Beyond the Night

Beyond the Night:

Creatures of Life, Death and the In-Between

Edited by

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PERSONAL NOTE/ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people were involved in this project, both through actual work and support in any other needed form. First of all, I am very happy that my proposed collection found a home at Cambridge Scholars Publishing. A collection like this is a lot of work and poses a lot of stress for all involved. I want to thank all the wonderful contributors who worked very hard to create a collection where all the pieces talk to each other. Without your help and input this collection would not have reached its completion. It has been a wonderful experience. Another round of applause for Suzan Aiken and Martina Kress very dear friends who, as always, did an awesome job of getting this collection into shape. Thank you all so much…

INTRODUCTION

This wonderful collection started its life as a conference. It was supposed to be the first of many, but as we all know life does not always go according to plan. Nonetheless, the conference was wonderful and almost all of the participants are represented in this collection. The theme of Creatures of the Night is probably as vast as it can get. After all, stories about vampires, werewolves, zombies, fairies, shape-shifters, and about hundreds of other beings are occupying bookshelves, screens, internet forums, role-playing communities and countless of other communities. While editing this collection I found myself confronted with the vast array of not only these creatures and their representations, but also the vast number of theories that can be applied to these creatures. It was soon after that I realized that this introduction will not be able to do this topic justice at all. To properly cover this field of study, I would need to write a dissertation on the subject. Therefore, I decided against it. If you are picking up this book you already know something about these creatures. You had fleeting contact with ghosts, fairies, vampires and goblins. Maybe just in your imagination, or while reading, watching, or interacting with people (whether in reality or the online world). This collection will tell you different stories. Some you may know some you may not. Some you might find yourself considering in a new light, others where you never thought that this is what they could be trying to say.

There is, for example, Alice Mills, who will help you to discover something new about an old classic in "Hero, Monster, Masturbator: Gaiman and Avary's Beowulf." Here she discusses the change Grendel's mother underwent from the monstrous mother to a tempting water-demon. She primarily explores the treatment of hero, mother and monster in this epic poem in connection to Julia Kristeva. Utilizing both, the poem and the 2007 screen adaptation Mills discusses mothers, monsters, and men. Additionally, the author will address the film's representations of sexual allurement and gratification, from seduction to (symbolic) masturbation.

In Alexandra Neagu's interesting work "Night's Monsters' Emersion into Daylight: Recognition and Identification of Self and other in Euripides' Bacchae" the author demonstrates how the *Bacchae* is not only a tragedy about recognising the other, but also an interrogation of one's capacity to accept the otherness that resides within him or herself. Here

Neagu exlores that not accepting the otherness as partly residing in oneself and considering it only as a characteristic of the other causes the defeat in the confrontation with the monstruous.

Simon Bacon focuses on speech within the horror film genre using theories by Melanie Klein and Julia Kristeva in "Bad Language: The Monstrous Manifestations of the Word Made Flesh in *Pontypool* (2008) by Bruce McDonald." Here the author will invert the normalized construction that a defective voice is somehow the product of a defective body, or mind, and discuss the ways in which a monstrous voice creates the monstrous body, and argues that, the monstrous voice, as creator and reproducer of monstrosity, should be considered as a separate category of Horror in its own right.

Simone Broders discusses the importance of Zoey Redbird in her chapter "'The Heartbeat of Outsiders'—Vampiric Otherness as Female Empowerment in P.C. and Kristin Cast's House of Night." Focusing on the different roles Zoey is partly forced into and partly chooses herself, the author explains the appeal of this character—and why this appeal crosses the border of the original demographic. Using Lacan as well as other theorists the author artfully explores this vital female character in relation to her personal growth as well as in connection to her surroundings.

Margo Collins tackles one of the world's best known vampire slayers in connection with the use of memory in "Memory and Monstrosity in *Buffy in the Vampire Slayer*." Inspired by Platonic ideas of anamnesis and hypomnesis—memory and forgetting—, Collins argues that Buffy's ability to craft and control memory permits her power over others. In addition she states that this show privileges anamnesis over hypomnesis and prefers the role of personal remembrance as a means of fashioning a safe and just culture.

Another author who highlights the importance of language is Malgorzata Drewniok "The Witch, the Tabby Cat and the Undead: the Language of the D'Artigo Sisters from Yasmine Galenorn's *Sisters of the Moon* series." Here the author explores what language choices the protagonists (half-human, half-faerie) of this series make to tell their stories. Additionally she addresses how the characters' personalities, their sexuality and outcast status are reflected in the language utilized as each book is narrated by a different sister.

Mary Ryan in "Once Bitten: Patriarchy and Feminism in the Twilight Saga" carefully scrutinizes the *Twilight Saga's* ability to talk about feminist issues. Using the different fractions in this series Ryan is able to create a timeline of the feminist movement. Stating that this series is an essential text in terms of feminism, the author demonstrates how the

novels portray situations and discuss issues which have proven central to feminist theory throughout time, as well as highlighting a utopian vision of the ideal feminist society.

Next is Sabine Planka who addresses more child-friendly vampires in her essay “Vampires in Detective Novels for Children.” The author debates the different roles the vampire assumes in her chosen media. According to her he is an adventurer, sometimes he’s split up into two siblings who are sharing the role—and sometimes he becomes part of a detective novel. Here the author thoroughly analyses the figure of the vampire in detective novels for children with the combination of crime scene investigation and gothic novel culminating in suspense.

Taking the reader on a more gruesome journey is Katharina Rein with her chapter “The Proletarian Ghost—Freddy Krueger as Parasite.” Here she reveals that Freddy can be labeled as a postmodern meta-monster; an amalgamation of different creatures like zombies, ghosts, shape-shifters, and serial killers. In her chapter the author will demonstrate how these creatures are a part of this cult figure and where he fits into the horror mythology of the present. In order to understand Freddy’s value today the author will also explain his worth in light of the era he emerged from.

In “Undead Yes, Unperson No—Vampires, Werewolves, Zombies and other ‘Differently Alive’ Characters in Terry Pratchett's 'Discworld' series” Martina Kress takes a unique look at Pratchett’s work. Here the author explains Pratchett’s approach to fantastical creatures; focusing on his conceptualization of undead characters. Revealing how Pratchett uses these extraordinary characters to draw attention to the ordinary, the author dives deep into the depths of Discworld in order to analyze these beloved characters.

Martina Witt-Jauch moves beyond previous notions of what memory and trauma do to the body in an attempt to disclose the myriad ways in which change is either internal—such as, madness, depravity, and enchantment—or external as constructed through performance in her wonderful chapter “Shapeshifters and the Spiritual Geography of Trauma in Louise Erdrich’s The Antelope Wife.” Here she argues that these shapeshifters reflect back upon an ideal of sovereign consciousness and thus a Western philosophical tradition that also believes in the brutalisation of senses through progress and mass culture.

Another peek at the classics is taken by Attila Mócza in “The Gothic Effect in Peake's *Presumption*, or, the Fate of Frankenstein and Byron's *Manfred*” where the writer argues that the Gothic effect is constructed in basically the same way in Gothic drama and in Gothic prose. He analyzes Peake's and Byron's work in accordance with relevant characteristics of

the Gothic genre. While the primary focus lies on the characters, the author also discusses the settings in both of the plays and apparitions in Byron's work will also be considered.

Last but definitely not least in this collection is Deborah G. Christie with her work “Flickering Nitrate: The Cinematic Vampire as Social Other in Nosferatu.” Here the author analyses the transformation the vampiric body had to undergo from a purely literary character to an entity that suddenly was visually represented. She argues that in order to understand Nosferatu’s contribution to the continuing social relevance of the vampire it is essential to look not just at the society that produced it, but also at the society that received and preserved it.

All of these authors are to be congratulated on explaining their respective monsters and connecting them to others mentioned in this collection. We hope that you will enjoy reading these works as much as we enjoyed working on them.

CHAPTER ONE

HERO, MONSTER, MASTURBATOR: GAIMAN AND AVARY'S *BEOWULF*

ALICE MILLS

Neil Gaiman, who collaborated with Roger Avary in writing the script for the 2007 film version of *Beowulf*, has explained in an interview that their understanding of the *Beowulf* story was transformed when it occurred to Avary to question why Beowulf spent so many hours below the surface of the lake fighting Grendel's mother when it had taken him a single wrestling match to give Grendel his mortal wound, and why he returned from the lake with Grendel's head as evidence of his death, but no evidence that the mother had also died. This led to further questioning of Grendel's parentage, and then of the veracity of the whole poem:

> What we did when we decided to write Beowulf was to adhere to a theory. Our theory was that at any point where the poem tells you what happened, it's telling the truth. But if at any point somebody in the poem goes off stage and then comes back saying, "While I was in the other room, this is what happened," they could be lying. Liars?
>
> Exactly. Beowulf heads off after Gwendel's [sic] mother, he disappears for eight days and comes back looking rather exhausted with Gwendel's head. We thought that he was very unreliable, so we came up with the theory that people can lie – especially in these wonderful sagas where people are forever standing up saying things like: "I am Beowulf and this is just what I did. I killed the mighty beast and the evil hag…" We had enormous fun doing that and still try to play fair as if it was some kind of peculiar game that we are going to be playing with English professors all around the world for the rest of time.[1]

[1] Futuremovies.co.uk.

It is the alterations to the poem's story, to which these questions lead, that I shall be exploring in order to interrogate Gaiman and Avary's version of the hero and monster for the early twenty-first century.

In their narrative, Hrothgar has long ago gone out to fight the water-spirit but has been seduced by her; their child is the deformed monster, Grendel, who comes back to plague Hrothgar's golden hall, Heorot, though he refrains from injuring his father or his father's young wife, Wealtheow. When Beowulf arrives, he succeeds in killing Grendel (this part of the film is reasonably faithful to the original poem) but, like Hrothgar, he is seduced by Grendel's mother; their son takes the form of a dragon. The water-spirit gives Beowulf long life, kingship and prolonged heroic strength, provided that he gives her a son, cherishes her and she retains his dragon-horn. Kingship promptly manifests as Hrothgar proclaims him heir and almost instantly commits suicide; kingship lasts until the water-spirit sends back the horn and Beowulf's dragon-son rises against him. Beowulf rides out against the dragon, knowing that he will die, but hoping that in killing the monster and dying himself, he can break the cycle of seductions, lies and killings; but at his ship-funeral his friend and successor as king, Wiglaf, sees the water-spirit rise from the sea in her immortal beauty and starts to wade out to her. The implication here is that he too will be seduced and engender another monster to perpetuate the cycle.

Apart from the film's rendition of events between Grendel's first visit to Heorot and Beowulf's preparations to kill Grendel's mother, very little of this is at all faithful to the Old English poem. There, a different set of ancient wrongs is played out. The poem alludes to stories of what will happen to Hrothgar's kingdom when he dies, when his sons will be killed and the kingship usurped, and what will happen to Beowulf's kingdom—of Geats, not Danes—when he dies without an heir. The original audience needed no more than a hint to be reminded that for all Beowulf's heroic achievements among the Danes and as king of the Geats, the peace he restores in Hrothgar's kingdom does not outlast Hrothgar himself, and the Geat kingdom collapses on Beowulf's death. In Hrothgar's case, no more is needed than a mention of the time

> when the blood-feud should bring out again
> sword-hatred in sworn kindred (84-4)

Sensibly, Gaiman and Avary decided not even to attempt to inform the film's viewers of this semi-historical context. Instead, their Beowulf becomes king of the Danes because Hrothgar has no human children, his wife having refused intercourse with him since learning of his copulation

with the water-spirit. In the film, betrayal and death are not to be found in tales of men jostling for kingship but as a cyclic pattern of events in a more mythic world where hero and monster repeat the same story with variations. Rather than broadening the scope of action, as the poem does, to nearby kingdoms, previous and future rulers, the film narrows it to one short stretch of land bordered by the sea, one kingdom and one sequence of royal rulers while implying that its story is the universal hero-monster tale.

The film is careful, though, not to fall into stereotype. Monster and hero are tied together not only by the demands of the cyclic pattern but also by kinship; thus each fight to the death involves either parricide or filicide, or both. Moreover, Gaiman and Avary have, as Kristin Noone puts it, "re-imagined the epic hero as something new, a hero who is also inescapably one of the monstrous." [2] Their Beowulf is generally inarticulate, given to grunting rather than fluent speech. Throughout, his heroic qualities are questioned, from Wiglaf's sardonic comments as to the number of monsters actually killed during the sea-fight to the bestowal of invulnerability on Beowulf by Grendel's mother. Mary Hurley argues that:

> the deal struck with Grendel's mother—that he would be a great king, and live forever in heroic songs—sounded his death knell. Enshrined by the songs which sing of his victories, in the Zemeckis film Beowulf seems entombed by his own exemplarity: lost in the songs which attest to his greatness.[3]

I would go further than this: once he has struck his bargain with Grendel's mother, Beowulf's heroism can be understood as her creation, not his. Agency is at issue here. The mother whose womb bears monsters is also the endower and ruiner of heroes. In this sense hero and monster blur into one.

Bruce McDonald's chapter in this volume, "Bad Language: The Monstrous Manifestations of the Word Made Flesh in *Pontypool* (2010)", proposes that "it is the otherness of the voice that produces the physical characteristics of the otherness of the monster." In relation to his thesis, *Beowulf* is a peculiarly interesting example of otherness, for the monstrous son of the water-spirit and Hrothgar, Grendel, speaks perfect Old English, accurate in vocabulary and grammar, while Beowulf in particular, and the human characters in general, speak an impoverished version of twenty-first century American English, with minimal vocabulary and plenty of

[2] Noone 2010, 139.
[3] http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/13/ba.php.

pauses and grunts. For those viewing the film who, like me, have studied Old English and read the poem in the original, this disconcerts: the monster who should be incomprehensibly roaring according to the clichés of action horror film, speaks at least as well as his opponents and even *in extremis* is capable of a well-formed sentence; moreover, he speaks just as a character in an Old English poem should, in the language of the time. The Old English expert who composed these words for Grendel made sure that viewers not versed in this language could capture the gist of what is being said, for Grendel's vocabulary consists of Anglo Saxon terms which have survived in the English language, with modification, until now. Grendel is thus "bound by the laws of language," as McDonald puts it, at least as much as his human opponents. Another telling detail in the film is that it is the human noise, the undifferentiated din from Heorot, that first provokes Grendel to violence. This again reverses McDonald's distinction between monster and man, in terms of whose language disintegrates.

The film's puzzling mixture of Norse and Christian references (in which respect it is quite faithful to the Old English poem) is critical to any interpretation of hero and monster. Scholars have reached no consensus as to whether the poem, *Beowulf*, is better understood as a pre-Christian oral tale revised with Christian trimmings or as the work of a Christian poet whose values and world-view infuse the story. In either case, the relationship between Norse and Christian elements is problematic. The poem's Grendel, for instance, is called a descendant of Cain. According to the Bible, Cain is accursed but his children are not. According to the poem, though:

> This unhappy being
> had long lived in the land of monsters
> since the Creator cast them out
> as kindred of *Cain*….
> From Cain came down all kinds misbegotten
> ÷ogres and elves and evil shades –
> as also the Giants, who joined in long
> wars with God. (109-112)

This implies that Cain's descendant, Grendel, is also at war with God and beyond redemption. But alongside such Biblical references is set an approving mention of building a funeral pyre for the dead Beowulf, a practice condemned among Christians of the poet's time. In the film Beowulf is given a funeral pyre in a ship burial and Hrothgar is a Norse ruler whose main god is Odin (in the poem, he is a devout Christian) but his follower Unferth is a worshipper of the new god of the Romans, Christ,

and is anxious for his deity to be given as much respect as any other. Oddly, Unferth appears to relapse into paganism when he hears the (false) news that Grendel's mother has been killed. At this point he swears by Odin and mentions Ragnarok. Much later, when the dragon harrows the land, Unferth is shown crouching by the altar of a burning Christian church, the size of which suggests that he may by now be the priest of a sizeable flock. Nevertheless, the dead Beowulf is honoured with Norse death- rites.

Such inconsistencies matter in terms of the belief system within which the hero can be understood to operate and its bearing on the relationship between hero and monster.[4] The question arises whether the film's mix of Christian and pagan elements can be read as anything but an incoherent jumble. A case in point is the old Beowulf's statement, on the battlefield, that: "The time of heroes is dead, Wiglaf. The Christ God has killed it…leaving humankind nothing but weeping martyrs and fear…and shame."

These remarks are immediately proved wrong by the captured Frisian warrior's demand to be killed only by Beowulf himself, clearly not an instance of weeping, fear or shame; they are false also in the context of Beowulf's heroic trajectory according to the film, starting before the time when the Christ God prevailed and exemplifying the pattern of hero reducing himself to become the puppet of Grendel's mother. It is Beowulf (and Hrothgar before him) who has simultaneously perpetuated the hero-monster struggle by engendering a monster son, and lost his heroic qualities by allowing the mother to control him. In Hrothgar's case this involves his son's careful obedience to his mother's instructions not to attack his father, and the long-term refusal of his wife to allow sexual intimacy and the chance to engender a human son. The film's last few minutes suggest that this cycle is shortly to continue with Wiglaf's surrender to Grendel's mother. Why, then, should Beowulf speak such an obvious untruth, if not to deny to himself and others the sad fact that it is none but he who has made himself a creature of shame? "We men are the monsters now," he has just said, but again this is a false generalisation. As long as the cycle of seduction, impregnation and fight persists, monsters will be engendered by men who also make monsters of themselves by yielding to Grendel's mother.

The first section of the film, dealing with Grendel's attack on the newly built Heorot, Beowulf's arrival and his killing of Grendel, sets up a different (but no more satisfactory) Christian reading of the hero-monster

[4] The issue of twenty-first century film viewers' perspectives is addressed by Frances Auld in "*Beowulf*'s Broken Bodies" via political philosophy and post-modernism, directions that I am not taking in this paper.

conflict. The humans are prompt to label Grendel a monster risen from hell, a demon, which would cast their opponents in the role of God's champions. However, Grendel is clearly not a denizen of a Christian hell but the offspring of a water-spirit and a mortal man, and he appears to have hitherto lived an inoffensive life in the cave with his loving mother. He is shocked to be called a demon to his face and he bleeds and dies, as mortal as any human being. Grendel's mother is perhaps immortal. Certainly she does not age over the years from Hrothgar's youth to Beowulf's old age. She seduces men not out of mere malice but in order to keep her race alive, since human heroes have slaughtered all her kin. Thus the film parodies any Christian interpretation of the hero as God's champion against demonic monsters, for it is the heroes who comply with the mother, thus guaranteeing the supply of new monsters. It is the heroes who behave as sinners, lying and acting out of lust, and a case could readily be made for the so-called monsters to be considered their victims, compelled to retaliate in order for their species to survive. As in the poem, Grendel's mother is motivated in her attack on the hall by vengeful fury at the killing of her son. The film's Grendel, as reimagined by Avary and Gaiman, is driven to attack in order to silence the noise emanating from Hrothgar's new hall which his ill-made ears find intolerable.

The concept of hero as father of the monster on whose existence his heroism is predicated is enhanced by the film's only direct reference to the Bible, shrieked out by Unferth. Carried on a stretcher, in agony from his burns, he tells Beowulf that the dragon gave him a message for the king that the agreement (between Grendel's mother and Beowulf, for a long "heroic" reign in exchange for a son) is ended. Then he shrieks out twice, "the sins of the fathers," quoting Numbers 14:18. It is not totally clear what this painfully articulated outcry means. Firstly, it is not impossible, according to the scanty evidence provided by the film, that Unferth is adding these words as his own contribution to a genuine message from the dragon. Earlier, Unferth has been represented as hostile to Beowulf, quick to insult him at the welcome feast. Since the film provides no evidence that Unferth knows about Beowulf's liaison with Grendel's mother and his fathering of the dragon, these words, "the sins of the fathers," if they belong to Unferth, can only be random accusations against Beowulf, a man who appears to be a blameless ruler. Another reading of the words is that he may be referring to his own sinfulness, for he has just lamented that the dragon has killed all his family. If he is a priest, he should function as a father to his flock, yet his fatherly care has done nothing to prevent the deaths of his spiritual family. Telling against this reading, however, is

the fact that the dragon treats Unferth as an incidental victim, focussing his efforts on killing Beowulf's women.

On balance, then, the words, "the sins of the fathers," must be spoken by the dragon and directed at Beowulf, but they make little obvious sense here either. Beowulf has no human children, for the kingship goes undisputed to his friend and follower, Wiglaf, at his death. Perhaps Beowulf is being rebuked as king-father whose family, his subjects, suffers the attacks of the dragon for whose existence he bears some responsibility. Yet the objection remains that the dragon focuses his attacks on Beowulf and his two women, not on the populace. Or is the dragon anticipating his own death, knowing that his father (Beowulf) will kill him? There are objections to this reading also. Why should the dragon send an enigmatic message via Unferth and not speak directly to Beowulf? If the dragon is referring to Beowulf as his father and himself as the child, then it must be Beowulf's sins that are visited on his wretched offspring, as the sins of Hrothgar could be said to be visited on his deformed son, Grendel. In this reading, retaliation for sin is indeed inflicted on the child—but it makes nonsense of the Biblical reference to have the father punishing the son for the father's iniquities. The main effect of this quotation, then, cannot be to reiterate the common interpretation of Beowulf as God's champion against the monster. Rather, the sins of the father amount to the necessary proof of his heroism: in order to have the strongest claims to being a hero, he must engender his own monster. The one monster who must not be killed in this pattern of events is the mother, by way of whose fertile womb the hero's prowess is doubly proven, as begetter and destroyer.

The problems that arise in a Christian reading of the film are not eased by the presence of a human character called Cain, another of Avary and Gaiman's additions to the story. This is not the Biblical Cain, Grendel's ancestor according to the poem, but a wretched slave, much beaten by his spiteful master, Unferth. It is this Cain who finds the dragon-horn and brings it to Beowulf, unwittingly carrying a message from Grendel's mother that she is putting an end to their bargain, taking away her magical favours, and that he will soon die. The Cain of the film is no murderer; in fact, once his master is maimed by the dragon and unable to torment him, Cain becomes Unferth's best help, a surrogate son. In retrospect from this outcome, if anyone could be said to have visited the sins of the father on the son in the human world, it would be Unferth.

A Christian reading of the film is thus fraught with difficulties. Grendel is no Biblical Cain, no kin-murderer, but reports to his mother that he did not harm Hrothgar (presumably on her instructions). The only

kin-murderers in the film would thus be Beowulf and Unferth, who does not deny Beowulf's accusation that he killed his brothers. Beowulf kills his only son, the dragon, but the dragon does not kill him: it is Beowulf's own act of cutting off his arm, a form of suicide, which brings about his death. There is no indication in the film that either Beowulf or Unferth is to be punished in the afterlife for the sin of kin-murder; instead, the film ends by leaning towards a Norse frame of reference with the elaborate ship-funeral given to the dead king.

When Beowulf calls Grendel a demon, he retorts in impeccable Old English that he is no demon, nor are his visits to Heorot motivated by evil as in the poem. Grendel's deformed head has an exposed ear-drum, supernaturally sensitive, and he is distressed past bearing by the festive noises coming from Hrothgar's new meadhall. He is thus a victim turned retaliator, punishing Hrothgar not for his sins but for the outward indications of his prosperity. He arrives in a rage like a neighbour infuriated by the amateur band practice going on next door that is keeping him awake each night.

The more the men fear him, the bigger Grendel's deformed body becomes, and it shrinks to the size of a baby when he dies. This final fate suggests a reading of the dead Grendel as embodying all the ruined hopes Hrothgar had for human offspring, denied him by the wife who refuses sexual intercourse with a man who has copulated with a water-spirit. Such a reading gives a sad significance to Grendel's small, foetally curled dead body, as the wretched child that was never allowed to be born into the world of the father but was killed off by the father's proxy once he was foolish enough to come knocking at the door. In this sense, too, Grendel is an example of the sins of the father being visited upon the son.

Much less evidence is provided in the film for the relationships between Beowulf, Grendel's mother and their dragon-son. This is a large dragon that must have been foraging secretly for many years, as Grendel had done, but whereas the film's Grendel went against his mother's instructions in attacking human beings, the timing of the dragon's attacks, beginning as she withdraws her favours from Beowulf, indicates that he is marauding at his mother's command. This inference is strengthened by the scene in which Beowulf tries to reinstate his bargain and she replies, "Too late," as the dragon is revealed, about to attack.

Insofar as the dragon is sent out to kill his father and be killed by him, both could be said to be victims of the father's sins. Late in the film Beowulf comments that he died in spirit many years ago, presumably when he was seduced by Grendel's mother. Suicide as part of his tactics to kill the dragon appears a triumphal closure of his life, in comparison to the

death of the spirit that he has endured for decades. Similarly, Hrothgar has paid over and over for his sin of being seduced, in his wife's contemptuous coldness towards him and her refusal to let him beget heirs. Once Grendel is roused to murderous fury by the noises of the meadhall, Hrothgar is shamed as a king, unable to avenge the deaths of his people, helpless against the monster. By the time he jumps to his death, he has been long dead as a potent lover or a potent king. The sins of the father have in this case been visited on the father.

A couple of questions arise from this teasing out of the film's Biblical references. Why do the water-spirit's offspring seem incapable of, or not interested in, producing their own children? Surely, if the mother can bear children by a human male, these males could beget children on a human female. If these monsters are indeed the last of their kind, it is only the mother who appears to find it at all urgent to breed. And why, when Hrothgar's son is so deformed and grotesque-looking, is Beowulf's son so magnificent in both dragon and human form? After all, Beowulf has repeated Hrothgar's pattern of secretly copulating, disowning his son, having his marriage founder on that mating and living a death-in-life as heirless king: if Hrothgar's son embodies his father's weakness and sin, why should Beowulf's son be so unmonstrous in form? The answer to this latter question probably has to do with Avary and Gaiman's predilection for doubles, as the same actor plays both Beowulf and his dragon-son in human form; just as Grendel can be read as embodying Hrothgar's ruined hopes, the magnificent dragon-man can be understood, in human form, as what Beowulf might have become.

So far in this essay I have been following Avary and Gaiman's lead in exploring the disjunctions between what is said to happen and what actually happens; but to interrogate further the film's representation of bodies and sexuality, images as well as words, I turn to the theoretical perspectives of psychoanalytical and archetypal criticism, as does Katherine Rein in her analysis of Freddy Kreuger elsewhere in this collection. Like Rein, I acknowledge the aptness of Kristeva's theory of the abject as a perspective from which to explore the monster; in this case, it is Grendel's misshapenness, his breaching of boundaries, his devouring of human flesh, his drooling and his ill-made ear that are most obviously relevant to the theme of abjection. Equally apt to a Kristevan reading is the film's representation of Grendel's mother, the water-spirit who seduces and then destroys her lovers, as David Marshall argues in "Getting Reel with Grendel's Mother: the Abject Maternal and Social Critique". Barbara Creed has written at length about such monstrous mothers from a Kristevan perspective in *The Monstrous Feminine*. The monstrous mother

has been a theme of psychoanalytic theory since Freud's notorious identification (in the son's unconscious) of the mother's pubic hair with Medusa's snake-hair. Analysis of the film from a Freudian viewpoint would emphasise, amongst an abundance of uncanny items, Medusa's snaky locks in the form of the water-spirit's extraordinarily long plait of hair—or is it a snake that can writhe of its own accord, or is it a whip to ensnare and then punish the captivated hero? Insightful though these approaches promise to be, arguably the most searching of psychological investigations into the film's monstrous mother is the archetypal, considering her in the context of ancient goddesses and the dragon-quest as understood by Jung.

A useful starting point for this archetypal reading is Jung's identification of the mother with the dragon in the cave and his comment that the allure of this creature for the hero is that of incest:

> But the spirit of evil is fear, is the forbidden desire, the adversary who opposes not only each individual heroic deed, but life in its struggle for eternal duration as well, and who introduces into our body the poison of weakness and age through the treacherous bite of the serpent. It is all that is retrogressive, and as the model of our first world is our mother, all retrogressive tendencies are towards the mother, and, therefore, are disguised under the incest image.[5]

In this context, Beowulf, like Hrothgar before him and probably Wiglaf[6] after him, and who knows how many before and after, is a failure as hero, succumbing to the lure of the mother within the womb-cave, re-entering its vaginal opening and exiting without having overcome her. Hence Beowulf's seeming heroic qualities, for the rest of his life, prove to be a glamour cast on him by the mother rather than his own. Here actor-based computer animation comes into its own, as the faintly unreal body aptly reveals its overlay of mother-power. As the child fatefully bound to the mother, Beowulf, like Hrothgar before him, cannot achieve a consummated fruitful marriage with Wealtheow.

There are strong hints that Hrothgar is incapable of sexual intercourse apart from his one encounter with the water-spirit. His wife finds it easy to repudiate his efforts at sexual intimacy. The magic drinking horn, his

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[5] Jung 1916, 388.

[6] In a rather cross article, "The Cinematic Sexualising of Beowulf," E. Risden points out that even Wiglaf's name calls his heroic status into question: "as his name implies,Wiglaf, "Battle-leavings," remains behind and has acquired some level of power. Now the "leftover" appears ready to submit, as have those before him, to the she-monster's charms." (111)

emblem of heroic prowess, spills its contents over his body: its phallic shape suggests the spilling of sexual fluid outside the body. Spilling of liquids in lieu of sexual penetration occurs more blatantly when Grendel, having forced his way into the hall for the first time, stands over Wealtheow's prostrate body and drools down upon her. Beowulf has a mistress but the one night they spend in bed together in the film is marked by Beowulf's restless sleep and bad dreams rather than the joys of intercourse. In their script Gaiman and Avery term this mistress Beowulf's "bed-warmer"[7], and in the film itself Beowulf is far from potent or passionate towards his young mistress:

> KING BEOWULF When I was young, I thought being King would be about battling every morning, counting the golden loot in the afternoon, and swiving beautiful women every night. And now…nothing's as good as it should have been...
>
> URSULA Perhaps tonight?
>
> KING BEOWULF No…
> (a rueful laugh)
> Tonight I feel my age upon me.[8]

As well as these indications of sexual failure and frustration, the principal male characters display an odd lack of external genitalia when naked. Hrothgar is not shown naked, but Beowulf's computer-enhanced, muscular and agile body is always positioned to hide the region of his genitals, however ludicrous the effect as he races about the hall or swings from the ceiling. Always some item—his knee, someone else's body, a convenient piece of wood—is in just the right position to hide them. This could be dismissed as the film-maker's inept attempt to avoid the wrath of the censors, but both the water-spirit's children are quite overtly represented as lacking genitals, when shown in full frontal nudity. This may answer the question posed above, as to why they appear so uninterested in helping along the survival of their species. It also suggests, in an archetypal reading, that the all-powerful mother has shaped her children in the womb as castrates. In the filmscript, Avary and Gaiman describe Grendel as "neutered" but his body shows no evidence of the excision of a penis. The same is true of the dragon when he shifts shape to human male. The story's fully human males, it seems, can only be overwhelmed with sexual desire and act out that desire potently with the

[7] Gaiman and Avary 2007, 76.
[8] Gaiman and Avary 2007, 65.

monstrous mother. She robs her heroic lovers of their heroism and joy in life, the chance of a happy sexual relationship with a wife, the prospect of begetting fully human heirs: in effect, these men are psychologically castrated.

Read archetypally, the monstrous mother who castrates her children or whose children castrate themselves (Beowulf lets his sword slip away as he embraces the mermaid; his borrowed sword turns to water as he embraces Grendel's mother; Beowulf himself, as I shall argue later, may be another of the water-spirit's sons) alludes to the great goddess, Cybele, whose incestuous love for her son Attis led to his madness and self-castration, a fate imitated by her male devotees. Whether Beowulf is read as incestuously fascinated son or as seduced hero, he and Hrothgar are both reduced by their sexual liaison with her to child status, their heroism given and taken back as she chooses, their sexual relationships diminished or non-existent—castrated devotees of a goddess they dare not publicly acknowledge. The male monsters' abstinence from sexual intercourse, their physical inability to engender sons, mirrors Hrothgar's failures with his wife, who refuses to touch him or lie next to him in bed, and Beowulf's sexual failures with the same wife when he becomes king. To satisfy the need for a monster as antagonist, it seems, the human hero is doomed to have only a monster as his son, and never to have a satisfactory marital relationship. Equally, the monster-mother is doomed to bear children only as prey for the hero; read as great goddess, she too is caught in the cycle of incestuous passion that breeds and feeds on itself. Just who is the real monster becomes less and less clear.

The water-spirit has many more analogues in myth and fantasy. With her great sexual allure and liking for human sexual partners, she has affinities with the Queen of Faeries in mediaeval English ballads and with Keats' *la belle dame sans merci*. As king-maker, as a prophetess whose magic powers help her prophecy to come true, her affinities lie with the witches in *Macbeth*. As an antagonist whom the king cannot kill, she is analogous to Arthur's Morgan Le Fay. When Grendel calls her "mother," his Old English pronunciation makes the word sound like "Mordor," associating her with Tolkien's Dark Lord. So familiar is this female figure of allurement and murderousness in literature and film that the question arises whether Avary and Gaiman, in neither following a coherent Christian narrative nor staying faithful to the poem's Norse origins, have merely supplanted these features with film cliché.

One aspect of the film which lifts it out of cliché is the wit with which the scriptwriters contrive their patterning of events. Not only does the mother's seduction of Beowulf mirror what, we are told, happened to

Hrothgar, so that each is left with a sexually cold wife and a monstrous son who must eventually be killed, but there are strong hints that it has all happened before. Beowulf, goaded into accounting for his failure to win a swimming match, tells a heroic tale of killing nine sea-monsters, a tally which, as noted by his followers, has grown in the telling, raising immediate doubts as to his veracity. The film's flashback to his fight with the sea-monsters tells a somewhat different story. The last of the monsters is shown to be a mermaid, human to the waist, bare-breasted. Deep underwater she embraces Beowulf and his long knife falls away as he responds. His verbal report lies by omission: the film implies another sexual liaison. This seductive mermaid functions as a double for Grendel's mother, also threatened with a sword which falls away into water-drops as they begin to embrace. Possibly they are the same supernatural being or possibly all water-spirits use the same *modus operandi*. The close resemblance between the two seductions raises questions about Beowulf's survival of that earlier meeting: what, as a hero, did he gain from it and what did he yield? Did she also give him supernatural powers and did he father a monster here too? Are those other sea-monsters whom he cheerfully slices up, themselves sentient offspring of some earlier liaison between the water-spirit and another hero? Similar considerations gather in retrospect around Hrothgar's heroic deed of killing the dragon Fafnir. Was this the occasion on which he copulated with the water-spirit to engender Grendel, and was Fafnir also the product of an earlier liaison between water-spirit and hero? Is there one water-spirit, manifesting in different shapes, or do all such supernatural beings triumph by seducing the hero?

The film's cyclic patterning of hero's seduction by water-spirit who seeks to engender a son to replace a killed son alternating with hero's killing of son of water-spirit and hero is complicated by further doublings. I have already probed the many situations in the film to which the phrase, "sins of the fathers," could allude and the questionability of each of these readings. "Sins of the father," roles of victim and retaliator, double among most of the male characters. To this can be added the ways in which Beowulf ends up becoming a double for Hrothgar and, in the film's final moments, Wiglaf becoming a double for both. Each is a king allured by the water-spirit, two of them engendering a monstrous son—and who knows what Wiglaf will do, once he reaches her? The human males function as doubles not only for one another but also for the monsters that they engender. Beowulf and his dragon-son in human form are played by the same actor. Beowulf and the dragon crash down together, dying, onto the shore where Hrothgar crashed to his death decades earlier. In binding a

chain to the dragon, Beowulf repeats the tangling of Grendel's arm in a chain, but when he cuts off his own arm to reach the dragon's heart, he is making himself a physical double of Grendel. By the end of the film, the roles of hero and monster are fast becoming interchangeable.

One of the less obvious instances of doubling occurs early in the film, when Beowulf is travelling on a ship over rough sea towards Hrothgar's kingdom. To encourage his men, he says, "The sea is my mother. She'll never take me back to her murky womb."

At this early stage in the narrative, there is no reason to suppose that these words amount to anything more than a heroic boast, but in retrospect he may be speaking the literal truth—and, simultaneously, its opposite. Since monster and hero are merging roles, perhaps Beowulf was also literally born from the sea-spirit version of Grendel's mother and it is the magical powers he has inherited from her that have given him the ability to breathe underwater. If so, the film is again playing with incest. Such an interpretation is encouraged by Beowulf's nightmare, the night that Grendel's mother visits Heorot to avenge her son's killing. In his dream Hrothgar's queen Wealtheow comes to Beowulf, confessing her love and desire for him before transforming into a fanged mouth, a vagina dentata, threatening his death. Such a doubling of queen and water-spirit, castrating and terrible, makes Beowulf's later coldness towards Wealtheow understandable, and makes their final assertion that they have always loved one another ring false. It also doubles mother-figure with the sexually desired (soon to be wife) queen. The lie, of course, in Beowulf's boast is that he will indeed re-enter the mother's "murky womb" four times over, first when he enters the vaginal opening of the water-spirit's cave, secondly when he begets a son on her, thirdly at his second visit to the cave and finally in his ship-burial.

Such iterations and doublings, when set out without the distractions of feasting and fighting, reduce the heroic life to that of a boy who cannot escape the mother's womb (in this film, represented by the water-spirit's treasure cave with its rib-like walls, a place for the son to live and then die). The hero can only, it seems, engender a son who cannot become his heir, on the monster-mother who may be literally his own mother ("The sea is my mother"); his son would then be his brother and double. Killing the son means dying as Hrothgar commits suicide and Beowulf sacrifices himself. The son is rendered impotent except with the mother. The hero, then, doubles as his own prey, never escaping the "murky womb" for all his accolades in the world of men.

Such complexities of patterning as these are more readily noted if presented in written form, with its greater hospitality to pauses for

reflection than the action film affords. The "sins of the fathers" episode, for instance, gives Beowulf and the viewer no time to take in the implications of what Unferth shouts at him, such is the urgency of the dragon's threat. A more distinctively filmic strength which helps *Beowulf* transcend cliché in its treatment of the monstrous feminine, is the decision to render Grendel's mother sexually alluring. Her naked golden body rising repeatedly from the water alludes to sea-born golden Aphrodite or Venus, goddess of sexual desire. When the sea-monster as mermaid entices Beowulf, during his swimming race, she seems at first glimpse to be standing on a shell, alluding to Aphrodite's rising from the sea; the ribbed shell is then revealed to be her own tail. It is notable that neither version of Aphrodite kindles any lasting passionate desire. She allures, seduces, gets impregnated and leaves the hero to his reluctant wife. While the seductive water-spirit says that her bargain will last as long as Beowulf cherishes her in his heart, these words prove meaningless, for there is no evidence that Beowulf thinks fondly of her once he returns to Heorot (this false note in the dialogue is just like the fake declaration of mutual love between Beowulf and his queen: the film's emotional range does not reach to love). Given the mutual coldness of Wealtheow and both her husbands, it seems likely that the seduction was these men's one moment of sexual passion. Aphrodite had one son in classical myth, Eros the beautiful, and the film provides two versions of Eros, neither with any potency: the dead, deformed Grendel and the dead, beautiful dragon-man. The film's Aphrodite figure doubles for the castrating mother goddess, offering an overwhelming moment of sexual passion at the cost of a lifetime's servitude. Read thus, Avary and Gaiman's version of *Beowulf* parodies the hero tale.

The implications of alluding to Aphrodite go further than the sad death of Eros, the unavailability of love. In the scene where the mermaid is seducing Beowulf underwater, the knife with which he has killed the other sea-monsters slips to the bottom of the sea as she nears him, and in the scene where Grendel's mother seduces him, she touches his sword and its blade turns to liquid that drips down between them. These details suggest a sexual interpretation that renders the Oedipal, incestuous copulation between mother and hero-son even less intimate. If, as I have speculated, Beowulf's mother is the sea, then the liquid dripping into the water can be understood as semen impregnating the water-spirit as Mother Sea. The fact that in both episodes the phallic weapon is dropped before penetration is irrelevant to her demand for a son. Not even ejaculation via masturbatory touch, as when she touches Beowulf's sword and it melts, can avoid the maternal womb. And as so often in this film, male monster doubles for

hero when the enraged Grendel, in his first attack on the hall, drools thickly over the prostrate Wealtheow.

The casting of Angelina Jolie is another factor that renders this version of Grendel's mother a surprisingly unclichéd take on the monstrous feminine. Jolie is instantly recognisable by her face, hair and eyes. This is not so much the case with the other actors, particularly the Beowulf whose body is rendered heroically muscular by computer enhancement. The identity of water-spirit as Jolie means that Beowulf, already trapped in the monstrous mother's womb-tomb, is also trapped by the allure of a celebrity and Hollywood film star. The fact that his phallic sword drops or drips as he looks at her suggests a reading in which the hero is mesmerised (along, no doubt, with some of the film's viewers) into a masturbatory voyeuristic fantasy. Jolie's frequent representation in the popular press as either mother or sexual predator only supports this archetypal reading of Grendel's mother as the great goddess of ancient myth. Jolie's 2013 disclosure of a double mastectomy and her encouragement to other women at heightened risk of breast cancer have, however, been given massive sympathetic media coverage and thus her sexual predator persona is being replaced—at least temporarily—by Jolie as self-sacrificial champion and likely saver of lives. This context substantially modifies the masturbatory voyeurism afforded by the camera's dwelling on that magnificent torso rising from the lake. The great goddess blurs into the wounded healer.

Gaiman and Avary's version of *Beowulf* presents a dismal account of the hero for our times. While his exploits of killing monsters remain they are contained in a cyclic pattern of lovelessness and lies in which the roles of father and son, monster and hero, become blurred. There is no particular shining act of heroism that sets Beowulf apart: all this has happened before, probably many times, and will happen again. The plot is driven by the water-spirit's implacable purpose to have a son. The satisfaction of this desire of the monstrous mother denies the male sexual love or intimacy. It prevents the son from fathering human children or ever really growing up. Sex produces monsters. Even masturbation produces monsters. The way in which Beowulf's cutting off of his arm replicates the tearing off of Grendel's arm adds to the dismal tally. Here another Biblical allusion can be detected at play, this time from the New Testament: "if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off" (Matthew 5.30). The dismal prospects of a hero's life in our times get even more dismal with this final twist, so to speak, as even the sacrifice of the guilty right hand (wielder of phallic sword, killer, masturbator) is not enough to keep either of these mother's boys, hero or monster, from the mother's watery embrace, the womb that is also the tomb.

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CHAPTER TWO

NIGHT'S MONSTERS' EMERSION INTO DAYLIGHT: RECOGNITION AND IDENTIFICATION OF *SELF* AND *OTHER* IN EURIPIDES' *BACCHAE*

ALEXANDRA NEAGU

Introduction

While literature offers us numerous examples of nocturnal manifestations of the creatures of the night, I chose to question, during my intervention at the "Creatures of the Night" conference held during September 29 through October 1st at the Salzburg University, the consequences of the eruption of such creatures into the human dominated daytime.[1] Taken out of their usual context, these creatures become less recognisable as a figure of otherness, but remain just as dangerous to humans. In one of Euripides' last plays, the author explores the identification of the *other* within the wider issue of recognition of the divine.[2] Both identification and recognition demand *seeing* the other. Yet, considering *otherness* as a categorical abjection in comparison to which the acceptable self is shaped means ignoring that the other can also be a part of the self. This paper seeks to show how the *Bacchae* is not only a tragedy about recognising the other, but also an interrogation of one's capacity to accept the otherness

[1] My gratitude goes to Nadine Farghaly at the Salzburg University for her relentless support during the conference and during the edition of this volume.

[2] This is only one possible reading of the tragedy. Other themes are confrontation between the rationality of the *πόλις* and the irrationality brought by a foreign priest, between rationality and religion, between politic rationality and divine will, between the autochthon and the foreign, between civilization and cannibalism and maenadism etc. See Jean Bollack, *Dionysos et la tragédie. Commentaire des Bacchae d'Euripide*, Bayard, Paris, 2005, pp. 45-68.