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Cain's Fratricide: Original Violence as 'Original Sin' in *Beowulf*

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Introduction

Scholars have often questioned whether or not *Beowulf* expresses anything specifically Christian since it nowhere explicitly mentions Christ or cites the New Testament. The influential literary critic Harold Bloom, for example, has wondered how there can be Christianity without either of these two features (Bloom, "Introduction," 1). In these doubts, he was merely echoing those of E. Talbot Donaldson, who held that "there is no reference to the New Testament — to Christ and His Sacrifice which are the real bases of Christianity in any intelligible sense of the term" (Donaldson, "Overview," 98). As I have previously shown, however, these two objections fail. For instance, lacking in

the Old Testament but consistent with the New Testament are such expressions as "suffer punishment in hell" (*in helle . . . werhðo dreogan*) and "the great Judgment" (*miclan dómes*) (Donaldson, "Text," 11: 588-589; 17: 978) as well as such epithets of Satan applied to the monster Grendel as "*feond mancynnes* ['enemy of mankind'], *Godes andsaca* ['God's enemy'], *feond on helle* ['the devil in hell'], *helle haefta* ['the hell-slave']" (Klaeber 104). Moreover, I have given strong reasons to interpret the hero Beowulf as an antetype of Christ (Hodges, "*Praeparatio Evangelium*"). I therefore hold that we must not only acknowledge the poet as a Christian but also conclude that Christian themes pervade the poem. However, we can wonder about the poet's orthodoxy, for his poem appears to treat as the original sin not Adam and Eve's fall in eating from the tree of knowledge, which goes utterly unmentioned, but Cain's primeval fratricide in killing his brother Abel, for from this murder comes all manner of evil in the world as well as the central moral problem thematized in *Beowulf*: kinslaying.

Cain as the Origin of Evils in the World

The Christian poet who composed *Beowulf* introduces Grendel by name immediately after an evening of joy in the great hall Heorot, where the Anglo-Saxon *scop* has just sung to harp's accompaniment a Genesis poem describing how God created the world and the life that lives and moves within it. Alvin A. Lee sees this "*cosmogonic myth*" reflected in the building of the Hrothgar's great hall Heorot, which "in turn is followed by *the myth of the Fall and the beginnings of fratricide and crime*, as the Grendel kin of the race of Cain begin to lay waste Hrothgar's hall" (Lee, "Heorot," para. 5). Enter Grendel:

Swá ðá drihtguman dréamum lifdon
éadiglice oð ðæt án ongan
fyrene fremman féond on helle·
wæs se grimma gaést Grendel háten
maére mearcstapa sé þe móras héold
fen ond fæsten· fífelcynnes eard
wonsaélí wer weardode hwíle
siþðan him scyppend forscrifen hæfde
in Caines cynne þone cwealm gewræc
éce drihten þæs þe hé Ábel slóg·
ne gefeah hé þaére faéhðe ac hé hine feor forwræc
metod for þý máne mancynne fram·
þanon untýdras ealle onwócon
eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnéäs
swylce gígantas þá wið gode wunnon
lange þráge· hé him ðæs léan forgeald.
(*Beowulf*: 99-114; all Old English *Beowulf* from Slade)

So the lord's men lived in joys,
happily, until that one began
to commit crimes, a fiend in hell.
This grim spirit was named Grendel,
notorious borderlands-haunter, he who held the moors,
fen, and strongholds. The land of monster-kindred,
this unhappy man had guarded from the time
when him the Creator had condemned
with Cain's kin. That killing [was] punished [by]
the eternal Lord, in which he [i.e., Cain] slew Abel.
This feud he did not enjoy, for He drove him far,
the Ruler, for that wickedness, from mankind.
Thence evil offspring were all born:

ogres and elves and evil spirits,
also giants, who with God strove
a long time. He repaid them their reward.
(*Beowulf*: 99-114; all *Beowulf* translations mine, following Slade)

From Cain's primeval kinslaying arise evil offspring, and the emphasis is placed upon this "original violence"—as René Girard (*Violence and the Sacred* 4, 61) or Regina M. Schwartz (*Curse of Cain* 2) might express it—rather than upon Adam and Eve's original sin.

Beowulf thus differs somewhat from the roughly contemporaneous *Genesis A*, which offers a similar Cain-and-Abel story but then adds a corrective, as if to ensure that the Anglo-Saxon audience not misunderstand:

æfter wælswenge wea wæs aræred,
tregena tuddor. Of ðam twige siððan
ludon laðwende leng swa swiðor
reðe wæstme. Ræhton wide
geond werþeoda wrohtes telgan,
hrinon hearmtanas hearde and sare
drihta bearnum, (doð gieta swa),
of þam brad blado bealwa gehwilces
sprytan ongunnon. We þæt spell magon,
wælgrimme wyrd, wope cwiðan,
nales holunge; ac us hearde sceod
freolecu fæmne þurh forman gylt
þe wið metod æfre men gefremeden,
eorðbuende, siððan Adam wearð
of godes muðe gaste eacen. (*Genesis* A, B: 987-1001;

all Old English *Genesis A, B* from *The Junius Manuscript*)

> After that mortal blow [against Abel] came woe and tribulation. From that shoot grew more and more a deadly bitter fruit, and the boughs of sin stretched far and wide among the nations; grievously the twigs of evil touched the sons of men (and do so yet), and from them grew broad blades of wickedness. With lamentation must we tell that tale of evil fate, not without cause. Grievous the ruin the lovely woman wrought us by that first of sins that ever men on earth had sinned against their Maker since Adam first was filled with breath from the mouth of God. (*Genesis A, B*: 987-1001; all translations of *Genesis A, B* from Kennedy, *Cædmon Poems*)

Both *Beowulf* and *Genesis A* portray much evil as stemming from Cain's killing of Abel—though the *Beowulf* poet mythologizes the evil by introducing monsters. A notable difference, however, occurs in the brief reversion in *Genesis A* to Eve's original sin, as if to ensure that no Anglo-Saxon would misread the story of the kinslaying and imagine that sin first entered the world through Cain's murder of his brother, Abel.

Nevertheless, *Genesis A* had presented postlapsarian life prior to the first kinslaying as relatively comfortable:

> No hwæðre ælmihtig ealra wolde
> Adame and Euan arna ofteon,
> fæder æt frymðe, þeah þe hie him from swice,
> ac he him to frofre let hwæðere forð wesan 955
> hyrstedne hrof halgum tunglum
> and him grundwelan ginne sealde;
> het þam sinhiwum sæs and eorðan
> tuddorteondra teohha gehwilcre

to woruldnytte wæstmas fedan. 960
Gesæton þa æfter synne sorgfulre land,
eard and eðyl unspedigran
fremena gehwilcre þonne se frumstol wæs
þe hie æfter dæde of adrifen wurdon. (*Genesis A, B*: 952-964)

Yet the Almighty Father would not take away from Adam and from Eve, at once, all goodly things, though He withdrew His favour from them. But for their comfort He left the sky above them adorned with shining stars, gave them wide-stretching fields, and bade the earth and sea and all their teeming multitudes to bring forth fruits to serve man's earthly need. After their sin they dwelt in a realm more sorrowful, a home and native land less rich in all good things than was their first abode, wherefrom He drove them out after their sin. (*Genesis A, B*: 952-964)

Despite the realm being more sorrowful and less rich, it still brings forth sufficient nourishment for earthly needs, and it appears a peaceable kingdom.

Indeed, in the punishment laid upon Adam in *Genesis A*, Junius ll. 925-938, nothing is mentioned of the curse on the earth's productive powers that caused it to bring forth thorns and thistles (cf. Genesis 3:17b-18), as Larry N. McKill, who otherwise emphasizes the fallenness of *Genesis A*'s postlapsarian world, himself acknowledges: "the *Genesis*-poet does not include the direct statement of the Vulgate that the earth is *maledicta* 'cursed' (Genesis 3:17) because of Adam's deed" (McKill 36-37). Instead, this curse appears transferred to the time after the first kinslaying:

Him þa brego engla,
godspedig gast gean þingade:

"Hwæt, befealdest þu folmum þinum 1010
wraðum on wælbedd wærfæstne rinc,
broðor þinne, and his blod to me
cleopað and cigeð. þu þæs cwealmes scealt
wite winnan and on wræc hweorfan,
awyrged to widan aldre. Ne seleð þe wæstmas eorðe 1015
wlitige to woruldnytte, ac heo wældreore swealh
halge of handum þinum; forþon heo þe hroðra oftihð,
glæmes grene folde." (*Genesis A, B*: 1008-1018)

And the Gracious Spirit, Lord of angels, made answer unto him: "Why hast thou slain that faithful man thy brother in thy wrath, and his blood calleth and crieth unto Me? Accursed for ever, driven into exile, thou shalt be punished for this deed of death! The earth shall not yield thee of her pleasant fruits for thy daily need, but by thy hands her soil is stained with holy blood. Therefore the green earth shall withhold from thee her beauty and her delights." (*Genesis A, B*: 1008-1018)

Even in *Genesis A*, therefore, the first kinslaying seems to take on characteristics associated with the fall, as the "crime of Cain is linked with the guilt of Eve" (Lee, "Heorot," para. 13).

The world also grows more brutal as a consequence of the first kinslaying, for Cain's offspring develop the arts of war:

Se æresta wæs Enos haten, 1055
frumbearn Caines. Siððan fæsten ongon
mid þam cneomagum ceastre timbran;
þæt wæs under wolcnum weallfæstenna
ærest ealra þara þe æðelingas,

sweordberende, settan heton.
þanon his eaforan ærest wocan,
bearn from bryde, on þam burhstede. (*Genesis A, B*: 1055-1062)

Enoch was first-born of the sons of Cain. He built a city with his kinsmen, the first of all those strongholds under heaven which sword-girt men established; and in the city sons were born to him. (*Genesis A, B*: 1055-1062)

And a descendent of Cain, Lamech, kills Cain himself:

"Ic on morðor ofsloh minra sumne
hyldemaga; honda gewemde
on Caines cwealme mine,
fylde mid folmum fæder Enoses,
ordbanan Abeles, eorðan sealde
wældreor weres. Wat ic gearwe
þæt þam lichryre on last cymeð
soðcyninges seofonfeald wracu,
micel æfter mane. Min sceal swiðor
mid grimme gryre golden wurðan
fyll and feorhcwealm, þonne ic forð scio." (*Genesis A, B*: 1093-1103)

"I have struck down a kinsman unto death! I have defiled my hands with the blood of Cain! I smote down Enoch's father, slayer of Abel, and poured his blood upon the ground. Full well I know that for that mortal deed shall come God's seven-fold vengeance. With fearful torment shall my deed of death and murder be requited, when I go hence." (*Genesis A, B*: 1093-1103)

Two things may be implied here: 1) that the cycle of war and blood-feud

has been established and 2) that Lamech will suffer fearful torment in hell after his own death.

We find similar views in *Beowulf*, lines 1255-1268 and lines 587-589, respectively. Lines 1255-1268 seem to imply that war begins with the evil spirits engendered through the outcast kinslayer Cain:

Þæt gesýne wearþ 1255
wídcúþ werum þætte wrecend þá gýt
lifde æfter láþum lange þráge
æfter gúðceare Grendles módor
ides áglaécwíf yrmþe gemunde
sé þe wæteregesan wunian scolde 1260
cealde stréamas siþðan camp him wearð
tó ecgbanan ángan bréþer
fæderenmaége· hé þá fág gewát
morþre gemearcod mandréam fléön·
wésten warode. Þanon wóc fela 1265
geósceaftgásta· wæs þaéra Grendel sum,
heorowearh hetelíc· sé æt Heorote fand
wæccendne wer wíges bidan· (*Beowulf*: 1255-1268)

That became evident, 1255
widely known by men, that an avenger then yet
lived after the hostilities, [after] the long evil time,
after the war-cares. Grendel's mother,
queen monster, remembered misery,
she who the dreadful water had to inhabit, 1260
the cold sea, ever since battle arose through him,
from the one slaying by sword [his] only brother,

father's kinsman. He then went blood-stained,
murder-marked, fled human pleasures,
defended the wasteland. Thence were born many 1265
pre-fated spirits. Grendel was one there,
a hateful sword-outlaw. He found at Heorot
a watching man biding for battle; (*Beowulf*: 1255-1268)

Much as the progeny of Cain are described as "sword-girt men" (ll 1059-1060: "*æðelingas, sweordberende*") in *Junius* ll. 1055-1062, Cain himself is here in *Beowulf* described as "one slaying by sword" (ll 1262: "*ecgbanan*")—a very unusual killing instrument in the Cain traditions (Fresch, para. 3)—and the spirits that sprang up from him seem to carry on the tradition of violence, with even Grendel described as a "sword-outlaw" (ll 1267: "*heorowearh*") though he uses no sword in his attacks (ll 677-687; but cf. ll 1545-1546, 1557-1562, which reveal that Grendel's lair contains weapons). From the text's "repeated allusions to the feud between God and Cain's progeny" (Parks, para. 9), Grendel and his mother would seem to be continuing the blood-feud begun by Cain (cf. ll 109: "*faéhðe*"), for their attacks are also called feuds (cf. ll 153, 1333: "*faéhðe*"; cf. Day, para. 2). And as with Lamech in *Junius* ll. 1093-1103, the eternal cost for killing a kinsman is damnation in hell, precisely as Beowulf tells Unferth the kinslayer (ll 587-589; cf. 1167-1168):

þéah ðú þínum bróðrum tó banan wurde
héafodmaégum· þæs þú in helle scealt
werhðo dreogan (*Beowulf*: 587-589)

Nevertheless, you your brothers' slayer were,
near relatives; for that you in hell shall

suffer torment (*Beowulf*: 587-589)

Beowulf expresses himself with such certainty about Unferth's ultimate damnation to hell for kinslaying that we can probably infer this to be a universally held Anglo-Saxon cultural belief.

Evils in the World as Kinds of Kinslaying

It appears, then, that *Beowulf* attributes to Cain's original violence the blame for the various *violent* evils in the world: violent monsters, violent blood feuds, violent wars, violent siblings, for Cain's "primal fratricide . . . is surely the operative link between [such things as] Grendel, the monsters, and Hrothgar's family kinslaying" (Anderson, para. 24; cf. Mellinkoff, "Cain I" and "Cain II"). Everywhere lurks the threat of violence. Interestingly, all of this violence not only stems from the first kinslaying, the various sorts of violence implicitly retain aspects of kinslaying. Cain's exile gives rise to the monsters, who are in some way understood as Cain's kin. Grendel himself, "God's adversary" (ll 1682: *godes andsaca*)—and "the Anglo-Saxons had no stronger signifier of evil than the enmity of God" (Nokes, para. 10)—is one of the "evil offspring" (ll 111: *untýdras*) who "were born" (ll 111: *onwócon*; cf. ll 1265-1266: *wóc*) through Cain's fratricide and are (whether actually or by association) Cain's kin (ll 107: *Caines cynne*). By extension, these creatures are the kindred of mankind, either actually or associatively. Human beings themselves, by virtue of the common descent presupposed by the poem's reference to Cain, are all connected by implicit ties of kinship, and Cain's original violence thus characterizes human relations everywhere, for "human behavior is defined by

his crime" (Morgan, para. 2). Kinslaying, therefore, and especially fratricide, stands for the violence characteristic of monsters, blood feuds, and wars.

With monsters such as Grendel and the dragon, there can be no peace, for they engage in feuds with humanity that are unending even if perhaps interrupted. Grendel will not pay any wergild (cf. ll 156: *féa þingian*) and the dragon, whose hatred (ll 2554: *hete*) of humans stems from malice (ll 2317: *nearofáges*), willfully allows no time for bids of peace (cf. ll 2555-2556: *næs ðaér mára fyrst fréode tó friclan*); cf. Day, para. 3). The only solutions are to fight on until the monster is killed, but even then, the feud can be taken up by a another monster—as did Grendel's mother (cf. ll 1333: "*faéhðe*"). Thus, note David Herman and Becky Childs, "in none of the cases mentioned . . . would monetary payment prevent the monsters from pursuing their goals" (Herman and Childs 11). By contrast, feuds between groups and wars between tribes, which are just feuds writ large, can be resolved by means other than killing. One can pay the *wergild*, or one can join the two groups or tribes in bonds of kinship through marriage, a role played by a woman known as a *freoðuwebbe* (ll 1942; cf. ll 2028-2029), i.e., "peace-weaver," but also known as a *friðusibb* (ll 2017), conventionally rendered "peace-pledge" but which literally translates as "peace-kinship."

Such resolutions were tenuous, however, ever in danger of breaking down. As David Day notes, "although there are mechanisms for ending the feud, such as political marriage or the payment of wergild, the focus in the poem is most often on the tragic failure of such efforts at closure" (Day, para. 4). Beowulf himself notes the problem in his report to his king, Hygelac, when he conveys the hopes of the Danish king, Hrothgar, for weaving peace through the betrothal

of his daughter Freawaru, to the prince of the Heatho-bards, Ingeld. Such a peace will soon be sorely tested, even during what appear to be the wedding festivities, as an old Heatho-bard spearman tempts a young warrior to vengeance over his father's death at the hands of the Danes:

> "Meaht ðú, mín wine, méce gecnáwan
> þone þín fæder tó gefeohte bær
> under heregríman hindeman síðe,
> dýre íren, þaér hyne Dene slógon·
> wéoldon wælstówe syððan wiðergyld læg
> æfter hæleþa hryre hwate Scyldungas?
> Nú hér þára banena byre náthwylces
> frætwum hrémig on flet gaëð·
> morðres gylpeð ond þone máðþum byreð
> þone þe ðú mid rihte raédan sceoldest." (*Beowulf*: 2047-2056)

> "Might you, my friend, recognise that sword,
> the one that your father bore to the fight,
> under his war-mask, on the last campaign,
> precious iron? There, the Danes slew him,
> controlled the slaying-field, when retribution failed,
> after the heroes' fall, the valiant Scyldings.
> Now here, of those slayers, the son of one or other of them,
> exultant in trappings, walks the floor,
> boasts of murder, and wears that treasure
> the one that you by right should possess." (*Beowulf*: 2047-2056)

Repeated promptings by the old spearman finally push the young man to seek vengeance by killing the Dane who slew his father, and the feud-cycle renews despite the peaceweaver. Thus does memory of past bloodshed bring

men to rend asunder the bonds of kinship forged through marriage, take up the old blood feud, and recapitulate the primeval kinslaying. As Beowulf himself notes, after the fall of a leader, only very rarely is the spear lowered in peace — no matter how good the bride (cf. ll 2029-2031).

Fratricide in Beowulf's Farewell Discourse

The fratricide motif occurs five times in *Beowulf*. We encounter it in the first reference to Cain's slaying of Abel (ll 104-110), in the first reference to Unferth's slaying of his own brothers (ll 587-589), in the second reference to Unferth's slaying of his own kin (ll 1165-1168), in the second reference to Cain's slaying of Abel (ll 1258-1265), and then as an extended motif in Beowulf's farewell discourse to his thanes (ll 2425-2471). The two Cain references ground kinslaying and the world's subsequent evils in the original violence whereby Cain slew Abel, whereas the two Unferth references bring the evil of fratricide into the present and set Unferth up as a foil to Beowulf, who can himself stand before God innocent of any kinsman's blood (ll 2739-2743). Beowulf's farewell discourse on kinslaying, therefore, holds particular interest, for he chooses to recount the story shortly before the fight with the dragon, which will lead to his own death. After opening this discourse by recalling how his uncle, King Hrethel, accepted him as a seven-year-old boy among his own three sons, Beowulf describes a tragic kinslaying by which the eldest son, Herebeald, is killed by a younger, Haethcyn:

næs ic him tó life láðra ówihte

beorn in burgum þonne his bearna hwylc
Herebeald ond Hæðcyn oððe Hygelác mín.
Wæs þám yldestan ungedéfelice
maéges daédum morþorbed strëd
syððan hyne Hæðcyn of hornbogan
his fréawine fláne geswencte·
miste mercelses ond his maég ofscét
bróðor óðerne blódigan gáre·
þæt wæs feohléas gefeoht fyrenum gesyngad,
hreðre hygeméðe· sceolde hwæðre swá þéah
æðeling unwrecen ealdres linnan. (*Beowulf*: 2432-2443)

Nor was I by him in life more loathsome to aught,
a warrior in fortress, than any of his sons,
Herebeald and Haethcyn or my Hygelac.
For the eldest was, unfittingly,
by a kinsman's deeds, a death-bed strewn
when him Haethcyn from a horn-bow
his friend and lord afflicted with an arrow,
missed his mark and his kinsman shot dead,
the one brother the other, with a bloody spear.
That was an irredeemable fight, sorely sinned,
thought-wearying at heart. Yet nevertheless, thus should
the nobleman, unavenged, part from life. (*Beowulf*: 2432-2443)

Beowulf goes on to describe King Hrethel's profound, helpless despair at the kinslaying, then concludes:

Swá Wedra helm
æfter Herebealde heortan sorge

weallinde, wæg: wihte ne meahte
on ðám feorhbonan faéghðe gebétan· 2465
nó ðý aér hé þone heaðorinc hatian ne meahte
láðum daédum þéah him léof ne wæs· (*Beowulf*: 2462-2467)

Thus, the protector of the Wederas,
on account of Herebeald, heart's sorrow,
welling, endured. Not a whit could he
on that life-slayer settle a feud. 2465
Yet, not he that warrior could possibly persecute
through hostile deeds, though he by him was not loved. (*Beowulf*: 2462-2467)

The poet has chosen this moment, immediately prior to Beowulf's fatal battle with the malicious dragon (ll 2273: *níðdraca*; ll 2317: *nearofáges níð*; ll 2554: *hete*), for Beowulf to narrate a detailed account of an *apparently* accidental fratricide. In the aftermath of the fratricide, the king declines and dies, and after his death, enemies come on the attack in a time of "sin and strife" (ll 2472: *synn ond sacu*), a consequence reminiscent of the violence following Cain's own fratricide.

Kinship Wins the Day

Beowulf's discourse about fratricide is followed by his attack upon the dragon. In the ensuing battle, Beowulf's efforts to destroy the malicious dragon prove unavailing until his *kinsman*, the beloved Wiglaf, joins him in the fight even though the ten other thanes have run away in terror:

hiora in ánum wéoll
sefa wið sorgum· sibb' aéfre ne mæg 2600
wiht onwendan þám ðe wél þenceð. (*Beowulf*: 2599-2601)

Fiercely in one of them welled
the heart with sorrows. Kinship can never 2600
a whit be altered, in him who thinks rightly. (*Beowulf*: 2599-2601)

This one, Wiglaf, joins Beowulf, and together, they go on to vanquish the dragon (ll 2706-2709):

Féond gefyldan —ferh ellen wræc—
ond hí hyne þá bégen ábroten hæfdon,
sibæðelingas· swylc sceolde secg wesan
þegn æt ðearfe. (*Beowulf*: 2706-2709)

The foe they felled —[their] valor driving out [its] life—
and then they both him had destroyed,
the noble kinsmen. So should a man be,
a thane in need. (*Beowulf*: 2706-2709)

Thus does the poem, in a crucial scene, emphatically affirm the importance of kinsmen coming to one another's aid in a time of greatest peril.

The Righteous Beowulf

Though Beowulf, with his kinsman's help, has slain the dragon, he is dying of wounds that the dragon has inflicted upon him and particularly from the

deadly poison that it has injected into his body. Yet as Beowulf looks back upon his long life, he faces death with confidence:

> ic ðæs ealles mæg
> feorhbennum séoc geféan habban 2740
> forðám mé wítan ne ðearf Waldend fíra
> morðorbealo mága þonne mín sceaceð
> líf of líce. (*Beowulf*: 2739-2743)

> I all of that can,
> sick with life-wounds, have rejoicing, 2740
> for me he need not reproach, the Ruler of men,
> for slaughter of kinsmen, when departs my
> life from body. (*Beowulf*: 2739-2743)

Indeed, not only has Beowulf not slain any kinsmen, he has actively protected them, as demonstrated by his loyal support of his cousin Heardred as the rightful king, after his uncle Hygelac's untimely death, even though his aunt Hygd offered him the kingship because she considered Heardred too inexperienced to defend the kingdom (ll 2354-2379).

Original Violence as 'Original Sin'

Though Beowulf presents a world full of violence, a world repeatedly threatened by evil, nowhere does this epic poem even hint at the traditional story of the Adam and Eve's first sin and subsequent fall. Instead, we twice find references to the story of Cain slaying his brother Abel, whence come the evil, monstrous offspring that strive with God (ll 107-114), of whom Grendel seems

to be one. Indeed, Grendel's violent intrusion into Heorot recalls that primeval intrusion of violence that ended the Golden Age:

> [Grendel] intrudes into the narrative of Beowulf just as lord Hrothgar's poet is singing of the creation the world—a bright song which begins with the shaping of the earth (91-2) and ends at its populating (97-8), before the introduction of original sin. Hrothgar's warriors are by conjunction immediately brought into this Golden Age ("*Swá ðá drihtguman dréamum lifdon*," "So the men lived in joy," 99), until Grendel suddenly intervenes. (Cohen, para. 3)

Cohen refers to creation's gentle moment penultimate to "original sin" in the poet's song, and the *Beowulf* text itself extends that gentle moment to include the time of Hrothgar's men living in joy until an act of *original violence* interrupts. This original violence committed by Cain is treated in the poem as a primeval act that explains all subsequent violence.

In this respect, *Beowulf* resembles the conclusion to the no later than 10th century Anglo-Saxon *Maxims I* (Muir 1), which directly states this view on the origin of violence:

> Wearð fæhþo fyra cynne, siþþan furþum swealg
> eorðe Abeles blode. Næs þæt andæge nið,
> of þam wrohtdropan wide gesprungon,
> micel mon ældum, monegum þeodum
> bealoblonden niþ. Slog his broðor swæsne
> Cain, þone cwealm nerede; cuþ wæs wide siþþan,
> þæt ece nið ældum scod, swa aþolwarum.
> Drugon wæpna gewin wide geond eorþan,

ahogodan ond ahyrdon heoro sliþendne.
Gearo sceal guðbord, gar on sceafte,
ecg on sweorde ond ord spere,
hyge heardum men. Helm sceal cenum,
ond a þæs heanan hyge hord unginnost.
(*Maxims I*: 192-204)

A feud arose for the race of men, just when swallowed
the earth Abel's blood. That was no one-day battle.
From that, strife-strokes sprang forth far and wide,
great guilt for men, for many peoples
pernicious violence. He slew his own brother,
Cain, that killing he saved (=premeditated?). It was widely known, after that,
that men's eternal violence harmed: thus (earth's) subjects.
They engage in battle with weapons widely throughout the earth,
conceiving and hardening hurting swords.
War-shield should be ready, arrow on shaft,
edge on sword, and point (on) spear,
heart for brave man. The helmet should be fierce,
and ever (for) the abject heart the least-ample treasure.
(*Maxims I*: 192-204; translation mine, following Shippey)

For this passage from *Maxims I*, which does not mention Adam and Eve's fall, all violence stems from Cain's original violence, which can therefore be understood as the equivalent of original sin.

Conclusion

Even as late as William Langland's 14th-century Middle English poem *Piers*

Plowman, the importance of kinship continued to exert a very powerful influence upon Anglo-Saxons—and even upon Christ himself (Hodges, "Kinsman as 'Redeemer'"). If *Maxims I* is taken to be representative of kinship's earlier significance, then the Anglo-Saxons' early form of Christianity expresses more horror at Cain's killing of his brother Abel than at Eve's theft of a few samples of fruit from a forbidden tree. Raiding, after all, was an acceptable practice—or even if it were not *entirely* acceptable, it perhaps derived from feuding, which itself had its inception in an act of original violence, Cain's fratricide. Even the more apparently orthodox *Genesis A*, albeit acknowledging Eve's first sin (*forman gylt*), attributes the origin of strife to Cain's fratricidal violence against Abel, and the epic poem *Beowulf*, in ignoring Eve's sin while accentuating Cain's kinslaying, more resembles *Maxims I* than *Genesis A*. As I have noted above, Grendel's violent entry into the great hall Heorot recalls Cain's original violence. In a recent article, Dongill Lee has noted that:

> The threat to Heorot by Grendel has far greater consequences than the collapse of a building; it refers to the civilization itself and to the cosmos. To call Grendel the new hall-thane implies that evil now has control in Denmark. (Lee 243)

I would add that to the extent that Heorot signifies the cosmos, then evil also has control of the world, and to the extent that Grendel signifies Cain—not to mention Satan himself—then the more emphatically is Cain's original violence understood to have introduced evil into the world. It is, in this sense, an 'original sin,' and the emphasis that this 'original sin' receives in *Beowulf* and other Old English literature suggests that the moral exhortation to assist one's kin was a rule often observed in the breach within Anglo-Saxon society.

주제어: 원죄, 카인, 형제 살해, 친족 살해, 앵글로색슨, 그렌델

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Cain's Fratricide: Original Violence as 'Original Sin' in *Beowulf*

Abstract Horace Jeffery Hodges

The poem *Beowulf* emphasizes the importance of kinship, deplores kinslaying, traces violence to the original fratricide in which Cain slew Abel, and sees Grendel's attacks as a continuation of that original kinslaying. The disreputable Unferth is condemned to hell for kinslaying, whereas the upstanding Wiglaf is commended for coming to the aid of his kinsman, Beowulf. Five times, the poem thematizes fratricide, the most extensive discourse on this theme occurring just prior to Beowulf's confrontation with the dragon. Moreover, shortly before his death from the dragon's poison, Beowulf states that he has no fear of reproach when meeting God, for he has killed no kinsmen. Interestingly, although the poem summarizes the creation story from Genesis, it says nothing about the original sin by Adam and Eve, nor does it even mention the first couple. Instead, Cain's murderous action in killing Abel is treated as the origin of evil in the world, thereby making this original violence a kind of 'original sin.' Intriguing parallels to this view of Cain's crime can be found in *Genesis A, B* and *Maxims I.*

Key Words

original sin, Cain, fratricide, cursed earth, Anglo-Saxon, kinslaying, Grendel