

**GRENDLES MODOR:
REPRESENTATION IN A
LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE**

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IN A LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

by

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ABSTRACT

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Beowulf has inspired readers and listeners since the eighth century, first as a performance then as a written poem. It is an epic tale of Anglo-Saxon warriors, life, and history. Recently, studies of Beowulf have introduced questions of twentieth-century gender stereotypes that provide a new understanding of the epic's characters and themes. However, these studies have delivered too simple a reading of complex characters like Grendel's mother and have led scholarship away from the poem. To bring critics back to the poem, this study attempts to make the poem a landscape. When the total landscape, the language, style, alliteration, and violence (physical and emotional), is studied, the poem is opened up to more than just simple readings. In a landscape reading, Grendel's mother becomes a force strong enough to disrupt the structure of the language and to battle the barriers between female and male, warrior and monster, and pagan and nonpagan. A landscape that is as violent as the characters is discovered, one in which all life is celebrated.

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Introduction

The scholarship surrounding Beowulf has been tempted away from the language arts of the poem. Using contemporary psychology and societal norms, critics have introduced new questions to be integrated into the Anglo-Saxon *landscape*, transforming the characters and the themes of the epic. These studies give the modern student a new understanding of the poem, but they have reduced the poem to simple statements about stereotypes.

Among the linguistic approaches to the language of the poem, there has not been--as far as I can tell--one that has measured the many images that the Beowulf poet drew from and contributed to the English language. There seems to be in the term "landscape" the varieties of personality that reflect the style of what the Beowulf poet saw and what he did. In this analysis, I hope to show how reading the background language as a landscape, reveals the stylistic shifts as valleys become hills become woods, and become water and shore. Using the term "landscape" is perhaps the best way to resist simplistic thematic readings.

A landscape reading reveals that Beowulf is a celebration of warriors and heroes. In its violence, a landscape of music and magic is revealed. The poem's language and characters work together to defend this landscape from readers who misinterpret the poem as a forum for twentieth-century social concerns. The Klaeber and Alexander texts and the Raffel translation have

attempted to make the poem a landscape, not a simple fact. These works present an opening to read the poem as a landscape and offer a truer reading of Grendel's mother. Using the language, sound, and appearance of the poem, this landscape reading creates a spirit of gender equality and of both biblical and pagan value systems.

Many critics have used gender stereotypes as a basis for studying Beowulf. However, these readings may not be the best means for understanding the characters because "stereotypes about 'female' and 'male' behaviour that exist in our attitudes and beliefs . . . [are] often said to be 'culturally produced' or 'constructed'" (sic) (Goodman vii). These simple readings of Raffel, Klaeber, and Alexander can reinforce the gender stereotypes that

tended to equate masculinity with virility, robustness, strength, and vigor, while femininity was defined in terms of tenderness, nurturing, pliability, softness, and receptivity. Inherent in such stereotypes is the belief . . . that once a person is found to be male or female there is only one possible kind of action. (Bullough 85)

It then becomes too easy to characterize every male in the poem as a brave warrior and every woman a peace-weaving queen and loving mother. These roles leave no room for Grendel's mother. In Rereading Beowulf, Irving assesses Grendel's mother as the antithesis of Beowulf, in a purely good/evil relationship. Gwendolyn Morgan sees a similarly antagonistic relationship existing, but internally, as a great/terrible mother complex in Grendel's mother. Morgan also finds her to be an allegory for the divine temptress and the poem a symbol of the triumph of male over female. Gillian Overing in her book, Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf, studies how the women

live within the masculine economy of the poem. These roles make no room for Grendel's mother, both a strong warrior and a loving mother, leaving the reader no choice but to characterize her as a monster because she refuses to conform to the preconstructed gender roles.

Using the Klaeber and Alexander texts and the Raffel translation, a new reading of Beowulf can be discovered, one in which the landscape is brought to the foreground and studied for the themes of the poem. Rather than seeing the poem as something engraved in stone, it is interesting to note that the rhythms and turns of English itself make images and sounds appear and disappear, surface and resurface until the poem becomes the very sea and battles it describes. When this practice is applied to Beowulf, new characterizations and values surface to resist recent readings and attention is drawn to the shifting linguistic patterns and artistic innovations. In essence, part of the poem is rediscovered. Each part of the written and oral landscape--the language, style, alliteration, and violence (physical and emotional)--adds new meaning to the characters and the values they represent. For example, Grendel's mother is frequently described by critics and translators as her son is described: "both human and monster, a force of chaos who annihilates order and reduces differences to undifferentiated gore" (Wilson 15). She is the pagan force working to overthrow God and male superiority through her battle with Beowulf. But, a landscape reading reveals that the language and the tone of the poem reinforce the ideal of a strong female and present Grendel's mother as both mother and warrior. Another aspect of the landscape is the poem as a performance--the sounds of the landscape. Much of the original meaning was delivered through the stress

and alliteration patterns of each line as the poem was read aloud, sometimes even to music (Alexander xxv).

Still another problem the student of Beowulf faces is the lack of a complete manuscript. The text of most modern editions is a collation of the text of Beowulf found in MS Cotton Vitellius A.XV in the British Library and the transcripts made by Icelander Thorkelin in 1786-87 (Alexander xix). Despite these two sources, more than one in twenty of the Old English words in any complete text has been restored or emended “where the editors think the text is defective or cannot be made to make sense” (Alexander xx). Some texts in the “original” Old English have emendations from over thirty different sources (Alexander xix). Beowulfian scholars have sought to solve the problem of a complete manuscript by accepting Klaeber’s text, first published in 1922, as the standard Old English text of Beowulf. For the modern English text, some scholars, including Robert Creed, view Burton Raffel’s 1963 translation, based on Klaeber’s text, as the orthodox modern English text of Beowulf (Raffel 123-126).

The 1995 Penguin Classics edition also leads a migration back to the poem, creating a text more loyal to the Old English as it combines the Klaeber and Wrenn-Bolton texts with glosses of the major words. The glosses in this text also use “a word-division and punctuation which do not correspond to modern conventions,” instead seeking to return to the original language (Alexander xx). The glosses also seek to eliminate editorial interpretation by giving literal definitions. As Alexander explains, “*athum-sweoran* (line 84) is glossed as ‘oath-swearers,’ not as ‘father-in-law and son-in-law’ as in most editions and translations.¹ The audience is to ask who these oath-swearers are” (Alexander xxii). While there will always be

critical arguments against every text, Alexander's glossed text has helped to bring Beowulf back to the Old English.

By reducing the poem to the issues of socially-constructed gender roles, critics have been led away from Beowulf. However, by using the Klaeber and Alexander texts and Raffel's translation, another approach to the poem, a landscape reading, is discovered. When the landscape of the poem is studied, and its language, sounds, and tones are revealed, recent readings are complemented and the characters, especially Grendel's mother, are opened up.

Chapter One

Landscape and Grammatical Gender

To understand Beowulf is finally to realize that the violent landscape of the poem is the poem. In his article, Eric Wilson studies the episodes of violence and Beowulf's attempts to create peace and concludes that "no act of violence in the poem is self-contained, but it results from prior violence and causes future bloodshed; the violence is so excessive that it threatens the very moorings of civilization" (Wilson 7). The violence is expressed in the language of the fight scenes and the descriptions of the characters and their emotions. The layers of language of the poem, the poet's style, create a landscape of both physical and emotional acts of violence.

Both the literal and metaphorical landscape combine to change the approach to the problem of Grendel's mother by drawing attention to the shifting linguistic patterns and artistic innovations of the Old English. In the literal sense, the landscape of Grendel's mother, her mere, transforms from freezing waters to hot, bubbling waves of "*haton heolfre*" as she changes from grievous to vengeful (Alexander 849). Metaphorically, the linguistic and thematic landscape also adapt to Grendel's mother. As she disrupts the peace at Herot to avenge Grendel's death, the poet's style changes, and the common order of the language becomes disrupted by disjunctive words and phrases. All the features of the landscape, the complex patterns of language and imagery, move between Beowulf and Grendel's mother without regard to the rigid stereotypes that would assign distinct themes to men and to women.

The landscape surrounding Grendel's mother threatens traditional gender roles, causing weak critics to rush to de-emphasize or completely obliterate it. The emotional violence of Grendel's mother, also part of the linguistic landscape, works together with her physical feats to debilitate society--if only for a moment. However, this landscape reading of the poem is left out of weak readings, and as a consequence, Grendel's mother's character is reduced to a monster. With a landscape reading, Grendel's mother's character can be completed.

After one thousand lines of violence, Grendel's mother enters the poem's landscape with her own physical and emotional violence that is already familiar to the audience through her son's actions. However, Grendel's mother's behavior is not the mercenary violence of Beowulf; hers is driven by emotions, which Beowulf cannot understand the strength of and which only intensify her physical power. At Grendel's mother's entrance into the poem, the poet at once begins to intertwine descriptions of her emotions with those of her strength into the landscape. Phrases such as: "*yrnthe gemunde*" (misery brooded on); "*man-dream fleon*" (human joys fled); "*geosceaft-gasta*" (doomed spirit); "*gifre ond galg-mod*" (greedy and in deadly mood); and "*sorh-fulne sith*" (grievous expedition) transform Grendel's mother from a monster to a grieving mother (Alexander 1259b-78a). They mark her emotional violence and intensify her threat to the stability of the hero. The poet easily moves through her emotions, creating an intimate landscape. The audience becomes aware that the poet knows the depths of this character, trusting every warning of the violence that she is capable of. Because the poet speaks of Grendel's mother's strength with

such intimacy, the audience never stops to question whether her gender will inhibit this strength, but instead accepts that it will reinforce it.

In the same passage, Raffel moves the focus from Grendel's mother's emotions to the Bible. Between lines 1259 and 1278, Raffel mentions God five times as opposed to the two times it appears in Old English: "God drove him [Cain] off . . . [Beowulf] Remembered God's grace and the strength He'd given him / And relied on the Lord . . . as God had meant him to do." While Raffel is not loyal to the original as he channels the audience's empathy to Beowulf and the biblical values he represents, he succeeds in creating a feeling of respect for all life. He opens his landscape up to create excitement and sympathy for Beowulf as well as for Grendel's mother.

The sounds of the landscape, the natural pauses, stresses, and alliteration of poetry that was first performed aloud, are also lost in weak readings: "Alliteration helped the composer find his words, and helped the audience find the stress-pattern which is the basis of the verse" (Alexander xxv). The half lines from the Klaeber and Alexander texts carry with these stress patterns the meaning of the poem as the "four main stresses [of each line] fall on the chief words for the sense" (Alexander xxv). For example, both phrases "*yrmthe gemunde*" and "*man-dream fleon*" fall after the medial caesura, alerting the audience for the third main stress, which is an echo of the initial sounds of one or both of the first two main stresses (Alexander 1259b, 1264b). In these phrases, "*yrmthe*" and "*man-dream*," the meaning of the half lines is signified--Grendel's mother lives with misery and without human joys. These character traits are further emphasized in the landscape as both words mirror the alliteration of the first main stress, gaining a memorable structure.

This is also the character of Raffel's poem, the monster who is free to spread misery and murder human joys. The sense of his poem is not linked to the stresses and alliteration of each line: "I should perhaps add that I have tried to let the weight and motion of each line determine where the stresses (four to a line) fall" (Raffel xxii). In line 1260, Raffel uses consonance to bring sound to his landscape: "Mother, living in the murky cold lake." The repeated patterns of the "m" and "k" sound, create the "murky cold lake" and emphasize this line and the frigid home of Grendel's mother. Part of the strength of a landscape reading is the ability to sound out the meaning.

In Grendel's mother's first demonstration of her physical strength, her attack on Herot, the landscape again perfectly balances her emotional and physical violence--equally displaying her as a grieving mother and a vengeful warrior:

*Heo waes on ofste, wolde ut thanon,
feore beorgan, tha heo onfunden waes.
Hrathe heo aethelinga anne haefde
faeste befangen, tha heo to fenne gang.
 . . . heo under heolfre genam
cuthe folme; cearu waes geniwod. (Alexander 1292-1303)*

Although Grendel's mother plans to murder, she does it quickly and without enjoyment, for the basic act of revenge--one knight for one son. The linguistic landscape portrays her rush in line 1292a: "she was in haste." The language moves through her mindset with a swift S V C order into two adverbs: "*thanon*" (away from there) and "*hrathe*" (quickly) (1292a, 1294a). It is clear from the syntax that Grendel's mother does not enjoy murdering Escher, she is simply avenging her son's death. Her act is so pure and without pleasure that the two clauses in lines 1294 and 1295, narrating the

kidnapping of Escher and her escape, are stylistic duplicates that use the order: adverb, subject, (preposition), object, verb. The landscape created by the poet even refuses to change, suggesting that this act is normal.

In case this point was missed by the audience, the poet repeats the motive in lines 1302b-03b. Now the sounds of the landscape emphasize the theme of revenge and grief. The main stresses of these lines summarize the meaning of the scene: “*heolfre*” (blood), “*genam*” (took), “*cuthe*” (well-known), “*folme*” (hand), “*cearu*” (sorrow), “*geniwod*” (renewed). The word “*heolfre*” is given added significance as it carries the alliteration of the whole line. “Under blood,” revenge, is the key phrase, reminding the audience of Grendel’s mother’s loss, her humiliation when she retrieves the trophy of her son’s murder, and her fate to die under blood with her son.

Raffel transforms this carefully structured landscape of grievous revenge into a murderous pilgrimage:

To save her life she moved still faster,
Took a single victim and fled from the hall,
Running to the moors, discovered, but her supper
Assured, sheltered in her dripping claws.
. . . She had carried off Grendel’s claw. Sorrow
Had returned to Denmark. (1292-1304)

Throughout this scene, Raffel builds a poetic scene for Grendel’s mother’s monstrosity with her “dripping claws” and foreshadowed acts of cannibalism, “her supper assured” (1294-95). In a dramatic instance of consonance, he accentuates Grendel’s mother’s actions when she carefully carries Escher to the moors: “assured, sheltered” (1295). This blatant use of alliteration implies that murdering Escher is more than revenge for Grendel’s

mother. She is wildly escaping, “still faster . . . fled . . . running,” but she protects Escher in a nervous excitement provoked by the thoughts of murdering then devouring Hrothgar’s most beloved knight (1292-94). Raffel also uses these lines to remind the audience of Grendel’s monstrosity as Grendel’s mother pays a final tribute to her son and carries off his “claw” (1303). In this line is the one instance of the revenge theme as the break of the line, after “sorrow,” emphasizes the sorrow of Grendel’s death and the sorrow of her act of revenge. Yet, Raffel does not dwell on revenge as the original does; instead he prefers to attribute Escher’s murder to Grendel’s mother’s appetite for destruction. In this passage, Raffel falsifies the original theme of revenge, but enriches the underlying theme of the Old English that celebrates the warrior in all mankind, even Grendel’s mother.

While the language stresses Grendel’s mother’s emotions in the midst of her violent physical strength in an effort to emphasize her human qualities, as well as her potential role as the destroyer of Beowulf, the opposite tactic is used with Beowulf. From the first mention of the hero, exclamations of his physical prowess saturate the landscape. Beowulf is introduced as: “*god mid Geatum*” (good man among the Geats); “*se waes mon-cynnes maegenes strengest*” (he was [of] mankind [of] strength mightiest); “*aethele ond eacen*” (noble and mighty) (Alexander 195a-98a). Here, the language and style are purely concrete--measures of nobility and physical strength that use standard word order: subject, verb, complement (SVC) (Quirk 92). Aside from an alliterative appositive phrase, “*aethele ond eacen*,” there is no excitement here to be mirrored by the language. Such a landscape reading allows the audience to appreciate the force of Grendel’s mother’s emotions and their ability to disrupt the natural order of the language, while with

Beowulf straightforwardness abounds. The poet clearly plays favorites, as he becomes intimate with Grendel's mother while merely recounting Beowulf's glorious reputation.

These lines present a trouble spot for complacent readings that find a declaration of Beowulf's superiority over Grendel's mother in the poem and in Raffel's translation:

In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's
Follower and the strongest of the Geats--greater
And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world
Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror. (Raffel 194-97)

Raffel boldly inserts two appositive phrases that interrupt the subject, "Beowulf," and the verb, "heard," of the main clause. The two appositives instill a pause in the main idea and alert the audience to an important interruption--two testimonies of the unparalleled strength of Beowulf. Raffel creates a superhuman hero, drawn from the landscape reading. However, this passage is not intended to simply show Beowulf's superiority. In illustrating the hero's strength, Raffel also shows Grendel's mother's strength since she soon will be his opponent.

The landscape uses the same direct language to describe Beowulf during his fight with Grendel, a moment which should evoke some emotion from the hero. As the first fight in a series of violent episodes, this scene sets the standard for which the remaining two will follow. In the scene, never does the poet, or the audience, achieve a close relationship with Beowulf. The hero thus becomes stronger as the landscape concentrates on his physical feats:

up-lang astod

Weak readings have transformed this landscape of the first battle into a bias toward Beowulf. For example, Raffel takes the intimacy of the landscape reading and instead applies it to the hero. He establishes the gruesomeness of Grendel, thus implying Beowulf's bravery in fighting him: "infamous killer . . . Almighty's enemy . . . hell's captive" (762-88). To emphasize his point, Raffel does not follow the Old English. In the opening lines of this battle, he changes *maera* (strange one) to "infamous killer" and *hearm-scatha* (injurious foe) to "writhing monster," which provide a more graphic description of Grendel's behavior. He is not merely strange and injurious as the Old English explains. Raffel's adjectives connote disease and pain as the reader silently hopes Beowulf conquers this plague. The battle is then described with such emotion that the reader can easily assume Beowulf's state of mind: "[Grendel] wanting no flesh but retreat, / Desiring nothing but escape . . . the battle swept, angry / And wild. Herot trembled . . . the horrible shrieks of pain / And defeat" (763-87). Raffel drives through Beowulf's emotional range, valor to victory, strengthening the underlying theme of the poem, the celebration of the strength and heroism of Anglo-Saxon warriors.

The narrations of Grendel's mother's emotional and physical violence establish that the landscape reading mocks any attempts to stereotype Grendel's mother. Under these gender stereotypes, females, such as Grendel's mother, "when linked with warlike or masculine behavior, became a metaphor for unnatural and heathen or devilish proclivities" (Nitzsche, "Anglo Saxon" 140). Thus, the numerous connotations of the monstrosity of Grendel's mother begin to shape her character, despite the attempts of the landscape to show her as a grieving mother. Even Raffel inserts a nonpoetic

line that assures the audience that Grendel's mother, though monstrously fierce, is still inferior to the men of the Danes:

. . . No female, no matter
How fierce, could have come with a man's strength,
fought with the power and courage men fight with,
Smashing their shining swords, their bloody,
Hammer-forged blades onto boar-headed helmets,
Slashing and stabbing with the sharpest of points. (Raffel
1282-87)

Raffel alters the meaning of these lines when he leaves out the word "*waepned*" (weaponed) from his poem: "a man's strength . . . the power and courage men fight with" (1283-84). He promotes the male superiority in these lines where Klaeber first observed: "it [this remark] is evidently to be explained as an endeavor to discredit the unbiblical notion of a woman's superiority" (181). Here, it is easy to become a willing slave to the constructed gender roles in which "male = power, authority, and female = passivity, compromise" (Goodman 2). Raffel reinforces the gender stereotypes when he proclaims that: "No female, no matter / How fierce, could have come with a man's strength" (1282-83). The controversy continues in other translations and through critics that are influenced by twentieth-century gender issues that fail to fully escape the fear of a strong woman (Alexander, Kennedy).

In the poem such a generalization was not intended; in fact, it was avoided by the poet's use of the word "*waepned*" in line 1284, therefore, reading impartially:

Waes se gryre laessa

efne swa micle, swa bith maegtha craeft,
wig-grye wifes, be waepned-men
thonne heoru bunden, hamere gethuren,
sweord swate fah swin ofer helme,
ecgun dyhttig, andweard scireth. (Alexander 1282b-87b)

In some translations, this passage makes a clear argument for the superiority of men over the “*wig-grye wifes*” (fearfulness in war [of] woman) (1284a). The S V O/C order “is also disrupted by *disjunction*, when first place is taken by an element which has special significance or importance in the context” (Quirk 93). Here, the expected disjunction occurs in the phrase “*waes se gryre laessa be waepned-men.*” There are two adverb phrases before “*waepned-men*” that interrupt the order (1282b, 1284b). Clearly, this phrase deserves special attention. A truer reading reveals that “*waepned-men,*” glossed in Alexander and Raffel only as males, is a compound formed from the past participle of the infinitive *waepnian*, to arm, and the plural of *mon*, men, thus creating “*weaponed-men*” (1284, Hall 394). This alternate definition becomes significant as it changes the meaning of the passage: the strength of Grendel’s mother cannot be compared with that of the *weaponed-men* of the Danes. No longer is this passage a disclaimer, but merely a matter of fact--no human, man or woman, could be expected to be victorious over men wielding hammer-forged swords, sharp enough to cut through helmets. Now, the gender bias disappears, to allow the poem to concede that external factors, such as weapons, have more influence in deciding the victor.

Another tool used to create meaning in these lines is the disjointed order of the main clause: “*waes [V] se gryre [S] laessa [C]*” (Alexander 1282b-84b). It appears to be just another disjointed form of the SVC order

that is common in Old English verse. However, it is also probable that the poet was implying the question, “Was the terror less compared with weaponed-men?”, because the VSC order seen here is standard in Old English questions (Quirk 93). If these lines are read as a question, the meaning changes from an outright statement of the weaponed-Danes’s superiority to a rhetorical question posed to the audience, intended to quell their instinct to quickly dismiss the strength of Grendel’s mother because she is a woman. Once again, the poet is using the flexibility of Old English to keep the openness of gender roles alive. However, the poet’s speech act becomes void because Raffel uses “man’s strength” instead of “*weaponed-men*” (Raffel 1283). He uses the lines from the Klaeber text that have “a certain conventional effect,” but with an inaccurate definition (Austin 14). The speech act is now a misfire: “the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched and our act is void or without effect” (Austin 16).

The landscape restores innocence to the poem, leaving behind the issues of gender that cloud reading of Beowulf. The landscape is now ready for the fight between Grendel’s mother and Beowulf. Here, again, the landscape changes to alternately emphasize its themes. As Beowulf is entering the mere, the focus is on Grendel’s mother’s emotions. She is described as: “*heoro-gifre*” (ravenous); “*graedig*” (greedy); “*lathan*” (hostile) (Alexander 1499-1505). The landscape creates excitement and suspense in the audience as they watch Beowulf entering the home of the “*brim-wylf*” ([she]-wolf of the lake), who is obviously ready for the fight (1506a). These emotions are also placed significantly in the metric scheme of the poem as a performance: “*heoro-gifre*,” the first main stress of line

1498 establishes the alliteration of the line, and as the first stressed adjective, the meaning of the entire passage--Grendel's mother is ravenous. The same oral pattern follows with the second adjective phrase: "*grim ond graedig*" (1499a). The alliteration is set and carried through the first and second stresses to the caesura. Only after this natural pause at the caesura to insure that the listener understands that Grendel's mother is ravenous, grim, and greedy does the performance continue. Yet the emotional tone of the landscape is already slowly beginning to transfer to Beowulf as the masculine pronoun *se* is used to refer to Grendel's mother in line 1497b--the exact moment when Beowulf first sees the mere, the start of the fight. This gender-incorrect pronoun is a foreshadowing of the impending role reversal.

As Beowulf sinks further into the mere, the focus on his emotions increases as that of Grendel's mother decreases. Now it is Grendel's mother that "*maegen-raes forgeaf*" (violent blow dealt out), and Beowulf who is "*faeges*" (doomed); "*yrre*" (angry); and ultimately "*werig-mod*" (weary) (Alexander 1519-1543). The level of intimacy previously used in the landscape surrounding Grendel's mother is transferred to Beowulf as he is immersed in the mere--into Grendel's mother's world. Consequently, the simple narrative style previously used to recount Beowulf's victories is now used with Grendel's mother. The reader can only imagine her emotional state, but is fully aware of her physical violence as she: "*Grap*" (clutched); "*gefeng*" (seized); "*hrathe*" (quickly); "*forgeald*" (repaid) (1501-1541). The landscape takes the characters back to the poem's social contract. It accentuates Beowulf's emotions--the only time this occurs in the poem--and Grendel's mother's strength.

However, the liveliness of the landscape changes. It is Beowulf who regains control of the victory as he: “*gefeng*” (grasped); “*yrringa-sloh*” (angrily struck); “*grapode*” (caught); “*braec*” (broke); “*gefeg*” (rejoiced in) (Alexander 1563-1569). The gender problem is exposed by line 1568 when the poet uses the adjective “*feagne*” (doomed), first used to describe Beowulf in line 1527, to now describe Grendel’s mother. The intimacy of the landscape has come full circle, as has the reversal of male and female roles. The poet plays with the landscape surrounding the emotional and physical strength of Beowulf and Grendel’s mother to prove that gender is easily manipulated, rendering it a void concept, since the landscape exposes the fictions of the gendered attributes.

The fight with Grendel’s mother is another spot for Raffel to engage in the landscape writing. He manipulates modern English to illustrate Beowulf’s renowned heroism and Grendel’s mother’s beastly viciousness. For Beowulf, Raffel finds verbs that connote the sound tactics of a skilled warrior, and, for Grendel’s mother, the irrational behavior of an animal. Words such as: “swung, leaped, tossed, seized, threw, lifted, struck,” play against the actions of Grendel’s mother: “ripped, tore, clawed, bit, tearing, squatting” (1519-65). The monstrosity of Grendel’s mother is never more apparent than in these lines, and by comparison, the heroism of Beowulf is at its peak. As this is Grendel’s mother’s death scene, the audience is left with a final testament to her gruesomeness--one last reminder of her descent from Cain. This passage is so successful because of the natural intensity it carries as a fight scene. Raffel can be sure that the reader is paying close attention to detail--the perfect moment to accentuate his good/evil landscape that, while

not true to the Old English, accentuates the warrior in both Grendel's mother and Beowulf.

In the fight between Beowulf and Grendel's mother, the text mocks the readings of scholars who misread this scene as one of male or female domination. For example, critics such as Morey believe that the mere has engulfed Beowulf into its female world as "Beowulf becomes the feminized object of his antagonist's male-imagined sexual violence" (Morey 493). A landscape reading illustrates the poem's war against these simplistic readings while demonstrating that the once distinct lines separating the gender roles have now converged.

To further juxtapose Grendel's mother's evil against Beowulf's goodness, critics have taken advantage of an extensive critical argument over line 1537a: "*Gefeng tha be feaxe --nalas for faehthe mearn*" (Alexander). In this line, some scholars, Klaeber and Raffel among them, retain the manuscript reading *eaxle* (shoulder) and reject the emendation *feaxe* (hair), proposed on metrical grounds. The problem for these critics lies in the connotation of *feaxfeng* (hair-pulling) which was a recognized insult among continental Germanic peoples (Stanley 339). Although the alliteration on *eaxle* is unusual for the line and most modern editors agree with Klaeber, these readings disregard the consequences of the use of *feaxe* in the Alexander text: "seized [her] then by [the] hair." Here, Beowulf is so desperate that he must resort to vulgar insults as he fights for his life. Grendel's mother, a warrior equal in all respects to Beowulf, withstands his unchivalrous behavior--another small battle won against traditional gender roles. Yet, in the midst of a battle to the death, Raffel's Beowulf threatens only Grendel's mother's life, never his noble masculinity as he "raised / His

arms and seized her by the shoulder” (1536-37). As in line 1284, this scene is another trouble spot for Raffel as he thought he was being loyal to the Old English and following the Klaeber text. However, by translating *eaxle* instead of *feaxe*, he inadvertently tempts readers to reinforce stereotypes and misinterpret Beowulf’s actions.

With the many dimensions of Grendel’s mother, the poet has a vast resource of traits to alternately emphasize in the landscape. She is introduced as both monster and emotionally-distressed female. The strength of her emotions to enrage and multiply her violent tendencies is embellished to the point that the reader begins to view her as a threat to the hero. Yet, in a weak moment, Raffel obliterates all threats to Beowulf in line 1282 so the work will not be entirely dismissed as pagan, as promoting gender equality: “No female, no matter/ How fierce, could have come with a man’s strength.” In Raffel these biblical undercurrents are part of his landscape that he uses to restore the magic and music of the Old English.

The landscape reading continues to emphasize the instability of Grendel’s mother’s character by emphasizing a linguistic style that is altered from other passages in the poem, an order of verbs and their objects that are inverted. In effect, it creates unstable language. No longer can the audience be assured that objects will follow verbs. Now Grendel’s mother is as much a threat to Beowulf, the social contract, civilization, and the biblical tradition as she is to the structure of the poem itself.

The language creates a landscape that becomes the foundation for the characters and themes. Excitement and spirit surround Grendel’s mother, as the language is turned upside down to accentuate her physical and emotional strengths. The poet and audience move intimately around her, guided by the

underlying theme of her disruption of the gender roles. Her character is pushed further into the foreground, by the contrasting language used with Beowulf as the poet gives a straightforward account of his brave deeds, void of emotion and intimacy. The audience can appreciate his valor, but is not excited by it. With Grendel's mother, emotions, violence, gender, and monstrosity feed off each other, the language, and the poem to create an excitement that can be discovered in a landscape reading.

Chapter Two

Landscape, Cain, and Authority

At the heart of Grendel's mother's character is an apparent contradiction in roles. She is both a descendant of Cain and a mourning mother, monster and human, biblical and pagan. At times she is the second of three monsters that Beowulf must fight, living in a hellish mere, and continuing the destruction that Cain began. She is also a mother, living in a cavernous, womb-like marsh, and seeking retribution for her loss. Yet, no matter which role she plays, she always remains nameless, identified merely through her relationship to the closest male in her life--she is simply Grendel's mother.

The predominant characteristic of Grendel's mother is her descent from Cain, making her a monstrous figure fated to spread violence and destruction against God and civilization. The principal basis for the Cain tradition in literature is found in the Bible (Williams 19). Although small discrepancies over the magical and monstrous characteristics of these descendants occur between the two stories, it is generally agreed that "all monsters are descended from Cain and that both Cain and his descendants were marked by a fantastic appearance . . . [and] peculiar strength of body and mind" (Williams 20). The Judaic culture attributes this strength to its theory that Cain is the offspring of Eve and Satan, thus Cain and his descendants are the direct progeny of Satan and must promote his desire to destroy mankind (Williams 20). It is this relationship between Cain and the

Devil that provides the foundation for the allegorical significance of Cain in literature.

In literary history, Cain's descendants are equated with evil, and "always true to their origins in envy and murder, and they build cities and states to satisfy their lust for power" (Williams 20). Cain's progeny are also often associated with the mother, the animal, and social evils. The animal quality is linked to bestiality, demon worship, cannibalism, and more directly to a representation of monsters (Williams 21). This quality is largely found in Raffel's translation of *Beowulf*, as both Grendel and his mother are described as animal-like and monstrous. It is also interesting that the mother parallel, Cain to Eve and Grendel to his mother, is found in the epic and suggested in Raffel.

The first description the reader is given of Grendel's mother is her genealogy. The poet purposely gives equal treatment to the ancestry of Grendel's mother, a supposed monster, as was previously given to Hrothgar, the king of the Danes. However, as the poet recounts Hrothgar's family history, the language assumes the bland style and mechanical tone of weak prose:

*Tha waes on burgum Beowulf Scyldinga,
leof leod-cyning, longe thrage
folcum gefraege; faeder ellor hwearf,
aldor of earde. Othaet him eft onwoc
heah Healfdene; heold, thenden lifde,
gamol ond guth-reouw, glaede Scyldingas.
Thaem feower bearn forth-gerimed
in worold wocun: weoroda raeswan,
Heorogar, ond Hrothgar ond Halga til;
hyrde ic thaet [Gap] waes Onelan cwen,
Heatho-Scilfingas heals-gebedda. (Alexander 53-63)*

Here, the poet clearly and repeatedly marks time with transitional adverbs and adjectives in a full landscape that mirrors a historical document rather than a poem: “*Tha*” (then), “*longe prage*” (long time), “*Othaet*” (until), “*eft*” (again), “*thenden*” (while) (53-57). The inherent movement of these conjunctions forces the reader to relive a hasty account of the events that led to Hrothgar’s reign, as if they do not matter anymore. These words are then combined with the word order common to Old English prose, S V O/C (Quirk 93). The resulting combination creates a simple, free-moving landscape that quickly and indifferently glorifies Hrothgar and leaves no room for the reader to pause and contemplate his character. These repeated descriptions of time also establish that Hrothgar, and the patriarchal world he comes to represent, are dated concepts, to be overthrown by Grendel’s mother.

Raffel breathes excitement into Hrothgar’s genealogy. Words with greater connotations of power are freely entered into the passage to represent the landscape of history:

Then Beo was king in that Danish castle,
Shild’s son ruling as long as his father
And as loved, a famous lord of men.
And he in turn gave his people a son,
The great Healfdane, a fierce fighter
Who led the Danes to the end of his long
Life and left them four children,
Three princes to guide them in battle, Hergar
And Hrothgar and Halga the Good, and one daughter,
Yrs, who was given to Onela, king
Of the Swedes, and became his wife and their queen. (Raffel
53-63)

For example, Raffel replaces “*leof*” (dear) with “loved”; “*gefraege*” (well-known) with “a famous lord of men”; “*heah*” (noble) with “the great Healfdane”; and “*feower bearn*” (four children) with “three princes to guide them in battle” (Alexander 54-59, Raffel 55-60). After reading Raffel’s passage, the audience extols Hrothgar, and by association Beowulf and Grendel’s mother for their warrior-like qualities.

Grendel’s mother’s lineage, however, is presented with a landscape that breathes excitement and deliberateness in its linguistic style:

*se the waeter-egesan wunian scolde,
 cealde streamas, sithan Cain wearth
 to ecg-banan angan brether,
 faederen-maege; he tha fag gewat,
 morthre gemearcod, man-dream fleon,
 westen warode. (Alexander 1260a-65a)*

To stress the importance of this passage and Grendel’s mother’s descent from Cain, the usual pattern of S V O/C is varied, and the style follows the expected disjunctions as the object precedes both subject and verb. For example, “*man-dream [O] fleon [V]*” and “*westen [O] warode [V]*,” both illustrate the poet’s attempt to stress that Cain and his descendants flee human joys (O) and dwell in waste (O) (1264b-65a). Here are two consecutive phrases with disjointed objects that cause the modern reader, and would have caused the original audience, to pause at the unusual style, thus assuring the poet that this point was received--Grendel’s mother is both human and superhuman. The stress and alliteration of this passage both point to line 1264 as the key phrase: “*morthre gemearcod, man-dream fleon.*” Every word in this line is a main stress, each important to the total meaning.

This is the only line in the passage in which both half-lines begin with the alliterative stress. During an oral performance, this line's alliteration would stand out from the rest, signifying to the audience the importance of this piece of Grendel's mother's history, in which she, because of her ancestor Cain, is marked with murder and exiled from human joys. There is an attempt here by the landscape to defend Grendel's mother and explain that until her son is murdered, she lives in peace.

Another stylistic device that emphasizes Grendel's mother's dual character is the use of gender-biased pronouns. Descriptions of Grendel's mother contain the masculine singular nominative demonstrative *se*, instead of *seo*, to refer to Grendel's mother. This happens with no other character in the poem, and many times to Grendel's mother; it draws attention to the duality of her character. In Line 1260, this and other style changes work together in the landscape to illustrate Grendel's mother's warrior-like strengths, once reserved for men, implied by her descent from Cain: "*se the waeter-egesan* [O] *wunian scolde* [V]," (she who dread-water should dwell in). First, the use of the masculine "*se*," then the disjunction in which the verb, "*wunian scolde*," follows its object, "*waeter-egesan*," are significant. Finally, the verb phrase itself is unusual in that the nonfinite part, "*wunian*," precedes the finite part, "*scolde*." These elements of the syntax add emphasis, one that can be both heard and seen, to essential characteristics of Grendel's mother: her strength that shines above the sentence, and her fate to live in a watery exile.

In the same introductory passage, Raffel introduces biblical values into Grendel's mother's landscape:

. . . living in the murky cold lake
Assigned her since Cain had killed his only
Brother, slain his father's son
With an angry sword. God drove him off,
Outlawed him to the dry and barren desert,
And branded him with a murderer's mark. (Raffel 1260-65)

The lines, "Assigned her since Cain had killed his only / Brother, slain his father's son," establishes a language of authority and history that demonstrates the awesome capabilities of Grendel's mother (1261-62). By ending the line with "only" and beginning with "Brother," Raffel uses the appearance of the language as another dimension of the landscape. He slows Cain's act with the break in this phrase, giving the reader time to think about the repercussions. Not only did Cain murder, but he murdered his "only brother." He further emphasizes this theme as he changes "*ecg-banan*" (slayer by sword) to "killed" (Alexander 1262a, Raffel 1261). The part of speech also changes--from a dative singular noun to a past tense active verb (Klaeber 321). Grendel's mother's ancestor is now actively "killing," committing a murder, breaking a commandment. The reader has no choice but to relive Abel's murder while Raffel foreshadows Grendel's mother's crimes. He asserts Grendel's mother's murderous ancestry and her threat to society with word of sound and action such as "slain, angry, outlawed, branded." Raffel uses the landscape of authority to instill in the audience a fear of Grendel's mother and, at the same time, a respect for her strength.

Another aspect of the Cain allegory in the landscape of Grendel's mother is the association of her character with the monster. In an introductory appositive phrase, the poet calls her "*aglaec-wif*," glossed in Alexander's translation as "she-monster" and in Raffel as "female horror"

(1259a, 1259). However, a more appropriate definition is needed, one without the negative connotation so common in characterizations of Grendel's mother. The word becomes more ambiguous as it is typically defined as both monster and warrior, depending on which character it is describing (Alexander 893). A more inclusive definition for the compound would be a woman having monstrous or warrior-like qualities, since "*aglaecwif* denotes a woman, a human female, who is also *aglaeca*" (Menzer 4). This problem definition follows a landscape reading. In later appositives, she is referred to by Alexander as "*mihtig man-scatha*" (mighty evil-foe) and "*mere-wif mihtig*" (mighty mere-woman) (1339a, 1519a). What Alexander glosses as "mighty evil-foe" is literally "false antagonist" or "bad warrior" (Clark Hall 228, 293). According to this definition, Grendel's mother is never an outright enemy to the hero, merely a warrior--an equal to the warrior Beowulf. In this landscape, Grendel's mother becomes an enemy to Beowulf only after he forces her to, after he murders Grendel. She is a false enemy, manipulated into a revenge murder, then attacked in her home and compelled to defend her life. Yet, weak readings present her as a foe to mankind.

The descriptions of monstrous strength are extended to the language of Grendel's mother's home. The "mere" that began as "*cealde streamas*" (cold streams) transforms into a surging mere as "*sunu deoth wrecan*" (son's death avenged) and "*sorh is geniwod*" (sorrow is renewed) (Alexander 1261a, 1278b, 1322b). Now a murderer in exile, Grendel's mother's mere is described with allusions to Cain's barren desert:

waeter under stod
dreorig and gedrefed. . .
Flod blode weol -folc to saegon-

hatan heolfre. . . .
wyrm-cynnes fela,
sellice sae-draacan (Alexander 1416b-26a)

Treating this description of the mere with as much importance as the descriptions of Grendel's mother, the poet uses alliterative appositives and disjunction to give special significance to the context. For example, line 1422a-23a, "*Flod blode weol -folc to saegon- hatan heolfre,*" (Water [with] blood welled up - [the] troop at gazed - hot gore) provides a particularly characteristic and stylistically divergent description of the home of a descendant of Cain. With "*blode*" (O) interrupting the subject and verb of the first clause, another dependent clause, "*folc to saegon,*" interrupting the main clause from its alliterative object phrase, "*hatan heolfre,*" this sentence has a style that begs for attention. As the reader is forced to struggle to find order and meaning in the sentence, the full impact of Grendel's mother's home and landscape is also appreciated.

In Raffel, the translation becomes a mere:

. . . below them was the lake, its water
Bloody and bubbling. . . .
How its heat rose up, watched the waves'
Blood-stained swirling. . . .
. . . crawling with snakes,
Fantastic serpents. (1416-26)

His lines end with the physical qualities of the mere, the water, waves, and snakes, and begin with its descriptive qualities: "bloody, blood-stained, fantastic." These lines are the landscape--they are the mere. He uses Old English stylistic devices: alliteration, "bloody and bubbling," and compounds, "blood-stained," to grab the reader's attention as he horrifies them with

illustrations of hell. Raffel's respect and affection for the eighth-century poet also appears in these lines as he uses the same techniques that the original poem uses. Only a monster could survive in these waters, a monster that Raffel's master created--Grendel's mother.

In the midst of the Cain allegory, another dimension of Grendel's mother takes shape. Although this role is easily overlooked, it is the first role she is introduced as, the one in which she is named after--mother:

Grendles modor,
ides, aglaec-wif yrmthe gemunde, (Alexander 1258b-59b)

Balancing her landscape, this role is given treatment equal to that given to her descent from Cain. The poet alters the style in these lines as well. Two appositives interrupt the main clause to define Grendel's mother's two roles: "*ides*" (woman) and "*aglaec-wif*" (monstrous/warrior woman). But the focal point of this description is the latter half of the sentence where the object of the verb, "*yrmthe*" (misery), is displaced. There is no uncertainty here as to what Grendel's mother is brooding on. She is mourning the murder of her only son. The sound of these lines repeats the emphasis of the style. *Ides*, *wif*, and *yrmthe* are main stresses and linked in their vowels by assonance. Meaning is found in Grendel's mother through these words: woman, female, and misery. The added emphasis of the landscape demands that more attention be given to these lines and to this role. Weak readings desecrate this image with a description of Grendel's mother that negates the mother image, calling her "the dangerous and devouring monster" (Morgan 56). The evil pagan monster of this study breaks out of the simplistic images

of the landscape reading: a loving mother, refusing to be typecast by the gender role that binds her.

As Grendel's mother's primary role changes, the landscape surrounding her does as well. The hot and bloody mere becomes a symbolic womb. It gave life to Grendel and received him at this death. It now houses a mourning mother figure. Life has come full circle in the mere. As it opens to accept what it gave birth to, the language changes to describe it as a "*fen-freotho*" (fen-refuge) (851a). The mere is now "a place providing protection or shelter; haven--something to which one may turn for help, relief, or escape" (Microsoft Bookshelf). It now nourishes Grendel's mother, feeding off the "*feorh-lastas*" (life-traces) (846b), of Grendel, to prepare her for her battle with Beowulf. Later, the mere becomes her protector as it takes an active role in the battle, heaving waves full of sea monsters to hinder Beowulf's descent:

brim-wylm onfeng
hilde rince. Tha waes hwil daeges,
aer he thone grund-wong ongytan mehte. (Alexander
1494b-96b)

Raffel emphasizes the importance of these lines in his near-literal translation:

. . . the heaving water covered him
Over. For hours he sank through the waves;
At last he saw the mud of the bottom. (Raffel 1494-96)

The mere has now become an extension of Grendel's mother, evolving as she does, disturbing roles in both its murderous and life-affirming landscape.

It is not long before the poet seemingly shatters Grendel's mother's image as a loving mother, however. She is foremost portrayed as an avenger of her son's death:

*Ond his modor tha gyt
gifre ond galg-mod gegan wolde
sorh-fulne sith, sunu deoth wrecan . (Alexander 1276b-78b)*

In these lines the style remains unchanged. Yet this simplistic structure is more effective here than a disjunction would be, because it allows an immediate comprehension of the action and its consequences. Grendel's mother still maintains her good/biblical qualities in addition to her bad/pagan acts; her dualism is now complete. She acts in violence and commits a social evil when murdering Escher, but she is provoked by love, a biblical ideal. She is also provoked by the same concept as Beowulf when he murdered Grendel--revenge. Yet as Beowulf is lauded and proclaimed a hero, Grendel's mother is hunted and murdered like an animal. She is a loving mother/female, but she is also a murderous monster/male.

Although her role will not be forced into either gender role, critics still punish her as though she were the stereotypical female, denigrating her act of revenge. In her decision to avenge Grendel's death, "the Great Mother becomes the Terrible Mother, a monster which dominates, threatens, and in some manifestations actually devours the male" (Morgan 55). Grendel's mother's character is evolving yet again, but not into the complete "Terrible Mother" as Morgan suggests. Grendel's mother's action follows the very same path that Beowulf soon will follow in his revenge of Escher's death which begins with Raffel's war cry, "It is better for us all / To avenge our

friends, not mourn them forever” (1384-85). Raffel clearly condones Grendel’s mother’s act. The visual landscape points to “all” as the center of this ideology; all men and all women are encouraged to act with revenge. The gender lines are dissolved in Raffel’s poem: what is expected behavior for men, is expected behavior for women.

Part of the reason critics are quick to categorize Grendel’s mother as the “Terrible Mother” is because she will not conform to the feminine role seemingly prescribed by Wealtheow. Wealtheow is not as forceful as Grendel’s mother. In a landscape reading she is content in the background. Complacent readings mistake this contentedness for feminine weakness, laud her for this trait, and punish Grendel’s mother for her security in her strength. Now unwittingly, Wealtheow’s characterization provides a point of general comparison for the roles of mother and woman. While Grendel’s mother emanates strength and action, Wealtheow’s character originates in a quieter strength. Unlike Grendel’s mother, she does have the advantage of direct speech, as she begs Beowulf to insure a peaceful future for her sons: “*Beo thu suna minum daedum gedefe, dream-healdende!*” (Be you in action gentle [with] my sons) (Alexander 1226b-27b). However, Wealtheow is unable to enjoy any benefits of her speech acts as she and, subsequently, her sons are victim to a fate that brings war and death.

Even her movements, another part of her landscape, are not outrightly active. For example, after her first speech, an address to her husband and for peace, Wealtheow then sits down with her children: “*Hwearf tha bi bence, thaer hyre byre waeron, / Hrethric ond Hrothmund*” ([She] turned then to [the] bench, where her sons were, Hrethric and Hrothmund) (Alexander 1188a-89a). These lines are perhaps the most telling of her intense love for

and desire to protect her children as well as her place in society--sitting, as she awaits her husband's speech. However, her role is not in deference to her husband as other critics intimate.

Raffel captures the essence of Wealtheow's strength in his translation: "Then she walked to the bench where Hrethric and Hrothmund, / Her two sons, sat together . . . Crossing the hall she sat quietly at their side" (Raffel 1188-91). Raffel's "quietly" personifies the peace-keeping role that she shares with her husband. Her acts are quiet--less conspicuous and easily overlooked: "within the hall, her presence emanates peace. She bears the cup to her lord and his retainers in order, she honors Beowulf with gifts, and she gently reminds Hrothulf of the loyalty he owes to uncle and cousins" (Morey 489). Raffel's landscape does not lessen her speech acts or shape her into a traditional female role; instead he uses the alliteration in "crossing" and "quietly" to draw attention to Wealtheow's acts which might otherwise be easily overlooked. The contrast between Wealtheow's quiet strength and Grendel's mother's violent strength emphasizes Raffel's characterization of Grendel's mother. He also reminds the audience of the strength of Grendel's mother in the scene that immediately follows this passage, her attack on Herot.

The reader is now fully aware that Grendel's mother is not simply a woman, but a mighty warrior woman--equal at all levels to Beowulf. In Raffel, she is a force of social evil with strength previously unknown to women. Raffel's, Klaeber's, and Alexander's landscape is emphasized using compounds, alliteration, and the natural rhythmic pauses in the language to ensure that the importance of her strength, not her monstrosity, is understood.

As in the disjunctive introductory passage of Grendel's mother, the landscape smoothly changes styles, establishing a focal point in her characterization.

The Cain allegory brings to the text and to Grendel's mother's landscape an added dimension. Cain's descendants are monstrous creatures of superhuman strength and murderous exiled antagonists in the biblical world. However, Grendel's mother is at the same time a mourning mother, forced to live in the same waters that took the last life from her son, and finally murdered for seeking retribution for her son's death. These dimensions work together with the language of the poem to create a landscape with as much strength as Grendel's mother herself. These moments are highlighted by changing the style and breaking up familiar sequences of speech to illustrate that there are no familiar boundaries, gender- or language-based, that can restrict Grendel's mother. She is at once woman and monster, mother and murderer, pagan and biblical. Grendel's mother disrupts all bounds she is placed in. The landscape disrupts the style of the poem in these passages where Grendel's mother disrupts gender roles to emphasize the constructed fictions of language and gender, all of which are lost in weak criticism as it rushes to assign her strength monstrous adverbs, her home hellish nouns, and her motherhood pagan adjectives.

Conclusion

A landscape reading discourages attempts to reduce Beowulf to flat statements about stereotypes. In the midst of the poem's violence, a landscape that celebrates life is revealed. The music and magic of the language and characters invite readers into this landscape to enjoy the play of social roles within a well-constructed work. New readings have misinterpreted the total landscape and delivered a too simple reading that diminishes the poem to a study of gender stereotypes.

The Klaeber, Alexander, and Raffel works provide for readers an entrance into the landscape and present a fresh reading of Grendel's mother. The language, sound, and appearance of the poem work within the total landscape to create a spirit of heroes, mankind, and equality.

The foundation of the landscape, language, uses style and diction to build its themes and characterizations. The descriptions of Grendel's mother's emotional and physical violence are saturated with a language style that is not found elsewhere in the landscape. As Grendel's mother grieves and murders, disrupting Hrothgar's court, the word order mirrors her actions. Standard S V O/C is broken down with disjunctive object and verb phrases. Alliterative noun compounds and appositive phrases complete the disruption of the language as Grendel's mother completes her revenge. Weak readings of these passages, that are full of stereotypes of violent emotions and monstrous strength, view them as an attack on powerful women and as a

justification of male superiority. Yet, when the language of the landscape is analyzed, the fictions of gender roles become dismantled as does the order in the language. Nothing is stable.

This theme is further emphasized by the sounds of the landscape, the alliteration and stress patterns. Once an oral performance, Beowulf gains much of its meaning through the oral landscape. Grendel's mother's dual roles, mother and warrior, are accentuated with alliterative descriptions of her misery and her descent from Cain. The four stresses of each line fall on words which carry special meaning. At certain points, for added emphasis, caesural pauses at the end of each half line are preceded with key phrases that relate to the themes of female and male warriors, not of feminine and masculine behavior. Grendel's mother transcends gender. The strict patterns of alliteration and stress in the landscape leave no room for equally strict gender stereotypes.

In addition to language and sound, Raffel incorporates the appearance of his lines of poetry, specific breaks in the sentences, into the landscape. Working with a modern language embedded with gender stereotypes, Raffel must compensate in order to remain loyal to the original landscape. To fight these fictions of gender roles, Raffel makes them a fiction; he breaks them up. He carefully breaks the lines of his translation to draw attention to the extremes of violence and sorrow that Grendel's mother endures. The effect is a humanized characterization of Grendel's mother and a fragmented view of femininity, one often misread as a validation of it.

The landscape reading creates a feeling of respect for all life. It recognizes the importance of Grendel's mother and her ability to tear down the stereotypical barriers between female and male, warrior and monster, and

biblical and pagan. It also opens the poem to more than just simple readings that mold the characters into overgeneralized roles invented by twentieth-century stereotypes. By studying the landscape, readers discover a language that is as violent as the characters. They discover a landscape that is an extension of Grendel's mother in which disjunctive styles and sounds struggle against complacent thematic readings.

Note

¹ All Old English spellings have been modernized, for example: the Old English thorn has been replaced with “th.”

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