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Beowulf and the Hunt

Francis Leneghan

Faculty of English Language and Literature, University of Oxford, Oxford OX1 4BH, UK; francis.leneghan@ell.ox.ac.uk

Abstract: The presence of hunting imagery in *Beowulf* has often been noted, but the significance of the figures of the stag and the wolf to the thematic design of the poem has yet to be fully explored. In this article, I first analyse the sustained presentation of the Danish royal hall as a stag, before exploring how the *Beowulf* poet exploited the various traditional associations of the wolf in the development of the figures of Grendel and Grendel's mother. Finally, I consider the elaboration of the hunting imagery in the final section of the poem, which focuses on the Geatish Messenger's account of the pursuit and killing of King Ongentheow by Eofor and Wulf, and the beasts-of-battle motif. The article concludes that the *Beowulf* poet made extensive use of animal and hunting imagery in order to ground his work in the lived experiences and fears of his audience.

1. Introduction

In his monograph, *Beowulf: The Poem and its Tradition*, John D. Niles argues that "the poem's controlling theme is community: its nature, its occasional breakdown, and the qualities that are necessary to maintain it" (Niles 1983, p. 226).[1] Other scholars have examined, in depth, many of the various communal and courtly activities that are described in the poem, such as feasting (or, more accurately, drinking), boasting, speech making, the recitation of poems to the accompaniment of the harp, and the exchange of gifts.[2] However, relatively little attention has been paid to the poem's interest in hunting. As a direct source of food and clothing, hunting was often a matter of life and death for early medieval communities.[3] Yet, in early medieval England, as in the present day, the hunting of game was also an aristocratic and royal leisure pursuit.[4] Bede, for example, casually mentions that King Oswine of Deira (d. 651) "had just come in from hunting" when he sat down to dine in his hall with Bishop Aidan (*Ecclesiastical History* III.14),[5] while, at the end of the ninth century, Asser writes approvingly of the young king-to-be, Alfred: "An enthusiastic huntsman, he strives continually in every branch of hunting, and not in vain; for no one else could approach him in skill and success in that activity, just as in all other gifts of God" (*Vita Alfredi* 22).[6] The most detailed account of hunting in Pre-Conquest England comes is provided by Ælfric's *Colloquy on the Occupations*, a text that was originally written in Latin in the early eleventh century as a teaching tool, before an Old English gloss was added at a later date by an unknown author. In response to the master's questions, the hunter explains that he hunts in the service of the king by using two main methods: in the first method, he sets nets (Latin: "*retia*"; Old English: "*max*") and uses hounds to drive the animals into them, where he cuts their throats; in the second, wild beasts are chased by swift hounds and are caught without nets. When asked which animals he hunts, he responds that he catches "heortas 7 baras 7 rann 7 rægan 7 hwilon haran" ("harts and bears and does and goats and some hares"). Whatever he catches, he gives to the king in exchange for food, clothing, a horse, and armour.[7] From these various accounts, it is clear that hunting played a major role in aristocratic culture throughout the Anglo-Saxon period.

Several scholars have highlighted the importance of hunting as a motif in *Beowulf*. William Perry Marvin (2006, pp. 17–44) argues that the first part of the poem reflects a shift in hunting practices, from a model based on the hunter consuming whatever is caught (the "immediate-return hunter", i.e., Grendel), to one in which the spoils are shared out by a lord (the "delayed-return hunter", i.e., Hrothgar). More recently, David Rollason has suggested that the location of the Danish royal hall, which "sat in a liminal position between forest on one side and more cultivated land on the other", may hint at "the sort of political symbolism attaching to wild areas which we see attaching to forests in late medieval Germany" (Rollason 2012, p. 448).[8] This article investigates how the poet exploited the traditional associations of two wild animals in particular, namely, the stag and the wolf, in order to dramatize the threats to communal life and royal society.

2. Stag

While scholars continue to debate whether the *Beowulf* poet was interested in the meaning of Germanic legendary names, such as *Beowulf* ("Bee-Wolf"?), *Wealhtheow* ("Foreign Slave"?), and *Unferth* ("Lacking in Courage"?),[9] there can be no doubt that he was alert to the significance of the name of the Danish royal hall: *Heorot* ("Stag").[10] The allusion to the defence of *Heorot* by Hrothulf and Hrothgar in *Widsith* (lines 45–49) suggests that this title was probably not an original coinage of the *Beowulf* poet, but, rather, that it was already a feature of the Scylding legends that were circulating prior to the poem's composition.[11] Nevertheless, as we shall see, the *Beowulf* poet fully exploits the potential of this traditional name of the Scylding hall by ascribing animalistic qualities to the building itself, and, as we shall see below, to its wolflike tormentor, Grendel.

Stags and other types of deer were in abundance in the forests of medieval England. Bede comments, in the geographical description of *Britannia*, in the opening of the *Ecclesiastical History*, that the island "is also noted for the hunting of stags and roedeer" (I. 1).[12] As we have seen, several centuries later, the king's hunter in Ælfric's *Colloquy* lists hart and doe among the animals that he hunts on behalf of the king, and, although Old English literature has surprisingly little to say about the type of food that was consumed at Anglo-Saxon feasts (Magennis 1999), the discovery of the remains of deer in close proximity to royal and elite residences indicates that deer were extensively hunted—and presumably consumed—by the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy (Sykes 2010, 2011). The stag was also prized as game on account of its valuable antlers, which were used for decoration as well as for practical purposes, such as to make ink-horns.[13] Indeed, Isidore states that the deer's Latin name, *cervus*, is derived from the Greek word for horn (κεραζ) (*Etymologies* XII.i.18; Barney et al. 2009, p. 248).[14]

Although the influence of hagiographical and homiletic motifs have been detected elsewhere in *Beowulf*, the poet does not seem to have drawn on the Christian associations of the stag/hart, which may not have been fully developed at the time of the poem's composition.[15] Recent scholarship on the dating of the poem has seen a return to the old consensus that *Beowulf* originated in an Anglian-speaking kingdom (i.e., Mercia, Northumbria, or East Anglia) in the seventh or eighth century.[16] During this period, and perhaps stemming from its associations with aristocratic hunting, the stag was revered as a symbol of royal power, as is demonstrated by the great whetstone, or royal sceptre, that was found in the seventh-century Sutton Hoo ship burial.[17] It is this royal association of the stag, together with its status as prized game, that the *Beowulf* poet exploits in his complex depiction of the Danish royal hall.

Heorot is first introduced with the narrator's statement that, after achieving success in battle and after gathering a loyal warband, King Hrothgar gave orders for the building of a great hall ("heal-reced" ("hall-building"), line 68a; "medo-ærn micel" ("great mead-hall"), line 69a; "heal-ærna mæst" ("greatest of hall buildings"), line 78a), from which he dealt out rings to the old and young. Reflecting on his work, Hrothgar "scōp him Heort naman" ("decided to name the hall 'Stag'", line 78b). After describing how the Danish king was

true to his word as well as his distribution of the rings and treasures (lines 80–81a), the narrator presents a striking visual image of this towering stag-like structure,[18] which is swiftly undercut by an allusion to its imminent destruction by fire:[19]

> Sele hlīfade
>
> *hēah ond horn-gēap*; heaðo-wylma bād,
>
> lāðan līġes— ne wæs hit lenġe þā ġēn
>
> þæt se ecg-hete āþum-swēoran
>
> æfter wæl-nīðe wæcnan scolde. (Emphasis added).
>
> (Lines 81b–85)

> The hall rose up, *high and horn-gabled*; it awaited battle surges, of hateful flame—it was not long after that the sword-hatred between father-in-law (i.e., Hrothgar) and son-in-law (i.e., Ingeld) would awaken after deadly slaughter.

By emphasising, on the one hand, Heorot's imposing size and, on the other hand, its vulnerability to attack, the poet may have had in mind the stag's reputation as both a formidable and a timid creature.[20]

The hall's stag-like appearance is again to the fore in the account of Grendel's night-time assault on Heorot, during which the monster stealthily advances under the cover of darkness towards the "horn-reced" ("horned-hall", line 704a), before "onbræd þā bealo-hȳdiġ, ðā hē gebolgen wæs,/recedes mūþan" ("he angrily tore open the hall's mouth, when he was swollen with rage", lines 723–24a).[21] Stanley B. Greenfield notes that, although the collocation, *reced/hūs* and *muþ(a)*, is a conventional formula for a door, which appears elsewhere in Old English verse, its appearance here in *Beowulf* is "peculiarly apt imagistically and syntactically" for two reasons: (1) Because the poet has already established the strength and hardness of the door ("fyrbendum fæst", line 722a), and only now reveals that Grendel could open it with ease, reducing it "as it were, to a soft mouth, an easily-forced point of entry"; and (2) Because of Grendel's fondness for eating his prey (Greenfield 1967, pp. 151–52).[22] As Greenfield comments, such originality in the handling of traditional poetic diction is a hallmark of the *Beowulf* poet.[23] What is more, only in *Beowulf* does the formula of a building's mouth form part of a broader pattern of zoomorphism. Of course, Grendel's main goal in attacking Heorot is to kill and eat the men who dwell within it, and not to destroy the hall itself. However, in the context of the sustained depiction of the hall as a stag, Grendel's tearing open of "recedes mūþan" might also evoke the violent taking down of a beast of prey by a fierce predator, such as a wolf.[24] By assaulting the hall itself, as well as its sleeping inhabitants, Grendel presents a challenge to the rapidly expanding royal authority that this building symbolises.[25]

The poet deploys the image of the hunted stag a second time in Hrothgar's description of the Grendelkin's haunted mere. In order to impress upon Beowulf the dreadful nature of this place, the Danish king says that a stag ("*heorot*") would rather be torn apart on the shore by a pursuing pack of hounds than venture into the water:[26]

> Ðēah þe hǣð-stapa hundum geswenced,
>
> *heorot hornum trum* holt-wudu sēce,
>
> feorran geflȳmed, ǣr hē feorh seleð,
>
> aldor on ōfre, ǣr hē in wille,
>
> hafelan [beorgan];[27] nis þæt hēoru stōw. (Lines 1368–72).
>
> (Emphasis added).

> Though the heath-stepper, oppressed by hounds, *the stag with its proud horns*, should seek the forest-wood, put to flight from afar, would rather give up his life, his spirit on the shore, than venture in to (protect?) his head; that is not a pleasant place

As Orchard notes, the pursued stag's great antlers ("heorot hornum trum") "cannot help but conjure images of the imperilled Danish hall, Heorot' ("horn-gēap", line 82b; "horn-reced", line 704a)" (Orchard 2003, p. 156). Given the stag's association with aristocratic buildings and its use as a symbol of royal power in Anglo-Saxon England, Grendel's twelve-year reign of terror in Heorot (lines 144–49a) might therefore also be viewed as an assault on the institution of kingship itself, which the wider Danish community was dependent on for protection and sustenance.[28] The paralysis of the terrified stag on the banks of the haunted mere mirrors the inertia of King Hrothgar, who sits powerless in the face of Grendel's nightly assaults on his hall (lines 129b–37, 144–59a, and 189–93).[29] In order to develop this predatory aspect of Grendel's character, the poet draws on various traditional associations of one of the most feared members of the animal kingdom, and the perennial enemy of the deer: the wolf.[30]

3. Wolf

The characterisation of Grendel and his mother is celebrated for its complexity and ambiguity. Both figures have their roots in the folktale of the Two Trolls, in which a hero typically fights male and female trolls in a building, and then in a watery setting. At times, they are presented sympathetically, as human beings who suffer exile and grief, while, at other times, they are cast as demonic monsters, and as the descendants of Cain who are hostile to God and to humankind.[31] Despite the general recognition that Grendel is sometimes associated with the figure of the wolf, relatively little attention has been paid to the poet's extensive use of lupine imagery in the characterisation of not only Grendel, but also his mother.[32] In the discussion that follows, I highlight how the poet draws on the traditional associations of the wolf in order to cast Grendel and his mother, variously, as predators and as hunted vermin, as man-eating prowlers of the wilderness, and as outlaws and demons. Then, in the final section of this essay, I will discuss the development of the wolf imagery in the account of the hunting of King Ongentheow by Wulf Wonreding and his brother, Eofor ("Boar"), as well as the poet's imaginative treatment of the beasts-of-battle motif.

No animal was more feared or hated in the early Middle Ages than the wolf.[33] In his *Etymologies*, Isidore derives the Latin term, *lupus*, from the Greek λυκρς, "because it slaughters whatever it finds in a frenzy of violence (perhaps cf. λυσσα, "rage") [. . .]. It is a violent beast, eager for gore" (XII. 23–24).[34] As ferocious creatures that were associated with battle, wolves were frequently depicted alongside boars, eagles, and serpents in early Anglo-Saxon art (Adams 2015), while Old English poets refer to warriors as "*here-/hilde-wulfas*" ("battle-wolves", *Genesis A*, lines 2015, 2051a), and as "*wæl-wulfas*" ("slaughter-wolves", *Maldon*, line 96a).[35] Of course, "*wulf*" was a highly productive name element throughout the Anglo-Saxon period, not least in *Beowulf* itself, where we encounter characters named *Wulf*, brother of *Eofor* ("Boar"), *Wulf-gar*, *Gar-ulf* (i.e., *Gar-wulf* ("Spear Wolf")), and *Hroþ-ulf* (from *Hroþ-wulf*, perhaps also "Famous Wolf"), alongside the Geatish hero himself (possibly *Beow-(w)ulf* ("Barley-Wolf") or *Beo-wulf* ("Bee-Wolf"), a kenning for "Bear").[36]

Ælfric's hunter does not include the wolf among the list of the animals of the forest that he catches on behalf of his king, presumably because it was not valued as game. Instead, wolves were hunted primarily as vermin in the early Middle Ages, and they were viewed as not only a danger to flocks, but also, as we shall see, to people.[37] Wolf-pits, either as pits for trapping wolves, or as the lairs in which they lived, are mentioned in several Anglo-Saxon charters (Hooke 2015, p. 269), in contexts that resonate with the watery habitat of the Grendelkin.[38] For example, a grant of land from King Æthelred in Crediton, Devon, which dates from 739 (S 255), mentions a "*wulf-pytt*" close to "*grendeles pytt*" and "*caines acer*" (Cain's Acre), in a marshy landscape that features lakes (including "*deormere*" ("deer-lake") or ("animal-lake")), streams, and brooks. While the location of a certain "*grendles mere*" close to "*beowan hammes*" ("Beow's home") in an early tenth-century charter (S 416) has been long recognized (Reynolds 1955), and, to the best of my knowledge, this connection

between "*grendeles pytt*" and "*caines acer*" in S 255 has not been noted before in *Beowulf* scholarship:

> [. . .] *on grendeles pyt. of grendeles pytte* on ifigbearo. of ifigbeara on hrucgan cumbes ford. of hrucgan cumbes forda on fearnburh. of fearnbyrig on earnes hricg. of earnes hrycge on wealdan cumbes ford. of wealdan cumbe on tettan burnan. of tettan burnan up on stream oð lyllan broc. of lyllan broce on middel hrycg. of middel hrycge on herepað ford. of herepað forda on cyrtlangeat. of cyrtlan gate on suran apuldre. of suran apuldran on grenan weg. of grenan wege *on wulfpyt. of wulfpytte on stream oð þa laca tolycgaþ.* [. . .] þanon on *deormere*. of deormere on langan stan [. . .] þanon on *caines æcer. of caines æcere on wulfcumbes heafod* [. . .].

> [. . .] *to Grendel's pit, from Grendel's pit* to Ivy Grove, from Ivy Grove to the Woodcock's Valley's ford, from Woodcock's Valley's ford to Farnborough, from Farnborough to Eagle's Ridge, from Eagle's Ridge to the forest of Cumbesford, from Cumbe forest to Tett's Stream, from Tett's Stream up the stream until Lill's Brook, from Lill's Brook to Middle Ridge, from Middle Ridge to Herepath crossing, from Herepath crossing to Cyrtle's Gate, from Cyrtle's Gate to Sour Apple-Tree, from Sour Apple-Tree to Green Way, from Green Way *to Wolf-Pit, from Wolf-Pit to the stream until it runs into the lake* [. . .] from there to *Deer/Animal Mere*, from Deer Mere to the Long Stone [. . .] *thence to Cain's Acre, from Cain's Acre to Wolf-Hollow's Head* [. . .].

Among the almost seventy named places that are included in this charter, only two feature "*-pytt*" as the second element: "*wulf-pytt*" and "*grendeles pytt*". This collocation may hint at an association between Grendel's lair and the habitation (or trapping) of wolves (and the biblical Cain) in the English landscape.[39] Another Grendel's Pit, which was again located near to lakes, marshes, forests, and wolf-inhabited hills, features in a grant of land by King Cenred of Mercia in Worcestershire from 708 (S 78):

> Ærest *of grindeles pytt* on wiði mære · of wiði mære on reade sloh · of þam sloh up on þa fearnige leage · of þere leage *on wulfan dune* · of þere dune on beran heafde · of beran heafde on wude crofte · of þam crofte on carca dic · of ðere dice on þene blace pol · of þam pole æfter long pidele into *þam mersce · of þam mersce æft on grindeles pytt*

> First from *Grendel's Pit to the Withy Mere*, from Withy Mere to the Red Slough, from that slough up to the ferny wood, from the wood to the *Wolf Hill*, from the hill to the Bear's Head, from the Bear's Head to Wood Croft, from that croft to Carca Ditch, from that ditch to that Black Pool, from the pool along the Piddle into the marsh, *from the marsh back to Grendel's Pit*.

Several details of the forbidding landscape that is occupied by the Grendelkin provide a close match to these charters:

> Hīe dȳgel lond
>
> warigeað, *wulf-hleoþu*, windige næssas,
>
> frēcne fengelād, ðǣr fyrgen-strēam
>
> under næssa genipu niþer gewīteð,
>
> flōd under foldan. (Lines 1357b–61a) (Emphasis added).

> They occupy a mysterious land, *wolf-slopes*, windy cliffs, terrible treacherous fen-tracks, where the mountain stream flows downward under the darkness of cliffs, water under the earth.

Noting the traditional association of wolves with precipices, and the identification of cliffs with places of burial and suicide, Norman E. Eliason has argued that that this image "may well have conjured up a picture of a cliff where wolves lurked, feeding upon animal and human carcasses" (Eliason 1935, p. 21). As I will now demonstrate, the poet

also exploits the wolf's reputation as an eater of human beings in the characterisation of the Grendelkin.

Both Grendel and his mother are said to be "grim ond grǣdig" ("fierce and greedy", lines 121a, 1499a),[40] which are qualities that are frequently ascribed to wolves in Old English literature. For example, in a passage towards the end of Blickling Homily XVI, which presents a close analogue to Hrothgar's account of the Grendelkin's haunted mere, we read how devils "on nicra onlicnesse" ("in the shape of sea-monsters") grasp at doomed souls "swa grǣdig wulf" ("like greedy wolves"), who drop from cliffs into the frozen lake that forms the entrance to hell (Morris [1874–80]1967, p. 209).[41] Grendel's own greed is highlighted in the narrator's description of how, upon entering Heorot, he rejoices in his mind ("þā his mōd āhlōg", line 730b) at the expectation of a feast ("wist-fylle wēn", line 734a). The focus then shifts to his gluttony, as he tears apart a sleeping Geatish warrior, Hondscio, limb from limb, before devouring his flesh and blood:

> Nē þæt se āglǣca yldan þōhte,
>
> ac hē gefēng hraðe forman sīðe
>
> slǣpendne rinc, slāt unwearnum,
>
> bāt bān-locan, blōd ēdrum dranc,
>
> syn-snǣdum swealh; sōna hæfde
>
> unlyfigendes eal gefeormod,
>
> fēt ond folman. (Lines 739–45a)

> The awe-inspiring one did not think to delay, but quickly he seized at the first pass a sleeping warrior, cut into him without warning, bit the bone-locks, drank blood from the veins, sinful morsels; soon he completely devoured the feet and hands of the unliving one.

Hugh Magennis has described this scene as a monstrous parody of the courtly decorum of the feasting scenes that occur elsewhere in the poem (Magennis 1999, pp. 24–25), while Andy Orchard notes that, in describing Grendel's cannibalism, the narrator "concentrates on just those aspects which would cause most offence to a Christian audience" (Orchard 1995, p. 63). Moreover, this revolting scene of gluttony and butchery is also reminiscent of the actions of a predatory wolf that steals into a farmyard or dwelling at night to capture and eat an animal, or even a sleeping human.[42] Equally wolflike is the manner in which Grendel habitually stalks the hall at night (lines 115–17, 716b–17), before swiftly creeping across the floor (lines 121b–22a, 724b–26a), with the intention of consuming ("ðicgean",[43] line 736a) his prey before returning to his mountain lair, where he rejoices in his plunder (lines 123b–25).

While it is impossible to say how frequent wolf attacks on humans were in the Middle Ages, the fear of being eaten alive by wolves was certainly a very real one in pre-Conquest England, as it still is in many parts of the world to this day, and it is alluded to in no less than three of the wisdom poems that are preserved in the tenth-century Exeter Book.[44] Although the compositional dates of these poems are unknown, in each case, the reference to the man-eating wolf appears in a *sum*-catalogue, and it seems likely that these sections reflect the oral tradition (Neidorf 2020, p. 108).[45] *The Wanderer* describes how "sumne se hāra wulf/deaðe gedǣlde" ("the grey wolf will dismember a certain one in death", lines 82b–83a); the narrator of *Beowulf* uses the same verb to describe how, upon entering Heorot and seeing a large group of sleeping Danes, Grendel "mynte þæt hē gedǣlde [. . .] ānra gehwylces/līf wið līce" ("intended that he should sever the life from the body of each of them", lines 731a–33a). Further parallels with Grendel are presented by, *The Fortunes of Mortals*, which warns of the terrible fate that awaits a certain unfortunate youth:

> Sumum þæt gegongeð on geoguð-fēore
>
> þæt se ende-stæf earfeð-mæcgum
>
> wēalic weorþeð. *Sceal hine wulf etan,*
>
> *hār hǣð-stapa*; hinsīþ þonne

mōdor bimurneð. Ne bið swylc monnes geweald.

(*The Fortunes of Mortals*, lines 10–14). (Emphasis added).

For some sufferers it happens that the end

woefully occurs during youth.

The wolf, the hoary heath stalker,

will devour him; his mother will then mourn

his departure. Such is not under human control. [46]

The man-eating Grendel is similarly described as a "mǣre mearc-stapa, sē þe mōras hēold,/fen ond fǣsten" (a "famous border-stepper, the one who ruled the moors, fen and stronghold", lines 103–04a), and "sinnihte hēold,/mistige mōras" ("sinfully he ruled the misty moors", lines 161b–62a). Verbal parallels such as these would have encouraged the poem's original audience to identify Grendel as he creeps toward Heorot through the mist with a lone wolf stalking its prey.

Another wisdom poem, *Maxims I*, warns that a wretched outlaw who takes greedy wolves as his companions will suffer an equally terrible fate:[47]

Wel mon sceal wine healdan on wega gehwylcum;

oft mon fereð feor bi tūne, þær him wat frēond unwiotodne.

Winelēas, won-sǣlig mon genimeð him wulfas tō gefēran,

fela-fǣcne dēor. Ful oft hine se gefēra slīteð;

gryre sceal for greggum, grǣf dēadum men;

hungre hēofeð, nales þæt hēafe bewindeð,

ne hūru wæl wēpeð wulf se grǣga,

morþor-cwealm mæcga, ac hit ā māre wille. (*Maxims I*, lines 143–51)

One must be true to a friend on each path;

one often travels far around a homestead, where he knows he has no certain friend.

Friendless, the unhappy man takes wolves as companions,

very treacherous animals. Very often that companion tears him;

there must be terror on account of the grey one, a grave for the dead man;

the grey wolf laments its hunger, not at all circles the grave with a dirge,

indeed does not mourn over the slaughter,

the murder of men, but it always wants more. [48]

In *Beowulf*, the traditional figures of the miserable outlaw and the greedy wolf are combined in the form of Grendel, who is similarly described both as an "atol ān-genġea" ("wretched solitary goer", line 165a) who is "drēamum bedǣled" ("deprived of joys", line 721a), and as a remorseless consumer of human flesh who rejoices at the prospect of another feast upon entering Heorot (lines 730b–34a).[49]

The horror of being torn apart and eaten by wolves expressed in these Old English poems may also reflect the belief that a dismembered body could not be resurrected on Judgment Day (Jurasinski 2007b). In *Beowulf*, of course, the question of the salvation of pagan souls is notoriously vexed.[50] However, it is at least possible that the Christian audience would have found Grendel's preferred method of eating his human prey particularly abhorrent for this same reason. Not only did the Danes not know how to worship the true God (lines 181b–83a), but those of them unfortunate enough to die at the hands of Grendel were also denied any hope whatsoever of bodily resurrection.[51]

Consolidating this link between the Grendelkin and wolves are several lupine epithets applied to the pair. For example, at line 1267a, the narrator describes Grendel as "heoro-wearh hetelic", where the first element, "heoro-" means "sword", while the second element, "-wearh", may mean either "oppressor" (Cf. the Old High German *warag* ("dreadful

transgressor")) or "wolf" (the Old Norse "*vargr*" ("wolf", "dreadful transgressor")).[52] Taking "wearh" as "wolf" here has the advantage of placing the wolf and the stag in opposition across the caesura:

> Þanon wōc fela
>
> geōsceaft-gāsta; wæs þǣra Grendel sum,
>
> heoro-*wearh* hetelic, sē æt *Heorote* fand
>
> wæccendne wer wīges bīdan. (Lines 1265b–68) (Emphasis added).

> Thence were born a great many misbegotten spirits; Grendel was one of those, hateful sword-*wolf*, who at *Heorot/Stag* discovered the sleeping man, awaiting battle.

Grendel's mother is referred to not only as "brim-wylf" ("she-wolf", lines 1506a,[53] 1599a), but also as "grund-wyrgen" ("wolf of the deep" *or* "transgressor of the deep", line 1518b).[54] The feminine form, *wylfen* ("she-wolf"), appears in the Old English glosses for "Bellona, i. furia, dea belli, mater Martis" ("Bellona, fury, goddess of war, mother of Mars"), and "beluae, bestiae maris" ("monster, beast of the sea").[55] Moreover, although Grendel's mother's war-terror ("wig-gryre", line 1284a) may be less than that of a "wǣpned-men" ("weaponed-man/man", line 1284b),[56] similar to the goddess, Bellona, who is typically depicted wearing a helmet and carrying a sword or spear, carries a "seax" ("short sword", line 1545b), and she appears to be protected by some form of body armour when Beowulf's blow with his own sword, Hrunting, is deflected off her neck (lines 1518–28).[57]

Grendel's physical features, about which information is so scarce, present another link with the wolf. Scholars have identified a number of literary analogues for the terrible light that gleams from his eyes as he enters Heorot ("him of ēagum stōd/ligge gelīcost lēoht unfǣger" ("from his eyes shone an ugly light, most like flame", lines 726b–27), including the humans and serpents that are described in *The Wonders of the East* (Orchard 2003, p. 25), and the giants in the biblical Book of Wisdom (Anlezark 2006).[58] Another, perhaps more immediate context for Grendel's shining eyes, however, is provided by the gleaming eyes of the wolf at night. Similar to all canines, wolves possess a photoreceptor behind the retina that is known as the "tapetum lucidum" ("bright tapestry"), which allows them to see in the dark. Occasionally, light is reflected from this structure, which produces the phenomenon known as "eye-shine".[59] As Irina Rau has pointed out, the wolf's shining eyes, as well as its association with the devil, are frequently recorded in later medieval bestiaries (Rau 2018, p. 11).[60] For example, the influential *Second-Family Bestiary*, which was probably produced in England in the mid-twelfth century, states: "The wolf's eyes shine in the night like lanterns, because certain of the Devil's works appear beautiful and wholesome to blind and foolish men" (Clark 2006, p. 143).[61] Sam Newton similarly connects the light that shines from Grendel's eyes with the East Anglian folk tradition of the Shuck, a wolflike canine that stalks the fens and that is associated with the devil and with death (Newton 1992, pp. 143–44).[62] To the original audience of *Beowulf*, then, this solitary detail of Grendel's physical appearance as he comes "of mōre under mist-hleoþum" ("from the moor, out of misty slopes", line 710) might have evoked the frightening image of the shining eyes of a lone wolf, or some other monstrous canine stalking its prey at night.[63]

The association between wolves and the devil that is evident in these later medieval bestiaries is also widely attested to across the Anglo-Saxon period, and it provides another link between the wolf and the demonic Grendelkin.[64] In the late-tenth century, Ælfric simply stated, "Se wulf is deoful" (*Catholic Homilies* I, 17), while the *Advent Lyrics*—a poem that probably dates from the seventh or eighth century—features an extended metaphor of the devil as a wolf attacking the Lord's flock that presents an interesting parallel to Grendel's assault on Heorot:[65]

> Hafað se *awyrgda wulf* tōstenced,
>
> *dēor dǣd-scua*, dryhten, þīn ēowde,

wīde tōwrecene þæt ðū, waldend, ǣr

blōde gebōhtes, *þæt se bealo-fulla*

hȳneð heardlȳce, ond him on hæft nimeð

ofer ūsse nīoda lust. Forþon wē, nergend, þē

biddað geornlīce brēost-gehygdum

þæt þu hrædlīce helpe gefremme

wergum wreccan.

(*Advent Lyrics*, lines 256–64a). (Emphasis added).

The cursed wolf, the fierce agent of darkness, has driven your flock apart, Lord, and scattered it far and wide. *The evil being cruelly oppresses and takes captive*, contrary to our desire and longing, that which you, the ruler, formerly bought with your blood. Therefore, saviour, we eagerly pray to you in our innermost thoughts that you may quickly help us weary exiles. [66]

This passage has no direct source in the Latin, "O Antiphons", which lie behind the *Advent Lyrics*, though the image of the wolf who scatters the flock can be traced to John 10.12 and to Acts 20.29. The verbal connections between this passage and the various descriptions of the wolflike and demonic Grendelkin are, however, extensive and are worth enumerating in full. First, we note that both the devil/wolf and the Grendelkin are cursed (the *Advent Lyrics*: "awyrgda",[67] line 256a; Grendel: "wergan gāstes" ("cursed spirit"), line 133a;[68] "forscrifen" ("condemned" (by God)), line 106b; "Godes yrre bær" ("he carried God's anger/curse"), line 711b; Grendel's mother: "grund-wyrgenne" ("wolf of the deep" *or* "transgressor of the deep", line 1518b). Moreover, both poets use "-scua" ("-shadow") compounds (both hapaxes), which are preceded by alliterating (near-homonym) adjectives that are used to describe the hated creature: "deor dæd-scua" ("beast, shadow-actor", *Advent Lyrics*, line 257a); and "deorc dēaþ-scua" ("dark death-shadow", *Beowulf*, line 160a).[69] Similar to the devil/wolf, the Grendelkin also carry their victims away once they have captured them. For example, after stating his intention to fight Grendel in Heorot, Beowulf declares:

'[. . .] Wēn' ic þæt hē wille, gif hē wealdan mōt,

in þǣm gūð-sele Gēatena lēode

etan unforhte, swā hē oft dyde

mægen-hrēð manna. Nā þū mīnne þearft

hafalan hȳdan, ac hē mē habban wile

drēore fāhne, gif meċ dēað nimeð

byreð blōdiġ wæl, byrgean þenceð,

eteð ān-genga unmurnlīce,

mearcað mōr-hopu— nō ðū ymb mīnes ne þearft

līces feorme leng sorgian. [. . .].' (Lines 442–51)

[I expect that he wishes, if he is able, to eat without fear the prince of the Geats in that war-hall, as he often has done to the glorious host of men. You will have no need to hide my head (i.e., to bury me), but he will have me gored with blood, if death takes me, he carries the bloody corpse, intends to taste it, the solitary walker eats without remorse, inhabits the moor-slopes—you will have no need to grieve for long concerning (the whereabouts of) my body.] [70]

Behind Beowulf's boastful words, we may detect a deep-seated cultural fear of being killed and eaten by a wild animal and of thereby being denied a proper burial. As we have seen, in Old English wisdom poetry, the animal that is most associated with such behaviour is the hated figure of the wolf.

In addition to these predatory lupine qualities that are ascribed to both Grendel and to Grendel's mother, on occasion the poet casts these enemies of Heorot as prey themselves. For example, the two accounts of Grendel's flight from Heorot both anticipate Hrothgar's subsequent description of the stag's doomed attempt to find refuge in the woods:

> Hē on mōde wearð

> forht on ferhðe; nō þȳ ǣr fram meahte.

> *Hyge wæs him hin-fūs, wolde on heolster flēon,*

> *sēcan dēofla ġedrǣg*

> (Lines 753b–56a). (Emphasis added).

> In his mind he became afraid in spirit; he could not (go) from there. His intention was to get himself away in a hurry, *he wished to flee to the darkness*, *to seek out the company of devils.*

> *Dēað-fǣge dēog* siððan drēama lēas

> in fen-freoðo *feorh ālegde,*

> *hǣþene sāwle*; þǣr him hel onfēng. (Lines 850–52). (Emphasis added).

> *He hid doomed to death,* after deprived of joys *he gave up his life* in the fen-refuge, *his heathen soul*; hell received him there.

The following narrative elements are shared between the flight of Grendel and the account of the hunted stag: (1) The eagerness to flee from danger; (2) The eagerness to seek a place of refuge; (3) The giving up of life; and (4) The departure of the soul/spirit. The structural and verbal affinities—and the thematic contrasts—between these passages complicate the extended animal-hunting metaphor that underlies the Heorot–Grendel episode. In an ironic reversal, the hunter has now become the hunted. Whereas the stag would rather be torn to pieces by dogs on the shore than venture into the haunted mere, Grendel plunges into the same body of water in a doomed attempt to prevent himself from being ripped apart by Beowulf.[71]

The motif of the Grendelkin as prey themselves is developed in the narrator's detailed description of the journey to the mere. In the aftermath of Grendel's first assault on Heorot, the Danes examine his tracks ("syðþan hīe þæs lāðan lāst scēawedon,/wergan gāstes") after they examine the loathsome tracks of the cursed spirit (lines 132–33a). Now, in the morning after Beowulf has ripped off Grendel's arm, men gather from afar "wundor scēawian,/lāþes lāstas" ("to examine the wonder, the tracks of the loathsome one", lines 840b–41). On his way back to the mere, the wounded Grendel leaves behind him a trail of blood ("feorh-lāstas bær" ("he carried his life-tracks"), line 846b), which provides the Danes with a clue as to his whereabouts. A large hunting party then sets out from Heorot to track them down to their lair. King Hrothgar leads the hunt, on horseback and well-equipped ("geatolic", lines 1397–1401a), accompanied by "gum-fēþa" ("foot-soldiers", line 1401b) bearing shields ("lind-hæbbendra", line 1402a). The group follow "lāstas" ("tracks", line 1402b) across "stēap stān-hliðo stīge nearwe/enge ān-paðas uncūð gelād" ("precipitous stone-cliffs with narrow paths, in single file (*or* lonely tracks), unknown trails", lines 1409–10). Upon their arrival at the bloodstained mere, a horn is blown (line 1432a), and a Geatish warrior shoots one of the sea monsters ("nicras", line 1427b) that are lying on the shore with a bow and arrow.[72] After falling into the lake, the dying beast is hooked back onto the shore by the hunters ("mid eofer-sprēotum" ("with boar-spears"), 1437b), who gaze in wonder at the "gryrelicne gist" ("terrible guest", lines 1441a), while Beowulf arms himself in preparation for his descent into the mere in pursuit of Grendel's mother. Through this sustained and varied use of hunting imagery, the Grendelkin are first cast as the wolflike predators of the noble stag, before they are themselves hunted down and killed like wolves in their mountainous watery lair.

4. The Hunting of King Ongentheow and the Beasts of Battle

Hunting imagery is deployed less frequently in the narration of the dragon fight. For example, when Beowulf sets off to seek out the dragon, we are simply told, "Gewāt þā twelfa sum" ("he went then as one of twelve", line 2401a), with none of the rituals of the hunt that we see on display in the pursuit of the Grendelkin to the mere, such as the blowing of horns, the use of bows and arrows, or the following of tracks. Only occasionally, and perhaps unconsciously, does the poet introduce an image that is derived from his knowledge of hunting, such as when the dragon tracks the thief who steals a cup from the hoard ("stearc-heort onfand/fēondes fōt-lāst" ("the brave-hearted one (i.e., the dragon) discovered the enemy's foot-tracks", lines 2288b–89a). The reason for this marked shift away from hunting imagery in the account of the hero's final monster-fight is unclear, although it probably has something to do with the nature of the adversary: a dragon. Although it is technically a member of the animal kingdom, the dragon is, of course, a mythical beast, and it is therefore not associated with hunting. Nevertheless, the narration of the dragon-fight is set within a dense patchwork of nonlinear allusions to the wars between the royal houses of the Geats and the Swedes, and it is here, in these passages, that the images of hunting and pursuit are sustained and developed.[73] In particular, the Geatish Messenger, in his long speech after Beowulf's death, relates the hunting and killing of the Swedish King, Ongentheow, by the Geatish brothers, Eofor and Wulf (lines 2961–88), before he concludes with an imaginative treatment of the traditional beasts-of-battle motif. In the discussion that follows, I argue that, in these passages, the poet expands upon and varies the stag–wolf imagery that is highlighted above in the Danish section, introduces new animals in the forms of the boar, raven, and eagle, and utilises hunting imagery as a metaphor for the conduct of warriors in battle, and for the concomitant act of plundering the slain.

First, the Messenger relates how the Swedish ruler, Ongentheow, pursued ("folgode", line 2932a) the Geats to "Hrefna Wudu" ("Ravenswood", line 2925b) in revenge for the kidnapping of his queen. Once he catches up with his quarry, Ongentheow kills King Hæthcyn and taunts the surrounded Geatish warriors that he will hang them in the morning, "fuglum[74] tō gamene" ("as sport for birds", line 2941a). Just as all seems lost for the Geats, Hygelac rides to their rescue, and his dramatic arrival is announced—just as the hunting expedition to the mere—by the blowing of trumpets and horns (line 2923b). With the tables now turned, Hygelac begins to hunt down the aged Swedish king: "þā wæs æht boden/Swēona lēodum" ("then the pursuit of the Swedish people was begun", lines 2957b–58a).[75] The hunting of Ongentheow culminates in a dramatic scene in which the Swedish ruler is savagely cut down and killed by the bestially-named Geatish assassins, Wulf ("Wolf") and Eofor ("Boar") (Owen-Crocker 2007; Williams 2015, pp. 197–98), before his corpse is plundered on the battlefield:[76]

Þǣr wearð Ongenðīo ecgum sweorda,	
blonden-fexa on bid wrecen,	
þæt se þēod-cyning ðafian sceolde	
Eafores ānne dōm. Hyne yrringa	
Wulf Wonrēding wǣpne gerǣhte,	2965
þæt him for swenge *swāt ǣdrum sprong*	
forð under *fexe*. Næs hē forht swā ðēh,	
gomela Scilfing ac forgeald hraðe	
wyrsan wrixle wæl-hlem þone,	
syððan ðēod-cyning þyder oncirde.	2970
Ne meahte se snella sunu Wonrēdes	
ealdum ceorle *ondslyht* giofan,	
ac *hē him on hēafde helm ǣr gescer*,	

> þæt hē *blōde fāh* būgan sceolde,
>
> fēoll on foldan; næs hē fǣge þā ġīt, 2975
>
> ac *hē hyne gewyrpte*, þēah ðe him wund hrine.
>
> Lēt se hearda Higelāces þegn
>
> brādne mēce, þā his brōðor læg,
>
> *eald-sweord eotonisc entiscne helm*
>
> *brecan ofer bord-weal*; ðā gebēah cyning, 2980
>
> folces hyrde, wæs in feorh dropen.
>
> Ðā wǣron monige þe his mǣg wriðon,
>
> ricone ārǣrdon, ðā him gerȳmed wearð,
>
> þæt hīe wæl-stōwe wealdan mōston.
>
> *Þenden rēafode rinc ōðerne*, 2985
>
> nam on Ongenðīo īren-byrnan,
>
> *heard swyrd hilted, ond his helm somod*,
>
> *hāres* hyrste Higelāce bær.
>
> (Lines 2961–88). (Emphasis added).

There it came to pass that *the grey-haired* Ongentheow was brought to bay with the edges of swords, so that the people-king had to submit to the sole judgement of Eofor (*Boar*). Wulf son of Wonred angrily struck him, reached him with a weapon, so that because of the blow *the blood sprang forth from his veins* from underneath his hair. Even so, he (i.e., Ongentheow) was not afraid because of that, the old Scylfing, but he quickly gave back a worse exchange for that murderous blow, after the people-king turned back. Nor could the brave son on Wonred (i.e., Wulf) deliver a counterblow to the old warrior, but he (i.e., Ongentheow) first *cut through his helmet into his head*, so that he (i.e., Wulf) had to fall to the earth, *bloodstained*; he (i.e., Ongentheow) was not fated to die yet, *but he recovered himself* although the wound injured him. The fierce thane of Hygelac (i.e., Eofor) then let the broad blade, *the gigantic ancient sword, break the giant's helmet over the shield-wall*, when his brother (i.e., Wulf) lay dead. Then the king (i.e., Ongentheow) bent down, *shepherd of the people, he was struck to his life*. Then there were many who bandaged his kin, quickly raised him up, when room was made for them, so that they were allowed to hold sway over the slaughter-place. *Then one warrior plundered another*, he took from Ongentheow the mail coat, *fierce hilted sword, and his helmet all together*, bore the ornaments of *the grey-haired one* to Hygelac.

This long section of the Messenger's speech is framed by an envelope pattern that emphasises the aged Ongentheow's grey hair ("blonden-fexa", 2962a; "hāres", 2988a).[77] Grey is, of course, not only the colour of old age in Old English poetry, but also, as we have seen, the colour of the wolf (*Fortunes*, 13a: "har hæð-stapa"; *Maxims I*, 150a: "wulf se grǣga").[78] While the wolf is typically associated with predatory behaviour, as we have seen, wolves were also hunted as vermin. Here, the wolflike Ongentheow is also cast as a shepherd of the people ("folces hyrde", line 2981a), mercilessly pursued by the savage Boar and Wolf. This passage has numerous close verbal and thematic parallels with previous hunting scenes in the poem. For example, the detail of the blood springing from the stricken Ongentheow's veins (2966b) echoes the earlier description of the wolflike Grendel's devouring of Hondscio in Heorot ("blōd ēdrum dranc" ("drank blood from veins"), line 742b), while Ongentheow's recovery after the blow from Wulf's sword (2975a) recalls how Beowulf regained his feet during his fight with Grendel's mother ("syððan hē eft āstōd" ("afterwards he stood back up again'), line 1556b). The manner in which Eofor cuts through Ongentheow's helmet with an *"eald-sweord eotonisc"* (an "ancient gigantic sword"), which causes him to stagger to the floor (lines 2973, 2975a, and 2979–80a), is

closely matched by the description of Beowulf's decapitation of the Grendelkin in the mere, in which he angrily strikes Grendel's mother's neck with an "eald-sweord eotenisc" (line 1558a) until the blade penetrates her armour and she staggers to the floor (1565b–68). Finally, Eofor's presentation of Ongentheow's plundered sword hilt and helmet to Hygelac (2987–88) recalls Beowulf's presentation of Grendel's head and the giant sword-hilt to Hrothgar.[79]

In the Messenger's account of the Geatish–Swedish wars, then, animal imagery is used to reflect the brutality of a conflict in which the protagonists on both sides display lupine qualities, with each ruthlessly hunting down and killing their prey. The wolflike Ongentheow first pursues and kills the young Geatish king, Hæthcyn, and taunts the besieged survivors that their corpses will be fed to birds. Then, Ongentheow himself is pursued and killed by Boar and Wulf, who symbolically dishonour and dismember his body by plundering his armour. This sustained interplay of animal figures culminates in the remarkable variation on the traditional beasts-of-battle motif that forms the conclusion to the Messenger's long speech.

The tricolon of raven, eagle, and wolf typically appear in Old English poetry on the eve of battle in anticipation of carrion.[80] However, whereas in other poems, these animals are usually part of the battle scenery, sometimes appearing individually, sometimes as a pair or trio, uniquely in *Beowulf*, all three animals are presented together, discussing how they have fared at their feast:[81]

> ac se wonna hrefn
>
> fūs ofer fǣgum fela reordian,
>
> earne secgan hū him æt ǣte spēow,
>
> þenden hē wið wulf wæl rēafode. (Lines 3024b–27)

> but the dark raven, eager over the doomed, often inquires, asks of the eagle how it went for him at the feast, when along with the wolf he plundered the slain.

Not only does the placement of the beasts in conversation effectively humanise them, as Mo Pareles has recently noted (Pareles 2019), but the positioning of this passage at the end of the Messenger's speech, in which the predatory boar and wolf are humanised in the form of Eofor, Wulf, and Ongentheow, collapses the boundary between the human and animal hunters. Indeed, the Messenger uses the same verb, "rēafode" ("robbed", "plundered", "rifled", "stripped", lines 2985a, 3027b), to describe the actions of Eofor and the beasts of battle as they pick over the slain.

Another predatory animal is introduced into the narrative when, following the conclusion of the Messenger's speech, the Geats rise as a group and trudge, dejected and weeping, "under Earna Næs" ("under the Eagle's Cliff", lines 3031b). The implications of this allusion to another bird of prey so soon after the account of the hunting of Ongentheow and the beasts-of-battle passage are clear: without a leader of Beowulf's stature to protect them, the Geats will be hunted down and slain as Ongentheow was, with their bodies plundered by their enemies and picked over by animals.

5. Conclusions

This article highlights the sustained use of hunting imagery in *Beowulf*, and it argues that the poet draws on the traditional associations of the stag and the wolf in his depictions of Heorot and the Grendelkin in the first part of the poem, before varying these motifs in the account of the hunting of King Ongentheow. I proposed that the poet inherited the name of the Scylding royal hall, Heorot, from Germanic legend, and that the poet knew that the stag was a symbol of royal power. From this kernel, I suggested that the poet developed a metaphor of the Danish royal hall as a hunted stag that is brutally taken down by a monstrous and wolflike predator. In elaborating the figures of Grendel and Grendel's mother, I argue the poet merged the northern folktale motif of a pair of male and female trolls who inhabit a watery lair and prey on the local population with a range of

traditions that are associated with the hated figure of the wolf. From vernacular wisdom poetry, the poet derived the motif of the wolf as a companion to the outlaw, as well as its fearsome reputation as a consumer of human flesh, both of which the poet brings together in the figure of Grendel himself. From homiletic tradition, the poet took the wolf's association with the devil. By combining these wolflike qualities with the tradition of a race of monstrous creatures descended from Cain, the poet produced a pair of terrifying predators who could serve as both natural enemies of the stag and ancient adversaries of God. In the narration of the pursuit of Grendel and his mother to the mere, the poet drew on his familiarity with large-scale royal-led hunts, from which he took details, such as the navigation of narrow precipitous tracks that led to the quarry, and the use of hunting horns, as well as weapons, such as bows and arrows. Finally, and more tentatively, I suggest that the hunting imagery is used for a rather different purpose in the final part of the poem, in which the hierarchy of the noble stag and the devilish wolf gives way to the opportunistic scavenging of the beasts of battle and their human counterparts, Eofor and Wulf. Through this consistent and varied use of hunting and animal imagery, the *Beowulf* poet transformed the raw materials of royal legend, folktale, and biblical lore into a work of imaginative art that reflected the leisure interests of the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy while also giving voice to some of the most deep-seated fears of the wider community.[82]

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

1   Kathryn Hume previously described the poem's theme as "threats to social order" (Hume 1975, p. 5). See further, Magennis 1996. All quotations from *Beowulf* are from Fulk et al. (2008), although I have silently hyphenated the compounds.

2   See, for example Magennis (1996), pp. 60–81 (on feasting); (Bjork 1994) (on speech as gift).

3   For example, Bede records in his *Ecclesiastical History* I.12 that the Britons were left without food following the Roman withdrawal, "except for such relief as hunting brought" ("excepto uenandi solacio"; Colgrave and Mynors 1979, pp. 44–45).

4   See, for example, Sykes (2010).

5   Colgrave and Mynors (1979, p. 259); "uenerat enim de uenatu" (p. 258).

6   Keynes and Lapidge (1983, p. 75); Stevenson (1904, p. 20): "In onmi venatoria arte industrius venator incessabiliter laborat non in vanum; nam incomparabilis omnibus peritia et felicitate in ilia arte, sicut et in ceteris omnibus Dei donis, fuit". Asser lists hunting as the foremost skill appropriate to a nobleman (*Vita Alfredi*, 75; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, p. 90), and twice refers to Alfred engaging in hunts once he assumed the throne (*Vita Alfredi*, 74, 76; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, pp. 89, 91). In the Prose Preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care*, "Alfred" uses hunting imagery to describe how the scholars of his day have lost the "track" (OE "*spor*") of wisdom left by their ancestors (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, p. 125). Similarly, the narrator of the preface to the Alfredian translation of St Augustine's *Soliloquies* describes how every man, once he has built a hamlet on leased land from his lord, delights to engage in hunting, fowling, and fishing (Keynes and Lapidge 1983, p. 139). The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for 885 (=884) records that the Carolingian ruler, Carloman II, was slain by a boar while out hunting (see also, *Vita Alfredi*, 68; Keynes and Lapidge 1983, p. 87).

7   Garmonsway (1978), pp. 23–25.

8   See also Faraci (1998) (on deer hunting); and Sykes (2011); Thiébaux (2015), pp. 17–18; Harlan-Haughey (2016).

9   For studies of these and other names in *Beowulf* see, for example, Robinson (1968); Fulk (1987); Fulk (2007); Jurasinski (2007a); Shippey (2014); Abram (2017); Neidorf (2018); and Shaw (2020).

10   For the identification of Heorot with the stag, see Orchard (2003), p. 156. On animal names in *Beowulf*, see Orchard (2003), p. 172. See also Herben (1935). The study of animals in medieval literature has become a major subject in recent decades. See, for example, Mann (2009); and Bintley and Williams (2019).

11   In Scandinavian sources, the Scylding/Skjoldung hall is referred to as "Lejre". Stephen J. Herben Jr. notes that an eighteenth-century map records two place names, *Stor Hiort* and *Lille Hiorte*, in the vicinity of Lejre (Herben 1935, p. 943). See further, Niles and Osborn (2007). For possible the connections with Hartlepool (Old English "*Heruteu*"), see Harris (2014). *Widsith* is usually thought to be among the earliest Old English poems, and it is probably antecedent to *Beowulf*: see Neidorf (2013b); and Neidorf

(2019). For arguments for a later post-Alfredian date of composition for *Widsith*, see Niles (1999); and Weiskott (2015). On the probable dating of *Beowulf* to the seventh or eighth century, see the essays in Neidorf (2014). Regardless of the date of *Widsith*, however, the appearance of the name, *Heorot*, in both poems, suggests that it was the traditional name of the Scylding court in England.

12   Colgrave and Mynors (1979), pp. 20–21 ("et ceruorum caprearumque uenatu insignis").

13   The use of antlers for making inkwells is alluded to in Exeter Book Riddles 88 and 93 (ASPR numbering), both of which are usually solved as "blæc-horn" ("ink-horn"); in Orchard (2021), these riddles are numbered 84 and 89. For text and translation, see Orchard (2021, pp. 408–11, 414–15). The majority of the Exeter Riddles probably date from the eighth century (see Neidorf 2013a, p. 39). Tim Flight (2016) has recently analysed the account of an aristocratic deer hunt led by King Edmund (r. 924–46) in the late-tenth century, *Vita S. Dunstani*. Della Hooke comments on the hunting of of deer for venison long before the Norman Conquest and highlights presence of deer-related terms in Pre-Conquest English place-names (Hooke 2015, pp. 267–71).

14   For a discussion of the *Beowulf* poet's possible knowledge of this and other Isidorean etymologies, see Frank (2020, p. 248).

15   On the influence of hagiography on the poem, see Rauer (2000). The hart appears frequently in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, and most famously in Psalm 42.1, "As the hart panteth after the fountains of water; so my soul panteth after thee, O God" (the Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate). In later medieval bestiaries and art, the stag often appears as a symbol of Christ, which is a tradition that can be traced back to Isidore's statement that stags are "antagonistic to serpents" (*Etymologies*, XII.i.18; Barney et al. 2009, p. 248). See Sill (1996, p. 21); Payne (1990, pp. 38–9); and Badke (2022): http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast162.htm (accessed 2 March 2022). In the tenth-century Old English prose version of the *Life of St Eustace*, the pagan lord, Placidas, is out leading a deer hunt when, separated from the majority of the group, he is confronted by a great stag ("ormæte heort", Kramer et al. 2020, p. 58). After pursuing the stag into a wood with a small group, Placidas becomes separated from his men. Eventually, he catches up with the stag, who is standing on a high rock, and he sees, "betweox þæs heortes hornum" ("between the horns of the stag"), a gleaming crucifix. The Old English, *Life of Eustace*, is based on a Latin version of the Greek original.

16   See esp. Fulk (1992, p. 390); Wormald (2006); and Neidorf (2014).

17   See Raw (1992); and Fulk et al. (2008, pp. 119–20).

18   Scholars have suggested that the name, *Heorot*, stems from the attachment of antlers, or even horns, to the gables (Rollason 2012, p. 448; Sykes 2010, p. 177; Blair 2018, p. 106). Blair argues that *Beowulf*'s Heorot is a literary counterpart to the "great hall complexes" of seventh-century England, such as the Northumbrian royal palace at Yeavering (Blair 2018, pp. 137–38).

19   The cause of the fire at Heorot is a feud with the Heathobards: Beowulf predicts that a fight will break out at the marriage of Hrothgar's daughter, Freawaru, and the Heathobard prince, Ingeld (lines 2020–69a). In *Widsith*, Hrothgar and his nephew, Hrothulf, defend Heorot against attack by a Heathobard force that is led by the same Ingeld.

20   Stags use their antlers to defend themselves against attack from other animals, such as wolves. For first-hand accounts from North America in the late twentieth century, see Mech et al. (2015, pp. 13–27).

21   During the ensuing fight between Beowulf and Grendel, the narrator twice uses the personal pronoun, *he*, to refer to the hall, as it struggles to withstand the battering it receives from the titanic struggle of these two fierce adversaries (772b, 773b).

22   Greenfield (1967, p. 150) notes two further instances of the formula: *Cotton Gnomes*, lines 36b–37a: "Duru sceal on healle/rūm recedes mūþ" ("The door must be in the hall, the spacious building's mouth"); and *Genesis A*, lines 1363–64a: "Him on hoh beléac heofron-rices weard/mere-hūses mūþ" ("At his" (i.e., Noah's) "heels, the guardian of the heaven-kingdom locked the mouth of the sea-house" (i.e., the Ark)).

23   See further Brodeur (1959).

24   On wolves as hunters of deer, see below. Wolves typically kill their prey, including deer, by biting the nose or throat and holding on until the animal dies of shock. For first-hand accounts of wolves hunting deer in late twentieth-century North America, see Mech et al. (2015, pp. 13–27).

25   On the symbolism of the hall in Old English poetry, see Hume (1974). On Grendel as symbolic of the threats to royal authority, and as a portent of a contested succession, see Leneghan (2020a, pp. 155–76).

26   On the motif of deer hunting in the poem, see Faraci (1998). Scholars have noted analogues in the *Aeneid*, VI. 239ff. (Klaeber 1911), and a thirteenth-century hunting manual (Rigg 1982). Others have connected this passage with pagan fertility cults (Nicholson 1986), or have read it as a Christian allegory (Robertson 1951, pp. 33–34). Anlezark (2007) places it within the classical Avernian tradition and compares a related passage in the Old English poem, *Solomon and Saturn II*.

27   The metrical rules indicate that the scribe has skipped a word after "*hafelan*". The verb, "*beorgan*" ("to protect"), is supplied by most editors, including (Fulk et al. 2008). For a recent and persuasive argument in favour of an emendation instead to "*hafele*", which produces the reading, "with its head raised", see Porck (2020). The fifteenth-century hunting manual, *The Master of Game*, describes how the stag will enter into a lake or marsh to try and throw pursuing hounds off its scent (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 1909, p. 33).

28 On Grendel as a symbol of a royal usurper and as a portent of threats to the Scylding dynasty, see Leneghan (2020a, pp. 162–76). In the opening lines of the poem, God recognizes the "fyren-ðearfe" ("terrible need") that the Danes had endured during a long period without kings (14b–16a). On the fear of lordlessness as a central theme in the poem, see Stanley (2005).

29 Noting the correspondence in the names between the animal and the royal hall, Sarah Lynn Higley reads this passage as a "counter-image" of the conventional motif that is known as the "Hero on the Beach" (on which, see Crowne 1960), in which the stag "appears to present a complex visual metaphor for the passivity and entrapment present in Hrothgar's kingdom" (Higley 1986, p. 344). On Hrothgar's inertia, see also Porck (2019, pp. 188–97); and Leneghan (2020a, pp. 50–67).

30 In their study of the interaction between wolves and white-tailed deer in contemporary North America, Mech, Smith, and MacNulty observe "a constant tension between the two species, with each trying to survive by outdoing the other" (Mech et al. 2015, p. 13).

31 For an overview, see Fulk et al. (2008, p. xxxvi–l).

32 See, for example, Orchard (2003, p. 156); and Marvin (2006, p. 19). For a linguistic survey of the wolf terms in the poem, see Wiersma (1961, pp. 41–53, 474–75). For a useful survey of wolves in Old English literature, see now Flight (2021, pp. 62–88). On the importance of wolves in the Volsung legend, which is alluded to in *Beowulf* in lines 875–900, see Vowell (Forthcoming).

33 A rare example of a positive depiction of a wolf in pre-Conquest England is found in Ælfric's late tenth-century, *Life of St Edmund*. After the saint's martyrdom, a wolf plays against type by miracously protecting his dismembered head in a forest (Clayton and Mullins 2019, pp. 196–97). See Faulkner (2012). For the more typical negative association of the wolf in the same text, see below, n. 65. Another guardian wolf appears in the twelfth-century, *Gesta Herewardi* ch. XXIX, in which the hero and his men are guided through a storm at night by a tame wolf that they mistake for a dog.

34 Barney et al. (2009, p. 253).

35 Most scholars accept that *Genesis A* was composed around the same time as *Beowulf*, which was in the seventh or eighth century (e.g., Fulk 1992, pp. 348–51; and Neidorf 2013a, p. 39); *Maldon* dates from the late tenth or early eleventh century, even though the poet appears to borrow directly from *Beowulf* (see Atherton 2021, pp. 128–38).

36 Werner (1963). Keynes suggests that Bishop Wulfstan of York used the pen name, *Lupus*, "as a warning to his flock that he was out on the prowl" (Keynes 2005, p. 22). For debate as to the meaning of Beowulf's name, see, for example, Abram (2017); and Shaw (2020, pp. 29–51).

37 In Ælfric's, *Colloquy*, the shepherd says that he guards his sheep with dogs in hot and cold weather, "þe læs wulfas forsweglen hig" ("lest wolves should eat them") (Garmonsway 1978, p. 22). Once caught and killed, wolves were valued more for their (foul-smelling) fur than for their meat.

38 S 50, 255, 276, 446, 582, 600, 970, 1036. All charters are cited by Sawyer number (S) from the Electronic Sawyer corpus (www.esawyer.org.uk), which is based on Sawyer (1968). The results were sourced from the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* (Healey et al. 2009), which was accessed on 29 December 2021. Cf. *The Master of Game* VII: "Also men take them (i.e., wolves) within pits and with needles and with haussepieds or with venomous powders that men give them in flesh, and in many other manners" (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 1909, p. 61).

39 Cf. "*grendles bece*" ("beech") (S 786); "*gryndeles syllen*" ("bog") (S 645); "*grendeles gatan*" ("gate") (S 1451); "*grendel*" (S 669); and "*grendles mere*" (S 416, 579). The poet twice relates the Grendelkin's descent from the misbegotten line of Cain (lines 102–14 and 1261b–65). The charter might therefore suggest that the Grendelkin were already associated with Cain prior to the composition of the poem. Alternatively—and I would suggest, more probably—the collocations of these place names might reflect the popularity of *Beowulf*, which perhaps inspired its audience to name the features in their own landscape after the people and places mentioned in the poem. A similar process seems to lie behind the naming of a neolithic burial chamber in Oxfordshire as "Welandes smiððan" ("Wayland's Smithy"), which is recorded in a charter of King Eadred to Ælfeah, 955 (S 564), after the legendary Germanic smith who is mentioned in *Beowulf* (line 455a), as well as in several other Old English texts. For possible connections between the name, *Grendel*, and the East Anglian word, *grindle*, which means, "drain", or "ditch", see Newton (1992, p. 144). Kaske notes the possible connections between the name, *Grendel*, and the Old English verb, *grindan* ("to grind"), and the noun, *grund* ("the bottom of a lake"), and connects the name's unusual *-el* ending with the names of the fallen angels, or "watchers" (e.g., Rameel, Kkabiel, Tamiel, Ramiel, Danel, and Ezeqeel) who, according the Book of Enoch, had intercourse with the daughters of Cain, which brought forth a race of cannibalistic giants (Kaske 1971, p. 426).

40 In a recent study of the extra (i.e., nonstructural) alliteration in Old English verse, Mark Griffith notes: "Word-initial *gr-* opens many words in Old English in the related semantic areas of grimness, grief, anger and violence", and suggests that the *Beowulf* poet used gr-clusters, such as *grim ond grædig*, as "a vehicle for the characterisation of the monstrous" (Griffith 2018, pp. 97–99).

41 The homily is labelled, "XVII", in Morris' edition. For a survey of the extensive scholarship on the connections between the Blickling XVI, *Beowulf*, and the *Visio Pauli*, see Orchard (2003, pp. 157–58). See also Malone (1958).

42 Compare the description of wolves in *The Master of Game*: "And there be some (wolves) that hunt at the hart [. . .]. There are some that eat children and men and eat no other flesh from the time that they be acherned (blooded) by men's flesh [. . .]. They are called wer-wolves, for men should beware of them [. . .]. And man's flesh is so savoury and so pleasant that when they have taken to man's flesh they will never eat the flesh of other beasts, though they should die of hunger. For many men have seen them

leave the sheep they have taken and eat the shepherd. [. . .] For he knoweth well and woteth well that he doth evil, and therefore men ascrieth (cry at) and hunteth and slayeth him. And yet for all that he may not leave his evil nature." (Baillie-Grohman and Baillie-Grohman 1909, pp. 59–60, 63).

43   This verb also appears in the context of eating, fens, a watery environment, and wolves in the enigmatic Exeter Book poem, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, lines 2a, 8a.

44   For recent commentary on these poems, see Niles (2019, pp. 93–106). In this discussion, Niles treats *The Wanderer* as a wisdom poem. See further Shippey (1994). One recent study found 489 human victims of wolf attacks in North America between 2002 and 2020 (Frey 2021). The majority of these victims were attacked by rabid wolves, but 67 were the result of predatory attacks, of whom 9 were killed. Accounts of wolves killing humans continue to inspire fear and are regularly reported in newspapers and online. See, for example, "Villagers Kill Wolf Attacking Humans" (Anon 2021), *The Times of India*, 29 October 2021: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/nagpur/villagers-kill-wolf-attacking-humans/articleshow/87346428.cms, accessed on 12 February 2022. The recent reintroduction of wolves to parts of Europe has attracted controversy, with farmers complaining about the losses of livestock and raising concerns about attacks on humans. See, for example, Hedgecoe (2021).

45   Niles (2019) treats all of the Exeter Book poems as roughly contemporary with their tenth-century manuscript, but most scholars have dated them to the early Anglo-Saxon period: Neidorf (2013a), for example, places *Maxims I* close to *Beowulf*, as part of the "archaic corpus" (i.e., prior to the ninth century), on lexical grounds; see also Cronan (2004). Fulk would assign *The Wanderer* a date later than *Beowulf* on metrical grounds (Fulk 1992, pp. 12–13, 166–67). For a study of Old English catalogue poems, see Howe (1985). See also Stanley (1956, pp. 445–47); and Stanley (2015).

46   Text and translation from Bjork (2014, pp. 56–57), with macrons added to indicate vowel lengths. The poem is often referred to as, *The Fortunes of Men*. For a recent discussion of the poem's structure and theme, see Neidorf (2020).

47   Brian O'Camb has compared this passage with Isidore's description of the wolf that is cited above (O'Camb 2016).

48   Text and translation from Bjork (2014, pp. 76–77), with alterations for British English spelling (e.g., gray/grey).

49   Grendel refuses to accept a truce ("sibbe", line 154b) or financial recompense ("fēa þingian", line 159b) for his feud with the Danes ("fǣhðe", line 153a). He is, therefore, quite literally an outlaw, who rejects the legal customs of society. William Chaney (1962) suggests that Grendel's inability to approach to the "*gif-stōl*" (lines 168–69) reflects the ancient custom whereby a criminal and murderer was denied access to royal asylum. For a survey of the interpretations of the *gif-stōl* crux, see Leneghan (2020a), pp. 162–76). For connections between Grendel and later English outlaws, such as Robin Hood, see Cotten-Spreckelmeyer (2011); Harlan-Haughey (2016).

50   Some scholars argue the poet believed that some "good pagans", such as Scyld and Beowulf, could be saved (e.g., Cox 1971), while others have rejected this possibility on the grounds of its incompatibility with the position of many of the Church Fathers (e.g., Stanley 1963). For an overview of the debate, see Fulk et al. (2008, pp. lxix–lxx).

51   On the denial of proper burial as an act of dishonouring the dead in *Beowulf*, see Owen-Crocker (2002); Leneghan (2020b).

52   The interpretation of the Old English, *wearh*, in this context, as "wolf", was first suggested by Grein (1861–1864). Klaeber ([1911–12]1997, p. 24) finds the proposal unlikely, but see Wiersma (1961, p. 54). In his study, *Wulf and Eadwacer*, Stanley also casts doubt on the association of wolves with outlaws in Old English (Stanley 1992), but the evidence of the wisdom poems cited in this article, as well as the *Advent Lyrics* and *Beowulf* itself, would suggest otherwise.

53   MS 1506a reads "*brimwyl*" ("surging water"?), but most editors emend it to "*brimwylf*".

54   Sarrazin (1910) notes a parallel in *Bjarkarimur*, in which the hero, Bjarki, fights a man-eating she-wolf. See also Rosier (1963); Klaeber ([1911–12]1997, p. 20).

55   *DOE Corpus*, (Healey et al. 2009); gloss numbers, 0104 (B138), and 0108 (B145). *Bellona* is also glossed as "wælcyrge" ("valkyrie") (*DOE Corpus*, (Healey et al. 2009); gloss numbers, 0731 [754] and 1847). For connections between Grendel's mother and the figure of the Valkyrie, see Chadwick (1959, p. 177; and Damico (1984, p. 46). The connection between the *Bellona* gloss and Grendel's mother is noted by Purser (2013, p. 115, n. 54), although he does not discuss the implications of the "beluae, bestiae maris" gloss. Grendel's mother is also described as a "mere-wīf mihtig" (a "mighty sea-woman", line 1519b).

56   Commenting on these lines, Fulk, Bjork, and Niles note: "If the *gryre* that she inspires is less, the danger that Grendel's mother presents is nonetheless greater, for the fight with her is more difficult for Bēowulf than the fight with Grendel" (Fulk et al. 2008, p. 197).

57   On the impenetrability of Grendel's mother's skin, see Cavell (2014, pp. 161–62).

58   On the effectiveness of this image, see Renoir (1962, p. 195). For further literary analogues, see Fulk et al. (2008, p. 159).

59   See Ollivier et al. (2004).

60   I am grateful to Irina Rau for sharing her unpublished research on this topic with me, and for discussing the connections between Grendel and wolves.

61   "Oculi eius in nocte lucent velut lucernae, quia quaedam Diaboli opera caecis es fatuis viris videntur esse pulcra et salubria" (Clark 2006, p. 143). See also Barber (1993, p. 71); Badke (2022): http://bestiary.ca/beasts/beast180.htm, accessed on 10 February 2022.

62   In *Beowulf*, Hrothgar associates Grendel with "scuccum ond scinnum" ("demons and evil spirits", line 939a). See further, Pascual (2014). Newton further suggests that the wolf may have been a royal symbol for the *Wuffingas*, the East Anglian ruling dynasty who claimed among their ancestors one, Hrothmund, a name that corresponds with one of the two sons of Hrothgar and Wealhtheow who is named in *Beowulf* (Newton 1992, pp. 106–8).

63   The *Second-Family Bestiary* records that the she-wolf, "if she needs to seek her prey at night, like a tame dog she goes back and forth at the sheepfold. And lest the dogs by chance smell the odor oh her breath and wake the shepherds, she walks against the wind. And if a branch or anything sounds beneath her footstep, she punishes the foot with an emphatic bite. Her eyes shine in the dark like lanterns." (Clark 2006, p. 143).

64   Demonic epithets are frequently applied to Grendel, for example "fēond mancynnes" (the "enemy of mankind", line 164b), "Godes andsaca" ("God's adversary", line 1682b), and "eald-gewinna" ("ancient enemy", line 1773a). On Grendel's demonic nature more generally, see Andrew (1981); and Johnson (2001). As Klaeber notes, Grendel's mother is also described in demonic terms, such as "wæl-gǣst wǣfre" ("wandering slaughter guest", line 1331a) and "æfter deofla hryre" ("after the fall of devils", line 1680a) (Klaeber [1911–12]1997, p. 64).

65   On the early date of the *Advent Lyrics*, see Rankin (1985); Fulk (1992, pp. 396–99). In his, *Life of St Edmund*, Ælfric describes how, after invading East Anglia in 865, the Viking chieftain, Hinguar, "færlice swa swa wulf on lande bestalcode" ("swiftly stalked the land like a wolf"), killing men, women, and children (Clayton and Mullins 2019, pp. 188–89). Writing around the same time, Wulfstan warns that the shepherds of the people (i.e., bishops and priests) must be wary, lest the "wodfræca werewulf" ("ravening werewolf") (i.e., the devil) should too quickly tear at or bite the godly flock: Homily 16b (Bethurum 1957, p. 31).

66   Translation from Clayton (2013, p. 19).

67   On the possible connections between the OE, "*wearg*" (Bosworth and Toller 1898, p. 1177; s. v. "wearg": "evil", "vile", "malignant", "accursed"), and the ON, "*vargr*" ("wolf"), see above.

68   The same epithet, "wergan gāstes", is used by Hrothgar in his advice to Beowulf (line 1747b) to refer to demons.

69   The parallel is noted by Klaeber ([1911–12]1997, p. 22), who links this phrase to the biblical, "*umbra mortis*" (Mt. 4.16, Lc 1.79 etc.)). In his speech to the Danish coastguard, Beowulf similarly refers to Grendel as a "dēogol dǣd-hata" ("secret doer of hateful deeds", line 275a), who performs "hȳnðu ond hrā-fyl" ("humiliation and slaughter", line 277a) in Heorot. For a list of all the Old English poetic compounds, see now Orchard (2020).

70   For further references to the Grendelkin's wolflike method of snatching their prey and taking them home to eat them, see lines 120–25, 1292–95, 2085b–92, and 2127b–28.

71   In Virgil's *Aeneid*, XI, 809–15, the fleeing figure of Arruns is compared to a wolf that has killed a shepherd or a bullock and that hides itself in the mountains and woods. On the complex and extensive symbolic use the wolf as both a ravenous predator and a nurturing protector in Virgil, as well as on numerous references to lycanthropy, see Fratantuono (2018). There is no strong evidence to indicate that the *Beowulf* poet was familiar with the writings of Virgil, although a number of scholars have raised the possibility. For a detailed study of the Virgilian parallels, see Haber (1931).

72   On this passage, see Brasswell (1973).

73   On the Geatish–Swedish wars, see Earl (2015); and Leneghan (2020a, pp. 180–94). On the nonlinear narration of these events, see Lapidge (2001).

74   "*Fuglum*" is supplied by most editors to fulfil the alliteration of the line, Cf. line 2448a, "hrefne tō hroððe" ("to the delight of the raven").

75   For debate about the interpretation of these lines, see Fulk et al. (2008, p. 261).

76   Earlier in the same speech, the Messenger relates how, following Hygelac's own death in Frisia, his young son, King Heardred, was pursued and killed by Ongentheow's son, Onela, as punishment for harbouring the exiled sons of Ohthere (lines 2379b–86).

77   The term, *blonden-feax*, is also used three times to describe the old and grey-haired Hrothgar, at lines 1594a, 1791a, and 1873a. Hrothgar is also described as "gamol-feax" (1608a).

78   Elsewhere, Ongentheow is described as "eald ond egesfull" ("ancient and terrible", line 2929a), both of which are qualities that are often associated with the wolf. On the associations of "grey" in Old English, see Biggam (1998).

79   "þone hafelan ond þā hilt somod" ("that head and the hilt together", line 1614); "from þǣm holm-clife hafelan bǣron" ("they carried the head from the sea-cliff", line 1635); "þā wæs be feaxe on flet boren/Grendles hēafod" ("then Grendel's head was brought into the hall by the hair", lines 1647–48a); "Ðā wæs gylden hilt gamelum rince,/hārum hild-fruman on hand gyfen" ("Then the golden hilt was given to the old ruler, into the hands of the gray war-chief", lines 1677–78).

80   The classic discussion is Magoun (1955).

81   As noted by Bonjour (1957, p. 569) and Griffith (1993, p. 196).

82   For a persuasive argument in favour of the poem's composition by a priest living in an aristocratic milieu in early Anglo-Saxon England, see Wormald (2006).

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