointedly never engages in. Further, the Aid and steadfast friend we find in Sigurd's story is Regin, Fafnir's greedy and scheming brother, who urges Sigurd to slay the dragon for personal gain, and aids him in doing so. Later, after Fafnir is dead, Regin plans on betraying Sigurd, which prompts Sigurd to kill him- quite unlike the relationship between Beowulf and Wiglaf, which we have seen plays out quite differently. Lastly, Sigurd goes on to find and rescue Brunhilde who has been placed in a ring of fire by Odin himself. This puts The Meeting with the Mother and Atonement with the Father/Abyss squarely within Sigurd's tale, as he must

face down a power greater than himself while in his Initiation, in order to marry the girl he's destined to be with. The very presence of greater powers and deity figures within Sigurd's story shows that Beowulf, and Grettir for that matter, were both a marked departure from other contemporary tales.

Though, even in the story of Grettir while there might not be deities per se, there is magic which is not present in *Beowulf*. Grettir encounters a "demon" and a curse with very real consequences which result from that encounter. Shippey already arrived at the conclusion that "[*Beowulf*] is a fairytale stripped of all magic" (Shippey, 11), and an application of Campbell only serves to strengthen this finding. *Beowulf* is, unlike its counterparts and predecessors, a story of human victory and human tragedy, with little room for fantasy.

We could go on endlessly marking differences and similarities between these tales and many others that contributed to the making of *Beowulf*, but for now within the bounds of what this paper can provide, we can see that we learn much about Beowulf as a character compared to his contemporaries and predecessors thanks to the application of the Monomyth.

What this truly serves to show us is that *Beowulf* is at the beginning of a series of narratives about the "English" hero. He is not Grettir, and certainly not Sigurd; though he shares many of the same stages as they do in their Hero's Journeys, he reacts to his stages in a very different way than they do. As the Monomyth tells us, however, this is because everything is a cycle: the story of the Epic is a cycle, and each time the cycle occurs it changes and tweaks to fit its new audience and setting. Beowulf displays traits which are dominant or ideal for his time, and these will change as the cycle continues, however, the cycle *itself* will remain the same story.

Furthermore, what I am describing here historically and macrocosmically in terms of Scandinavian versus Anglo-Saxon culture also happens microcosmically inside the poem itself: Three cycles, each one different from the one before, but all three together serve to tell us who the hero is. Around Beowulf's life the cycles of Hrothgar, the Danes, the Swedes, and the Geats continue to turn.

The question becomes, what other departures might be found upon closer examination, and why? Only further research can tell.

B. What We Learn About the Interactions of the Otherworld with the Known World

There is much to be seen about the liminality of this piece, the otherworld, and how they define the Campbellian cycles we've just seen. Considering that *Beowulf* and the *Grettis Saga* both rose from the same root myth, it's interesting to see that they both have the same patterns of liminality as well. The otherworld in both of these stories is encroaching, and the heroes Cross Campbellian Thresholds by staying overnight in either a haunted mead-hall or a haunted farmhouse, or some other man made structure, until the infringing darkness comes and finds them. They will then defeat it and pursue it back through the penumbral layer to the true threshold of the otherworld, that of the umbral layer. This is wholly absent from tales such as that of Sigurd, who goes seeking his foe directly. That is to say, he is not precisely dispelling any haunting, but penetrating the other world to find gain. The otherworld in Sigurd's tale and other like dragon slayer myths is much more static, waiting for the hero to seek it out, rather than pushing through and contaminating the world of men.

Campbell's model also highlights what the otherworld looks like in *Beowulf*. Beowulf doesn't cross into a realm that is specifically different than his own. The otherworld is still firmly on earth, tangible to the touch, and definitely not across a rainbow bridge or through a door under a faerie mound. Going back to the *Völsunga Saga* we mentioned before, frequent appearances by deities are made, whether it be granting boons, taking them, or simply delivering messages to our heroes. Beowulf, on the other hand, is alone. He does not touch the realm of the Gods, therefore the Gods (or God in his case) are not there to help him.

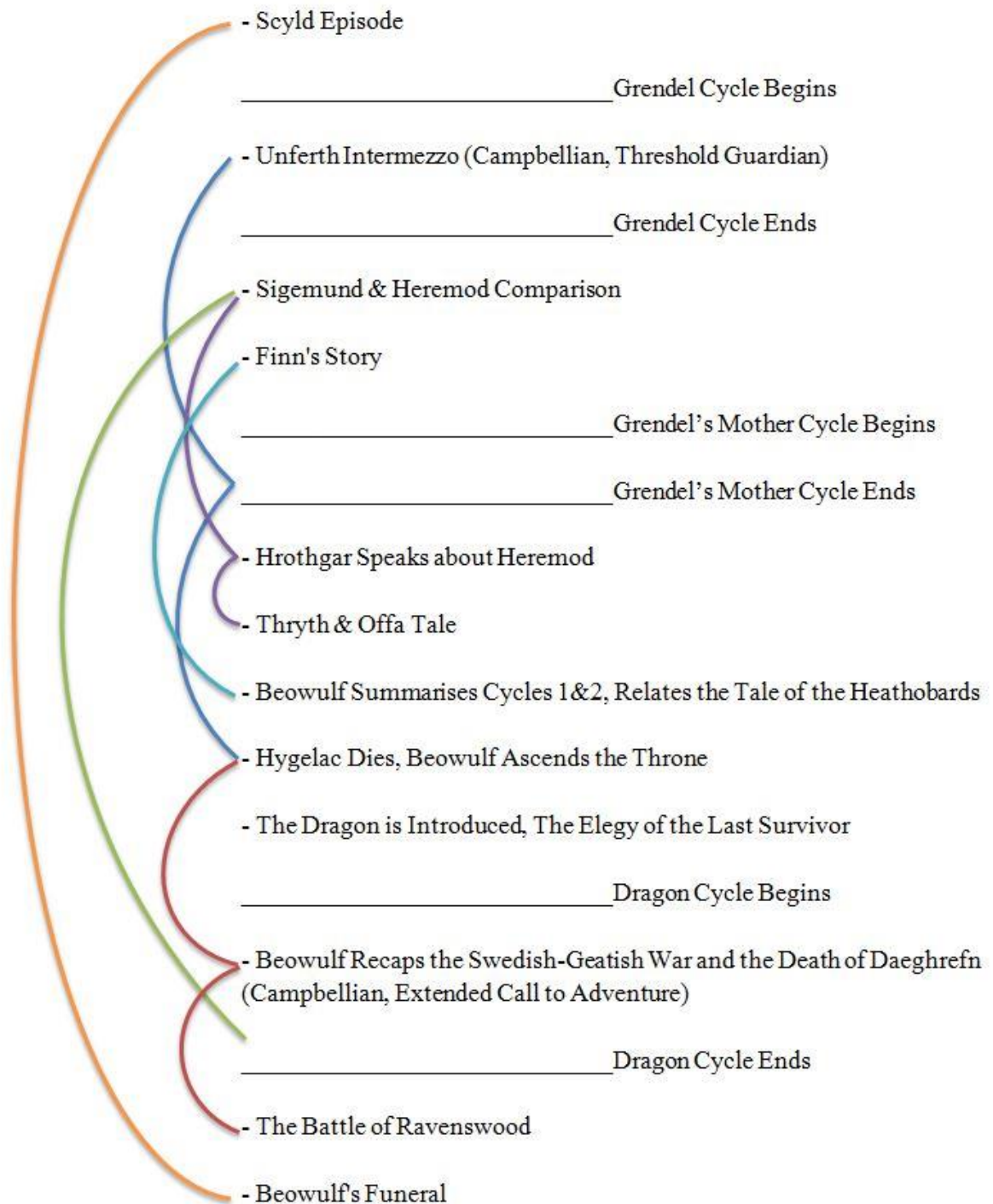
It would certainly be of interest to analyse in depth which stories contain the more ethereal steps of the Monomyth, and which do not. It would also be of interest to see how the otherworld reacts in these root stories, and if there is a divide in Western Dragon Slayer tales as to characters who seek the otherworld versus those that only want to put it back where it belongs.

C. A New Way of Viewing the “Digressions”

As it has been stated already, the intercalated historical and mythological episodes of *Beowulf* have been thoroughly analysed from historical, linguistic, and artistic points of view. Many issues regarding them have been long since put to bed and there are several things we can say with surety: chief among these is that they all have a thematic role in the text and were likely chosen for specific reasons, not added at random (Bonjour, 57). Beyond this thematic role, however, there's the question of their place in the narrative. Viewing the text as a single story arc can make the episodes seem jarring or digressive, however, when *Beowulf* is viewed in light of Campbell's model and taken as a set of three stories, a clear pattern emerges: all true episodes fall at the beginnings and ends of the major heroic cycles, acting as bookends. In this way they don't at all seem out of place - rather the opposite, as the Epic demands openings and closings to help with the ebb and flow of action, as I've already pointed out.

Despite the cycles mapping out three stories, this poem must be viewed as a whole (Bonjour 57). It bears repeating that these cycles are inexorably tied to one another, and the episodes are not detachable interpolations, they are transition paragraphs between the three narrative cycles and cannot be taken apart from these. The interaction with the Campbellian narrative cycles is interesting: not only do these episodes not interrupt Campbellian cycles of the poem, they enhance the cycles by referencing and building on each other.

We can think of it like a game of Cluedo: there are secret passages that go from the study to the kitchen and the conservatory to the lounge - these rooms might be on opposite ends of the house, but they are linked in ways not readily apparent, and understandable with a little bit of investigation. What we can see from the graphic below is that each episode builds on the transition episodes before it in order to tie each of the three narrative cycles together with the same artistic themes.



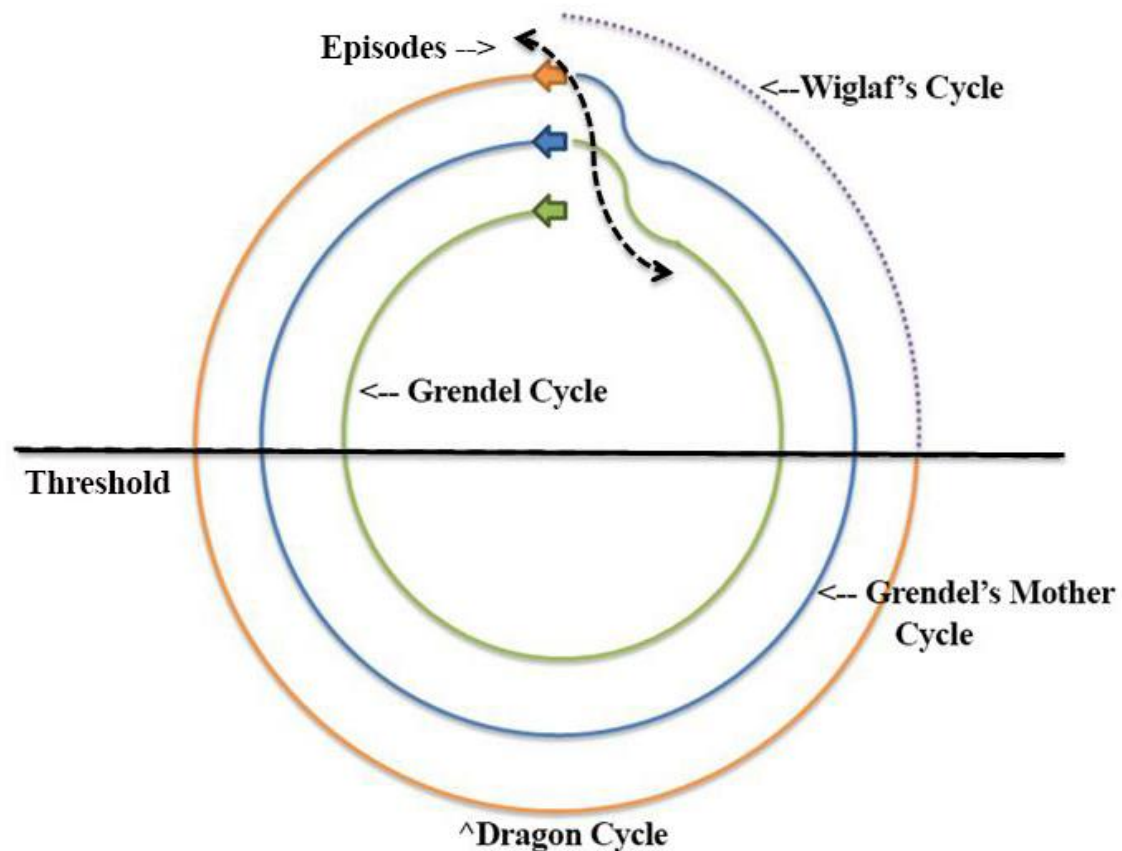
The funeral of Scyld and Beowulf's funeral serve to cap the story with mirrored action regarding two highly regarded saviour-kings; this is foreshadowing, and setting up the entire action of the poem. The rise of a great warrior who eventually finds the pyre, saving the world in between is what we're going to get, and it shows us that before Beowulf there were others who had cycles similar to his (at least in the case of Scyld).

The Unferth Intermezzo, as it is called, is part of a Campbellian stage and therefore not a true episode, but still sets up the feats of swimming in the Cycle of Grendel's Mother and also the tale of Beowulf's swim to Frisia and back during the episode regarding the fall of Hygelac, and so we can see that the establishment of Beowulf as a fine swimmer will echo from Cycle 1 to both 2 and 3. The comparison between Beowulf and Sigemund foreshadows Beowulf's fight against the dragon; like in the case of Scyld, this is an outside reminder that there were other cycles before Beowulf and he is repeating a well known, well loved story. However, the contrast of Beowulf to Heremod is also important to show what cycles he is *not* repeating; this contrast is echoed again in the end of the second cycle and at the beginning of the third, linking all three cycles together. Finn's story links directly to a story regarding Hrothgar and the Heathobards told in the third cycle, making sure to reemphasise Klaeber's "perils of tribal enmity". And, lastly, Beowulf's ascension to the throne after the war with Frisia sets off the series of narratives about Hrethel's war with the Swedes and the goings on between Geatland and Ongentheow and Onela, culminating with the looming threat of Swedish vengeance waiting on the border for Beowulf's death.

The end effect is that the episodes tie the Campbellian cycles together by using other, outside cycles of historical or mythological figures as a sort of thread: what we end up with is the sense that Beowulf's life is also not in a vacuum and is instead a part of something much larger. It is the story of a society and of an age of characters, such as Finn and Sigemund, who all had a part to play in shaping the world that would come to create and form Beowulf. As well, these cycles, thanks to the episode of Thryth and Offa, are not removed or detached from the stories of the Anglo-Saxon people who were experiencing *Beowulf* centuries after his death.

If we take the following graphic we can see that time and history (represented by the black, dotted line) run through the cycles of *Beowulf*. Along this dotted line are hundreds of cycles from hundreds of heroes, some big, some small, some connected to our hero either directly or indirectly. The historical episodes of *Beowulf* are this dotted line, for they are the narrative's representation of time and history, which threads through the cycles and acts as a basting-stitch to hold them together.

*note that the dotted line represents where the episodes always cross the cycles, moving from one to the next through time, connecting prior and future cycles as well.



Other cycles may bubble up through the surface of the story being told (which is represented by the spiral) and cross with Beowulf's narrative. These other cycles, which appear as the episodes, emerge where needed to remind us that Beowulf's story is only one of many: it is both a continuation of previous stories, and also, will be continued after Beowulf is gone.

D. Addressing Criticism of Monomyth

It would be remiss not to briefly address the criticisms which the Monomyth has drawn. The two of academic interest are: that it is non-inclusive of female protagonists (Frankel, 1), and that it is ethnocentric (Ellwood, 127).

Regarding the applicability of the Monomyth to the female protagonist, it has to be noted here that some of Campbell's language is unfortunately dated, and stages such

as “Woman as a Temptress” can come across as cringeworthy to a modern scholastic audience. However, there are two things at play here that are worth investigating before assuming that the model actually contains a flaw regarding gender. First, that Campbell to a large extent amassed and analysed myths, and myths are often quite old in terms of when they were first created or being told. As the world was largely patriarchal no matter where one was in those days, it was very often that the roles of women as seen by their societies were expressed via folklore: as temptresses, as mothers, as nurturers, as lifebringers. It is not necessarily that Campbell himself saw women exclusively in these roles, but more that he took note of a pattern that older myths definitely expressed. Second, that while this first point does seem a detriment to the model’s aspiration to universality, the underlying concepts (such as the hero encountering a force of life, gentleness, or mercy in contrast to a later encounter with something unforgiving, cold, and deathlike in its power), are not wrong or in desperate need of being scrapped. For modern stories, it’s possible to adapt the language of the model while still keeping the core concepts intact, and it’s quite serviceable.

Further, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* is not devoid of heroines by any means. The opening story of the chapter “The Hero’s Journey”, in the opening stage of the opening act (Call to Adventure, Departure), is the story of a woman: the princess and the frog (Campbell, 41). Throughout his explanation of the Journey there are twenty something more myths about women seeking the otherworld and walking their paths, certainly not only sitting and waiting to be collected. The thesis of the Monomyth is that it can represent humanity and the stories humans go through and tell, and the variation across race, gender, historical setting, and class will be shown via variations in the stages and inversions. When he defines a human as a hero, his language is normally gender neutral: “The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who...” (Campbell, 14), “The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth or the dreamer of a dream...” (Campbell, 89), etc.

It’s worth noting that there are actually two adapted models of the Monomyth specifically regarding modern female journeys, and one of them written in fact by one of Campbell’s own students. These models tend to be quite specific to women of a certain (modern) time period, but are nonetheless very useful and thoughtful when it comes to analysing female-specific journeys, though their usefulness for a female based Western Epic is not something I have currently explored.

The argument of ethnocentricity is one of worry, that a boiling down of myth to base parts erases cultural markers and differences, particularly between Occidental and Oriental mythologies, with a bias towards the Occidental. While it is a viable concern in an abstract way, implying that the Monomyth is reductionist is challenging to reconcile with the fact that myths from across the globe and across time periods were compiled in order to create said Monomyth. Campbell expressly states he is not making a political statement: this is merely an observation of existing similarities he has drawn from literally hundreds of myths. As any good anthropologist should, he reports on them as he finds them and expressly states there is no attempt to doctor them to fit a pre-supposed hypothesis. While it is true that no human can be completely objective, and that of course even just the translation of these myths into English means they lost certain nuances, Campbell's work was cross disciplinary and took him as close to a "whole" understanding of his work as possible: he was above all an anthropologist as well as a literary critic, with a strong background in archaeology and prehistory, and had a working knowledge of around a dozen languages (see: *The Hero's Journey*, Campbell, Cousineau). As a pre-emptive refute of any challenges of ethnocentrism, this statement can be found in the foreword of the current edition of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*: "Perhaps it will be objected that in bringing out the correspondences I have overlooked the differences between the various Oriental and Occidental, modern, ancient, and primitive traditions. The same objection might be brought, however, against any textbook or chart of anatomy, where the physiological variations of race are disregarded in the interest of a basic general understanding of the human physique. There are of course differences between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind, but this is a book about the similarities; and once these are understood the differences will be found to be much less great than is popularly (and politically) supposed" (Campbell, xii).

Whether Monomyth achieves the goal that Campbell set out for it to achieve (that being universality) is not an argument for this paper. What is, is whether or not the model is applicable to the Western Epic, and we have seen the answer is yes. It is not my opinion that the Monomyth is inherently biased, but an exploration of whether or not it fits equally well with the Eastern Epic or the African Epic is not something I could confirm or deny at this point.

E. Final Thoughts

Here, our own Journey comes to an end. From the mead-hall fires of Heorot, to the depths of the monstrous mere, we have followed our ready hero across the landscape he has mapped with his deeds, until the bitter end. The map, for the moment, is drawn but not complete; on the far edges are the questions posed in these conclusions, waiting to be explored and answered. What follows, perhaps, will be further investigations of this tale and comparisons with its Epic compatriots.

But, for now, I will leave such things uncharted.

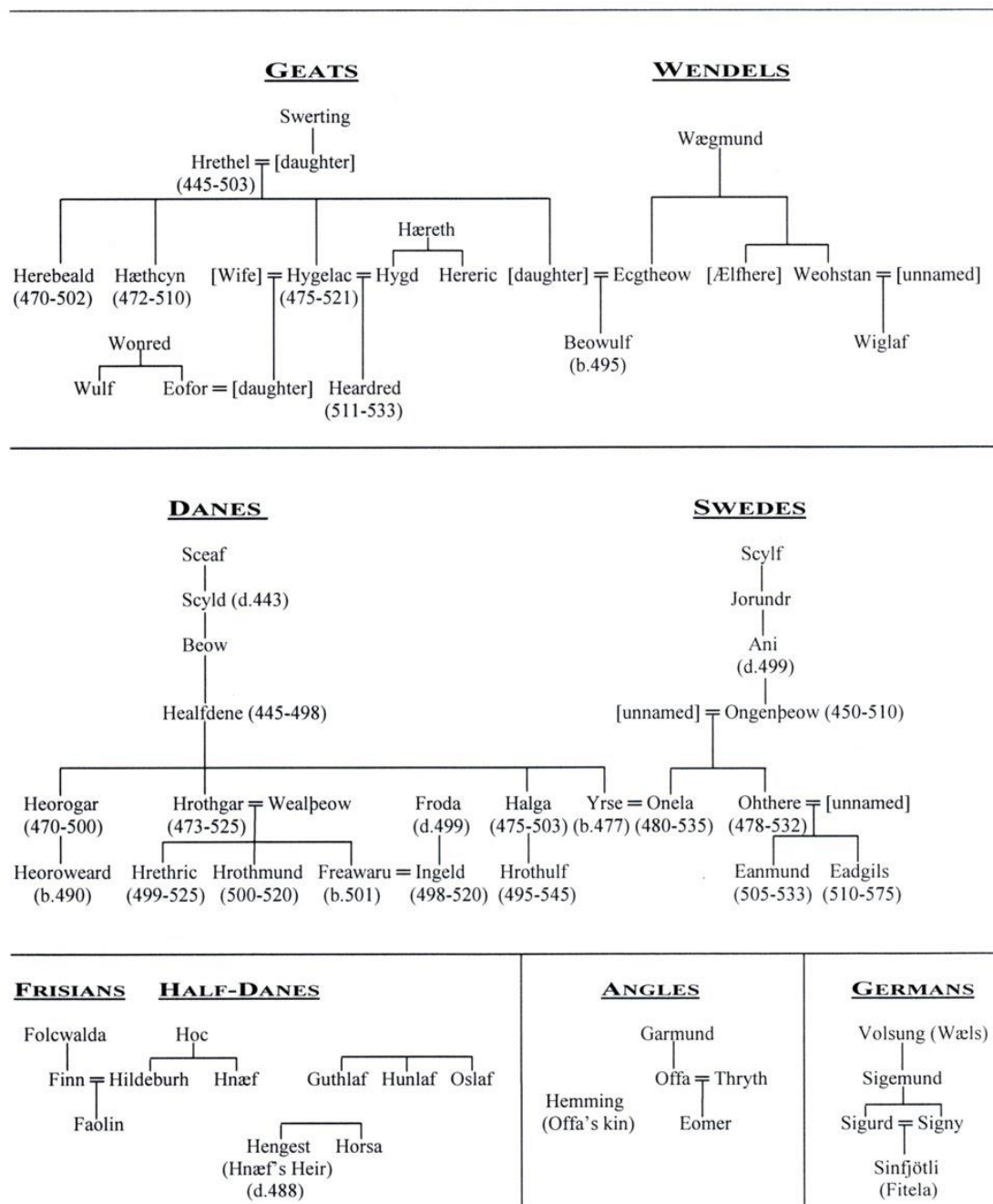
IV. Appendices

A. Appendix 1: A Map of Scandinavia in the 6th Century



(Yosso, 1)

B. Appendix 2: A Lineage Map of the Kings of Geatland and the West-Danes



(Merenda, 1)

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