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"Di:4 bid se pe his Dryhten ne oncirdep", "Dot bid se pe him his Dryhten nor" How far do these quotations from *The Seafarer* and *Maxim I* respectively illustrate an attitude to life found in the Old English texts you have studied?

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To a modern reader in our secular society, 'Foolish is he who does not fear his Lord' does not have a particular significance; indeed we may not even completely understand what it means. This was most likely not the case for an Anglo-Saxon society in which it was a widely held belief that an awareness of and reverence for God was the key to how to live a good life. The prevalence of this phrase is quite marked, and it is evidently an inversion of the verse from the Biblical book of Proverbs The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom'. A grant of land from King Eadwig to his thegn Aethelnoa, dated 956, contains the verse — evidence that it was a commonly known phrase. If it was indeed widely known, then it is not surprising that it appears in various forms in other Old English texts; but it is interesting to consider how far it was an attitude actually shared by the society of that time. Furthermore, the more theologically developed sentiment found in the Maxim poem, 'Dol bib se be him his Dryhten nat' (Foolish is he who does not know his Lord)[3] would have also been a preoccupation for an Anglo-Saxon society, who did not know the fate of their heathen forebears. In the course of this essay I shall explore the various links between the two quotations and Beowulf and Judith, and I shall reflect upon whether the characters are God-fearing or not and the implications that this has in their lives and the themes of the texts. This will lead to a discussion on how good and evil are represented, and the extent to which the ambiguous concept of heathen redemption would have matched their world view.

From the evidence that we have, it seems that Anglo- Saxon society was preoccupied by the concept of a vengeful and powerful God and the punishments that He could mete onto sinful people. Both Beowulf and Judith support the claim that an Anglo-Saxon view of life was God-fearing, and suggests that those who did not give due reverence and respect to the Lord would come to an untimely end. This is evident from the rest of the line in The Seafarer, which reads to baes oft cyme8 dea8 unhinged' (death comes suddenly to him), and both of the texts demonstrate that those who do not fear God will be punished. For example in Judith, Holofernes, the leader of the Assyrians, is described as 'nergende 16a' (loathsome to the saviour) and as being a 'dEofulcunda' (devilish man) (1.63) His desire to rape Judith, who is a virgin in the poem, is a manifestation of his heathen character: 'pohte 66 beorhtan idese mid wTlde and mid womme besmitan' (he meant to defile the lady with sin and depravity). (11.58-59) Holofernes' sinfulness and lack of respect for God is made more explicit in the Old English poem than in its original source, and the evil nature of his intent is exacerbated by Judith's pure nature - 'nergendes beowen Prymful' (glorious handmaiden of the saviour) (11.73-4) Her virginity appears to be an addition by the poet, who wants to clarify the distinction between good and evil in the poem. Marsden comments on the differing representations of these two characters in the Old English poem and the Apocryphal version

of the story, and claims that the poem's message is clear: faith will be rewarded and God will humble the proud.' Or in other words, those who are foolish and do not obey God's law will be punished. Holofernes' fate after death is graphically described by the poet: 'Lag se fUla leap gesne beftan, gst ellor hwearf under neowelne noes and Baer geny8erad woes susle gesgaled sy88an fre, wyrmum bewunden wTtum gebunden, hearde gehfted in hellebryne eefter hinsTae.' (II. 111-117) (His foul carcass lay behind, dead; his spirit departed elsewhere beneath the deep ground and was there prostrated and chained in torment ever after, coiled about by snakes, trussed up in tortures and cruelly imprisoned in hellfire after his going hence.) Described thus, it would be hard for an Anglo-Saxon audience to avoid the inherent Christian lesson of the text.

Similarly, in Beowulf we are faced with the example of those who have not feared God, and these characters are used to provide a contrast to the good warriors in the poem. Although theoretically none of the characters would have 'known' God, as the poem is set in a pagan period of history, the poet's Christian narrative voice projects a sense of a ruling God into the text, and the characters respond accordingly. There has been much discussion about the Christian elements of Beowulf', and some critics claim that there is an absence of 'specific Christian references'.' It seems clear to me, however, that one way in which the poet creates an explicit Christian lesson is his representation of Grendel and his mother. As well as being monsters that represent the unknown and threatening evils of the world", they represent a polarity of behaviour that contrasts with that of the poem's heroes. Grendel is called "feond on helle'[12] (1.101) (fiend out of hell) and the two monsters are descended from Cain. (1.107) Grendel he fag wI8 God' (1. 811) (had given offence to God) and both he and his mother have rebelled against God and have killed their kinsmen, just as their ancestor Cain had done. Their consequent punishment at the hands of Beowulf as described by the poet shows an amalgamation of heroic and Christian traditions. After Beowulf kills Grendel, we are told that 'Haefde East-Denum/ Geatmecga leod gilp gelgasted/ swylce oncyp8e ealle gebette, inwidsorge Pe hie aar drugon, and for Preanydum Pollan scoldon torn unlytel.' (II. 828- 833) (The Geat captain had boldly fulfilled his boast to the Danes: he had healed and relieved a huge distress, unremitting humiliations, the hard fate they'd been forced to undergo, no small affliction.) In this way, Beowulf's slaughter of Grendel fulfils the heroic tradition that deaths of kinsmen must be avenged; a tradition whose worth is magnified by the fact that Beowulf is a member of the Geats, rather than the Danes. However, as well as reinforcing the heroic code, Grendel's death introduces the concept of religious retribution because the monster had offended the Lord, and therefore his untimely end inevitably arrives: 'ond se ellorgast/ on feonda geweald feor sialan' (II. 807-8) (his alien spirit would travel far into the fiend's keeping)

Cavill claims that the poem 'echoes and uses (within limits) the normal discourse of Christianity',' and indeed the monsters' fate supports this claim. Their gruesome behaviour is threatening to the secular world of the mead-hall, but at the same time it also represents a divergence from the Christian world view. Therefore, their death and subsequent journey to hell are a satisfying conclusion of the heroic tradition, placed within a framework of Christian doctrine. Tolkien puts forward a similar argument which highlights the coming together of Christian and Pagan elements, as seen in Grendel and his mother: 'They are directly connected with Scripture, yet they cannot be dissociated from the creatures of northern myth, the ever-watchful foes of the gods (and men) … [it is] at this point that new Scripture and old tradition touched and ignited.' "The audience would have been aware of their own pagan past, a past that the Beowulf-poet portrays in his text. Combined with their Christian present, this 'ignited point' would have had a greater significance than for a modern audience.

It is interesting to consider the slightly different meanings of the word 'fear'. If The Seafarer poet was basing the line from Proverbs 9:10, this would have been translated from the Latin word 'timor' from the Vulgate. Although this expresses a sense of fear, and the implications of this meaning in the quotation are seen in the fate of those characters who lead sinful lives, the word in modern English and Middle English (without the prefix) also has another meaning of 'reverence' and 'awe'. While it is difficult to imagine the ways that an Anglo-Saxon audience would have conceptualized a relationship with God, in both Judith and Beowulf the protagonists hold a reverent respect for Him, rather than a sense of dread. In Judith, the eponymous heroine prays to the Trinity for courage before she kills Holofernes, and her prayer demonstrates her personal anguish and a corresponding belief that God will provide her with the comfort that she desires: 'Whte binre nalfre miltse bon rriran bearfe.' (Never have I had greater need of your grace.) She is certain that she is one of God's chosen people and she reveres her Lord. As one critic notes, Judith's faith underlies and appears to enable her success,'' and her wisdom - she is described as 'ferh8gI&Eaw' (1.41) (wise) - shows that a fear of God enables humankind to make right and godly decisions.

Beowulf appears to have a similar reverence for God, particularly His role in deciding the outcome of fights 'aa.r gelyfan scealf r¯yhtnes dome se the hine dea8 nime8' (11.440-1) (Whichever one death fells, must deem it a just judgement by God). However, his relationship with God is more ambiguous than Judith's, partly because of the pagan context of the poem that is narrated by a Christian poetic voice. It could be claimed that ultimately Beowulf values his own glory and fame over his sense of duty to God, and that this leads to his ruination. To examine this further, it is useful to compare the three accounts of the hero's fight with Grendel's mother. In chronological order of the text the poet first says: God/ geweold wigsigor; witig Drihten/ rodera Radend hit on rhyt gesc6:1/ 98elice' (11.1553-6) (holy God decided the victory. It was easy for the Lord, the ruler of heaven to redress the balance). Then later when Beowulf recounts the story to Hrothgar, he says 'trihte woes/ gDa getwafed, nymoe mec God scylde.' (II.1657-8) (if God had not helped me, the outcome would have been quick and fatal). In these two passages, both Beowulf and the poet express reverence for the role that God played in the hero's victory. However, when Beowulf tells of his struggle to Hygelac he boasts 'Unsafte ponanir feorh oaferede; noes is fgage 136 g9t.' (11.2140-1) (I barely managed to escape with my life, my time had not yet come.) By the time he has travelled back to his native land, Beowulf has forgotten, or repressed, the thanks he had to God in his victory. Beowulfs sense of self-importance only grows as the poem nears its climactic ending. Before he fights the dragon he does not mention God at all and instead focuses on the fame that he would gain: '.g9t is wylle... fgah8e secant fremman,' (11.2512-4) (I shall pursue this fight for the glory of winning) This fight is to be Beowulfs last, and although perhaps it is overly simplistic to claim that a lack of reverence for God leads to his death, other textual hints point to a similar conclusion. For example, the gent-woman's lament: 'swede geneahhei lact hio hyre heregangas hearde/ ondrede, warlfylla worn, werudes egesan/ h9neio and ligaftnyd.'(Her nation invaded, enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles, slavery and abasement) captures the sense of regret at the heroic king's death and also her preoccupation now that their kingdom is left unprotected. Also the poet's final epithet for Beowulf as lofgeornost' (1.3182) (keenest to win fame) suggests that perhaps his pride and ambition for glory, instead of an appropriate reverence for the Lord's wishes is what led to his downfall. Clearly, this is a Christian view of the text that we can suggest from a modern reading, but it is not impossible that a contemporary audience could have seen the connection too.

The characters who fear or dread the Lord show us an interesting snapshot into a world view of the contemporary audience, as they are praised for their worship of God. However, a deeper theological challenge for medieval society was the destination of

heathen souls after death, and whether those who had never known God's glory could be redeemed if they had lived a righteous life. T.A. Shippey notes a comparison between the line from The Seafarer and from Maxims I which reads 'Dol bith se the him his dryhten nat, to thaes oft cymeth death unthinged' (He is foolish who does not know his Lord; death often comes suddenly to such). Consequently, the Maxims poet seems to be assigning agency and blame to those heathens who had not been converted, and suggests that they deserve punishment as do those who deliberately go against His will. Nevertheless, other Old English texts are not so straightforward in their condemnation of heathens. In Beowulf the poet describes how the Danes despair of Grendel's attacks: 'HwTlum hTe geheton zet heerftrafum/ wIgweorbunga, wordum b2edoni *t him gastbona, geoce gefremed/ wig laeodlareaum' (II. 175-8) (Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed offerings to idols, swore oaths that the killer of souls might come to their aid and save the people.) and we are explicitly told 'Metod hTe ne cubron' (1.180) (They did not know the creator). How a Christian audience would have responded to this is uncertain, and furthermore the incongruity of this passage is often emphasised by critics who note the discrepancy between the Danes' behaviour here and in the rest of the poem. Critics are divided upon how to interpret this part of the poem. Tolkien suggests that the poet was creating the impression of a pre-Christian but monotheistic world like that of the Old Testament. Thus the lapse into idolatry parallels the historical lapses of Israel.' Other critics focus on the irony of praying for relief to heathen gods, a prayer that actually ensures the Danes' destruction. What seems more likely is that the passage is used to show the depths of despair that the Danes are going through[il] (Irving) and that it is a narrative device used by the poet to show the lack of faith in their ancestral heritage, and to contrast this with the contemporary situation. Again we are reminded of the ignition of scripture and old tradition, to which Tolkien brings our attention. The worship of pagan idols would still have been in cultural memory and indeed some people claim that it was still ongoing at the time of Beowulf's composition.' The audience would perhaps have been saddened by the poet's allusion to heathen activities, but their faith would have been strengthened by the following lines: 'Wel bib poem pe mot after deaodgage Drihten secean and to Feader frimum freo8o wilnian'(11.1136-8) (Blessed is he who after death can approach the Lord and find friendship in the Father's embrace). Therefore, I would argue that the folly of the heathen Danes is used to serve as a reminder to the Christian audience to remain steadfast in their faith, and was not necessarily a straightforward condemnation of the sort that we have encountered in Maxim I.

Furthermore, it seems that in both *Beowulf* and *Judith* the poet is framing an exploration of Christianity in a non-Christian context for particular effect. Both are 'pre-Christian' texts; Judith is an Apocryphal story of the Jews, and Beowulf is about a pagan society, but they are both infused with Christian dogma. Judith, in her hour of need, prays to 'orynesse 8rym'(I.86) (Majesty of the Trinity) which is obviously an anachronism, and subsequently Holofernes is sent to a very 'Christian-like hell'.[23] Judith as a protagonist can also be seen in the light of the heroic tradition, because she decapitates her enemy and encourages her army onto victory. Damico and Leyerle claim that Judith and Beowulf are two similarly heroic characters, who mix the sacred and the secular, and the decapitation scenes in the two texts are used to support this claim. However, I think that this is in danger of being a somewhat superficial comparison to make between these two complex texts and what I think is more important is the framing of the Christian faith around pagan and Jewish traditions. I believe that it shows a sense of spiritual connection, even if this spirituality is not the true-faith' of Christianity.

In conclusion, both Beowulf and Judith show that those who fear God are rewarded and those who do not are punished. The ways in which Holofernes and the Grendel monsters

are described, and the gruesome punishments that they suffer, demonstrate the clear link in both texts between sinfulness and retribution. Within both of these texts there is an 'ignition' between the Germanic heroic tradition and the Christian doctrine, in which the deaths are celebrated because they follow the code of revenge but they are also seen in the light of the Christian dogma of hell. The two texts were considered in their role as a lesson for the audience, in so much as they could use the poems as tales from a non-Christian past, to strengthen them in their own faith in the contemporary time. This is particularly resonant regarding the fate of the heathen Danes in Beowulf, whose presence in the poem, I have argued, is to serve as a facet of cultural memory for the Anglo-Saxons and to encourage them to be steadfast in their faith. Although it is difficult to gauge what the reaction and reception of these texts would have been in the Anglo-Saxon society, they help us to understand the way that they felt life should be lived. The importance of identity in a tribe, as seen in Judith's protection of the Israelites and Beowulf's help for the Danes, was considered of utmost importance. However, within this traditional context the significance of living a God-fearing life seemed to have been developing as a lesson for those who wanted to be redeemed. Ultimately, the texts may not be about the Christian God, necessarily, but the importance for readers was that the characters were God-fearing, regardless of the detailed context. This would suggest a general inclusiveness in their spiritual thinking; a sense of engagement with their religious beliefs, history and the present that coloured the way in which they interpreted these texts and lived their lives.

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