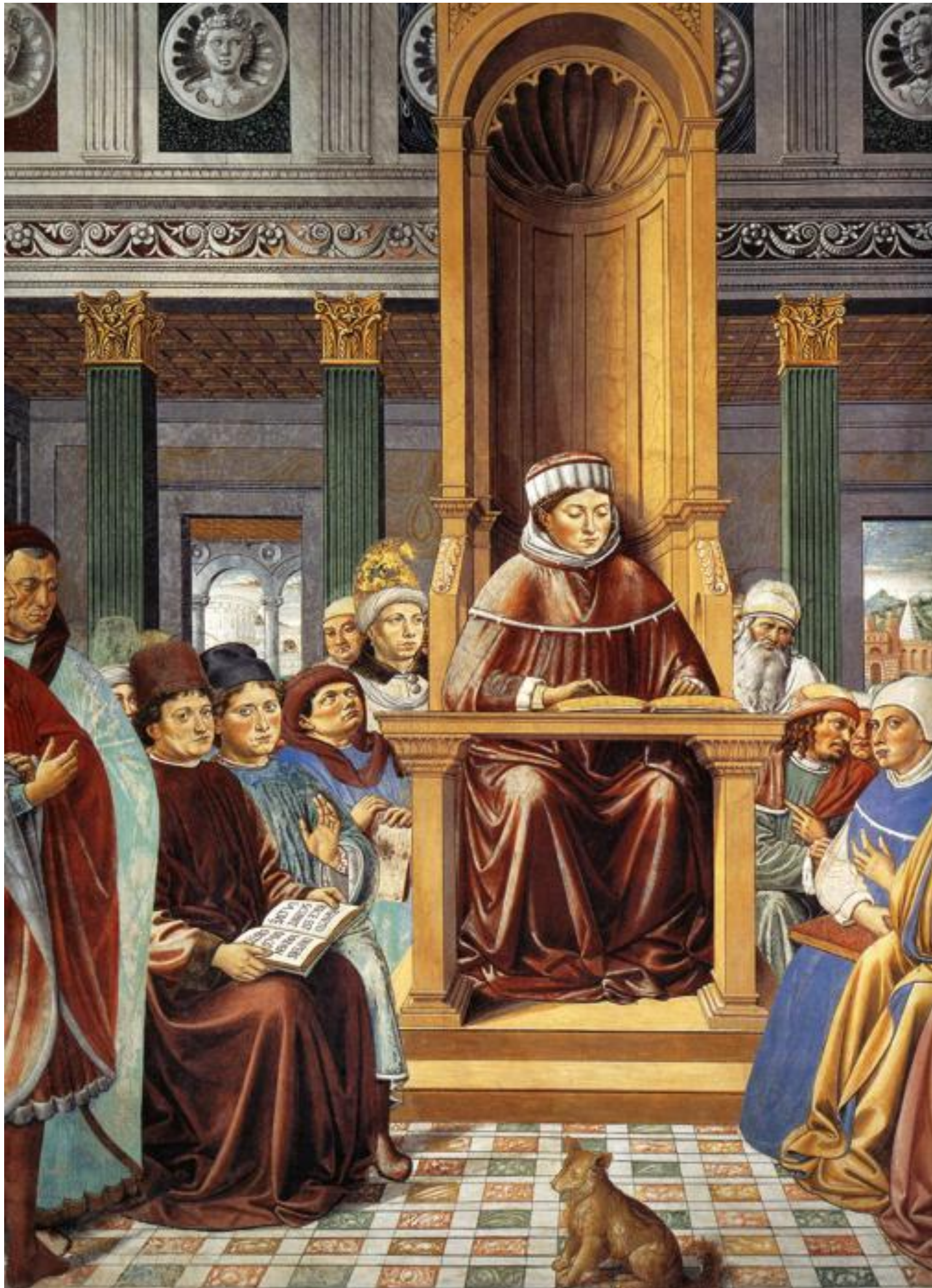
Aquinas College

# *Writers' Night Symposium* **Proceedings**

April 8, 2011

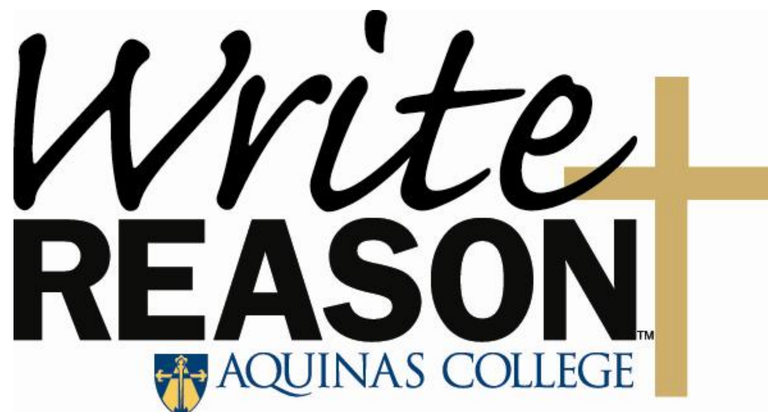


Cover image: "St. Augustine Teaching in Rome". Benozzo Gozzoli (1464-1465).

The ***Writers' Night Symposium*** is the culmination of the Writers' Night Essay Contest, a campus wide event sponsored by the *Write Reason Plan*.

The ***Write Reason Plan*** at Aquinas College aims to strengthen writing and logical thinking habits among the student population. Write Reason is the effective expression of clear, organized, and accurate ideas that are stated convincingly according to the objective standards of truth and reality, as established in the Trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric, which is the foundation of a liberal arts education.

Habits of mind (logic) and habits of expression through language (grammar and rhetoric) are the foundation of a college level education. Through these habits we come to know the truth and express ourselves responsibly according to what we know of reality. The Write Reason Plan aims not only at improving writing and critical thinking skills, it considers the whole person as an individual, a member of society, a citizen, a future professional, and made in the image of God. To think according to the standards of logic and objective truth and to express ourselves clearly is the end of all education and the vocation of every human person.



*The Write Reason Plan* at Aquinas College Presents the First Annual

# Writers' Night Symposium

Friday April 8th, 2011, 6:00 – 8:00pm

**Introductory Remarks**

"On Literary Excellence" – Dr. Aaron Urbanczyk, *Write Reason Director*

**2011 Writers' Night Contest Winners**

"Sacred Poem and *Beatus Vir*" – Sister John Peter Clarke, O.P.

"The Heavens:  A Lyrical, Luminous Love Affair" – Sister Mary Therese Malone

"A Study of the Monsters in *Beowulf*" – Sarah Whitmore

"The Homeric Simile:  Agamemnon as a Force of Nature" – Sister Scholastica Niemann, O.P.

"Commemorative Speech:  William Byron Gilmore" – Nathan Gilmore

**2011 Writers' Night Nominees**

Sheila Blalock
Brandon Bell
Sister Magdalena Dudenhoeffer, O.P.
Sister Amanda Felix, O.P.
Sister Rita Marie Kampa, O.P.
Madison Kearney
Sister Mary Anthony Ice, O.P.
Bryan Joyce
Jennifer Morris
Sister Jennifer Nguyen
Sister Alexandra Reed
Larry Reynolds
Whit Smith
Amanda Tilley
Sister Maria Francesca Wiley, O.P.
David Watson

**2011 Writers' Night Judges**

Peggy Hazel, Assistant Professor of English

Sister Mary Dominic Pitts, O.P., Associate Professor of English and Theology

Aaron Urbanczyk, *Write Reason Plan* Director

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“Sacred Poem and *Beatus Vir*”

Sister John Peter Clarke, O.P.

ENG 214: Dante

Instructor: Dr. Katherine Haynes

Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:7-8, which speak of the blessed man who trusts in the Lord, provide a perspective from which to contemplate Dante’s claim that his poem is sacred (*Paradiso* 25.1-2). Dante’s *Commedia* is his exploration of what it means to be the *beatus vir* who bases his life on the Word of God. The *Commedia* is founded on the tradition of Patristic and medieval exegesis, dependent upon Augustine, typified by Peter Lombard, and enriched by Thomas Aquinas. Both Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:7-8 share the *Commedia*’s focus on the nature and path to beatitude. An intellectual genealogy may be as follows: Augustine influenced Peter Lombard, Peter influenced Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas Aquinas influenced Dante. Thomas writes that Psalm 1 is like the “title of the whole work”; it “expresses the desire [*affectum*] of a man raising his eyes at the whole state of the world and considering how men act and how they fall short” (*Super Psalmo 1*, n.1). Thomas’ interpretation of Psalm 1 bears here a close resemblance to the *Commedia.* Dante, formed in the tradition of Patristic and medieval exegesis, drew literal inspiration from the Sacred Scriptures and from its venerable commentators.

Among all the books of Scripture, the Book of Psalms was the “most loved by patristic and medieval exegetes” (Colish 531) and it particularly resonates with Dante, a poet abundantly graced by God but now in deep need of mercy (Colish 537). Medieval exegesis of Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:7-8 illumine Dante’s understanding and use of Sacred Scripture as a living, judging Word: Scripture reflects beatitude and judges man according to his capacity for participate in reality. The *Commedia* is Dante’s exegesis of the revelation he received, which is firmly rooted in the definitive Christian revelation. Dante travels through the misery of sin and the pains of purification in order to recognize what beatitude *is*. In this respect, the succinct comment of Thomas Aquinas on Psalm 1, “*Beatitudo hominis est Deus*,”

captures the heart of Dante's *Commedia*. This beatitude is not only the reason for love or for life; this beatitude is ultimately the reality of God.

In order to arrive at this beatitude, the meaning of his poem, Dante poet expected readers of the *Commedia* to apply exegetical principles to (Hawkins 44; Moevs 181). Medieval exegesis has "its own structure . . . [an] understanding which penetrates through the surface of the letter" (Lubac 226). Dante studied with the mendicant friars and he was familiar with the exegesis of the university schools (Hawkins 26-27), where scholastic master Peter Lombard's (1100-1164) work on the Psalms was popular (Colish 532). Peter Lombard was a key figure in Scholasticism and imparted to the theology of his time a breadth and depth in its compilations and distinctions in doctrine. Colish characterizes scholastic exegesis as a way of teaching based on prayer, study, correlation, and attentiveness to the "polysemous structure of the text" (543).

Peter takes Psalm 1 as a compilation of all the themes of the Book of Psalms but retains a focus on the moral facets of the Psalm (Colish 537, 540). Considering his concern with the moral life, it is very likely that Dante paid special attention to exegesis of the moral sense in Scripture. Augustine's words into on freedom in verse 2 (*in lege Domini voluntas eius*) echo in the moral and eschatological tone of Peter's commentary, a tone also found in Dante. Dante also may have found Peter's categorization of men useful: the very good, the very evil, the moderately good, and the moderately evil (Colish 543). It appears that Dante puts the moderately good in Purgatory and the moderately evil in the vestibule of Hell. Like Peter, (Colish 542) Dante draws together many different strands of thought, categorization, and creativity while reverencing the unity and symphony of the Scriptures (Lubac 241-251).

Polysemous synthesis is the signature both of the scholastic exegesis Peter Lombard's work typifies and of the *Commedia*. In its Augustinian echoes and scholastic distinctions, Peter's exegesis of Psalm 1 shows both the continuity of tradition and the freshness of eager study. This tradition of exegesis continued in the work of Thomas Aquinas. Like Augustine and Peter, Thomas sees "Christ first among the blessed, and Adam among the wicked"; hierarchy and recapitulation also figure prominently in

*Commedia*. Judgment is another common theme to Psalm 1 and the *Commedia*. Psalm 1 describes the states of both the blessed man and the wicked: *beatus* and *impii*. All men come together in the search for happiness, but they separate in whether they attain it or not.

Of chief significance to the *Commedia* is Thomas's description of the way to salvation: *processus ad beatitudinem*. Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., places Thomas's use of *processus* in the context of his "*exitus-reditus* scheme" (55). For Thomas, *processus* is not the Neoplatonic necessary emanation of creatures, but rather "a free creation, inaugurating time and the history of salvation" (Torrell 55). *Processus* is God's free act, His making of man for happiness: *ad beatitudinem*, the goal of salvation history, union with the Trinity that is the origin of Creation (Torrell 56, 63). The *Commedia* abounds in processions; the journey up Mount Purgatory to the music of the Beatitudes clearly expresses Dante's own *processus* from and back to God. *Processus*, especially in the last cantos of *Purgatorio*, is "an image of historical time" (Lansing 136). But in Thomas's commentary, the dynamism of *processus* is immediately related to the earthy simile of the just man to a rooted tree. Thomas, like Dante after him, sees a connection between time as *processus* and the need for stability. For a tree must be grounded in order to grow towards fulfillment. The tree, the image of the just man, has to be grounded in Christ, in "divine protection"; only then can it stretch out its roots to the water, *ad humorem mittit radices suas* (Jeremiah 17:8), and so retain spiritual verdure (Aquinas, *In Ieremiam prophetam*). This simile strikes at the root of Dante's concern: the reconciliation of earthly movement and eternal rest in divine order. Just as the tree is planted in the earth but stretches out to the running waters, man is rooted in God and freely stretches out to grace and so partakes of everlasting glory. Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:7-8 contain in seminal form God's revelation, and as such, they echo throughout the *Commedia*, whose narrative and authority are based on the Bible itself (Hawkins 41; Kleinhenz 76).

These two Biblical texts, though not directly quoted, may be traced through allusions and images in the *Commedia.* Dante often evokes entire passages from Scripture with a single word (Hawkins 42, 47; Cook 3, 7; Kleinhenz 76). Like a good exegete, Dante glosses, paraphrases, and correlates Biblical texts

(Kleinhenz 78, 83, 85). The Bible itself is "like a great poem, with a pedagogical intent, whose inexhaustible significance leads us to the pure heights of the summit of contemplation" (Lubac 77). In the *Commedia*, the single word *beatus* evokes entire Psalms, the Beatitudes, and Matthew 25 (Cook 9; Kleinhenz 79). This word *beatus* is etymologically tied to Beatrice, Dante's guide who gives him a foretaste of Heaven. The beatitude that Beatrice brings is the theme of Dante's comedy because it points him to beatitude as the goal of all human desire. Because the desire for beatitude is inescapable, Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:7-8 are not isolated instances but rather passwords that lead the reader on a journey—just as the *Commedia* turns Dante into a poet, a pilgrim, a psalmist, and a prophet.

When the *Commedia* begins, the pilgrim Dante realizes he has gone far astray in a dark wood; he has missed the tree of life for the forest (*Inferno* 1). Moevs, in his study of the metaphysical principles of the *Commedia*, notes that the *hyle* of hylomorphism means "wood"; the dark wood of *Inferno* 1 "philosophically evokes the flux of the material world" (Moevs 39). Yet God recognizes his creature crouching under the tree of materiality; it is there that He draws his disciple to trust in Him (*confidit*, Jeremiah 17:7), as the story of Nathaniel shows (John 1:48). Dante's pilgrimage through Hell shows him the dead end: *iter impiorum peribit (*Psalm 1:6). The journey is a judgment upon himself and not merely upon others. When the pilgrim Dante sees the wicked tossed on the wind in the Circle of the Lustful (Psalm 1:2), he too faints away. He is chaff by implication—*tamquam pulvis, quem proicit ventus*—obviously not "a tree planted by flowing waters" (Psalm 1:3).

The pilgrim Dante learns that discipline is necessary for blessedness; docility lies at the crux of wisdom. In *The Design in the Wax*, Marc Cogan takes the poetic structure of the *Commedia* as based on the order of nature and the order of grace, which provide the keys to understanding the contrapasso of *Inferno* and that of *Purgatorio* (Cogan 41, 43). Because creation itself is "an unfolding of divine love" (Moevs 5), anything that goes against this *splendore* is morally wrong because it is metaphysically false. Cogan holds that *Inferno*'s structure reveals the harm sin does to human nature. The damned followed wrong counsel because they perverted nature and rebelled against grace (*Inferno* 26). In their eternal

repetition of their sinful acts, the damned reap what they sowed, as Saint Paul warned (Galatians 5:8; Cogan 38).

*Inferno*'s *contrapasso* is the poet Dante's representation of the punishments to which Psalm 1 refers to in verses 4-6. Dante is creatively representing what is metaphysically true. There is an order in man; therefore, there are degrees of good and evil in his acts which begin with his desires. Thomas speaks of three steps in the process of sin and refers to the leading of others to sin as *pessimum* (*Super Psalmo 1*, n.1). The more grievous sins concern the will's determination to pursue either the final good of beatitude or "general goods" knowable by reason (Cogan 35). The key importance of appetite as the determinant of a sin's gravity reveals "the state of the agent" (Cogan 74), who chooses the sin voluntarily.

Psalm 1 and the *Commedia* consistently emphasize that the damned freely chose evil (Cogan 40; Colish 541). A tree is known by its fruits: the *contrapasso* is a revelation of reality—of man's relation to himself, to others, and to God. The appetites are the seeds of human acts, and because they are the appetites of a human soul, they are intrinsically intellectual (Cogan 142). Like David and Jeremiah, Dante puts the responsibility for beatitude or damnation at the feet of free will. As Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17 teach, the fruits are either eternal happiness or misery. The Photinists in Hell despaired of eternal happiness by denying the immortality of the soul (*Inf.* 10.15); on earth, they chose, in the language of Psalm 1, the company of scoffers. The damned only experience parodies of company and communion, as the reptilian mutation of identity (*Inferno* 24, 25) and mutual devouring (*Inferno* 32.124-32; 33.76-8) indicate. What Dante sees at the hypocrites' tombs accords with Augustine's comment on verse five of the psalm: the damned do not rise except to condemn themselves and others (70). The disease of the Eighth Bolgia shows that false doctrine is indeed *pestilentia* (Hebrew reading of Psalm 1:1; Augustine 67).

The violent suicides desperately run into trees and self-destruct (*Inferno* 13.94-129), but those who allow themselves to be crucified with Christ become verdant, fruitful trees—they "stretch out their roots to the stream" (Jeremiah 17:8). Thomas notes that "God himself is the reason for trusting" (*In Ieremiam*). By the roots, the Psalmist signifies "the firmness of divine protection"; this firmness is

contrasted with "human fragility." The stream in the Psalm and in Jeremiah is baptism: it is a death to grasping after time. As Dante and Virgil leave Hell, they see a narrow stream and they look out upon the stars (*Inferno* 34.130-139). The pilgrim Dante is ready to grow upwards.

Buried with Christ in the Paschal Mystery, Dante comes to Purgatory. Preaching on Jeremiah 17, Origen says that the man on the road to holiness has "put on the death of Christ, for He has become a first-fruit of all men who turn round toward God" (164). The Paschal Mystery unites "creation and redemption, enacted within history as the Passion, Christ's and our own; it is enacted as text as Dante's journey" (Moevs 7). Purgatory takes Dante on the right path, the path the Lord knows and watches (Psalm 1:6), after he has faced and rejected sin. Augustine comments that man enjoys the delight of freedom "in the law," not under the law (67). Girded with the lowly reed, Dante begins to reclaim the freedom of his humanity in humility (Augustine 69). The real nature of man begins to be revealed (Cogan 146): the tree is known best by good fruits.

On Mount Purgatory, the pilgrim Dante begins to show his good fruits. With every terrace and its corresponding Beatitude, he realizes that all things—Casella's songs, philosophical speculations, political strife—pass away; he is made for eternity. The blessed man keeps his mind and will fixed on the Lord's law. Good works are related to knowledge and the disposition of heart which they manifest. In his lecture, Thomas refers to Proverbs 20.5: "The intention in the human heart is like water far below the surface, but the man of intelligence draws it forth." God knows thoughts and desires, and He judges man according to the disposition of his heart and according to his external works (Aquinas, *Super Psalmo 1*, n.1-2). The stream in the Earthly Paradise reflects Dante's transparency before God: it "reveals all it contains" (*Purgatorio* 28.30).

As Purgatory makes Dante fitter for Heaven, the motif of *beatus vir* begins to take on the promising note of the Beatitudes. While Aquinas qualifies man's enjoyment of the Beatitudes on earth, he still teaches that each Beatitude contains a promise of its full action in Heaven (Cogan 95, 96). Dante's experience bears out Aquinas: he becomes lighter, happier, more blessed with the completion of each terrace. *Die et nocte*, in his dreams and his conversations, Dante begins to muse on the law of the Lord

(*Purgatorio* 9.13-67; cantos 17-18; 19.1-33). His habits (in the original sense of *habitus*) are rectified and readied for Heaven (Cogan 125). The pride and envy so ingrained in the impious, derisive, and wicked are purged away at the roots of the intellectual appetite (Cogan 101). Sadness is the result of sin, of wrong willing; virtue alone makes a man *beatus*. The souls on the sixth terrace are drawn with the desire of Christ to the tree (*Purgatorio* 23.73-75). Their repentance bears fruit, as the just man prospers like a tree in abundance of good works: *fructum suum dabit in tempore suo; et folium eius non defluet* (Psalm 1:3).

At the top of Mount Purgatory, Virgil tells Dante he is free to pursue his desires, for his desires are at last rightly ordered (*Purgatorio* 28.142). Augustine's *Exposition on Psalm 1* speaks of "freedom in the law" not "under the law" (67). From pursuing beatitude in humility, Dante has passed from being a lowly reed to becoming a sapling. Thomas juxtaposes three stages of good fruits against the three steps of sin: planting, fruition, and preservation (*Super Psalmo 1*, n.2). Beatrice refers the quality of Dante's soil and the stages of planting (*Purg*. 30.118-120).

Dante sees that the stakes against which the sapling is planted are high. The Earthly Paradise is the meeting place of Adam and Christ, of nature and grace; the Procession and the Masque express the "collective totality" of good and evil (Lansing 134). This gathering in the garden is a judgment both general and particular: Beatrice's indictment of Dante ties his fall with that of Adam (Lansing 135). The judgment of man is tied to a tree because it is on wood that a Man welds and weds the creature in Truth. Gryphon's grafting of the trees (*Purgatorio* 32.37-60) illustrates Bonaventure's teaching that Christ became man so that we could receive the fruits of the tree (174). In the Christological interpretations of *beatus vir* offered by Augustine (67), Peter Lombard (Colish 535), and Thomas Aquinas (n.1), Christ Jesus himself is the *beatus vir*; he rejected a seat with the prideful, unlike Adam. Christ Crucified, "submerged in the waters of suffering" (Bonaventure 144), calls all men to follow him and taste of his fruit (Bonaventure 175). Christ is the one who is planted beside *decursos aquarum,* the waters of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 1:3; Augustine 67). Grafted into Christ, Dante blossoms in the promised resurrection (Bonaventure 160): "I came away remade from those most holy waters, remade as are new plants renewed with new spring leaves" (*Purgatorio* 33.142-145).

In Dante's poem, the tree of the Cross is thus the nexus (Moevs 79), revealing the union between God and man, a union revealed in the Sacred Scriptures and above all in the Person of the Word made flesh (John 1:48-49). The *Commedia* "arises from the ground of being (is written by love) as creation itself does, or as Scripture does" (Moevs 79). Neither salvation nor the *Commedia is* wholly self-effected; they both flow out o "all-encompassing love" (Moevs 88). Dante wreathes himself with Christ-Apollo's laurels in Paradise (1.13-15; 1.25-27); these fruits and leaves are Christ's own works and words (Augustine 69; Bonaventure 121). Because these leaves belong to Christ, Dante loves them for His sake (*Paradiso* 26.64.66) and so the leaves never fade.

Dante's poem is perennial because it is sacred. Like the witnesses of Scripture, the poet passes on what he has first received (Lubac 230). The *Commedia* is sacred because it is concerned with the *processus* of salvation, from Adam to the present (*Paradiso* 26.91-117). Salvation is the vision of God, the last vision of *Paradiso*. All that Dante sees in Heaven is a clear reflection of the living waters of grace (Cogan 151; Augustine 67)—no false self-fixation but a self-possessed knowing of God's *splendore. Splendore*, the radiance of other souls in God, again shows Dante God's hierarchy, the order, the *lex Domini* that reconciles justice and love and reflects most perfectly God Himself (Cogan 151, 221).

When Dante sees his own happiness in the last canto of *Paradiso* (Cogan 237) he knows that what God has planted in the heart of man, He will bring to fruition. His own love for Beatrice, drew him to seek after the "eternal fountain," and in the Empyrean, he sees how right it is to trust wholly in God (*Paradiso* 33.97-145). Saint Bernard tells Dante: "Let your sight run through this garden" (*Paradiso* 5.19-24). The *Primo Mobile* redeems and reconciles the temporal and the eternal, the sensible and the spiritual (Moevs 38); it gives him what he craves: lasting union with the truth.

Psalm 1, Jeremiah 17:7-8, and the *Commedia* are meant to provide a vision of reality. These texts are not theoretical in the modern sense; they are theoretical in the original sense of *theoria*, contemplation. Scripture, their commentaries, and the *Commedia* are not bland moral discourses; they are magnified microcosmic images; they are visions. While Dante knows that human language is limited in its ability to convey what he has seen, he also knows that whatever he can say is rooted in the Christian

revelation. Botterill holds that Dante's claim for authority is strengthened, rather than weakened, by the impossibility of poetry to capture his vision (Botterill 168). That his tongue is limited does not mean that his authority is not true. Human words that are steeped in the Scriptures and taken into depths of the personality wield a holy authority that cannot be denied. "A truly authoritative language is one that deals exclusively in truth" (Botterill 173): like an exegete, Dante truly interprets the true words of God because these words have taken flesh in his own life. He has been re-rooted; he has passed from *selva oscura* to *candida rosa* (Lansing 134). Thomas says that the Psalm 1 is composed out of the impulse of prayer (*Super Psalmo 1*, n.) and Moevs holds that only total sacrifice, Christic self-giving reveal the meaning of the *Commedia* (79). Like the Scriptures, the *Commedia* is understood only when it is internalized. Perhaps the *Commedia* is a prophetic retranslation of the message of the Psalms, and the translation is tied to *transhumanar*.

Dante sees in his own life the reflection of universal salvation history. Because God's revelation happened in time but transcends time, the Sacred Scriptures have the power to vivify the Christian (*Paradiso* 5.76-78) and to vibrate within him as he travels to beatitude. By drawing out central themes of beatitude, revelation, and judgment, medieval exegesis (Augustine, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, and Bonaventure) supports Dante's claim. Medieval exegesis sees Christ as the blessed Man who leads all men to beatitude. By becoming man, God affirms the *processus* of man, a *processus* that demands that "we may keep ourselves under God through will and intellect" (Aquinas, *Super Psalmo 1*, n.1). The reconciliation of the divine and the human, the unity of will and power, and the rest of restless desires only happen only through the Incarnation. Moevs holds that Dante's *Commedia* mirrors Christ's Incarnation and self-revelation: "it is what it reveals" (9). Dante becomes himself through the poem because the poem is the sacrament of his own salvation, in and through the Incarnate Logos he has seen.

Vision aside, did Dante really consider his poem on the level of Scripture? Dante's interweaving of Biblical themes makes it clear that he bases his claim to authority on the Scriptures he invokes (Hawkins 41, 91). Hawkins notes that Dante identified himself with David as well as with the prophets

(31, 82). Because God's revelation happened in time but transcends time, the Sacred Scriptures have the power to vivify the Christian (*Paradiso* 5.76-78) and to vibrate within him as he travels to beatitude. Dante sees in his own life the reflection of universal salvation history.

The point of Dante is that vision is never an aside. In seeing God's own joy, Dante sees himself. His transformed desires (Cogan 244) are now fulfilled in the One who never fails to give the happiness He has promised. Dante realizes that God has been manifesting Himself all throughout his pilgrimage (245). Through Beatrice, Dante has come to God and so become *beatus vir*, an ever-verdant tree in His beatitude (*Paradiso* 26.85-88). In the *processus ad beatitudinem*, man is only blessed when he is rooted in the Trinitarian ground of being; he moves in love and delight at the speed of Empyrean rest.

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“The Heavens: a Lyrical, Luminous, Love Affair “

Sister Mary Therese Malone

A Review of

C. S. Lewis’ *The Discarded Image, An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature*

HIS 111: Western Civilization I

Instructor: Mr. Stephen McCarthy

In his book, *The Discarded Image*, C. S. Lewis takes the reader on a fascinating journey through the medieval worldview. This worldview is the image which modern man has discarded in favor of a worldview that matches the discoveries modern science has made – hence the title of the book. However, something is present in the medieval worldview that is lacking in the modern worldview. C. S. Lewis attempts to show the reader the beauty and wonder of the medieval worldview by discussing many different authors and then walking the reader through the medieval universe, especially the heavens, earth, and their inhabitants. As the book is nearly overflowing with delectable bits of insight and information, I will focus only on one fascinating aspect of the book – the heavens, their operations, and their inhabitants. To the medieval mind, the heavens were not simply a combination of stars, planets, asteroids and other such objects that come to the modern mind when one thinks of what we now call “outer space.” Instead, the medievals saw the heavens as full of order and logic, and yet also as a vibrant, musical dance of the heavenly bodies propelled by the love of God.

The medievals saw the world as a globe and the universe as geocentric. The universe consists of four contraries: "hot, cold, moist, and dry" (John Milton quoted in Lewis 95). These are the basic building blocks of the universe. "They combine to make the four elements. The union of hot and dry becomes fire; that of hot and moist, air; of cold and moist, water; of cold and dry, earth" (Lewis 95). These elements separated themselves based on a certain kind of homing instinct they had. Each element, and thus every single part of the universe, had a place to which it always desired to go and towards which it was always moving. As Chaucer says, "unto which place every thing / through his kindly enclyning / moveth for to come to" (Chaucer, *House of Fame*, quoted in Lewis 92). This, then, is how the medievals would describe something such as gravity. If I hold a pen in the air and let it go, it will fall to the ground, time and time again. The medievals would say that the pen desires to go to the ground, where other matter is, that it is "kindly enclyning" towards the ground. Today, we would say that the law of gravity makes the pen fall to the ground. Both views are anthropomorphic; they project something of man onto the pen (Lewis 93). However, whereas today we describe the universe as operating in response to laws, the modus operandi of the medieval world is slightly softer, and vastly more appealing: everything is moved by love and desire. The pen wants to go to the ground. It desires it. It does not fall because it has to in order to obey the laws of gravity, but because it wants to, because it knows that it belongs on the ground.

The basic constitution of the medieval universe is as follows: the earth itself, the matter, wants to be packed tightly together. The water desires to be on the surface of the earth. The air desires to be above the water. Fire, the last of the four elements, wants to be above the air. This is why the flames of fire are always jumping up into the air; the fire is trying to get to its home, to that place to which it is "kindly enclyning" (Lewis 95). When the medieval man took a step

back and considered the entire universe, he saw it as arranged thus: “the central (and spherical) Earth is surrounded by a series of hollow and transparent globes, one above the other, and each of course larger than the one below” (Lewis 95). The moon is placed in the first globe outside of the earth. After that, in each globe, the planets are fixed: “Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn” (Lewis 96). Of all of these globes and heavenly bodies, it is perhaps most critical to properly understand the role of the moon in the medieval mind. The sphere of the moon is the “great divide” (Lewis 108). Everything above the moon is immutable; everything below the moon is mutable. When, going from the heavens to the earth, we pass the moon, we go “from the realm of necessity to that of contingence, from the incorruptible to the corruptible” (Lewis 108). Thus, when the medieval authors use phrases such as “under the moon,” “sublunary,” or “translunary,” they mean much more than the geographical description (Lewis 108). Outside of the spheres of the planets there is the sphere of the firmament, that is, the stars. After the firmament, there is the Primum Mobile, which is “sometimes divided into three spheres of the Crystalline Heaven, the First Moveable, and the Empyrean, or highest heaven” (Brand). The Crystalline Sphere was “included to explain certain anomalies in the observed movement of the heavenly bodies.” The First Moveable is that which is put into motion by the Prime Mover, Who resides in the Empyrean. Thus, the medievals viewed the universe as a set of geocentric, concentric spheres which contained the planets, firmament, First Moveable, and Empyrean.

The operations of the heavens are even more fascinating than their constitution; the medieval world is moved by love. The Prime Mover, God, sets the sphere of the First Moveable in motion. The First Moveable then sets the firmament in motion. Each sphere in turn sets the sphere below it in motion, all the way down to the earth. In addition to transmitting motion to the spheres below it, the spheres also transmit Influences to the earth. Each planet has a different

Influence which it transmits to the earth; once on earth, the Influence effects mortals and influences their moods and actions. Some of the planets are traditionally seen as sending down good Influences to the earth, whereas some of them send down bad Influences. However, that view is missing something. In Dante's *Paradiso*, he places different blessed souls in the different planets (Lewis 116). This shows, as Lewis states, that "the temperament derived from each planet can be turned either to a good or a bad use. Born under Saturn, you are qualified to become either a mope and a malcontent or a great contemplative" (Lewis 117). The medieval Catholic Church did not have a problem with this worldview, as long as man did not forget that, regardless of the Influences, he still had free choice; he still had an intellect and will which he was expected to use (Lewis 103).

But there is another aspect to the movement of the heavens that merits mention – exactly how the motion of the universe works. God, as the unmoving Mover, sets the entire universe in motion, not through what He does, but, rather, by Who He is. As Aristotle said, "He moves as beloved" (Aristotle's *Metaphysics* quoted in Lewis 113). He is so loved by the universe that the universe moves out of love for Him. This, of course, assumes that there is something sentient in each part of the universe. The medievals called these Intelligences and believed that each planet has one. The Intelligences were creatures which inhabited the different spheres as, according to some, our soul inhabits our body. The earth is the only planet without an Intelligence, but it is instead ruled by Fortune. These Intelligences desired to share in the Divine perfection, and, as finite creatures, shared in "the swiftest and most regular possible movement, in the most perfect form, which is circular" (Lewis 115). This is why the spheres move in circles around the earth, and this love of God is why they bother to move at all.

The overall mood of the heavens was not that of darkness, silence, and terror. Rather, it was seen as an inviting space filled with light and sound. To the medievals, "the sun illuminates the whole universe" (Lewis 111). The darkness that we see when we look up at the sky at night is only a "shadow cast by our Earth" (Lewis 111). The sun is always rotating around the earth; thus the part of the earth that is not facing the sun will always be in shadow. To John Milton, this is "the circling canopie of Night's extended shade" (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, quoted in Lewis 112). Thus, because the darkness is only a shadow that the earth itself casts, the rest of the universe is filled with the light of the sun. The universe is also filled with music. As Henryson said, "every planet in his proper sphere / In moving makand harmony and sound" (Henryson, *Fables*, quoted in Lewis 112). Dante also heard this wonderful music of the heavens (Dante, *Paradiso*, quoted in Lewis 112). Thus, unlike our modern conception of space as dark, quiet, and therefore, to some at least, terrifying (Lewis 99), the medieval conception was that of an inviting, ordered place filled with light and sound.

C.S. Lewis succeeds in filling the reader with wonder and awe at the medieval conception of the universe. I have loved reading The Discarded Image. It has given me a much better understanding of the medieval worldview. It was worthwhile both for knowledge's own sake, and because, by reading it, I have gained a much deeper appreciation for the medieval authors. Even simple references by a medieval author to "under the moon" that did not strike me as particularly important before reading this book have taken on a whole new meaning. C. S. Lewis has generously opened up a whole new world for me, and for that I am grateful. Our modern worldview is very legalistic. We can become obsessed with laws and formulas. The medieval worldview, where everything is an ordered, vibrant, happy, beautiful, musical dance all done for the love of God is a refreshing change. The ending of the book, however, leaves something to be

desired. In Chapter VII, Lewis discusses, among other things, man and the different types of souls. After the exciting, intriguing earlier part of the book, I was disappointed to find only basic Thomism in this section. I do not claim that there is anything wrong with basic Thomism, but rather only that I was disappointed not to find Lewis' typical brilliant touch in this section of the book. Regardless of all that, however, *The Discarded Image* is a fascinating book that I would highly recommend to anyone who is interested in viewing our world with new eyes.

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# “A Study of the Monsters in *Beowulf*”

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ENG 213

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In the darkest recesses of man’s most primitive mind, there lurks an understanding that this universe, so full of wonder, cannot be ruled solely by natural laws. Man begins to acknowledge, however quietly and distressed, that he may not be the pinnacle of creation. And in that fearful darkness of his intellect, a subconscious glimmer of mighty godhead and warped creation arise and cause his heart to beat a terrible tattoo of dread. In that moment, he has confronted the supernatural and found himself lacking. The Beowulf-poet forces his audience to confront the supernatural in a variety of ways in his Old English masterpiece, *Beowulf*. These supernatural presences extend far beyond a random sampling of various gods and ghouls, and instead are often vividly encountered in characters such as God, Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the Dragon. The threads of Godly intervention are woven throughout the tapestry of *Beowulf* and provide a glimmer of light where everywhere else there is darkness. Beowulf’s encounters with Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the Dragon are the most dramatic clashes and engagements with the supernatural in the work. Though the villains are connected by their common descent from the supernatural, Beowulf’s conflicts escalate in their intensity and difficulty; finally, culminating in Beowulf’s magnificent battle with the Dragon.

Throughout the poem, frequent mention is made of God; this is meant to evoke our simultaneous understanding of the Christian God of the audience and poet, and the pagan god Beowulf surely believed in. However, there is a diametric opposition to God and His good, and it is Beowulf who battles three perversions of creation: Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the Dragon. The escalation of evil and power in those dark forces of the supernatural is no coincidence. Grendel is, though the accursed seed of Cain, nearly human, and it is over him that Beowulf has the easiest victory. Grendel’s mother is closer to Creation and therefore a more primordial being; though Beowulf triumphs again, it is a more difficult

victory. Finally, he confronts the most powerful and evil of supernatural beings, the Dragon. This agent of darkness is so evil and powerful that it is almost on par with an element. Beowulf, unable to encounter such wickedness and survive, must die in his final victory, both overcoming and overcome by evil.

God, in *Beowulf*, permeates all things. He is in the entirety of His creation, and even forces of evil must accept that they are used by God for His purposes. However, one must consider what god is being referred to in a poem written by a Christian about pagans; is it the God of Christianity or a greater god of Germanic, pagan tradition? The *Norton Anthology's* editorial on *Beowulf* says that though references to the Christian God are numerous, there are "none to pagan deities" (30), which would imply the poem is entirely Christian. This directly contrasts with Tidmarsh Major's interpretation, which claims that since the original manuscript did not contain capitalizations of "god," the poet deliberately chose to create an authentic setting of pre-conversion Anglo-Saxon culture in which pagan deities and the Christian God could exist simultaneously.

As both the *Norton Anthology* and Christopher Cain are quick to note, there are no truly Christian references; that is, no reference to God is mediated through Christ and His saving power, but rather is directly addressed to a supreme, omnipotent God; the God of the Hebrews, Yahweh, is a fitting interpretation of the deity seen in the poem. The deity of *Beowulf* is a lofty judge, condescending to use heroes and monsters to fulfill his will. Fate, doom and justice are under his complete control, and his dispensation of death and justice is a cold mercy. Cain reports that in Beowulf, as in the Old Testament, it is "by God's judgment that one is deemed worthy – not by the redemptive blood of Christ" (232), and in these ways the god of the poem is the same as the God of the Hebrews. This parallel construction of the god in *Beowulf* and the God of the Old Testament is a purposeful reconciliation of the Jews' ability to inherently acknowledge the supremacy of God (the Father) over contemporary pagan gods. The Beowulf-poet was tacitly stating that the nobility of his Germanic ancestors was foreshadowed by the Hebrew prophets and patriarchs, who, like the characters in *Beowulf*, were surrounded by pagans but inherently knew the true God.

Two of the commonly alluded to Genesis references, Cain and the Deluge, are related. These instances are related in that Cain began a bloody history for man and the Deluge was God's just retribution for the man's explicitly mortal sins, like the one committed first by Cain. This establishes a pattern in salvation history: man sins and must be reprimanded by God to be saved. Interestingly, this pattern persists in *Beowulf*. The Danes sin against God and man by their drunken violence and demon worship, and in retribution, God sends Grendel to exact His vengeance and Beowulf to cleanse the people of their, now mitigated, sins: "Beowulf is the instrument of God in cleansing Heorot of the devilish Grendel" (Cain 235).

That Beowulf performs his heroic deeds because they are the will of God is indisputable, as he himself claims that it is God who "in His wisdom grant the glory of victory / to whichever side He sees fit" (*Beowulf*, l. 686-7), namely, Beowulf. A great pre-Christian figure, Beowulf is unfortunately not entitled to salvation from eternal death. It is at this junction that the poet was most clear in his Christian message, though there were great pagan personages who were the instruments of God, and perhaps had an understanding of an almighty monotheistic god of all; they were not entitled to salvation from sin and death as they did not know Christ, and therefore the great heroic standard of the pagan past is lost forever because it cannot redeem lost souls, as ultimately shown in the death of Beowulf.

Grendel is one of the best known supernatural figures of terror in the literary world. The sheer grisly nature the homicides he perpetrates are enough to chill the blood. He gulps the life from men, almost as though in consuming their body and blood he will be imbued with the essence of humanity from which he is forever exiled, "spurned and joyless" (*Beowulf* l. 720). The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy decrees that one must "be sure . . . [not] to eat the blood; for the blood is the life" (12:23) and the book of Genesis issues a similar statement, "you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (9:4). Old Testament scholars contend that God, in the Old Testament, prohibited the consumption of even animal blood because it lowers the one who ingests it to the life state of an animal. To further the alien nature of Grendel, he is revealed to be the seed of Cain, offspring of Earth's first murderer and inheritor of all which is most monstrous in mankind. Fidel Fajardo-Acosta demonstrates that the "seeds"

of Cain may be a reference to those sins which are now identified as intemperance and fratricide. Historically, revilement of Danish culture was not uncommon. Danes were rumored to engage in pagan, even Satanic practices, and were therefore "proverbial enemies of the newly-Christianized and relatively more civilized groups inhabiting the English islands" (207). It is no surprise that the Beowulf-poet used the Danish culture to epitomize those vices that he deemed harmful to civilization and Christianity. In showcasing the Danes as beset by evil and unable to rid themselves of it, the Beowulf-poet is issuing a powerful sanction against the way of life subscribed to by "pagan" Danes.

If Grendel is seen as a symbol of intemperance and fratricide, then his ability to ravage the nation is actually the fault of the thanes of the Danish culture, and is a manifestation of a divine rebuff against drunkenness and what follows it. After Heorot Hall is established, Grendel is titillated and angered by the closeness of his human kin. The fact that Grendel does not begin to roam the country until after the establishment of the mead hall is significant and especially so when coupled with the fact that Grendel, though seemingly impervious to destruction by the Danes, only ventures to Heorot after nightfall to "see how the Ring-Danes / were settling into it after their drink" (*Beowulf* l. 116-7). It is only after Grendel finds them drunk, "asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain/ and human sorrow" (l. 119 – 20), that he indulges in ravaging the hall. Though Grendel's attacks become regular events, as predictable as feasting and drinking in Heorot, the Danes fail to perceive, capture, or kill their nemesis. This failing is not due to any supernatural power of Grendel, rather to the intemperance of the Danes who, in their drunken state, are unable to perceive that Grendel is already among them – in the breasts of their brothers. Grendel creeps from the heart of a drunken thane, ravages his brothers, and dissipates, with the mead, back into nothing more than a haunted conscience, a dim memory of a monster. In fact, the language used to describe Grendel's attacks and rages is akin to language used to describe drunkenness: "flushed up and inflamed . . . / blundering back" (*Beowulf* l. 124 -5).

Thus, it follows that Heorot cannot be cleansed of its peculiar monster, Grendel, because he stalks in the hearts of its occupants. The task of ridding the Danes of the seed of Cain must fall to someone who does not give in to intemperance and further his crimes through violence and fratricide. Beowulf, a

foreigner, possesses the necessary fortitude to salvage the desolated Danish society by virtue of his God-given gift of temperance, which allows him to curb both his appetite for alcohol and violence: "he acted according to discretion; when drinking he slew/ no hearth-companions; his spirit was not violent . . . a generous gift that God gave him" (trans. E.T. Donaldson, *Beowulf* l. 2179-2182, qtd. In Fajardo-Acosta 210). With the gift of temperance, Beowulf is discerns Grendel's emergence and grasps his hand, "a wonderful allegorical representation of precisely the manner in which the virtuous man holds in check his own violent passions and appetites" (Fajardo-Acosta 210). In this way, Beowulf becomes a prototype of Christ, able to discern the darkness in the human heart, take on the burden of destroying that evil, and mortally wounding the malice in human hearts. Taken in this way, Grendel is a symbolic monster, destined to stand as an object of hatred forever because the reader hates in him what he hates in society and perhaps in himself; his penchant for intemperance and the willingness to sacrifice our brother man rather than offer up self.

Instead of seeing Grendel as a symbol, one may see him as a real character with two very important qualifiers: he is an element of the fantastic and uncanny. The fantastic is a term used to characterize that which is beyond the scope of human ability to understand. It is the unknowable and unknown, the truth too frightening to acknowledge, and the shapeless on the periphery of one's vision. Grendel is more than representative of the fantastic: his shape is undefined and he is glimpsed only though his actions, "the horrified response of others and the elliptical statements of the narrator" (Sandner 163). Further, one is never entirely certain of Grendel's purpose or nature; thus, even after careful analysis, only a tentative sketch of his function can be arrived at. This inability to truly understand Grendel makes him much more than the average monster intended to scare through gory violence; he is a psychological horror, a true agent of the fantastic. Additionally, Grendel is uncanny in that he "marks the return of the repressed" (Sandner 164) knowledge of that which is most disturbing – Grendel is every man. The reader discovers that the horror of Grendel, thought to be so alien and other, is actually self. Grendel haunts a world very like the one the Beowulf-poet inhabits, and it is the fear of the reader that

perhaps that world, from which ours grew, is not so very distant; that the world of monsters is present still and the culture that knew those monsters lives on.

The fear that Grendel is actually self is referred to as an "uncanny double" which "haunts the self, questioning the integrity of self by . . . [its] eerie similarity to what one knows oneself to be" (Sandner 166). Grendel is a double for all mankind. He is our brother, related to us through Adam and Eve, and he is an exile from society and humanity by the very fact of his nature; this worry that we may be exiled like him is echoed in fears of exclusion and repulsion, and alerts the reader to the awareness that he, too, may be a monster in ways related to his nature (original sins and its fruits). However, Grendel is utilized as a much more extensive double through the initial portions of the text. Grendel and Beowulf, seemingly arch-enemies, are actually uncanny doubles. In their battle, they grasp hands, momentarily welding themselves together and meeting "at the limit of the human . . . which reveals them as uncanny doubles for one another" (Sandner 169). Further, their stance (facing one another) evokes the understanding that one is glimpsing the archetypes of heroism and evil, but for all their differences, they are truly just their enemy's repressed character. For example, Grendel is Beowulf's repressed intemperance, malice, and thirst for blood, and Beowulf is Grendel's repressed (or forgotten) temperance, heroism, and just retribution. However, they both have shared attributes: mighty of stature, "champions to their kin" (Sandner 169), great warriors, and they each will "feast well and bloodily if victorious" (Sandner 170). Likewise, it is not coincidental that Beowulf has "the strength of thirty [thanes] / in the grip of each hand" (*Beowulf* l. 380-1) and Grendel "grabbed thirty men" (*Beowulf* l. 122). In this way, Grendel and Beowulf have another parallel drawn between them, what Beowulf has naturally (the power and authority of his peers) Grendel seeks to ingest through death and rage. Regardless, they are lashed together in a bond of mutual strength, war-craft, and violence.

Finally, though Grendel is monstrous, one has to question whether he is, in fact, a monster. He does not terrorize the country-side as most monsters of legends do. Instead, he attacks the heart of the tribe – their capitol, Heorot. This may be because he is a symbol of the destructive power of alcoholism (to be found at Heorot), or perhaps it is because he is using human war strategy to weaken the stronghold

of his enemy. He is treated like the king of a warring tribe, as the Danes seek to gain peace with him through the usual methods sought when engaged in a war with another tribe: "he would never / parley or make peace with any Dane / nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price" (*Beowulf* l. 154-56). Further, this implies that the Danes perceive Grendel as being in a position to offer compensation if he chose to. It seems unlikely that if Grendel were a horrific monster anyone would seek to parley with him or ask for recompense in the form of coin, perhaps. Rather, one must conclude that he is more akin to man, in form, than monster. It is not unreasonable to assume that Grendel is the manifestation of the monstrosity of man, haunting his own people; an uncanny double of a Danish lord, Hrothgar, exacting vengeance on his thanes instead of gifting them with bright rings.

A similarly ghastly perversion of Creation is Grendel's mother. The enigma of Grendel's mother is far more elusive than ever Grendel was. It is clear, however, that she was as she was discerned to appear "like a woman" (*Beowulf* l. 1351), whereas Grendel was "warped / in the shape of a man" (l. 1351-2). There is a sense that Grendel's mother is slightly more human than her son and is closer to Creation. This makes her an older form of evil. The feminine genius is utterly warped in her, and the mystery of motherhood is a farce; for she brings not life but death into the world, and in her son all the grotesqueries of human nature are brought to fruition.

Indeed, the knowledge that her only son has been killed drives her to Heorot, and her bitterness is only compounded by the fact that she resents her position as mistress of the damned: "she had been forced down into fearful waters" (l. 1260). Nonetheless, she is "grief-racked and . . . desperate for revenge" (l. 1278) over the death of her son, which, in the Anglo-Saxon culture, is deemed honorable. Beowulf himself declares that "it is always better / to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning" (l. 1384-5), and this is the exact course of action Grendel's mother takes. When examined in this light, it would appear that Grendel's mother does the only honorable thing one could do in such a situation. Indeed, the language used to describe her is often not unflattering and is more akin to the praise a warrior may receive: "amazon warrior," "the powerful other one," and known to engage in "ruinous combat." Beowulf, who defeated Grendel with his bare hands, must use an ancient sword, forged and possessed by

giants before the Flood, to destroy Grendel's mother, a being full of the power of Creation and primitive strength. Lastly, Beowulf experiences a new emotion in combat, fear. Though his duel with Grendel is a bitter fight, it is only when encountering his mother that Beowulf "felt daunted / the strongest of warriors stumbled and fell" (*Beowulf* l. 1543-4), and it is in that moment the great power of the ante-diluvium mother is grasped.

Next, one must question whether Grendel's mother is a monster or a woman. Though the interpretations of her exact nature vary, it is commonly acknowledged that the use of "wif" in relation to Grendel's mother deems her a woman. The importance of her femininity becomes apparent when one deduces her use as an uncanny double. She may function as a double for two women: Wealtheow and Eve.

Wealtheow is queen and mistress of her people, she holds sway over her court, and is unfailingly generous. Her courtesies and gift giving characterize her as a great queen and, most importantly, she promotes peace within her realm. Conversely, Grendel's mother is bearer of bad fruit, breeding feuds and vice, stealing life from men and selfishly guarding her underwater hoard. However, she too is a queen and holds court, though it is over hellish cohorts. Reference is made to "her court" (l. 1507) and "her armory" (l. 1558), vital components to her stature as a queen. Thus, the definite similarities begin to become patent in their queenly natures. Indeed, even the ghastliness of Grendel's mother cannot taint the power of her queen-ship and therefore cannot entirely sever her resemblance of Wealtheow. Lastly, though Wealtheow promotes peace, she does so at a price – warfare. Wealtheow and Grendel's mother are both willing for others to die so that they may enjoy the peace victory brings. They callously allow death so that their courts may prosper: Wealtheow risks the life of Beowulf and his thanes, and Grendel's mother allows her son to ravage the Danes for his pleasure and her pride. This particular uncanny double allows one to see the monstrous, repressed selfishness of earthly queens. Though they desire the peace and prosperity of their people, they are willing for others to die for them and their kingdom, imperiously promoting death; each woman as bloody as the other.

In like manner, Grendel's mother and Eve (of the Old Testament) are uncanny doubles. Firstly, they are both the prototype female for their races: Eve as the first woman and Grendel's mother as the first daughter of evil. The repressed fear of the Fall finds its home in Grendel's mother, a foul expression of the moment in which (through Eve's sin) death entered the world. Grendel's mother's spawn sounds the death knell for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of thanes and Eve's actions brought death to all mankind. Both Eve and Grendel's mother were murderers (Eve indirectly and Grendel's mother directly) and both bore murderers. Eve brought the first murderer into the world and Grendel's mother, a descendant of Cain, furthered the breach against man's dignity through her son. In this way, the agonizing truth is realized; monstrous man is as akin to Cain as his direct descendants, Grendel's mother and Grendel. Mankind begins to sense his resemblance to the "hell-bride" and her progeny, cousins to man, and in all their hearts beat the failing flow of Fallen blood. The line between monsters and man blurred and blended through their genetic and behavioral brotherhood.

Finally, the Beowulf-poet concludes the life of his mighty hero with the greatest confrontation possible, the battle between Beowulf and the Dragon. The fight between the hero, reminiscent of Old Testament heroes, can only be fittingly fought against the darkest and most powerful force of evil in the universe, the Dragon. Not surprisingly, the Dragon is an expression of the power of Satan exerted over humanity: the nations and their kings, the powerful pagan, and the ancestors of the Beowulf-poet. Unlike Beowulf's fights with Grendel and his mother, which were undertaken to prove his "strength and courage and thereby to enhance his personal glory" (*Norton Anthology* 31), the fight with the Dragon is commenced because it is the only way to save the Geats.

Scholarly contention over the amount of sentient life attributed to the Dragon is rampant. Some scholars choose to interpret the poem in ways which portray the Dragon functioning by instinct, a bestial mind in a glorified worm. Others, however, choose to interpret the language surrounding the Dragon as vivifying, allowing him a rich interior life. In his article, Thomas Klein supports the traditional view of the Dragon as a being with "mental processes . . . . [and] a whole inner life" (34). He argues that the words used to describe the Dragon's actions are active, not the passive instinctual yearnings of a dumb

animal. In Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*, numerous words are applied to the Dragon which leaves no doubt of his will, power, intellect, desires, and emotions: anger, imagining, discover[ing], impatience, fury, delight, trust, [being] watchful, and terror (82-3). This being is more than animal and more than supernatural monster, it is the preternatural evil that rules all other evils, it is the power of Satan hidden in a beast.

Fifty years into the rule of Beowulf, another power asserts its dominance, begetting an anti-rule which mimics the role of the king of the world (Satan), the Dragon awakes. The dragon is awoken by "a lone man / [who] took to his master / the gold-plated flagon" (l. 2280 – 2282). The punishment that arises from this one thief's crime condemns all the Geats to some sort of suffering: loss of property, death, and death of their king. In this state, the land of the Geats resembles the whole of humanity – doomed to pay the price of original sin, which arose from one human. Every Geat is subjected to the Dragon's fury because of their brother's dissolution; they all face death. Fortunately, Beowulf ransoms his people. As a pre-Christian hero, he gloriously seeks to free his people from the power of the Dragon, but (again as a pre-Christian) he cannot save them without succumbing to the weight of the ransom price.

The swath of the Dragon's power exercised over the land extends from his underground hoard to the villages he ransacks and the king of the nation. Like the Devil, the Dragon believes that the worth of the world is best measured in materials. The Dragon "prowls" though he is guarding his hoard, a phrase evocative of language used to describe Satan who "prowls about the world seeking the ruin of souls." He is "driven to hunt out / hoards under ground, to guard heathen hold / through age-long vigils" (*Beowulf* l. 2275-77), like his mirror image who has authority over things of the earth and dominion over things under the earth. Thus, he guards his hoard jealously. Concurrently, the hoard of wealth may symbolize Satan's harvest stored under the Earth; namely, the souls of the dead who, like "heathen hold" are pagans or those who died before Christ's sacrifice.

"The burning one" destroys the common people before turning on the nobles, indiscriminately slaughtering all, compelled to destroy all in his path because of his own rage. The Dragon is a dread reminder of the awful sway of evil, sin, and death that pre-Christian figures were subject to before

Salvation. No one is safe from the ravages of the Dragon, just as none were safe from hellfire due to their unredeemed nature. However, Grendel and his mother only attack the nobility whereas the rage of the Dragon encompasses all people. This may be because Grendel sought to punish the nobility for their peculiar sins, was a manifestation of them, or was an uncanny double for the noble Beowulf, as his mother was a double for women of stature and power (Wealtheow and Eve). Conversely, the Dragon, analogous to Satan, seeks to gather all souls to himself to soothe the bitterness of loss of Heaven and his resultant rage. Regardless, Beowulf is the sole hope of his people, though he too is a pagan and cannot overcome the Dragon entirely. In fact, the post-conversion audience of the Beowulf-poet understands that when the narrator claims that "final day was the first time / when Beowulf fought and fate denied him / glory in battle" (l. 2573-5) it is God, who controls fate, who denies Beowulf the ultimate victory over the Dragon. Though Beowulf manages to fatally wound the Dragon through his God-given strength and courage, he fails to live through the encounter as he "discovered / deadly poison suppurating inside him" (*Beowulf* l. 2713-4). The Dragon has poisoned him with his proximity, a final testament to the power of evil, and God, Beowulf's only hope, has not deemed Beowulf worthy of salvation. Though he is a hero formed in the image of Old Testament champions, he cannot do as Christ did: encounter Satan, release the world from his control and live again. Beowulf must die, claimed by the Dragon, because he was not released from sin and death. Thus, it is only fitting that the hero who was the exemplar of pagan, Germanic culture must die as his contemporaries died, doomed to hellfire and ruled over by the Dragon. Finally, the audience is confronted with an awful truth, their ancestors: like Beowulf, were not saved from final damnation, and their salvation can only come from a hero greater than any produced by pagan culture, the King of Kings, Jesus the Christ.

In conclusion, the fantastic and supernatural haunt *Beowulf* and reveal the age old disquiet of monsters lurking in the shadows. Whether those shadows are external inhabitants of the natural world or internal beatings of a monstrous heart, the supernatural pervades the spaces around the reader, and in him. Though Beowulf was overcome by those forces, the reader is comforted by the fact that He who created

the supernatural also rules it, and He has saved all mankind from the terrible power of the Dragon and his minions.

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"The Homeric Simile: Agamemnon as a Force of Nature"

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ENG 311: Epic Literature

Instructor: Dr. Dutton Kearney

A good simile is meant bring the reader some deeper understanding of a complex person, place or event. This is achieved by comparing something unknown or misunderstood, to something that is familiar and well-known to the reader. Despite first impressions, Homer's character, Agamemnon, is no one-sided, shallow, caricature of a man. In the *aristeia* of Agamemnon, spanning Books X and XI of the *Iliad*, Homer repeatedly uses images of nature's power to describe Agamemnon. These similes reveal something essential about Agamemnon's character. By analyzing Homer's choice of similes, we can learn something about Agamemnon that might otherwise be lost. A detailed look at them provides a unique understanding of the development of the character of Agamemnon, and a deeper understanding of Homer's skill as a poet.

At first glance, Agamemnon does not fare well in the reader's estimation of Greek leaders. His abduction of Chryseis and subsequent antics over Achilles' war-prize, Briseis, have resulted in Achilles removing himself from any further battle. This is a great loss to the war-weary Greeks, who looked on Achilles as their one hope in this siege of Troy. Agamemnon does not seem to have the common good foremost in his mind. Furthermore, he suggests that they all give up and return home, a shameful homecoming with no news of victory or success. Supposedly he only suggests this as a sort of reverse psychology, hoping to convince the Achaians to stay and fight. But when, throughout the book, Agamemnon suggests this again and

again, the reader begins to wonder if he isn't more than little lily-livered. By Book IX, Agamemnon seems less and less a kingly leader and more of a wallflower.

All of this changes, though when Odysseus, Ajax and Phoenix are wholly unsuccessful in their plea to get Achilles to return to the war. Book IX closes with Diomedes counseling Agamemnon to "be ready to fight in the foremost" (709), when they awaken at dawn. Unable to sleep, Agamemnon, paces the Achaian camp. With the opening of Book X, we have our first simile regarding Agamemnon, and with it the reader is forced to revise his first impressions of Agamemnon. Homer compares the restless Agamemnon to "a great rainstorm, a hail incessant, / or a blizzard" (6-7). Homer continues by skillfully painting the picture of a massive storm moving its way across the plains, lightning flashing, and overtaking everything in its way. Such was Agamemnon, preparing to do battle. At last, we have a true warrior and leader of the Achaians, ready to prove his valor; and like the tempests of nature, he is a force to be reckoned with. By likening Agamemnon to an elemental force of nature, Homer leaves the reader with a number of impressions. Storms which wreak havoc upon the land are usually slow in coming. The buildup of tension and suspense are part of the terror of a massive storm. Likewise, Agamemnon is merely gathering his forces; his battle with the Trojans will not occur until later in Book XI. But the simile is effective— we wait with bated breath and can see the time coming when Agamemnon will let loose on the battlefield.

The storm which we could see in the distance has come upon us by Book XI. To describe the *aristeia* of Agamemnon, Homer uses a series of three similes, all involving the power of nature. The first simile continues the storm theme of Book X. However, now that the fighting has begun, Homer has to increase the terror from anticipation to reality. What is more frightening than a rainstorm or a blizzard? Perhaps only the havoc caused by a different kind of

storm, a wildfire. In this simile, Homer likens Agamemnon to a firestorm. The Trojans are powerless in the face of this "obliterating fire," (XI, 155) and Agamemnon dominates the battlefield like a wildfire which the "wind carries…everywhere" (156). The reader imagines Agamemnon fighting so intensely that it seems like he is everywhere at once, darting up here and there, like a forest fire among dry timber.

Only a few lines later, the second of the three nature similes is applied to the powerful warrior. Leaving behind the storm imagery, Homer likens him to another frightening aspect of the natural world. Agamemnon is compared to a lion in the midst of frightened cattle. In gory detail, Homer says that Agamemnon is like a lion that breaks the animal's neck, "caught fast in the strong teeth, / then gulps down the blood and all the guts that are inward" (XI, 175-176). Trojan after Trojan is mauled by the brutal Agamemnon. So many, apparently, that Homer stops listing them by name and concludes Agamemnon's *aristeia* by remarking that Agamemnon "went after them / killing ever the last of the men; and they fled in terror" (177-178). This marks the end of Agamemnon's *aristeia* but not the end of Homer's description of this Greek warrior.

The third of the three similes in Book XI explains why Agamemnon's command of the battlefield comes to such an abrupt end. When Agamemnon is injured in the fighting, Homer chooses an interesting simile to describe Agamemnon's reaction. "As the sharp sorrow of pain descends on woman in labor, / the bitterness that the hard spirits of childbirth bring on,…/ so the sharp pains began to break in on the strength of Atreides" (269-272). This force of nature, this brutal warrior, has been brought down like a woman in labor by a spear-wound to his arm.

This last simile may surprise the reader. After the first impressions of the weak leader who longs to return home, Homer managed to convince the reader that Agamemnon was an elemental force, leaving in his wake only terror and destruction. But now, after a flesh wound,

Agamemnon flees the battle scene like a woman.  This is perplexing and may even seem contradictory to the reader.  In reality, Homer is actually very effective in giving the reader an accurate impression of a complicated character.  Agamemnon *is* like a firestorm, a blizzard, a fierce lion.  He is there one minute, and gone the next; inconstancy is his modus operandi. This makes him unpredictable on the battlefield, tearing the Trojans apart. But for all his wrath, he passes like a storm that spent itself in one great burst or a fire that burnt itself out too quickly. And so it turns out that this inconstancy is his greatest weakness, as well.  Because of Homer's skillful application of these nature similes, the reader is left with a meaningful insight into this Greek warrior. It is true, Agamemnon turns out to be less than the ideal hero, but he is much more than a shallow, one-sided caricature of a weak leader.

“Commemorative Speech:  William Byron Gilmore”

Nathan Gilmore

ENG 110

Instructor:  Mrs. Peggy Hazel

There’s a story in our family (completely true, by the way) that my father’s grandfather once knocked out the Golden Gloves boxing champion with one punch.  For a long time, I got this story mixed up:  I was sure my grandfather had done it.

William Byron Gilmore – Pappy to me – has always been a fighter; both by trade and by personality.  He was a bomber pilot, racking up 147 combat missions, mostly in the Vietnam War, and ultimately retiring as Lieutenant Colonel.  And, as he never tired of reminding us, he wasn’t just any bomber pilot:   pappy flew the B-58 “Hustler”, the first supersonic bomber ever used by the Air Force, capable of Mach 2.  It took a special breed of pilot to work with a plane that could pass 8 football fields in one second.  You didn’t fly these things without serious skill, serious smarts, and serious guts.  You didn’t fly these things much, period.  B-58 crews were the Air Force elite, handpicked from other strategic bomber squadrons.  Pappy, with his “take no prisoners or guff, either” attitude, seemed born for the job.

Pappy was born in 1930, on November 18th.  I, of course, wouldn’t meet him until much later.  My first memories of him (forever captured on videotape) are images of him at play:  my brother and I are wrestling him to the carpet, shrieking with laughter punctuated by his growling “*Rowf! Rowf!*”  That is Pappy:  he throws himself into life, and if it involves a fight along the way, so much the better.  Beyond these memories, it can sometimes be hard to say how well I actually know my grandfather.

Pappy's a man that kept his business to himself and expected you to do the same. Most of my knowledge of him comes from stories – stories that my dad told me, or much more rarely, stories from Pappy himself. The Bill Gilmore of these stories is quite the character: a man who could outsmart, out-fight, and out-cuss anyone. But these stories, as does the time spent in the company of the man himself, also reveal a steely determination, and above all, a giant personality. Pappy, in his own way, is a legend. Pappy, for instance, never seemed to tire of speed, even after leaving behind his supersonic planes. One of his hobbies was racing cars, and one day, he pulled up in an Austin Healey Sprite beside some poor sap revving his engine at Pappy. Pappy, in true Bill Gilmore fashion, kept neck-and-neck for a stretch, then flashed a wicked grin at his hapless opponent, put the car in fourth gear and tore off into the distance.

Much or our relationship has been at a remove, both because Pappy has never been one for sentimentality and because he was never very thrilled about my parents' decision to raise his grandkids on the mission field, least of all in Pakistan. I knew him them mostly through the rare letter to the family and the semi-annual birthday card. He usually signed them "Love, Pappy" or sometimes "Love you fiercely". I always loved it when he did that; it seemed so in character. Even his love was fierce.

So was the rest of him. Pappy could be a hard man, unpredictable in temperament. I never knew whether an offhand comment would trigger his infamous temper of his welcome growly laugh. I remember several visits to Pappy's house that turned into heated altercations, often involving my mother, who has never been one to back down herself. Pappy has made peace and broken it several times with Mom; her independence both irritates and impresses him. He likes a good fight, and he respects a good fighter. When my brother was little, Pappy had him playfully hoisted above his head, and Jason was kicking his chubby little legs in the air. Figuring that Pappy would probably throw the child across the room if he got kicked in the face, Mom said tentatively "Don't hurt Granddad, Jason" "That didn't

hurt!", Pappy retorted pepperishly. My mom shot back with "Then kick him harder, Jason!", which somehow caused Pappy to roar with laughter.

To me, Pappy has always been a figure to respect. His gritty self-reliance was remarkable. He never asked anyone to do anything for him. That's why, even after his wife died, and his drinking raged out of control, he never asked for help. And that's why, when his long history of drinking caught up to him, it was strange to see him so helpless. He had always been rightly proud of how he kept in shape – he didn't stop lifting weights until he was well into older age, and regularly won seniors' golf tournaments – but the drinking sucked the life out of him. His weight dropped to 120 pounds, clinging loosely to his 5'3 frame. His insides, inflamed with drink, refused to function, and he would yell with the pain that shot through his stomach.

Pappy, like every other time he faced a challenge, beat this one. My parents drove to his home in Florida and brought him to ours in Franklin. Pappy started to kick his addiction, sitting in a recliner and watching Westerns, all the while giving his incomparable commentary on the weather, the food and the fact that his rations of Scotch were getting steadily smaller. His appetite came back, and he was more often, in his particular parlance, "hungry enough to eat the hind end of a rag doll". His pugnacity seemed to seep into his life, as if no such puny thing as a drinking habit could stand in the way of the force of nature that was Bill Byron Gilmore.

Pappy has made a life of fighting. His classic threat "I'll kick your butt until your nose bleeds" sums up so much of his character, but also the way that that character has powered him through the challenges he's faced. He's not afraid of a challenge: he relished it. Pappy meets life head on, full-speed at Mach 2. He doesn't just live life – he sits immovably in the pilot's seat, and let me tell you: he's done it with serious skill, serious smarts and serious guts.