

The Significance of Grendel's Attack in the Light of Lacanian Psychoanalytic Theory

Edriss Zhaleh

Master Student of English Literature, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

This research tries to examine the significance of Grendel's attacks, in the first half of the Old English poem, *Beowulf*. The researcher, by the use of Lacan's ideas such as the name-of-the-father, paternal function, and the law, and also by the use of the biblical texts which are alluded to in the poem by the poet, tries to show that, the sense of the fear and threat caused by the attacks of the monster, is the result of the sense of fear and guilt that the subject experiences. This fear and guilt are emanates from subjects incestuous desire toward the transgression of the law of the incest taboo. This deduction is possible if one focuses on the relation of Grendel with his biblical ancestors, Nephilims.

Keywords: Grendel, Nephilim, Nature, symbolic order, the Name-of-the-Father, paternal function, and the law

Introduction:

In the poem, *Beowulf*, written in 1000, in Old English, a sense of threat can be found. This sense of threat emanates from the fear that has been with the human beings since the appearance of the concepts such as

family, tribe and marriage. The fear of an act, which even thinking of the possibility of committing it, or the unconscious desire toward it, causes the subject to experience a sense of guilt, and forces him to punish himself for having such an unconscious desire. These fear and desire have been accompanied the subject since his entrance to the symbolic order of language. It is nothing but the fear of incest. Incest taboo is the law that prevents the subject from committing such an act. As Evans writes, according to Lacan, "the law is the set of universal principles which make social existence possible, the structures that govern all forms of social exchange, whether gift-giving, kinship relations or the formation of pacts" (101).

In *Beowulf* the importance of one signifier, the Name-of-the-Father, can be discerned through the patronymic name, Shielding. This one signifier is what maintains the law. In the next few pages, the role of the father as the symbol of this law will be discussed. The researcher also suggests that Grendel is the embodiment of the desire of transgression; the desire comes from the imaginary realm of the Nature which is outside of the border of the symbolic order. This desire is seen as a horrific desire from the point of view of the symbolic order of the society return again and again like a monster. This is the same fear that can be seen in the passages of the bible that the poet uses in the poem; these are the same passages that Lacan uses to bring an example of the law the father and the punishment of the transgressors of the law.

The Role of the Signifier and the Symbolic Society of the Poem

As Fink explains, according to Lacan, instating of language, the chain of signifiers which makes the process of substitution possible, is made by the substitution of one primordial signifier for another; it means the substitution of "the Name-of-the-father" with "the mother's desire". Lacan calls this process, "the paternal metaphor," or the "paternal Function." Assimilation of this one signifier makes it possible for the child to enter into the symbolic order, as a subject of language (Fink, 55). As Lacan states in *Ecrits*, the Name-of-the-Father refers to the prohibitive role of the Father. "It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law" (230). The law that father represents is the set of the universal principles that underlies all the social exchanges, and as the most basic exchange is communication, the law has basically a linguistic entity. So, in other words, what differentiates human society from the animal society is the law. Lacan states that:

This law, then, reveals itself clearly enough as identical to a language order. For without names for kinship relations, no power can institute the order of preferences and taboos that knot and braid the thread of lineage through the generations. And it is the confusion of generations which, in the Bible as in all traditional laws, is cursed as being the abomination of the Word and the desolation of the sinner. (*Ecrits* 229-230)

Beowulf starts with the name of the patriarch of Shieldings, the Shield Sheafing. Like most of the names in *Beowulf*, Sheafing is a compound noun, consists of two parts: "sheaf" which is a symbol of fruitfulness, and the patronymic suffix "-ing," which means "son" (Greenblatt, 34); so his full name literally means "shield the son of sheaf." This name both indicates his ability to be a protective shield for his people and simultaneously it represents his potency, his ability to regenerate. As in the next lines of the poem, he saves his people by bringing a son, an heir to his throne. At the beginning of the poem, Shield who is a "foundling," casted off to the sea, is founded on the shore of Denmark by the Danes. Later on, due to his physical power and by defeating all the other challengers, he becomes the king of the Danes and by this he establishes the Danish royal dynasty. In the poem, the poet refers to the Danes as Shieldings, which consists of the word "shield," the name of their patriarch, and the patronymic suffix "-

ing,” so Shieldings literally means, children of shield. Shielding, is a “name for kinship relations,” and as Lacan states, it institutes “the order of preferences and taboos that knot and braid the thread of lineage through the generations.” All the Danish tribes are identified by this name. By naming the tribes, he establishes family boundaries and instates the incest taboo. Therefore, “Shielding” is a signifier through which one, by identifying with it, can enter the society, or the symbolic order.

Another rather radically different interpretation of this patriarch is also possible by emphasizing on the two naming signifiers: “Sheafing” and “Shielding.” Although revered by the poet as an ancestor, Sheafing is not a member of the society of Shieldings. He is “the son of sheaf.” According to Constance B. Hieatt, Sheafing is the “mythical ancestor of the Danish kings. His mysterious arrival and equally mysterious “passing” suggests his divine origin,” and according to Hieatt, his name “son of a sheaf,” makes him to function as “a nature myth” (Constance B. Hieatt, 3). The true Shielding is actually Shield’s son, Beow, who has the same name as the hero of the poem, Beowulf. According to Lacan, the father who appears in the second time of the Oedipus complex is the father who Freud has mentioned in his book, *Totem and Taboo*, the father who is the omnipotent ‘father of the primal horde’ and in spite of his role as instituting the incest taboo or law, he himself is not part of it. He is the law itself and has access to all the women in the tribe, while preventing the other’s access to them. His pleasure has no boundaries. Perhaps one can read the first lines of the poem as an elegy for the primal father, who is the first father of the society, the ancestor who is not a member of this society. The imaginary father has two guises. One is the “the prototype of God-figures in religions, an all-powerful protector” and the other is “the terrifying father of the primal horde who imposes the incest taboo on his sons” (Evans, 63). In the poem one can see the extreme amount of cruelty and violence in the behavior of the Shield Sheafing:

There was Shield Sheafson, scourge of many tribes,
A wrecker of mead-benches, rampaging among foes.
This terror of the hall-troops had come far (lines 4-6)

This kind of wild behavior is specific to the Shield, and not the other kings of the poem. The main focus of Shield’s attacks is on the mead-halls, a Germanic banqueting-hall which is the social center of their community. His attacks are only comparable to the attacks of the first monstrous antagonist of the poem, Grendel. Shield afflicts the same horror on “the hall-troops” that Grendel does. He makes his law by brutal physical force. As he does not belong to the society after his death, he plunged into the sea, a ritual burial, again specific to him in the poem.

Beow, who is the first one who literally carries the name of Shielding, is the symbolic father who presents in the third time of the Oedipus complex, and who himself, while representing the law, is a subject of that law. Beow has to follow the law to keep his status as the head of the society. In the Danish society, what keeps thanes loyal to their cyning, or hlaforð, is their lord’s generosity in distributing the wealth among them. In the poem, Beow is securing his future status as the king, by distributing wealth among thanes:

Beow's name was known through the north.
And a young prince must be prudent like that,
Giving freely while his father lives
So that afterwards in age when fighting starts
Steadfast companions will stand by him
And hold the line. Behaviour that's admired
Is the path to power among people everywhere. (lines 19-25)

This law is evidently economical, but as it has been mentioned before, the law is the set of fundamental principles which underlies all social relations, and the first law is the prohibitive law of the incest taboo. One can see the same structure in the law of the Anglo-Saxon society.

According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, a sacrifice is needed for the subject to enter into the symbolic order. The child at a certain point is required to give up some *jouissance*, and this *jouissance* can be founded again in language, or the symbolic order. According to Fink, "it is only insofar as we alienate ourselves in the Other and enlist ourselves in support of the Other's discourse that we can share some of the *jouissance* circulating in the Other" (Fink, 99). Fink continues that, castration, or giving up the *jouissance*, can be associated with other registers, like economic register: in a capitalist system, the giving up of surplus value by the worker to the abstract free market of capitalism makes the worker to experience a loss. But this experience of loss and giving up is what "allows an enormous market mechanism to develop" (Fink, 100). Claude Levi-Strauss, in his book, suggests that the similar structure is governing the rules of Kinship:

Without reducing society or culture to language, we can initiate this "Copernican revolution" ... which will consist of interpreting society as a whole in terms of a theory of communication. This endeavor is possible on three levels, since the rules of kinship and marriage serve to insure the circulation of women between groups. Just as economic rules serve to insure the circulation of goods and services, and linguistic rules serve to insure the circulation of messages. (Strauss, 83)

Therefore, law puts a limitation on enjoyment of the subject in the benefit of the subject, to prevent the accumulation of the pleasure, *jouissance*, goods, women and ..., and helps these to circulate among the members of the society. What keeps the realm of the culture, or the symbolic order, is obeying of the law. If one does not obey the law, and accumulates all the goods, in one place, it will die for everyone, as the primal father did by accumulating all the women of the herd for himself, preventing his sons from accessing to them, and as the result of his tyranny, he becomes the cause of his own death.

Beow follows exactly the same law and presents an ego-ideal for the society to follow. As the symbolic father of castration, he himself obeys the law, distributes all the wealth in the society, and prevents the accumulation of wealth. Through the entire poem, this one law is emphatically mentioned by the poet and other characters. This one law is what holds the Danish society together. Obeying this law is the constitutive part of the identity of the kings in the poem. This can be seen through the use of descriptive phrases, or kennings, used in the poem for describing the kings such as "the ring-giver," used in lines 36, 153, 1011, 1102, 1343, 1486, 1635, 3034; "gold-giver" used in lines 1923 and 2652; "treasure-giver" used in lines 607 and 2311. So not only the king is the pivot of the economic structure of the society, but also he is the symbol of its law, which is basically economical. He is the signifier of the law which underlies all the distribution of the wealth in the society.

Protection is another role of the symbolic father. According to Lacan, anxiety arises, when the child understands that he cannot satisfy the desire of the omnipotent mother with his real insignificant organ (Evans, 11). Desire of the mother is "viewed by Lacan as potentially very dangerous to the child, threatening to engulf it or swallow it up" (Fink, 56). What neutralizes the mother's threatening desire is the substitution of the Name-of-the-Father for the mother's desire. This metaphorical substitution is what Lacan calls the paternal metaphor, or the paternal function.

In the poem, other adjectives for the king, beside those which refer to his role as the symbol of the law, are those which refer to his role as the protector of the society. Hrothgar, the descendent of Beow and the king of the Danes, is called by the poet as the "protector of the Shieldings," in lines 373 and 1700.

Hygelac is also recognized in line 1969 as “his people’s protector” and even Beowulf himself, after becoming king, is called by the poet as “the warriors’ protector” and from the mouth of Wiglaf, in line 2644, as “the shepherd of our land”. God, which according to the Christian trinity is the father, and which is called “the Almighty Father” in line 927, is described as the “Heavenly Shepherd” in line 929. According to Lacan, the protective omnipotent father figure is the prototype of God-figures in religions (Evans, 63). The idea of the king as the protector can be seen in the word “lord”. This word, which is used for addressing the king, is “derived from Old English *half*, “loaf,” plus *weard*, “protector”” (Greenblatt, 5). So, hlafor, or lord means the protector of bread, and refers to the protective function of the king. The Anglo-Saxon thanes were subjected to a pattern of vengeance and counter-vengeance and “a warrior without the protection of a lord was extremely vulnerable to acts of retribution” (Bloom, 16). The protective role of the father in the Oedipus complex and the resemblance of this function in the poem will be discussed further in the next pages.

The distance between the mother and the child, which protects the child is created by the law which the father is its representative. As it has been stated, the signifier which establishes the lineage and kinship and thus creates the prohibitive taboo is the name of the Danish tribes “Shieldings”. This signifier shows the descendent of the shield, and all the Danish tribes in the poem are recognized by this one signifier. There are many marriages in the poem, but almost all of them are among the people of different tribes (except one instance which should be found not in the text of the poem but in the Genesis as the poem addresses the reader to it). Beow, the ego-ideal of the Danish society and the first symbolic father, according to one source, marries to “a Swedish princess,” and that is why his son is called Halfdane, thus he himself obeys the law. Hrothgar, the son of Halfdane, marries Wealhtheow, who is called by the poet as Helming woman (line, 620). The daughter of Halfdane, whose name is not mentioned in the poem, marries Onela the swede (line 62). Freawaru is promised to Ingeld the Heatho-Bard to end the feud between Shieldings and Heatho-Bard (line 2024-25).

Many critics read these marriages as the examples of the peace weaving custom. According to this custom, a princess bride, which was considered as a peace weaver, marries to another tribe royal family. Peace weavers “were given in marriage to rulers of other peoples as a way of settling conflicts” (Bloom, 18). Aside from that role, it can also be considered as obeying the law. As it was said before, the first law is the prohibition of the incest made by the Name-of-the-Father, through paternal metaphor. This law is transmitted from one generation to the other through the kinship nomination. The signifier is what distinguishes one family from another. What distinguishes Shieldings from other tribes is the name, Shieldings, which they inherited from Shield Sheafing. This signifier is what prevents the marriage of the people from the same tribe which was considered incestuous among the primitive tribes.

Heorot, the Position of the Father

One of the recurrent themes throughout Lacan’s work is the distinction between Human society and Animal society. According to Lacan, language is “what essentially distinguishes human society from natural societies” (Ecrits 414). While humans have language, animals only use codes to communicate with each other, and while there is no one-to-one relationship between the constitutive elements of language, there is “fixed bi-univocal (one-to-one) relationship” between the elements of code, that is indices (Evans, 26). Lacan uses the term “nature” to designate animal world, and to designate the other term of this binary opposition, he uses the term “culture,” which in Lacanian psychoanalysis is an equivalent of the symbolic order.

This is what exactly distinguishes the monsters in *Beowulf*, from society. In spite of their very human like nature, according to Lacanian perspective, they cannot be considered as the members of the human

society, because throughout the poem, there is not even a signifier uttered from the mouth of the three antagonists. Orchard writes that, “the monsters are mostly voiceless, although Grendel in defeat makes a terrifying sound” (146). This is what makes them among the realm of animal society and nature. Grendel and his mother are actually “outcast” from the point of view of the Danish society, which is established, as stated before, through the nominative patriarchal signifier, Shieldings.

Paul Acker states that, “the murderous Grendel and his mother reside at the edge of the area of socialization centered in the hall (Heorot), beyond the marches and in a mere at the margin of which even a hunted stag (heorot) must recoil in horror” (703). It is an interpretation of lines 1345 to 76. In these lines, the word “stag” is not straightly mentioned by the poet:

On its bank, the heather-stepper halts:
The hart in flight from pursuing hounds
Will turn to face them with firm-set horns
And die in the wood rather than dive
Beneath its surface. (lines 1368-1372)

The stag is a male deer and because of his antlers can be the symbol of the phallus. All the quadrupedal animals, because of their salient genital organs can be considered as the symbol of the phallus, or the one who possesses it, the father. So these lines show the boundary of the realm of symbolic which is phallogocentric and is ruled by the father. Such a comparison has been made by Freud, and later on by Lacan, in the case study of the Little Hans. Stag also can be read as the totem of the Shieldings, which in this case is the symbol of the primal father.

According to the poem, Hygelac, the king of the Danes, after gathering a mighty army, decides to build a hall and orders to his men to build a great mead-hall. According to *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, mead is “the strongest alcoholic drink available before distilling was introduced” (41). Mead is an alcoholic beverage made from fermented honey and water. Mead-hall is the feasting hall of Anglo-Saxons. It is the financial center of the Shieldings, where Hrothgar “would dispense his God-given goods to young and old” (line 71-72). This mead-hall is connected with the discussed law of exchange which prevents the accumulation of goods in one place. It is where the king “doled out rings and torques at the table” (line 80). Hrothgar names this hall “Heorot” which means “Hart,” which is a male deer. It is called by this name because of “antlers fastened to the gables or because the crossed gable-ends resembled a stag’s antlers” (Greenblatt, 35). It is also the “throne-room” (line 71) for Hrothgar, and as the poet says:

... Heorot was the name
He had settled on it, whose utterance was law.
(lines 88-99)

It is a symbolic hall, a position to be occupied by the king, or the lawgiver. It is like the Name-of-the-Father, which is a position to be occupied by the Father, as the signifier of law. According to Lacan, “It is in the *name of the father* that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his person with the figure of the law” (Ecrits, 230). According to lines 88-99, in the poem Hrothgar, who settles on Heorot, is this figure of the law. Heorot also represents the cultural achievement of the Danish society. It shows the craftsmanship and the art of the Shielding society, which is the result of sublimation of the jouissance and obedience to the law, as it is made by the order of Hrothgar:

Far and wide through the world, I have heard
Orders for work to adorn that wallstead
Were sent to many peoples. ... (lines 74-75)

The outside of Heorot is decorated by “gold thread” (line, 993) but the inside is “iron braced” (line, 996). As it has been stated, for Lacan what distinguishes the society of animals from the human society, is language. Heorot is the place, where this human faculty reaches to its peak; it is the place of poetry. In the beginning lines, the poet tells how the sound of the scop in Heorot, who sings about the biblical story of creation, makes Grendel furious. After killing Grendel, the “king’s poet” performs “his part with the saga of Finn and his sons” (line 1066) in the great hall.

To sum up, Heorot is the cultural, financial and legislative center of the society, and it can be considered as the Name-of-the-Father, which is the position that can be occupied by the one who is the lawgiver, the father, for the symbolic order, which is the culture itself. The attack of the monster to Heorot can be regarded as the attack from the imaginary register, or from the realm of Nature, to the heart of the symbolic order, or in other words, to the central primordial signifier that works as an anchoring point in it.

Genealogy of Grendel

One of the difficulties of examining the two first antagonists of the story is that the poet never gives an exact description of the characteristics of the monsters. This can be justified by the fact that Grendel is described by the poet as the “shadow-stalker”; He only attacks at night and walks in the shadowy parts of the Danish land. The only way to recognize him is to compare him with his ancestors. This research uses two sources to reach a general idea about the identity and the characteristics of Grendel. One source is the poem itself; there are many lines in the poem dedicated to the description of this creature, and most of them have biblical coloring. The other source, as Orchard points out in his research, is the one which was also available for the Christian poet of *Beowulf*: Genesis, the first part of the Bible. (Orchard, 149)

Genesis is also the name of an Old English poem in the *Junius Manuscript*, known also as *Junius 11*, or *Caedman Manuscript*. *Junius Manuscript* is a collection of Old English books. It contains long biblical poems, “identified by the titles *Genesis* (or *Genesis A* and *B*), *Exodus*, *Daniel* and *Christ and Satan*” (Lapidge, 270). It is attributed by Francis Junius to *Caedman*, the 7th century poet. *Genesis*, which is the longest poem in this collection, consists of two parts: *Genesis A*, and *Genesis B*. *Genesis A* is based on the first book of the Bible, which includes the stories, such as the story of Abel and Cain, and the Noah’s flood.

As Orchard says, *Genesis A* is “rather glosses over the troubling verses in Genesis VI.4 concerning the miscegenation of the sons of God and the daughters of men” (Orchard, 150). According to Genesis, chapter 6, 1-4:

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they [were] fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the LORD said, my spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also [is] flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare [children] to them, the same [became] mighty men which [were] of old, men of renown.

According to *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, the Hebrew word for the giants mentioned in this part is Nephilim, which is a problematic word for exegetes to interpret or translate. It literally

means the “fallen ones” and it “depicts a fresh threat to the God-given distinction between divine beings and humans” (Toorn, 618). To eliminate this threat God reduced the age of man to hundred and twenty years, and then he swept away all the living beings from the earth, by the deluge. They were the result of the transgression, the miscegenation of the sons of God and the daughters of men and a threat for God. In the Anglo-Saxon version of this story, in *Genesis A*, the poet says that:

After 120 years were tallied up in the world, exile afflicted the doomed people, when the Lord wanted to inflict punishment on those breakers of the covenant, and strike down in death that giant-kin, guilty in their deeds, mighty criminal assailants, unloved by God, hateful to the Creator. (Orchard, 150)

It is the same part of the *Genesis* mixed up with the story of the Cain’s exile. In these lines the poet considers the Nephilims as the people in “exile”, “the doomed people”. These words connect them to the Cain who, as the result of his crime, was banished from the Eden, and God made him “a fugitive and a vagabond ... in the earth.” After that “Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden” (KJ, 4).

In *Beowulf*, there are references to the story of Cain and the Noah’s Flood, which both have been mentioned in the Old Testament, while there is no reference to the New Testament, which is the main part of the Christianity. Grendel by the poet is considered to be among the descendent of Cain, and the poet introduces him in this way:

So times were pleasant for the people there
Until finally one, a fiend out of hell,
Began to work his evil in the world.
Grendel was the name of this grim demon
Haunting the marches, marauding round the heath
And the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time
In misery among the banished monsters,
Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed
And condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel
The Eternal Lord had exacted a price:
Cain got no good from committing that murder
No because the Almighty made him anathema
And out of the curse of his exile there sprang
Ogres and elves and evil phantoms
And the giants too who strove with God
Time and again until He gave them their reward. (line 99-104)

“Their reward” mentioned in the line 104, according to Christianity, is the Noah’s Flood, and as in the *Genesis A*, all the Nephilims are the offspring of Cain. Here again the poet mixes up the two parts of the *Genesis*. One can compare “the marches,” “the heath”, and “the desolate fens,” which are the designated place of the exile of Grendel and the other members of the Cain’s Clan to “The land of Nod, on the east of Eden” mentioned in *Genesis* (4:16), in which Grendel, like his ancestor Cain, is a wanderer and a vagabond. Grendel is addressed as “the God-cursed brute” (line 121). He has been cursed because of the wrong of his ancestor, Cain. In the Anglo-Saxon terms one can say it is his “wyrd” to be a malicious. Wyrd is a pre-Christian concept and “it refers to that which inevitably must happen” (Lapidge, 516). Wyrd, unlike destiny, is linked to the past, not the future, and it implies that the future is set and what is happening is beyond one’s control.

So, as the *Genesis A*, considers Nephilims as the descendants of the banished Cain, afflicted by the same punishment of their ancestors, and Genesis, the first chapter of the Old Testament considers these giants as the children of “the sons of God” and “the daughters of men,” Grendel, which is among the banished ones, and Cain’s descendant, like all the other exiled doomed giant-kin, is a descendent of his human ancestor, Cain, and his divine ancestors “the Sons of God”. Andy Orchard, by the emphasis on the words used in description of doomed people (giant-kin) mentioned in the *Genesis A*, points out the similarity between mentioned doomed people and Grendel, and writes, “Like the exiles described here,” (in the *Genesis A* extract), “Grendel too is both ‘guilty’ ... and ‘doomed’ ... , specifically ‘doomed to death’” (Orchard, 150).

Such a comparison between Nephilims of the Old Testament, and Grendel, and considering them as kinsmen, is strengthened by the description of Grendel from the mouth of Hygelac, the king of the Danes, when he describes Grendel and his mother for Beowulf:

... two such creatures
Prowling the moors, huge marauders
From some other world. One of these things,
As far as anyone ever can discern,
Looks like a woman; the other, warped
In the shape of a man, moves beyond the pale
Bigger than any man, an unnatural birth
Called Grendel by country people
In former days. They are fatherless creatures,
And their whole ancestry is hidden in a past
Of demons and ghosts. (Heaney, 1347-1357)

The “unnatural birth” may refer to the misogyny of the two races of “the sons of God and the daughters of men.” Here Grendel is described as “bigger than any man.” In the Old Testament book of Numbers, it is written about the Nephilim that, “... there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, [which come] of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight” (Numbers, 13:33). In *Beowulf* one of the few Grendel’s descriptions given by the poet is in lines (1637–1639), when it is stated that, it is the task of four people to carry Grendel’s head back to Heorot; this emphasis on the gigantic size of Grendel makes him more connected to the Nephilims.

Another proof for this claim can be found in the lines explaining Beowulf’s fight with Grendel’s mother. In the line 1557, Beowulf finds a precious heirloom in the armory of Grendel’s mother:

Then he saw a blade that boded well,
A sword in her armoury, an ancient heirloom
From the days of the giants, ...

This heirloom is a significant object in the poem. First, it is an heirloom and belongs to the antagonists of the poem. Second, it shows the ancestors who left it behind for the antagonists, it means the Giants, or in another words, the Nephilims. According to Beowulf in line 1663, it was “a weapon made for giants”. In line 1688, when Hrothgar examines the hilt of the sword he notices the genealogy inscribed on the hilt of the sword:

... It was engraved all over
And showed how war first came into the world

And the Flood destroyed the tribe of giants.
They suffered a terrible severance from the Lord;
The Almighty made the waters rise,
Drowned them in the deluge for retribution.
In pure gold inlay on the sword-guards
There were rune-markings correctly incised,
Stating and recording for whom the sword
Had been first made and ornamented
With its scrollworked hilt.

According to what Hrothgar sees on the hilt of the sword, it belongs to biblical giants, the Nephilims. It is the same story in the Genesis, and in the Anglo-Saxon poem *Genesis A*.

According to Hygelac's words, Grendel and his mother are more like humans than monsters, except their size, and their unnatural strength. Many critics refer to the humanness of these two creatures, if not in behavior but in their appearance. According to Orchard, Grendel "is emphatically man-shaped, while the second, Grendel's mother, is figured more as a beast" (Orchard, 142). He is a bipedal humanoid. He may not use man-made weaponry, but his fighting is also like humans, and this is vivid in his wrestling with Beowulf. He is a warrior.

If one accepts his shared ancestry with the Nephilims, he should also accept that Grendel is not only a human but also more than a human. In *Beowulf* there is no mentioning of the father of Grendel, and Hrothgar considers him among "fatherless creatures," whose "their whole ancestry is hidden in a past," and as the poem clearly states, he is from the race of the giants, who according to Genesis, are "mighty men which [were] of old, men of renown" (Genesis, 6:4). The Nephilims were the offspring of "Sons of God" which are "a group of heavenly beings other than Yahweh" (Toorn, 794). This makes Grendel a demigod, among other "warriors" and "men of renown," such as Hercules. Nephilims in the Bible are champions, as Goliath is the champion of the Philistine in Samuel 1:

{17:4} And there went out a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, named Goliath, of Gath, whose height [was] six cubits and a span. {17:5} And [he had] an helmet of brass upon his head, and he [was] armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat [was] five thousand shekels of brass.

Goliath, like Grendel, is among the descendants of Nephilims, and a warrior who is fighting God's champion, David. Goliath is on the army of Philistines against the Israelites. Orchard, by putting *Beowulf* in the context of *Liber Monstrous*, a late seventh-or early eighth-century Anglo-Latin catalogue of marvelous creatures, states that, one of the traits of *Beowulf*, is "lending monstrous attributes to long-dead pagan heroes" (Orchard, 143).

Grendel is similar to Shield Sheafson, which designates the primal father of the first horde: focus of their attacks is on the mead-hall and its occupants. While they block the other's access to the enjoyment, each one tries to monopolies it to themselves.

Sympathy with Grendel and the desire toward becoming the primal father

There is a great inclination in the 20th century writers to sympathize with the monster and try to see the story from his point of view. The most famous work among the works which creates in the reader a sense of sympathy with Grendel, is John Gardner's book *Grendel*, which he wrote in 1971. In this philosophical

novel, Gardner changes the point of view of the story and tells the story from the point of view of Grendel.

As *Beowulf* is an epic, one can compare it with Homer's *Iliad* in one respect. According to Northrop Frye, Homer has established the "demonstration that the fall of an enemy, no less than of a friend or leader, is tragic and not comic" (Abrams, 97). This objectivity can also be seen in the Christian writer of *Beowulf*. Grendel is a great warrior that his demise can raise as much sympathy in the reader as the death of Beowulf. The picture the poem depicts of Grendel is a lonely warrior who lives among the clan of Cain who has been banished from the Garden of Eden. Grendel has to carry what that can be called sins of the father or "iniquity of the fathers" which has been mentioned in the bible for many times including in Exodus 20:5.

The reason behind such a sympathy with Grendel can be found in the fact that, readers and writers sympathize with Grendel in the same way as Hamlet sympathizes with his uncle; Hamlet's hesitation in taking revenge from his uncle can be read as his sympathy with his uncle who has actualized Hamlet's unconscious desire. Grendel is the representative of desire of the human being to transgress the law of the father and return to the preoedipal stage of unity prior to the child's entrance into the symbolic world of language.

Child's attitude toward the mother's desire is an equivocal feeling. On the one hand, he tries to be the sole object of the mother's desire, and maintains the unity with the mother, on the other hand mother's desire causes the anxiety in the child which can be solved only by the intervention of the father. As Grendel can be compared to Shield Sheafson, who has been assigned the role of the primal father, he can be seen as the representative of that part of the subject who wants to transgress the incest taboo or the law of the father. As Homer writes, "this other father, therefore – the cruel and licentious one – is the reverse side of the law" (Homer, 59). As Fink states, he is the desire of transgression of the law, which is ironically in the same law. This father is foreclosed, and it means out of the symbolic order, and thus ex-sists. All women are accessible to him, even mother and sister. Fink continues that:

He (the man, or the masculine subject) is altogether castrated and the other that some instance (Instanz) negates or refuses castration — shows that incestuous wishes live on indefinitely in the unconscious. Every man, despite castration (that splitting up of the category of women into two distinct groups), continues to have incestuous dreams in which he grants himself the privileges of the imagined pleasure finding father who knows no bounds. (110)

Grendel is the result of the subject's internalization of the law, not as it represented by the symbolic father but as the way in which imaginary father of the primal horde represents it. So, Grendel can signify part of the human subject which is in contrast with the law, the desire toward the primordial object of the incestuous desire, the mother.

Conclusion

Grendel, a biblical Nephilim from the race who has transgressed the law (the same story that Lacan refers to), is the indicator of the desire of transgression in the human psyche. The Mere, the place of Grendel's exile, can be seen as the place of the repressed desires, the unconscious. The Mere also, as placed in the realm of nature, can represent the imaginary register of the human psyche. It is the realm in which Grendel lives with his mother in harmony, the symbol of the world of preoedipal unity. The attack of Grendel to the Heorot, the Name-of-the-Father, the place that can be occupied by the symbolic father of the society, is the attack to the whole symbolic order. The threat that Shieldings are faced with, is the same old biblical threat; the threat of miscegenation, the intertribal, interracial relation which is seen as

incestuous. What prevents this transgression is the Patriarchal name, which distinguishes different tribes, and maintains the law from one generation to another. The horror that Grendel represents comes from the desire of the subject and his sense of guilt and horror which emanates from this repressed desire.

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