

■ Humanizing the Monsters: A Schematic Reading of *Beowulf*

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Abstract

Although the fights between the protagonist Beowulf and the three antagonists construct the main plot of *Beowulf*, they merely serve as static background for the narrative. As the only human hero in the story, Beowulf the character fits into a conventional hero schema; however, the several monstrous qualities that Beowulf possesses outweigh his heroic features. By contrast, his three adversaries, though seemingly negative and villainous, are more human-like and have their own individual characteristics. The invasion of Beowulf's three opponents into human society is not motivated by an intention to challenge human authority, overthrow the social system, or even ruin human civilization, but rather to protect their rights from the malicious interference and harassment of the humans and the hero. By performing a schematic analysis, this paper aims to show that the so-called monsters should be foregrounded figures against the background of Beowulf's three battles. The appearance and delineation of Beowulf as well as the fighting between Beowulf and the three antagonists can be constructed as the basis from which humane elements can be recognized in the monsters' brutality and barbarity. Beowulf, the idealized hero, is an inverted version of a monster due to his extraordinary strength and the traits he shares with Grendel and the dragon in particular. Due to continuous schema disruption and refreshment, *Beowulf* as an epic is undermined and

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(Received: 3 July 2013; Accepted: 2 December 2013)

transformed into a monsters' epic, which calls for barbarian elements in humanity and humane elements in monstrosity. The monsters suffer their fate untraditionally, and the hero is depicted as privileged. In this medieval literary world, the fights result from the uprisings of the underprivileged elements of human society.

Keywords: Beowulf, hero, monster, humanity, barbarity, schema

Humanizing the Monsters: A Schematic Reading of *Beowulf*

The main plot of *Beowulf* is based on a trio of fights between Beowulf, who is the hero, and three monsters. Although Beowulf is the protagonist, the three antagonists possess more human characteristics than the hero. Differences in the nature of the monsters are more salient than those in the human characters. Although monsters generally belong to the unknown realm, Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon are bestowed with individual identities much like humans. Their individuality defines them more prominently than all of the human characters, except Beowulf. The other human characters, who lack the text space allotted to the monsters, are assimilated into the background, into the community of ordinary human beings, or into a past that is no longer glorious. In contrast, the three monsters that take part in parallel conflicts with Beowulf represent the foregrounding actors of the narrative. Furthermore, they are clearly differentiated from each other, and this uniqueness also humanizes them and evokes sympathy from the reader.

Two major literary critics who discuss the monstrosity in *Beowulf* are J. R. R. Tolkien and Fidel Fajardo-Acosta. In "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*," Tolkien highlights the significance of the monsters and draws critics' attention to their contribution to the whole story. However, Tolkien's argument is directed at a reexamination of the genre of *Beowulf* as an epic (Tolkien 5-6). On the other hand, in *The Condemnation of Heroism in the Tragedy of Beowulf*, Fajardo-Acosta analyzes in detail how Beowulf becomes a monster. Fajardo-Acosta's purpose is to illustrate that "the elegiac quality of the poem is a lament for the loss of the human being at the hands of the beast" (4). Hence, his book focuses on the negative features of the protagonist. In this paper, while I orient myself to the study of the three monsters, my reading intends to demonstrate the humanity of the monsters, which, of course, partly results from Beowulf's transformation into a monster. In other words, this paper carries on foregrounding the monsters but, in addition to re-evaluating Beowulf's humanity, casts emphasis on the humanity reflected by the monsters.

To illustrate this approach, I apply the schema theory in cognitive poetics. An advantage of adopting cognitive poetics is that it provides readers with a scientific means of achieving an understanding of a literary text (Stockwell 4). Cognitive poetics, according to Peter Stockwell, is "essentially *a way of thinking* about literature rather than a framework itself" (6, italics original). The "cognitive turn" (Harbus 17; Stockwell 6) "is in a position to offer an explanation for intersubjective readings, and also a means of exploring literary readings in a principled way" (Stockwell 122). While this paper confirms Tolkien's state-

ments about the monsters and Fajardo-Acosta's analysis of monstrosity, it aims to examine the reader's cognition of the poetics of the text and argues that the reading of the text helps humanize these monsters. It looks into *how* it may happen, not *what* it should be. In other words, this paper is not meant to produce new meanings of the text, but it instead attempts to provide an organized exposition of how those apparent meanings are reached.

A disadvantage of cognitive poetics may arise due to the operational terminology borrowed from cognitive science. Although this approach "might seem to be no more than recasting old ideas with new labels, . . . new labels force us to conceptualize things differently" (Stockwell 6). In order to re-evaluate the monstrous characters in *Beowulf*, a reorientation is required. The cognitive poetic investigation of the text must start from the descriptive terminology to carry out a systematic analysis in a different perspective. The aim of this approach, of course, is to shed new light from a different angle on a further reading of the text.

As cognitive poetics processes literary reading with both psychological and linguistic dimensions, it "offers a means of discussing interpretation whether it is an authorly version of the world or a readerly account, and how those interpretations are made manifest in textuality" (Stockwell 5). The extant version of the *Beowulf* text incorporates a Christian revision or critique of a pre-Christian genre and creates a new schema for the reader "to *revisit* the issue of literariness and literary language" (Stockwell 79, emphasis added). In this sense, previous studies of *Beowulf* will be considered as examples of a generation of textual meanings; this paper will look into the process of the production and reproduction of these meanings. It is this "mental processes at work during meaning-making" (Harbus 16) that cognitive poetics intends to highlight. In short, cognitive poetics "embraces a move towards the examination of the way literary meanings are produced in the mind of the recipient" (17). By adopting a cognitive approach, this paper studies the patterns presented in the text that are recognized by the reader.

In this approach, the traditional thematic studies and linguistic studies of *Beowulf*, consequently, will help illustrate how different interpretations are created. "Old English translated texts," as Harbus points out, "offer a wonderfully rich opportunity for exploring the mental processes at work in the interpretation and linguistic refashioning of a text, because they play out the act of meaning-making within cultural transformation" (25). For example, Stockwell carries out a cognitive poetic analysis of "The Dream of the Rood" (82-87).¹ By highlighting "dream schema," "the schema of Christ's death," "the schema of the central tenets

¹ For an analysis of Matthew 20: 1-16, see Burke 116-17.

of Christian faith,” and “the schema of Christ’s passion,” he explores the blends of several binaries in the text, such as the cross becoming a participant in the crucifixion as well as “an accepting recipient of all the other participants’ actions” (86). The cross actively shares the wounds and pain of Jesus and is passively carried, buried, and then dug up and adorned by other people. While a personified cross in the first part of the poem disrupts the reader’s schema, the cross’s catechism reinforces the reader’s schema of “familiarity and domestic warmth” (87). Overall, the poem directs the listener to experience the truth of “mysticism and spirituality” (87). In a similar fashion, by applying a schematic approach to a reading of the monsters in *Beowulf*, this paper aims to achieve the schema reinforcement of humanity. Other critical studies of *Beowulf* therefore become the objects of this schematic approach; the critics’ interpretations serve as examples for our examination of the generation of different schemas. Each quotation of the analysts of *Beowulf* in this paper will then be part of the construction of a schema.

In this sense, any interpretation or translation of *Beowulf* can afford a different understanding of the production of the text’s meanings. This paper intends to expose and expound upon the “product” of comprehension, i.e., “the structure and characteristics of fictional worlds as the result of complex interpretative processes” (Semino, “Possible Worlds and Mental Spaces” 89). Analyzing the definition of monsters in *Beowulf* requires an examination of the schemas produced and modified by the text. Schemas, by definition, are “organizations of knowledge, idiosyncrasies, and culture” (Oatley 165). When we read a text, as Keith Oatley states, “we assimilate what we read to the schemata of what we already know. The more we know the more we understand, and we project what we know to construct a world suggested by the text” (166). Schemas of mankind and of monsters in *Beowulf* are refreshed and blended as the descriptions of three monsters blur the readers’ cognition. The schema of a hero is therefore reconstructed as the schema of monsters. All these transformations and world switches are carried out by the language employed to describe the monsters. According to Stockwell, the view of schema theory in a literary context “points to three different fields in which schema operate: world schemas, text schemas, and language schemas” (80). The following three sections will develop these three fields respectively.

I. World Schema: Monster as Humanized Animal/Animalized Human

World schemas contain schemas “that are to do with content” (Stockwell

80). The story of *Beowulf* contains three encounters with monsters. The possible range of a schematic field is partly determined by the semantic scope as well as the degree of “prototypicality.” As Stockwell states, “*prototypicality* is the basis of categorization, with central examples acting as cognitive reference points in the middle of a radial structure” (29, italics original). The “monster” prototype is considered the center of readers’ cognitive activities in assessing the monsters in *Beowulf*. The concept of “monster” encompasses diverse associations of strange living forms unlikely to exist in the real world.² When imagining a monstrosity, some may think of Frankenstein’s man-made monster with superhuman power, while others may picture a hybrid deformity that is a combination of several predatory animals. In *Beowulf*, the monsters indeed possess basic features according to our conventional schematic knowledge, yet they behave in quite humanized ways.

The content of *Beowulf*, which features a human hero’s vengeful combat with killer monsters, preserves the human vs. alien schema: the human-centered society in conflict with alien beings. In one script of this schema, inhuman enemies outside the human community intrude and threaten destruction. After the introduction of Heorot Hall, we build up a conceptual structure in which a nonhuman enemy approaches: “se ellen-gæst earfoðlice” ‘a powerful demon, a prowler through the dark’ (86).³ The poetic speaker’s description fulfills most of the schematic knowledge about such a creature. The “powerful demon” wanders around desert places with superhuman destructive power and Achillean skin, feeding on human flesh.

The description of Grendel’s mother’s dwelling similarly contributes to this schema preservation. She is an “ides, āglæc-wif” ‘monstrous hell-bride’ (1259) who inhabits fearful waters (1425-30). However, she seems to be a different kind of monster; her underwater hall is waterproof and fire burns in it (1515-16). These are the local headers for this she-monster. She has strength “swā bið mægþa cræft” ‘as much as an amazon warrior’s’ (1283). Unlike Grendel, who can grab thirty men at one time and occupy Heorot at night, she simply hits and runs, taking only one man away. She relies less on her physical power than

² The definition of “monster” in *OED* includes: 1. “Something extraordinary or unnatural; a prodigy, a marvel”; 2. “An animal or plant deviating in one or more of its parts from the normal type”; 3. “An imaginary animal . . . having a form either partly brute and partly human, or compounded of elements from two or more animal forms”; 4. “A person of inhuman and horrible cruelty or wickedness”; and 5. “An animal of huge size; hence, anything of vast and unwieldy proportions.” The schema of monster, therefore, is associated with something inhuman and uncommon, and a monster is usually horrible, cruel, and wicked.

³ All the quotations and translations of *Beowulf* in this article are from Heaney.

Grendel does. After her battle with *Beowulf*, her dwelling is not “infested” any more (1621-22).

In the third section of the poem, the image of the dragon in *Beowulf* confirms our schemas about a dragon: a giant, fierce, treasure-guarding beast covered with scales and equipped with wings enabling it to fly while it emits scorching fire. In contrast to Grendel, who is “earn-sceapen / on weres wæstmum” ‘warped in the shape of a man’ (1351-52) and his mother, who “idese onlīcnes” ‘looks like a woman’ (1351), the dragon here is definitely a wild and weird animal. Its delineation fits better with our existing schematic knowledge of a monster.

Beastly power or sorcery differentiates the three monsters from human beings and thus fulfills the basic requirement of being a monster. These various depictions of monsters may lead to schema accretion, which is “the addition of new facts to the schema” (Stockwell 79), but they still reinforce our monster schemas. Nevertheless, as Andy Orchard states, the three monsters are human-like to a certain degree:

[D]espite the clear antagonism between the worlds of monsters and men, there is . . . something deeply human about the “monsters.” All are given human attributes at some stage, and the poet even goes so far as to evoke our sympathy of their plight. (“Psychology and Physicality” 29)

A possible early schema disruption occurs when the speaker emphasizes the first two monsters’ background. Grendel and Grendel’s mother are descendants of Cain, a detail that situates their story in the Christian schema. *Beowulf* preserves the schema that justice wins over evil. In addition, the allusion to the Old Testament upholds the Christian schema: the hero takes an eye for an eye to ensure justice in the text world. As these two monsters are presented as dangerous murderers threatening social order, “mynte se mǎn-scaða manna cynnes” ‘[t]he bane of the race of men’ (712), the speaker highlights their villainy in the Christian order so the schematic construction of monsters can be bolstered. Grendel and his mother are introduced as monsters that live among the outcasts—“Caines cynne” ‘Cain’s clan’—after being banished by “Scyppend” ‘The Creator’ (106). The use of “Scyppend” ‘the Creator’ (106) or “Drihten” ‘the Eternal Lord’ (108) suggests the speaker’s evaluative criteria of Christianity. Later, the speaker again emphasizes the background of Grendel, “Panon wōc fela / geōscaft-gāsta; wæs þāera Grendel sum / heoro-wearh hetelic” ‘from Cain there sprang / misbegotten spirits, among them Grendel / the banished and accursed’ (1265-67) and identifies these monsters’ abnormality and barbarity. Our schematic construction of monsters may be reinforced, but this accreted facet of a Christian source also disrupts the monster schema. As

Johann Köberl argues, “if he can suffer damnation, he must have a soul; if he has a soul, he must be human” (96). Thus, the background of Grendel and Grendel’s mother, being foregrounded, reinforces their humanity.

While the speaker may try to justify the destruction of monsters by listing them in a tradition of religious evilness, the background reduces their mysteriousness and humanizes them—they are still the offspring of Cain and therefore of Adam and Eve. The passage introducing their ancestry aims to recount the biblical story of Cain, but it reports Grendel and his mother’s inheritance of Cain’s doomed fate rather than Cain’s brutality (1260-65). Although this background knowledge groups Grendel and his mother into the company of “eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnēas, / swylce gīgantas, þā wið Gode wunnon” ‘ogres and elves and evil phantoms / and the giants too who strove with God’ (112-13), it also states why they shun people and why their evil is doomed. They do not choose it themselves. Being “banished and accursed” (1267), they are forced to leave the human world. As Köberl rightly points out, “Grendel is a human exile, his monstrosity metaphorical” (96).⁴ In this sense, they are humans; they are considered “different” only because their ancestors have been expelled from human society.

Meanwhile, the projection of human characteristics on the monsters should not be overlooked. Each monster grounds its attack in a specific reason. First, song and revelry wake a lone monster:

Ða se ellen-gæst earfoðlice
þræge geþolode, sē þe in þýstrum bād,
þæt hē dōgora gehwām drēam gehýrde
hlūdne in healle; . . .

Then a powerful demon, a prowler through the dark,
nursed a hard grievance. It harrowed him
to hear the din of the loud banquet
every day in the hall, . . . (86-90)

Grendel’s loneliness is, in fact, in contrast to the happiness in the human community. Being “fāg gewāt” ‘branded an outlaw’ (1263), Grendel “man-drēam flēon” ‘shunned company and joy’ (1264). He “atol ān-gengea” ‘waged his lonely war’ (165), “āna wið eallum” ‘one against all’ (145). Like an alienated boy jealous of the joy in company and annoyed by the revels in Heorot, he finally goes on a rampage, breaking the harmony of the human society that excludes him. Ian Duncan is right to point out that Grendel is “in human shape, the divine figure disfigured, the manlike monster or giant”; he is “a rational soul

⁴ For more critical literature dealing with Grendel’s humanity, see Fajardo-Acosta (47).

bearer and consequently damned”; and he shares “the passion, misery, kinship feeling of men” (121). In other words, Grendel is almost a human being, but he is underprivileged. Andy Orchard also claims that Grendel is “capable of evoking sympathy . . . in the battle, when the predator becomes prey” (“Heroes and Villains” 192):

Sōna þæt onfunde fyrena hyrde,
 þæt hē ne mētte middan-geardes,
 eorþan scēatta on elran men
 mund-gripe māran; hē on mōde wearð
 forht on ferhðe; nō þȳ ær fram meahte.
 Hyge wæs him hin-fūs, wolde on heolster flēon,
 sēcan dēofla gedræg; ne wæs his drohtod þær,
 swylce hē on ealder-dagum ær gemētte.
 The captain of evil discovered himself
 in a handgrip harder than anything
 he had ever encountered in any man
 on the face of the earth. Every bone in his body
 quailed and recoiled, but he could not escape.
 He was desperate to flee to his den and hide
 with the devil’s litter, for in all his days
 he had never been clamped or cornered like this. (750-57)

In the passage, Grendel’s suffering is pitiful, although he is entitled “The captain of evil.” His torment surpasses his evil. Because of Beowulf, Grendel is changed from an invader into a kind of victim. His defeat wins our sympathy, since he, having been ignored and unwelcome, suffers first from the Danes’ harassment.

Likewise, Grendel’s mother reacts like any human mother facing her child’s murder: she becomes enraged and practices the code of revenge, much like a human hero. However, if most readers’ schematic knowledge of monsters includes such warlike aggressiveness, this stereotype is reduced when she is found at the beginning of her night raid: “Hēo wæs on ofste, wolde ut þanon, / fēore beorgan, þa hēo onfunden wæs” “The hell-dam was in panic, desperate to get out, / in mortal terror the moment she was found” (1292-93). Although she successfully murders one warrior, she flees back to her den immediately. She does not intend a massacre. However, when Beowulf tries to invade her dwelling, she is forced to fight back (1506-09). Christine Alfano claims, after reading this description, we should “relieve Grendel’s mother from her burden of monstrosity and reinstate her in her deserved position as *ides, aglæcwif*: ‘lady, warrior-woman’” (65). Without Grendel’s death, Grendel’s mother would not have paid her fatal visit to human society; without Beowulf’s attack, she would have rather stayed in her den than attempted to strike the invader.

As monsters, Grendel and his mother contrast the dragon's wild instinct and animal courage by showing feelings and thoughts. Still, we can see a trait of humanity in the dragon when gaining insight into its mind through lines such as, "hwæðre wīges gefeh, / beaduwe weorces" 'he worked himself up / by imagining battle' (2298-99) and "beorges getruwode, / wīges ond wealles" 'now he felt secure / in the vaults of his barrow' (2322-23). This increases familiarity with the originally unknown creatures and posits a potential challenge to the conventional schematic knowledge of *monster*. Tolkien also points out that the dragon is "a personification of malice, greed, destruction (the evil side of heroic life)" (17). Even though he is animal-like, the dragon carries human characteristics, albeit in a negative way.

On the other hand, Beowulf has more terrible characteristics than the three monsters. As Köberl states, "If the monsters have been variously humanized, Beowulf has certainly been assigned his share of monstrous features, whether in his own right or through his contact with the monsters" (99).⁵ Fajardo-Acosta also points out, "although the hero is portrayed in the poem as an enemy of the monsters, he can be seen as somewhat of a monster himself" (2). Beowulf's fights with the monsters are proactive, not passive. He waits for Grendel and has decided to terminate him in advance. Without negotiating with Grendel's mother and the dragon, Beowulf sets off to find them and kill them.

Beowulf's transformation into a monster complements the suffering of the monsters. First, the name Beowulf is associated with "bear" (Fajardo-Acosta 8-10) and "wolf" (Fajardo-Acosta 11-12, 14-18). Both associations build a picture of Beowulf as a figure of cruelty and barbarity as well as strength and community. Although these animals have positive attributes, giving the hero a name based on animals subverts the heroic image of humanity.

Moreover, with his extraordinary strength, Beowulf is more like a monster than any of his antagonists. Cedric H. Whitman notes that Beowulf has *monstrous* physical strength and is "the megalomaniac hero who can swim for eight days and eight nights over the Baltic Sea in full armor slaying whales all the way" (20). While the monsters are human-like, Beowulf is portrayed as a monster-like hero who boasts:

selfe ofersāwon, ðā ic of searwum cwōm,
fāh from fēondum, þær ic fife geband,

⁵ While Köberl maintains that Beowulf's monstrosity can be deduced from his appearance, his behavior, his manner of fighting, and "some of the epithets applied to him in the text" (99), this paper analyzes the characteristics in respect of world schema, text schema, and language schema in order to provide a cognitive interpretation of humanity of the three monsters.

yðde eotena cyn, ond on yðum slōg
 niceras nihtes, . . .
 They had seen me bolstered in the blood of enemies
 when I battled and bound five beasts,
 raided a troll-nest and in the night-sea
 slaughtered sea-brutes. . . . (419-22)

When telling his people about Beowulf, Hrothgar particularly emphasizes Beowulf's physical strength, "hē *þritiges* / manna mægen-cræft on his mund-gripe, / heaþo-rōf hæbbe" 'a thane . . . with the strength of *thirty* / in the grip of each hand' (379-81, emphasis added). This description reminds the reader that when Grendel first attacks Heorot, "on ræste genam / *þritig* þegna" 'he grabbed *thirty* men / from their resting places' (122-23, emphasis added). Beowulf and Grendel have the same power and are both awe-inspiring. Like Grendel, Beowulf is, in John M. Hill's words, "fierce, terrifying, and hugely strong" (75). What Beowulf has done is monstrous, and the distinction between hero and monster is blurred again and again in their portrayals.

Furthermore, the fight between Beowulf and Grendel's mother can be considered part of Beowulf's transformation into a complete monster. Before he dives into the waters, what he cares for most is his own fame and the treasures of Hrothgar. Plunging into the lake inhabited by all kinds of monsters symbolizes his metamorphosis into a monster. His subsequent fight with Grendel's mother turns him into a truly evil figure. Fajardo-Acosta states:

The battle with Grendel's mother represents the initiation of Beowulf into full-fledged Cain-gianthood, and into the status of demonic being. At the same time, his former self, his gentle humanity, suffers an irrevocable blow which effectively constitutes the death of Beowulf the man at the hands of Beowulf the monster. (84)

If the ambiguous identification between Beowulf and Grendel is an initiation of the transformation, Beowulf's fight with Grendel's mother can be seen as a completion of this schema refreshment or a revision and reconstruction of the schema.⁶ He becomes ruthless in the battle without any regard for the fact that Grendel's mother has killed only one man to revenge her murdered son.

II. Text Schema: Stories about Monsters

Text schemas "represent our expectations of the way that world schemas

⁶ For further discussion of Beowulf's supernatural powers, see Stanley B. Greenfield (67-73). Greenfield points out that there is something in the "conflict between good monsters and bad monsters" (70); this contrasts with Fred C. Robinson's statement that "in general the wonders are carefully restricted to the devil's party" (20).

appear to us in terms of their sequencing and structural organization” (Stockwell 80). They bridge world schemas and language schemas because they deal with how the world schemas are presented to us through the language of the story. In *Beowulf*, we find the formula of a hero fighting with a monstrous enemy to restore the order of civilization. The formula takes two forms in our text schema: the hero acting as a protector who drives away the intruding alien force and the hero journeying a distance to win treasure or rescue someone after conquering the guarding monster. While *Beowulf* borrows some components from these two patterns, the text world of *Beowulf* is mainly divided into two sub-worlds:⁷ one in Denmark and the other in Geatland. Traveling to Denmark, Beowulf kills Grendel and Grendel’s mother, protects the Danish people from further massacre, and earns treasure and honor from Hrothgar. Back in Geatland, Beowulf fights with the dragon and wins the treasure for his people. He challenges the dragon in the name of justice and revenge. Indeed, each of Beowulf’s militant actions is a counterstrike to a monster’s attack, but his actions are aggressive attacks rather than defensive reactions.

Before these main fights occur, the poem begins with the introduction of the dynastic history of the Danes. As John D. Niles notes, “[t]he hero is not introduced until line 194, where he is not yet named” (225). On the other hand, by line 86, “se ellen-gæst” ‘a powerful demon’ has already appeared; this refers to Grendel. The text from the very beginning has challenged our schema of a hero story. Conspicuously, Grendel’s background is introduced in great detail (99-114), while “great parts of Beowulf’s life remain untold” (Niles 226). The foregrounding of Grendel from the beginning seems to orient the poem into a monster story.

In addition, a chain of revenge occurs in the three conflicts between man and monster. The operation of cause and consequence, whether out of natural forces or human will, is inescapable. This doomed circle of war may be mysterious to the characters but is always explained by the speaker. Our text schema assures us that it is always the trouble-making monsters that initiate war. Otherwise, the monsters’ evil nature justifies the act of destroying them. The speaker stresses their evilness by linking them to Cain, and the dragon is a presumed symbol of evil in the Christian schema. However, it is remarkable that each conflict in the narrative begins with human misconduct. As Manfred Malzahn and Muhammad Abu al-Fadl Badran argue, “the crimes begin when the mon-

⁷ For further discussion of sub-worlds, see Gavins 35-52; Semino, *Language and World Creation* 71-87; Stockwell 140-49; and Werth 210-58. Here the sub-worlds are recognized by the reader with respect to the physical locales of the story.

sters have to suffer the inadvertent addition of insult to injury, in form of a daily reminder of the abjectness of their condition” (11). Grendel attacked Heorot because the noise of Hrothgar’s banquet annoyed him (87-89). Grendel’s mother, on the other hand, wanted to kill Hrothgar’s men to avenge her son: “Ond his mōdor þā gýt / gífre ond galg-mōd gegān wolde / sorh-fulne sīð, sunu dēoð wrecan” ‘But now his mother / has sallied forth on a savage journey, / grief-raked and ravenous, desperate for revenge’ (1276-78).⁸ The dragon scorched Geatland to punish the theft of its treasure: “Wæs ðā gebolgen beorges hyrde, / wolde se lāða līge forgyldan / drinc-fæt dýre” ‘his pent-up fury / at the loss of the vessel made him long to hit back / and lash out in flames’ (2304-06). The feud apparently begins with human intrusion to the monsters’ world. This plot arrangement creates a world schema modification and suggests that the speaker avoids taking sides with the monsters or with men or, to be more precise, the ancient pagan people. As Fajardo-Acosta argues, “[t]he transformation of the perspective hero from man into monster, commendable and admirable from the standpoint of the heroic ideology, is however highly undesirable and even damnable from a Christian point of view” (2). By demonizing the monstrous figures and laying the blame on human characters in his narrative, the speaker transcends his text world and watches the war between Beowulf the heathen and Grendel the Christian outcast (107), which serves to illustrate their sins: pride, covetousness, anger, and envy.

Due to their nature, these monsters are enraged by humans for different reasons. In return, each of Beowulf’s fights is driven by the same social code of vengeance. In the intervals between Beowulf’s three fights with the monsters, digressions in a mournful tone occur that tell the human history of bloody feuds and cruel tyranny. When Hrothgar and Beowulf celebrate the victory over Grendel, the king’s poet sings about the Finnsburg episode (1070-158). Likewise, before challenging the dragon, Beowulf recalls King Hrethel’s sadness for failing to settle the feud and the endless war between the Swedes and the Geats (2464-67). These accounts dilute the atmosphere of human triumph or any high-spirited talk along the warpath that readers might expect, and thus they deviate from the grand epic heroism in the text schema. As deictic sub-worlds,⁹ these passages, which link the three fights, extend the temporal scope of the

⁸ As Köberl states, “of the monsters, her motivation is probably the least controversial and, humanly, the most understandable” (98). Orchard also argues that “[s]ympathy might be more naturally forthcoming for Grendel’s mother, roused by grim circumstance to avenge her son” (“Heroes and Villains” 192). See also Clark 287. Grendel’s mother’s revenge seems most human and justifiable.

⁹ Stockwell defines deictic sub-worlds as those that “include flashbacks, as well as flashforwards, and any other departure from the current situation” (140).

text world and slow down the narrative pace. Most importantly, their position in poetry turns them into a reflection of Beowulf's conflict with the monsters; at each joyous or cheerful moment, the episodes remind readers and the characters of sorrow and transform the story into a metaphor of a vicious circle of vengeful war. As a result, our presumption of *Beowulf* as heroic poetry undergoes schema refreshment, and a facet of the parable restructures our schema of the epic genre.

This parabolic reading assimilates Beowulf with the monsters; the hero and the monsters function as symbols in the speaker's moral teaching. Extending this method of reading elements in the text as corresponding, we can see a parallel relationship develop between Beowulf and the monsters. If we presume that *Beowulf* is an epic, we face a schema disruption that challenges our knowledge about this genre. The story begins with the introduction of the Danish royal line from the very first hero, Shield Sheafson, in Danish history, and then it comes to Grendel's attack. The entire narrative basically follows the chronological order of the three combats; therefore, the story does not open *in medias res*. Next, although Beowulf has supernatural power much like a conventional epic hero, his close affinity with the other monsters is conspicuous. Beowulf is presented as a foreign hero voyaging overseas to save the royal house in Denmark. A similar pattern occurs with the introduction of the dragon. He functions as a foreign force to provide protection and is introduced after a description of the origins of a noble family's treasure. With both functioning as forces intervening to protect the remainder of a prosperous family, the dragon and young Beowulf become counterparts.

In addition, Beowulf shared a similar situation with Grendel in his youth. Grendel is cast out by God, living in misery and solitude in contrast to the revels in Hrothgar's hall; the young Beowulf is likewise unpopular. Readers may wonder why none of his countrymen tries to prevent him from going to Demark: "Ðone sīð-fæt him snotere ceorlas / lýt-hwōn lōgon, þeah hē him lēof wære" 'Nobody tried to keep him from going / no elder denied him, dear as he was to them' (202-03). The downgrading in the text schema can be seen in the flashbacks into history, which introduce the reason for the indifference of Beowulf's people:

. . . Hēan wæs lange,
 swā hyne Gēata bearn gōdne ne tealdon,
 nē hyne on medo-bence micles wyrðne
 drihten Wedera gedōn wolde;
 swýðe wēndon, þæt hē slēac wære,
 æðeling unfrom. . .

... He [Beowulf] had been poorly regarded
 for a long time, was taken by the Geats
 for less than he was worth: and their lord too
 had never much esteemed him in the mead-hall.
 They firmly believed that he lacked force,
 that the prince was a weakling; ... (2183-88)

Beowulf's "inglorious youth" (Fajardo-Acosta 27-31) echoes Grendel's situation. The Geats know of the existence of Grendel (1351-55), but they never consider him threatening until Grendel begins his slaughter. The Geats have a similar disregard of Grendel's mother. They have seen two monsters, one female and the other male (1345-53), but only after Grendel's mother has attacked Heorot do they realize that the she-monster can exact revenge on them.

Meanwhile, by killing Grendel, Beowulf is akin to Grendel. While Grendel begins his murder without investigating the Danes, Beowulf kills Grendel without investigating Grendel's motive or grievances. Fajardo-Acosta has rightly perceived that Beowulf is, in a certain way, Grendel's brother: "Cain's killing of Abel functions as an archetype of the crime Grendel tempts Beowulf to commit, the murder of a man who, through a series of complex kinship ties, turns out to be a brother" (3).¹⁰ Readers such as Fajardo-Acosta, who recognizes the Christian schema of the First Murder, will see the connection between Beowulf's prodigious power and the ruthless killing of Grendel. Both Beowulf and Grendel possess the nature to kill; they are savage and bloodthirsty.

Furthermore, Beowulf's insistence on revenge for Aeschere, who is murdered by Grendel's mother, is ironic and undermines its justification because the monster has just committed the same code of bloody vengeance: "Sēlre bið æghwæm / þæt hē his frēond wrece, þonne hē fela murne" 'It is always better / to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning' (1384-85). The excuse of revenge, which is repeatedly used by the two opposing parties, becomes morally ambiguous. The juxtaposition of hero and monster also complicates our schemas by equating a hero's story with the monsters'.

The attacks by the monsters actually reveal the negative side of human society. Duncan argues that "each time the monster strikes closer, the behavior

¹⁰ For more on the symbolic relationship between Grendel and Beowulf, see Fajardo-Acosta 43-76. However, Fajardo-Acosta's suggestion that "Grendel's mother is Hrothgar's sister and . . . Grendel is the offspring of her incestuous union with Hrothgar" (57) seems far-fetched and requires more specific textual evidence. Additionally, the source lacks an explanation for the idea that Grendel's murder of the Danes for "twelve winters" (147) is motivated by, according to Fajardo-Acosta, his claim for the throne. If Grendel were Hrothgar's heir, though illegitimate, he would not have to wage "his lonely war" (164) and "never / parley or make peace with any Dane / nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price" (154-56).

of the hero's companions deteriorates toward its folklore paradigm of treachery or desertion" (115). Both the dragon and Beowulf are, as Duncan continues, "more radically alone" (115). The hero and the monster seem rather alike. Therefore, we can quote Köberl on this ambiguity to confirm the reader's refreshed text schema:

The similarity or identity of hero and adversary may be better approached mythologically, with the protagonists seen as competing aspects of an ultimate cosmic unity of order and chaos; or in psychological terms, where the monsters are aspects of the hero's own human personality, and by the same token, of ours, where we find the Self fighting against the darker sides of its own being. (104)

The similarities between the two sides are also recognized by Fajardo-Acosta (3); they complement the transformation of the protagonist into a monster. The process of assimilation of the two opponents creates a fuzzy distinction between the hero and the monster.

III. Language Schema: Words about Wordless Monsters

Language schemas, as Stockwell states, "contain our idea of the appropriate forms of linguistic patterning and style in which we expect a subject to appear" (80). Descriptions of the monsters play an active role and occupy a large portion of *Beowulf*. Nevertheless, many linguistic patterns are deviant in the discourse.¹¹ On the one hand, the monsters are given many titles, including epithets, metaphors, or kennings;¹² on the other hand, the narrator and other human characters often refer to Grendel and the dragon as "he" (*hē*) and to Grendel's mother as "she" (*hēo*). Due to the ambiguous reference to the monsters, a parallel juxtaposition between the human hero and Grendel and the dragon is thus created and makes them compatible and exchangeable.

Along with the narrator, the human characters in *Beowulf* use different titles to represent the monsters. When the human characters talk about the monsters, they use personal pronouns after mentioning the name or an initial descriptive title. It is not unusual to replace a character whose name or title has been mentioned previously with a pronoun. Yet, the language schema is unconsciously modified when a sequence of personal pronouns builds an illusion that a human is

¹¹ For the study of the Old English of *Beowulf*; see, for example, Greenfield 67-73; Köberl 89-140; Orchard, "Psychology and Physicality" 28-57; Orchard, "Heroes and Villains" 169-202; Robinson 20-35; and Stanley 3-34. My study is based on Heaney's translation.

¹² Similarities between Grendel and Beowulf and between the dragon and Beowulf in Old English can especially be seen in Köberl 100-04.

being discussed. The reason for this confusion is that the personal pronouns “he” and “she” are used in most places where the pronoun “it” (*hit*) should be adopted.

In addition to “Grendel” and the pronoun “he,” this monster is referred to by various titles.¹³ However, Grendel is depicted as “a negative reflection and perversion of roles in that society” (Köberl 97).¹⁴ In Orchard’s words, “Grendel is certainly ‘the wicked destroyer,’ but he is also both ‘the destroyer of men’ and ‘the man-shaped destroyer’” (“Psychology and Physicality” 31). Of the other two monsters, one is defined by her relationship to Grendel and the other is a common kind of monster; they do not have their own names but are similarly bestowed with epithets. These titles, like names, help confer prominence on a figure. Since they are composed of rhetorical compounds and not proper names, variation is essential in order to attract readers’ attention, stimulate our language schema, and deepen our impressions of the monsters. Unnamed, the dragon and Grendel’s mother are differentiated from the textual ground by multiplying epithets.¹⁵ This constant language schema accretion contributes to building the vivid, active characters of the monsters.

In the passage describing the fight between Beowulf and Grendel, the pronoun “he” is used to represent both (735-835). This double reference may lead to confusion in our language schema when the two characters are likely to be mistaken for each other. In this narration, a message seems to be implied—for the *Beowulf* poet, as a Christian, it does not make much difference whether the victory goes to Grendel or Beowulf, since both are denied God’s salvation in a pagan world. Ironically, when Beowulf reports his fight with Grendel to Hrothgar, he seems to help humanize the monster (963-79): Beowulf refers to Grendel as “he” and considers Grendel to be a wicked outlaw. Thus, in contrast to the narrator, Beowulf has a different attitude toward the monster. Beowulf surprisingly puts himself and his opponents at the same level, while the narrator is ambivalent about the victor because they were both denied salvation.

¹³ For example, in Heaney’s translation, Grendel was “a powerful demon” (86), “a prowler through the dark” (86), “a fiend out of hell” (100), “the God-cursed brute” (121), a “dark death-shadow” (160), “the Lord’s outcast” (169), a “corpse-maker” (276), “the shadow-stalker” (703), the “bane of the race of men” (712), the “captain of evil” (749), the “dread of the land” (761), “the terror-monger” (765), a “hell-serf” (786), “the banished and accursed” (1267), and “the enemy of mankind” (1275).

¹⁴ For example, Grendel is “the hall-watcher” (142), “ruled” Heorot like a usurper (144), is “the killer” (1995), or is a “maddened spirit” (2073) in Heaney’s translation.

¹⁵ In Heaney’s translation, Grendel’s mother is “an avenger” (1257), a “hell-bride” (1259), “the hell-dam” (1292), and a “ghastly dam” (2120); the dragon is “an old harrower of the dark” (2270), a “scourge of the people” (2278), “the hoard-guardian” (2293), “the guardian of the mound” (2302), “the hoard-watcher” (2303), “the vile sky-winger” (2314), “the sky-plague” (2347), a “sky-borne foe” (2528), the “hoard-guard” (2554, 2593), “the serpent” (2568, 3041), the “mound-keeper” (2580), “the sky-roamer” (2830), a “poison-breather” (2839), and “the deep barrow-dweller” (2841).

This juxtaposition is reinforced when Hrothgar advises Beowulf not to become another Heremod (1713-18). For Hrothgar, Beowulf had the potential to be Heremod, whereas, for the reader, this description can appropriately be applied to Grendel. Hence, Hrothgar's warning to Beowulf reveals the similarities between the hero and the monster. As Malzahn and Badran point out, "the treacherous nature of nobility" (7) exists in Beowulf the hero. Fajardo-Acosta also asserts this monstrosity of the hero: "[t]he monsters are embodiments of the temptations with which Beowulf is confronted—to all of which he succumbs—and also mirror-images of Beowulf, of what he slowly becomes as he moves up the ladder of heroic achievement" (3). Grendel and the other two monsters, in this sense, only show the dark side of a hero.¹⁶ They are foils of the monstrosity of the hero; consequently, Beowulf becomes even more savage than the monsters.

Compared with Grendel and Grendel's mother, the dragon seems more inhuman. One reason is the lack of explanation about its origin. Instead of introducing the background of the dragon, the narrator first spends quite a few words on the origin of the treasure it guards and on the lonely ancient wanderer who left this treasure. Then, the narration introduces the dragon simply because it takes over the treasure. Readers learn the history of the treasure rather than the origin of the dragon. The dragon is like a wolf schematized into the realm of wildlife, and nobody cares about a wild animal's ancestry. The dragon is referred to as "wyrm" 'serpent' (2567): "Gewāt ðā byrnende gebogen scriðan, / tō gescipe scyndan" 'Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing / and racing toward its fate' (2569-70) and later, "wyrm yrre cwōm, / atol inwit-gæst, ððre siðe" 'a wildness rose / in the dragon again and drove it to attack' (2669-70). The dragon, in this sense, is merely an animal.

Even though Beowulf, as a hero with Christian thoughts, seems to realize the futility of revenge toward the end, his death is paralleled with the death of the dragon (also a "he") as he is incinerated in a heathen cremation. Furthermore, we may see how Beowulf and the dragon become tokens in this parable as our language schema is challenged when reading the description of Beowulf's death. The description of the deaths begins thus:

Ðā wæs gegongen guman unfrōdum
 earfoðlice, þæt hē on eorðan geseah
 þone lēofestan lifes æt ende,
 blēate gebæran. Bona swylce læg,
 egeslic eorð-draca, ealdre berēafod,
 bealwe gebæded. . . .

¹⁶ For more parallels between Beowulf and Grendel, see Orchard, "Psychology and Physicality" 30-35.

It was hard then on the young hero [Wiglaf],
 having to watch the one he held so dear
 there on the ground, going through
 his death agony. The dragon from underearth,
 his nightmarish destroyer, lay destroyed as well,
 utterly without life. . . . (2821-26)

At first, this passage focuses on Wiglaf's observation, so readers see Beowulf through Wiglaf's eyes. If readers stop at the end of line 2824, the reference to "þone lēofestan" 'the one he held so dear' (2823) could be "the dragon." Our expectation of a further description of Beowulf is halted here because the narration then focuses on the death of the dragon that is killed "for ðæs hild-fruman hond-geweorc" 'through the battle-strength in Beowulf's arm' (2835). Except for the mention of Beowulf at the beginning and the end of this passage, these lines focus on the dragon. The importance of the dragon is enhanced, while Beowulf the figure is just the frame for this action.¹⁷ This reversal of expectation undermines our language schema.

A similar pattern occurs when the troop comes to see their ring-giver's "wundor-dēaðe" 'marvelous death' (3037). Instead of the king's body, "Ær hī þær gesēgan syllicran wiht, / wyrm on wonge wiðer-ræhtes þær, / lādne licgean" 'But what they saw first was far stranger: / the serpent on the ground, gruesome and vile, / lying facing him' (3038-40). Again, the depiction of the dragon occupies the place where readers expect Beowulf to be. With as much emphasis on the dragon as on Beowulf, perceptions are mixed. Meanwhile, the narrator repeats the death of the dragon: "Bēah-hordum leng / wyrm wōh-bogen wealdan ne mōste" 'No longer would his snakefolds / ply themselves to safeguard hidden gold' (2826-27), and "Nalles æfter lyfte lācende hwearf / middle-nihtum, māðm-æhta wlonc / ansyn ywde" 'Never would he glitter and glide / and show himself off in midnight air, / exulting in his riches' (2832-34). The mourning tone of these lines wins our sympathy and humanizes the dragon. At this point, the hero and the monster can represent each other, since for the transcendent narrator, "hæfde æghwæðer ende gefēred / lānan lifes" 'Both had reached the end of the road / through the life they had been lent' (2844-45). Conspicuously, right after we learn "wæs ðā dēaðe fæst, / hæfde eorð-scrafa ende genyttod" 'but death owned him now, / he would never enter his earth-gallery again' (3045-46), the description continues:

Him big stōdan bunan ond orcas,
 discas lāgon ond dýre swyrd,

¹⁷ For further discussion of contextual frame theory, see Stockwell 155-58.

ðmige, þurhentone, swā hīe wið eorðan fæðm
 þūsend wintra þær eardodon.
 Beside him stood pitchers and piled-up dishes,
 silent flagons, precious swords
 eaten through with rust, ranged as they had been
 while they waited their thousand winters under ground. (3047-50)

This passage presents the same fate for the dragon as for Beowulf. “Him” (“him”) in line 3047 can refer to either the hero or the dragon.¹⁸ Thus, the ambiguous reference strengthens their common features and makes them almost identical in many aspects.

Overall, this schematic approach reveals the significance of the monster-characters as conspicuous figures in *Beowulf*. In the text world, each of them bears his or her unique nature and displays humanity in his or her actions and motivations, which change the world schema from time to time. The narrative and stylistic devices also disrupt readers’ expectations of a story about a hero conquering monsters. Beowulf, the idealized hero, is a version of a human monster. Due to discourse deviation, this schema disruption suggests that monstrosity and humanity are mingled under divine supervision; it may further force readers to rethink the higher power of the narrative and the higher order it presumes over the world. *Beowulf*, as an epic, is more like a monsters’ epic, for it calls for barbarian elements in humanity, and, by their transformation in the text, the monsters unexpectedly become the underprivileged people in a human society. In other words, the humanized monsters fighting against an extraordinary figure likely represent the doomed attempt made by the oppressed to contend with the superior minority in the medieval literary society. Nevertheless, due to the schematic knowledge we possess and process, when we read the epic we humanize the three monsters.

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¹⁸ For more parallels between Beowulf and the dragon, see Orchard, “Psychology and Physicality” 29-30.

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人性化的妖怪： 以基模理論閱讀《貝爾沃夫》

摘要

雖然《貝爾沃夫》的主要情節是主角貝爾沃夫與其他三位反派角色的打鬥，這些場景可視為整個故事的靜態背景。貝爾沃夫是故事中唯一的一位人類英雄，可是他擁有的妖怪特徵卻遠遠比他的英雄特質來得更顯著。反觀貝爾沃夫的三個妖怪對手，雖然被刻劃出不少反派與邪惡的特色，卻也同時各自呈現出人性化的一面。這三位反派角色之所以會入侵人類的社會，動機絕非是為了要挑戰人類的權威、顛覆人類社會的體制，或者甚至是推翻整個社群；相反地，他們是因為人類或者貝爾沃夫的冒犯以及騷擾，在捍衛自己的權益之下，不得不進而反擊人類。本文採用基模理論來討論《貝爾沃夫》這個文本，試圖呈現，所謂的妖怪反倒是文本中意欲突顯的角色，而英雄貝爾沃夫與他們的爭鬥只不過是整個故事的陪襯。這三位妖怪實際上充滿人性，而且藉著塑造貝爾沃夫典型刻板的英雄角色以及慘烈的打鬥情節，正足以突顯並強化他們比貝爾沃夫更像是人類。即使貝爾沃夫是位英雄，個性與行為卻充滿了野蠻與暴力，從他超乎常人的氣力，尤其他和葛雷恩多以及龍的許多相似處看來，貝爾沃夫比妖怪更不像是個普通人類。《貝爾沃夫》常被定位為史詩，可是因為在故事發展中有許多基模概念的崩解與更新，所以此史詩很容易被解讀成是替妖怪們打抱不平的創作，而非英雄的史詩。在故事裡，人性與妖怪特質持續互相轉化，與其他傳統詩不同的是，三位妖怪彷彿正是人類社會中飽受欺壓剝削的受害者，為了自身的生存權益與尊嚴，與佔有優勢地位的英雄展開必然失敗的抗爭。

關鍵字：貝爾沃夫，英雄，妖怪，人性，野蠻，基模