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The shapers in John Gardner's "Grendel"

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The Shaper's in John Gardner's *Grendel*

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Robert S. Grunska
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Approved, May 1980

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study of the Shapers, or artists, writers, etc., in John Gardner's novel Grendel is to demonstrate Gardner's view of what a Shaper, based upon the medieval notion of the Germanic scop or bard, is and does in his society. In this novel, which is a re-working of the Old English "epic" poem Beowulf, the monster Grendel is the focus of Gardner's attention. As the narrator of the novel, Grendel is himself seen as a Shaper, or writer, struggling to discover a meaningful existence, or at least an understanding of existence, through his shaping of reality in words. All of the other characters in Grendel, Beowulf and the scop especially, can also be said to be pursuing the same path of enlightenment.

After reviewing several philosophical, theological and literary stances presented to him by the other characters in the novel, Grendel intellectually and physically, through his day to day life experiences and his encounter with death at the hands of Beowulf, comes to an understanding of life and art. That understanding being that in a created world, or a world which simply exists outside oneself, the Shaper must create his own world, or reality, however arbitrary it may be, through his words or art as he attempts to explain and understand that world around him and find his place in it, even if the moment of enlightenment comes at his death.

Throughout this study, it will be shown that Gardner's concern with the idea of the Shaper of art and reality is not limited to Grendel, but is a primary concern of many of his other writings; in his novels as well as in his more "serious" literary work, specifically regarding Beowulf, itself. During the course of this chapter by chapter, image by image, exegesis of Grendel, these other writings of Gardner's will be brought in to shed more light on the central meaning of Grendel and to support the conclusions of this paper.

From the point of view of Gardner's interest in the concept of the Shaper and shaping, this study will suggest that Gardner's work concerning Beowulf, either in his fiction or in his literary criticism, can be taken as a representation of Gardner's ideas concerning the role of the Shaper, or artist, whether medieval or modern, in society. Simply that the shaper gives himself and the others around him an internal sense of meaning or reality through his words or art which serves to connect man with the external reality of the outside world.
The Shaper's in John Gardner's *Grendel*
INTRODUCTION

John Gardner's *Grendel* is a "self-conscious" novel based upon the medieval "epic" *Beowulf*, which it both indirectly praises and criticizes. As its title implies, the focus of this retelling of the Beowulf-legend is the monster himself, Grendel, who also happens to be the first-person narrator of the tale. *Grendel* is a self-conscious novel because Gardner is somewhat limited by the early Old English poem itself in regard to his novel's plot and characters, and because he is forced to be practically parodistic in order to exercise his own imaginative and artistic control over his material. Thus Grendel himself becomes the dubious "hero" of the legend and Beowulf the "villian." This inversion immediately casts a cloud of doubt over the reliability of Grendel as a trustworthy, or even sane, narrator, since, undeniably, he is a monster -- but that need not interfere greatly with a fairly straight-forward textually-based interpretation of the novel. As the narrator, Grendel is himself quite self-conscious of his own, possibly untrustworthy artistic role and of the all-important influence of his own, necessarily, distorted perception of reality, i.e., the reality of his own history, upon his narrative.

Grendel's self-consciousness as narrator is greatly
heightened by his obsession in the novel with the old scop in Hrothgar's meadhall, Hart— the Shaper, and by his own evolving awareness that he himself is a Shaper. The monster is very concerned with and troubled by the relationship between art (i.e., the artist's alternative vision of reality) and reality (i.e., the "facts of life" which Every-man faces from day to day) in the Shaper's "shapings" in song and what it implies about sanity and insanity, the meaning of life and death, and the nature of Truth in general. This concern with the role and function of the artist is merely the major symptom of Grendel's broader concern with the relationship between words and reality— particularly the words which he uses in his narrative, as well as in his hours of waking and breathing, to describe, and shape, his own peculiar perception of reality. These are also, obviously, the concerns of Gardner as well, providing the impetus for his writing of Grendel in the first place. Fortunately, this narcissistic or mirror-like quality of Gardner's Grendel does not detract from the book's inherent worth as a successful novel.

Gardner deals with these broad philosophical and aesthetic questions in several of his other works. This is not the place, of course, to go into any depth, but, by way of introduction, a few sparse comments would be in order. In his novel, The Sunlight Dialogues (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), Gardner describes his central character Taggert Hodge, or the Sunlight Man as he is more appro-
appropriately known, as "a lunatic magician" (p.xi) or Shaper. Through his mad iconoclasm and magic, the Sunlight Man presents Fred Clumly, the Chief of Police of Batavia, New York, with an alternative vision of reality, which operates on a higher, truer level than the conceptions of Batavia's status quo, or, more specifically, Clumly's conception of "law and order," and promulgates the noble abstract conceptions of personal freedom and universal love. In *The Wreckage of Agathon* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973), Gardner's central character, the Athenian philosopher and anarchist, Agathon, offers a similar vision of reality through his philosophizing and fictionalized autobiography, or narrative shaping of his own past, to his disciple Peeker and the tyrant of Sparta, Lykourgos. Both the Sunlight Man and Agathon die untimely deaths as a result of living out their peculiar visions of reality, but not without first achieving some kind of enlightenment or leaving behind a vital spiritual legacy to those who survive them—it will be demonstrated that Grendel also follows the same path and achieves a similar destiny.

or Shaper—in this case, a painter—who equates his alternative vision of reality offered in his paintings and in his eccentric life-style with madness—but a necessary madness. In the same way, Queen Louisa, in her three tales, offers her medieval kingdom, from her husband King Gregor down to her maidserant Muriel, a different, better and brighter reality through her own madness than the cruel reality in which her fellow sovereign and subjects find themselves trapped. Finally, in his epic poem, *Jason and Medeia* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975), Gardner bombards the reader with a whole crowd of madmen and Shapers. The narrator of the poem, a thinly-veiled surrogate John Gardner, is himself a twentieth-century poet, who witnesses the pathetic history of Jason and Medeia in a kind of dream-vision. Orpheus, the greatest Shaper of all, shapes the Argonauts' reality by means of his magically creative songs. The mad Idas shapes his and the Argonauts' reality, and is shaped himself by his perception of future reality, through the use of his unfortunate prophetic gift. The prophet Teirisias makes an appearance, and, like Idas, suffers from the blind vision of prophecy which relentlessly shapes his and others' reality. Oidipus, in exile, also achieves a similar "blind vision," with which he instructs Jason, who vainly attempts to profit from Oidipus' bitterly acquired "gift" of prophetic shaping. Argus is a more concrete Shaper, whose shaping of the good ship Argo and of the Golden Fleece itself causes the woe of Jason and all who fall in with him. Medeia, mad with
jealousy, shapes, through her black magic—her deadly words of incantation—the bleak reality of Jason's final undoing. Lastly, Jason himself, mad with ambition, known far and wide for his golden tongue, is a Shaper who consistently presents all those within earshot with an alternative vision, or private narrative version, of reality—which, of course, eventually ruins him. As Gardner's Shapers in *The King's Indian* and *Jason and Medea* are generally madmen, so, likewise, the Shapers in *Grendel* (Beowulf, the Shaper, and Grendel) "suffer" from different forms of the same "madness"—which is, in reality, a more profound sanity. Gardner's concern with the relationship between madness and artistic shaping will reveal itself again and be treated more fully later in the actual exegetics of *Grendel*.

In his major work of criticism, *On Moral Fiction* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), Gardner concentrates primarily on the role of the artist and on the function of the imagination, particularly in terms of the artistic creation of literature. Thus Gardner, in *On Moral Fiction*, suggests an abstract theoretical foundation for the concrete image of his notion of the Shaper or artist and his art as found in *Grendel*. As intimated before, *Grendel*, as a work of fiction, is itself a metaphor for, or a mirror of, Gardner's own struggle to discover a solution to the aesthetic riddle concerning the ambiguous relationship between Art and Nature—to state the case in its most abstract terms. In *Grendel*, the *Beowulf*-poet as Gardner's source of inspiration
and subject matter, Gardner himself as author, Grendel as narrator, and the Shaper as the character emblematic of them all, all come together, hopelessly enmeshed in the complex aesthetic web of the work of fiction itself, struggling to attempt to answer such questions as: What is art? What is reality? And what is the connection, if any, between the two? In this respect, *Grendel* is anticipated by *On Moral Fiction*—*Grendel* is the practical construction, although written earlier, built upon *On Moral Fiction*’s theoretical foundation. This close connection between the two works will be discussed in some detail in the conclusion of this essay.

The Shaper in Gardner's *Grendel* is thus not only one of the novel's major secondary characters, but also a representation of *Grendel*’s major theme—creativity, imagination, art, etc. There are different levels of this theme of creative "shaping"—to use the term most appropriate to the Shaper's name—in the novel. On the cosmic plane, God shapes the world by the Word. On another "cosmic" plane (at least from the perspective of *Grendel* as a work of art or verisimilitude), Gardner shapes the world of the novel by the "Word." On a philosophical plane, Grendel shapes his own reality or world with words, and on an artistic plane, both Grendel and the Shaper shape art in the forms of narrative prose and poetry. In the process of exploring these ideas, the best approach will be to proceed through *Grendel* "chronologically," chapter by chapter, tracing the narrative
for its effects, treating these different levels of the theme as they are treated by Gardner through Grendel in the linear process of the novel, in order best to show how this concept of creative shaping evolves in the work.

Grendel lends itself well to this kind of "chronological" approach. Suggestively, Grendel's entire narrative is structured around the yearly procession of the Zodiac (twelve chapters—each corresponding to an astrological sign), beginning with Aries and progressing in order through Pisces (each sign of the Zodiac is identified by a predominant metaphor or simile in each of their respective chapters)—early spring through late winter (metaphorically, the ignorant bliss of youth and life through the sad wisdom of age and death.). The first chapter, for example, opens with Grendel's description of an "old ram" (p.1), Aries, and in the last chapter, Pisces is represented by Beowulf himself. Also, in connection with Grendel's twelve-fold structure, Gardner progresses through twelve different philosophies or world-views (e.g., Hrothgar's imperialism in Chapter Three, and the dragon's nihilism and materialism in Chapter Five), examining and rejecting them in Grendel's mind in favor of a more "natural" understanding of things based upon the "order" inherent in the universe (represented again by the procession of the Zodiac), and into which man finds himself thrown, willy nilly. Finally, the year which elapses within the twelve chapters of the novel is the twelfth year of Grendel's "war" with Hrothgar, as well—"And
so begins the twelfth year of my idiotic war" (p.1).
"Twelve is, I hope, a holy number," Grendel will vainly
comment, "Number of escapes from traps" (p.80)—unfortunate­
ly, this will not be the case. This structural device is of
considerable importance to any extensive interpretation of
the novel as a whole and will be dealt with more closely
later. Grendel also breaks down readily into two distinct
and neat developmental units of six chapters each. The
first six chapters relate Grendel's "primary education"--his
introduction to, and growing awareness of, the Shaper and
his art. In this phase of his "schooling," Grendel
struggles to understand the Danish scop and the strange
effect the Shaper has upon him. In the last six chapters of
the novel--the monster's "higher education"--Grendel becomes
the Shaper's "apprentice," eventually "succeeding" the old
scop and becoming himself a "Shaper." This progression is
also vital, obviously, to any useful interpretation of
Grendel.

In the process of tracing these progressions through
the novel, inevitably, many other related issues will crop
up and demand digression, simply because they are all facets
of the larger concern of this essay with the concept of "the
Shaper" and the function of, and motivation for, his
"shaping" in Grendel. The moral implications of shaping
and the social obligations of the Shaper, as well as the
various "roles" of the Shaper--such as liar and soothsayer,
historian and philosopher, prophet and priest, magician and
madman—will, to different degrees, be considered. Also, in order to understand better Grendel's apprenticeship and career as a Shaper, it will be necessary to discuss thoroughly the monster's interaction with, and responses to, the other characters in the novel besides the undeniably important characters of Beowulf and the Shaper. The characters of Grendel's mother, the dragon, Unferth, Wealtheow and Ork, the elderly Danish priest, file by Grendel as narrator and the reader as participant within the novel in what amounts to an almost allegorical parade of meaning which reflects and portrays by counterpoint Grendel's growing understanding of shaping and his personal evolution as a Shaper. Lastly, two important issues or themes which do not fall so neatly into place in this general discussion of the Shaper and his shaping, but are nonetheless helpful in any study of *Grendel* as a whole—Grendel's kinship to Cain, and Gardner's treatment of the medieval notion of the tri-partite soul in regard to the Fall—have been delegated to the appendices.
Chapter I. Grendel's "Primary Education":
Grendel's Introduction to, and Evolving Awareness of,
the Shaper and His Art.

In Chapter One of John Gardner's *Grendel*, several
levels of shaping appear. Since Grendel himself is the
voice of *Grendel*, it is appropriate that he be aware from
the beginning of the novel that he is shaping his own story
or reality. Grendel describes himself as: "Talking,
talking. Spinning a web of words, pale walls of dreams,
between myself and all I see" (p.4). Immediately, the
reader is made aware of Grendel's solipsistic frame of mind
and feelings of alienation from everything outside of him-
self. Grendel can only conceive of his own reality in
terms of the words which he continually utters (as demanded
by the novelistic form which will not usually allow blank
pages) to hold his world together. Gardner gives Grendel a
glimpse of the fact that he exists only as an artistic
vehicle for the shaping of the twentieth-century novel.
Thus Grendel states: "I move down through the darkness,
burning with murderous lust, my brains raging at the
sickness I can observe in myself as objectively as might a
mind ten centuries away" (pp.5-6). Gardner "observes"
*Beowulf* 's Grendel in his own novel only after he has re-
created him and given him his own words, words which come from the mind of Gardner approximately ten centuries after the composition of *Beowulf*. In this chapter, Grendel introduces the Shaper himself, somewhat objectively at first, by giving the reader two brief pictures of him. "The old Shaper, a man I cannot help but admire," Grendel comments ironically after he has just attached the Dane's meadhall, "goes out the back window with his harp at a single bound, though blind as a bat" (p.7). And "where the king's hall surmounts the town," Grendel tells the reader, "the blind old Shaper, harp clutched tight to his fragile chest, stares futilely down, straight at me" (pp.7-8). Obviously, these portraits of the Shaper are painted from Grendel's peculiar perspective, but, interestingly, the reader is allowed a glimpse of the Shaper both aware and unaware of the monster's own observing presence. Grendel's observations are not without bias however. The reader senses already that the monster has ambivalent feelings toward the old scop.

Grendel begins Chapter Two, as he began Chapter One, by stressing his dependency upon words to perserve and, in a sense, even create his personal history: "Talking, talking, spinning a spell, pale skin of words that closes me in like a coffin" (p.11). In this instance, Grendel is speaking, unwittingly, more than metaphorically. His "pale" words (cf. "pale walls"—p.4, "pale skin"—p.11), impotent and sick unto death, do in fact become Grendel's coffin, the
only "remains" that he leaves behind after his destruction, which immediately follows the last words of his narrative. Grendel expands this notion of the reality-shaping nature of words when he dogmatically states: "I create the whole universe blink by blink" (p.16) -- perception by perception, word by word. The monster ends this chapter with a verbal reprise (Gardner does not want the reader to miss the point!): "Talking, talking, spinning a skin, a skin..."(p.22).

In Chapter Three, Grendel concentrates most of his attention on the Shaper. The subject of the Shaper comes up after Grendel has witnessed human warfare for the first time and has heard, also for the first time, human war-songs. He wonders "if the songs were true," and concludes: "I suppose at least one or two of them were" (p.28). Thus, from the outset, in the monster's mind, the Shaper, who, "Inside the hall," Grendel "would hear...telling of the glorious deeds of dead kings...his harp mimicking the rush of swords, clanging boldly with the noble speeches, sighing behind the heroes' dying words" (pp.28-29), is dubiously connected with both warfare and song--war-songs which are open to question in regard to their veracity. Grendel hints that the Shaper also consciously creates his own universe, in song at least, "blink by blink," when he mentions that the Shaper occasionally "stopped, thinking up formulas for what to say next" (p.29). "One night, inevitably, a blind man turned up at Hrothgar's temporary meadhall. He was carrying a
harp," and when "the blind old man went in...A boy darted up from the weeds at the foot of the hill, the harper's companion. He too was shown in" (p.34). The presence of a Shaper was "inevitable" in any meadhall. The first song which the Shaper sings, and Grendel quotes, is a poetic translation by Gardner of Beowulf 1-11 (Grendel, p.35), which recounts the mythic history of the Danish king Scyld and his son Beow. The reader is granted an opportunity here to witness many levels of shaping simultaneously: the Beowulf-poet's initial shaping of this legendary material shaped anonymously much earlier, Gardner's own shaping of this passage in the process of translation, the Shaper's actual shaping of the song in the novel, and Grendel's shaping of the Shaper's song as he quotes it from memory. As "he sang—or intoned with the harp behind him—twisting together like sailors' ropes the bits and pieces of the best old songs," the Shaper entranced not only the surrounding listeners but even the very hills, all hushed "as if brought low by language" (p.35). There is a certain numinous aura about the Shaper's art, and Grendel admits that "He was king of the Shapers, harp string scratchers (oakmoss-bearded inspired by winds)," and that "That was what brought him over wilderness, down blindman's alleys of time and space, to Hrothgar's famous hall" (p.35). Grendel hints here again at the Shaper's creative relationship to reality through words, as well as at the bardic nature of the scop, who, although blind, possesses the inner sight, the ability to
see what others cannot, thus better enabling him to create a meaningful reality for his community. But Grendel is slightly pessimistic and, although impressed by the Shaper, not overly impressed, because he realizes that although the Shaper would indeed "sing the glory of Hrothgar's line and gild his wisdom and stir up his men to more daring deeds," he would do so only "for a price" (p.35). Even more clearly now, Grendel's ambivalence toward the scop is revealed. But yet, Grendel is moved by the Shaper's songs of glory: "Even to me, incredibly, he had made it all seem true and very fine" (p.36).

After the blind man's well-received performance, the monster creeps away, his "mind aswim in ringing phrases, magnificent, golden, and all of them, incredibly, lies" (p.36). Grendel tries desperately to understand the Shaper: "What was he? The man had changed the world, had torn up the past by its thick, gnarled roots and had transmuted it, and they, who knew the truth, remembered it his way—and so did I" (p.36). The Shaper had somehow changed the hideous reality of barbarian warfare and butchery into something noble and heroic—and had made it stick! Although Grendel insists: "I knew the truth" (p.36), he admits: "I also remembered, as if it had happened." (p.37) all the heroic lies of the scop's song which had not actually happened. If the Shaper's "reality," or interpretation of Danish history is not "true," why does Grendel find himself "torn apart by poetry" (p.37)? Why is he so ambivalent about the Shaper's
obvious mis-reading of history in song? Why is he reduced to "crawling, whimpering, streaming tears across the world like a two-headed beast"? Why does he confess to the reader: "I gnashed by teeth and clutched the sides of my head as if to heal the split" (p.37)? If the Shaper signs "lies," why is the monster so moved? But, more to the point, how much of Grendel's own reality or history, shaped by his own words, is a "lie"? The moral implications of the Shaper's "lying" art create a dilemma for the monster. The end of the scop's art seems moral enough, but the means to that end--conscious lying--taints the Shaper's vision and baffles Grendel. In confused despair, Grendel, in order to clear his mind of the Shaper's devious art, screams, the sound "harsh and ungodly against the sigh of the remembered harp," but the echo, "like a thousand tortured rat-squeals," replies: "Lost!" (p.37)--and he is.

Grendel continues his examination of the Shaper, as he attempts to understand the phenomenon of the scop's song, throughout Chapter Four. The monster informs the reader that he has begun his scourging of Hrothgar's new hall Hart and his devouring of Hrothgar's thanes. As a result, the Shaper "sings to a heavier harpsong now, old heart-string scratcher, memory scraper. Of the richest of kings made sick of soul by the scattered bones of thanes" (p. 39). Both Hrothgar and the Shaper have contributed to the building of this splendid hall, which Grendel now plagues, and both share "The pride of creation" (p.39). But Grendel
gives the Shaper most of the credit: "He built this hall by the power of his songs: created with casual words its grave mor(t)ality" (p.39). Grendel understands that Hart, the symbol of all that the Danes hold dear, is not only the physical, outer shaping of reality into a meadhall by Hrothgar, but also the spiritual, inner shaping of reality into an abstract symbol by the Shaper. The monster's pun at the end of this passage is particularly meaningful. On the one hand, the Shaper's words have created Hart's "grave morality"—its solemn symbolic representation of bravery, justice, moral strength, etc.—but, on the other hand, the Shaper's commemorative words of glorious warfare have created Hart's "grave mortality." The Shaper's song is necessary in the first place to keep the memory of the dead heroic past alive, because only poetry can survive man's inevitable mortality. The fact that the glory of the Danes, represented by Hart, consists in their achievements in battle, suggests, on the dark side, that the Danes, and Hart with them, will eventually themselves fall in battle—those who live by the sword must die by the sword. Grendel's explicit pun here on the words "morality/mortality" seems to justify an implicit pun on the words "casual/causal" in the same passage. The word "casual," which actually appears in the text, implies something about the arbitrary nature of the words sung by the Shaper, words which seem innocent enough in song, but which, in reality, exert a certain "grave" influence. More interesting, but admittedly less
plausible, is the "between-the-lines" use of the word "causal" in Grendel's statement. Not only are the king's orders that Hart be built "causal" words, but the scop's songs, which express verbally what Hart expresses physically, are also "causal" words—the Shaper's words, like the Word of the First Cause which created the universe, provide the impetus for Hrothgar's words of command, the very words which caused Hart to be "created."

Because of Grendel's "war" with the Danes, the Shaper "knows no art but tragedy—a moving singer. The credit is wholly mine" (p.39). Grendel shares intimately in the scop's shapings because he himself has inspired their subject matter of late. But again, Grendel is ambivalent, because, "Inspired by winds (or whatever you please), the old man sang of a glorious meadhall whose light would shine to the ends of the ragged world" (pp.39-40), in response to which, Grendel confesses: "...the things he said seemed true" and "I listened, felt myself swept up" (p.40). "I knew very well that all he said was ridiculous," the monster insists, "not light for their darkness but flattery, illusion, a vortex pulling them from sunlight to heat, a kind of midsummer burgeoning, waltz to the sickle" (p.40) of death. "Ridiculous!" he repeats to himself, "I snatched up a snake from beside my foot and whispered to it, 'I knew him when!'" (p.40). Although Grendel fights it, the Shaper's song tempts him toward belief and a dangerous new understanding of reality, much as the Snake in Eden tempted
Eve. Grendel is both repelled and attracted by the scop's song. After the song, the monster narrates: "I backed away till the honeysweet lure of the harp no longer mocked me. Yet even now my mind was tormented by images" (p.41). He watches the Shaper's audience leaving Hart, all "smiling, peaceable, hearing the harper as if not a man in all that lot had ever twisted a knife in his neighbor's chest" (p.41). Grendel is again pessimistic, but he wants still to believe. "'Well then he's changed them,' I said, and stumbled and fell on the root of a tree. 'Why not?'") (p.41), Grendel asks himself, internally debating, struggling with the Shaper's temptation again, represented by "the root of a tree"—symbolic descendant of that first Tree. Grendel continues: "Why not? the forest whispered back—yet not the forest, something deeper, an impression from another mind, some live thing old and terrible" (p.41). The "old and terrible" mind which beckons Grendel to accept the Shaper's vision of reality will eventually reveal itself to be the mind of Beowulf himself in the final chapters of the novel. Grendel's understanding and acceptance of the Shaper's vision will come about only through the experience of his own death.

"He reshapes the world," Grendel argues on, "So his name implies. He stares strange-eyed at the mindless world and turns dry sticks to gold" (p.41). Then, in a moment of intuition, Grendel identifies himself, to a degree, with the Shaper. "A little poetic, I would readily admit," Grendel
confesses concerning his definition of the Shaper by function, because, he goes on to explain: "His manner of speaking was infecting me, making me pompous" (p.41). Grendel vainly tries to refute in his internal debate his former admission that the Shaper possibly does change men and reshape the world: "'Nevertheless,' I whispered crossly—but I couldn't go on, too conscious all at once of my whispering, my eternal posturing, always transforming the world with words—changing nothing" (p.41). The monster realizes that he is kin to the Shaper because he too "reshapes the world" with words, ultimately with "lies"—"changing nothing." He is being sorely tempted—the entire time that Grendel has been engaging himself in internal dialogue, he informs the reader: "I still had the snake in my fist" (p.41). Struggling within himself, Grendel continues his debate: "'He takes what he finds...and by changing men's minds he makes the best of it. Why not?' But it sounded petulant, and it wasn't true, I knew. He sang for pay, for the praise of women—one in particular—and for the honor of a famous king's hand on his arm" (pp.41-42). Grendel is torn. On the one hand, "If the ideas of art were beautiful, that was art's fault, not the Shaper's. A blind selector, almost mindless: a bird. Did they murder each other more gently because in the woods sweet songbirds sang?" (p.42), but, on the other hand, "His fingers picked infallibly, as if moved by something beyond his power, and the words stitched together out of ancient songs, the scenes
interwoven out of dreary tales, made a vision without seams, an image of himself yet not-himself, beyond the need of any shaggy old gold-friend's pay: the projected possible" (p.42). "Why not?" Grendel vainly asks again—he cannot reply. But the mind of Beowulf, unknown by name to Grendel as yet, tempting him to give in to the Shaper's vision of reality, still exerts its influence. "I could feel it all around me," Grendel narrates, "that invisible presence, chilly as the first intimation of death, the dusty unblinking eyes of a thousand snakes" (p.42). The monster's ultimate awareness of the Shaper will result, like the Fall, in death, but Grendel only has dim intimations of the fact: "It followed me--whatever it was" (p.42).

The next phase of Grendel's understanding of the Shaper is critical. The scop sings of that greatest of Shapers— the Creator. Grendel summarizes the Shaper's Caedmon-like song (cf. Beowulf Ll. 90-98) thus:

He told of how the earth was first built, long ago: said that the greatest of gods made the world, every wonder-bright plain and the turning seas, and set out as signs of his victory the sun and moon, great lamps for light to land-dwellers, kingdom torches, and adorned the fields with all colors and shapes, made limbs and leaves and gave life to the every creature that moves on land (p.43).

Thus Grendel learns about the first Almighty Artist who created the first and greatest piece of art—the universe—the culmination as well as the conception of all art and the fundamental doctrine of all theology—the Creation by the Word. As God shaped the world, or reality, so Grendel is
learning, the Shaper shapes reality, as Grendel himself also shapes reality. But Grendel's lesson does not stop here. In the midst of the song, the monster notes that, suddenly, "The harp turned solemn: as the Shaper (paraphrasing Beowulf Ll. 106-114) "told of an ancient feud between two brothers which split all the world between darkness and light. And I, Grendel, was the dark side, he said in effect. The terrible race God cursed" (p.43). Grendel discovers, at least from the Shaper's point of view and construction of reality, and God's, that he is the alienated offspring of the first murderer, Cain, and thus part of a cursed race. Grendel is tainted by that second fall of man, the discovery of homicide, as well as by that first Fall of man, the discovery of personal, unavoidable mortality. As the Shaper's art is tainted, of necessity, by the first Fall, by which all of the seed of Adam are cursed, so Grendel's art or shaping of reality is tainted by the second fall, by which all of the seed of Cain are cursed, as well as by the first Fall, since Cain is, of course, of Adam's seed.

Grendel has had intimations of his cursed heritage from the beginning of the novel and from childhood. In Chapter One, Grendel had described his mother thus:

Life-bloated, baffled, long-suffering hag. Guilty, she imagines, of some unremembered, perhaps ancestral crime. (She must have some human in her.) Not that she thinks. Not that she dissects and ponders the dusty mechanical bits of her miserable life's curse....'Why are we here?' I used to ask her. 'Why do we stand this putrid, stinking hole?' She trembles at my words. Her fat lips shake. 'Don't ask!' her wiggling claws implore....'Don't ask!'
It must be some terrible secret (p.6).
His mother only has a dim remembrance of Cain's curse and her kind's exile to this cave, but Grendel's understanding is awakened by her silence, for his suspicions will finally be confirmed by the Shaper's song. Grendel had informed the reader, in the beginning of Chapter Two, that he did not speak "in a language that anyone any longer understands" (p.11). This is the case because Grendel speaks an ancient language inherited from his exiled ancestors, a language which has not evolved at the same rate as the language of the Danes, due to his race's seclusion. When Grendel had first heard the language of the Danes, he had recognized that "it was my own language, but spoken in a strange way" (p.18). He had realized that because "they talked in something akin to my language...we were, incredibly, related" (p.30)—both Grendel and the Danes are descendants of Adam. In Chapter Nine, Grendel will notice that the Danish priests in their ministrations speak "an antique language...closer to mine than to their own" (p.111)—the ancient linguistic traditions of the priests preserved in a static liturgy bridge the language gap between the monster and the Danes. The closer relationship between Grendel and the children of Adam is more clearly brought out in the characters of Unferth and Beowulf. Unferth, like Cain, is, as handed down in Beowulf, a "brother-killer" (p.89), a crime for which he will "prowl the stalagmites of hell" (p.142). When Grendel and Beowulf finally meet in battle,
Grendel, in agony, will call Beowulf a "dear long-lost brother, kinsman thane" (p.148), and Beowulf will call Grendel "my brother" (p.149). As an anti-type of Cain, Beowulf will kill Grendel, the anti-type, ironically, of Abel (i.e., after Grendel has achieved a degree of enlightenment); as an inverted anti-type of Abel, more appropriately, Beowulf will kill Grendel, the inverted anti-type, understandably, of Cain, to restore the balance— even the score.

When Grendel had ventured out of the cave for the first time as a child to swim up through the mere or "pool of fire-snakes" (p.11) and explore the world aboveground, he had said of the snakes: "I knew— I seemed to have known all along— that the snakes were there to guard something" (p.11) — to guard the descendants of Cain imprisoned in the cave. Grendel and his mother are not the only offspring of Cain sharing the cave. He had described others "on shelves or in hallways of my mother's cave, large old shapes with smouldering eyes sat watching me. A continuous grumble came out of their mouths; their backs were humped" (p.12). Referring to "those humpbacked shapes back in the cave," Grendel had asked himself: "Were they my brothers, my uncles, those creatures shuffling brimstone-eyed from room to room... each in his private, inviolable gloom?" (p.16).

After Grendel had returned from his adventures above-ground (in which he had gotten stuck in a tree and had been attacked by a bull and by some Danes, to be saved at last by his mother) to the safety of his mother's cave, he had
discovered that "There were no other shapes. I think I dimly understood even then that they'd gone deeper into darkness, away from men" (p.21). Since Grendel had broken the terms of the exile and entered again into the world of men, the other descendants of Cain, except for his mother who is bound to the monster by maternal love, had retreated further into exile away from Grendel and from men, out of fear, apparently, of divine retribution, but Grendel is fated to move even further into the world of men and embrace his punishment--death.

After Grendel has heard the "dark side" of the Shaper's song in Chapter Four about the creation of the world and the race of Cain, he admits: "I believed him. Such was the power of the Shaper's harp!" (p.43). While Grendel had been listening to the scop's song, he had been holding a corpse with its throat cut by the Danes which he had found outside the meadhall. Grendel interprets the presence of the corpse as "the proof that both of us were cursed, or neither, that the brothers had never lived, nor the god who judged them" (pp.43-44). His "proof" works not so much as a denial (which would be too facile) as a corrective of the myth of Cain and Abel. Because this myth presupposes the myth of the Fall, both Cain and Abel are actually fallen, but Cain is also especially cursed. Similarly, both Grendel and the Shaper are just as guilty, partaking of Adam's guilt, but Grendel is especially cursed by his genetic association with Cain. The monster concludes, however, that all men are
actually tainted by the curse of Cain, as well as by the curse of Adam. Unferth is the perfect example, as, indeed, are all of the Danes who continually murder their "brothers," and as is the Shaper, who celebrates these killings in song. But Grendel is still invariably ambivalent. "Oh what a conversion!" (p.44) he ironically laments. But this is just the beginning of Grendel's "conversion" and of his understanding of "the power of the Shaper's harp!"

After the discovery of his dubious heritage, Grendel feels horribly isolated. He enters the meadhall, after hearing the scop's song, crying "Mercy! Peace!" (p.44), but the Danes, misunderstanding, attack him. "They have their own versions" of this episode, Grendel confesses, "but this is the truth" (p.44)—the reader is forcibly reminded here of Grendel's narrative role, and is immediately made suspicious of the monster's reliability as a narrator because of his almost arrogant use of the word "truth." By the monster's own philosophical admissions, the reader is made aware of the fact that Grendel's concept of truth is somewhat relative, to say the least. Because of Grendel's feelings of isolation after this incident, he envies the Shaper and Hrothgar. Since they are both a part of the Danish community, unlike himself, they have "people to talk to." "Why can't I have someone to talk to?" he complains, "The Shaper has people to talk to...Hrothgar has people to talk to" (p.45). The monster longs to share his idiosyncratic verbal world; to break out of his solipsistic
chains. But then Grendel realizes, as he takes another step toward identification with the Shaper, that the scop is also isolated and really has no one to talk to either. "Perhaps it wasn't true," Grendel ponders, because "if the Shaper's vision of goodness and peace was a part of himself, not idle rhymes, then no one understood him at all, not even Hrothgar" (p.45). Hrothgar, Grendel also realizes, is isolated too, but in a different way. He is isolated from his own sons by his visions of political glory, his kingly position, and his wealth, which they covet. Grendel recoils from the cynical thought that the Shaper and Hrothgar and, possibly, the rest of the Danes are as miserable as he is, and suggests to himself that "That could change...The Shaper may yet improve men's minds, bring peace to the miserable Danes" (p.45), but he is too well aware that the Shaper's mission is hopeless ("But they were doomed"--p.45) because all men are fallen. Still, Grendel is drawn to the Shaper and his hopeless mission. "I was addicted," he confesses. "The Shaper was singing the glorious deeds of the dead men, praising war," Grendel narrates, "He sang how they'd fought me" but, he claims, "It was all lies. The sly harp rasped like snakes in cattails, glorifying death" (pp.45-46). Grendel is, as always, ambivalent. He is still being tempted by "snakes in cattails" (metaphorically reminiscent of some absurd auto da fe' to believe the Shaper's vision and discover, ultimately, a "glorifying death."

"Woe to the man," the Shaper sings on, "who shall
through wicked hostilities shove his soul down into the fire's hug! Let him hope for no change: he can never turn away! But lucky the man who, after his deathday, shall seek the Prince, find peace in his father's embrace!" (p.46 and *Beowulf* Ll. 183-188). When Grendel responds to this dogmatic assertion of the Shaper with a whispered "Bullshit!" he is again haunted by that nagging question and the unidentified presence which asks it, *Why not?* (p.46). Grendel describes this questioning presence as "Teasing, tormenting, as cold as a dead hand closing on my wrist" (p.46)—the identification of this presence with death and with Beowulf's prodigious grip is prophetic. Grendel does not want to acknowledge the reality of this deadly presence which promises new, forbidden knowledge if Grendel will but answer the question correctly, so he dismisses it as "Imagination, I knew. Some evil inside myself pushed out into the trees. I knew what I knew, the mindless, mechanical bruteness of things, and when the harper's lure drew my mind away to hopeful dreams, the dark of what was and always was reached out and snatched my feet" (p.46). But the presence cannot be so easily defined out of existence. "And yet I'd be surprised, I had to admit," Grendel continues, "if anything in myself could be as cold, as dark, as centuries old as the presence I felt around me" (p.46). ("You'd have thought he had centuries"—p.135, Grendel will say of Beowulf later in Chapter Eleven.) When the monster then tells the reader that "I touched a vine to reassure myself"
and discovered that "It was a snake" (p.46), the reader is once again reminded of that Snake in Eden. Not until the end of the novel, when the invisible presence is revealed to be Beowulf, does Grendel really understand the temptation—only the repeated question "Why not?" gives him the hint at this time that his own enlightenment is in some way dependent upon the Shaper's art and function.

After recovering from the jolt the snake gives him, Grendel continues; "It came to me that the presence was still there, somewhere deeper, much deeper, in the night. I had the feeling that if I let myself I could fall toward it, that it was pulling me, pulling the whole world in like a whirlpool" (p.46). This falling motion is representative of Grendel's, specifically, and mankind's, generally, fall into knowledge and death. Grendel will "fall" in the next chapter toward the dragon, and in its presence completes his "primary education." His education is culminated, and Grendel again will feel himself falling, in the presence of Beowulf (who will also then become a dragon), deepest into knowledge—the knowledge of his personal death. Grendel recovers a bit, after his scare, and ruminates upon the Shaper's "Ridiculous" (p.47) songs. Although "It was a cold-blooded lie that a god had lovingly made the world and set out the sun and moon as lights to land-dwellers, that brothers had fought, that one of the races was saved, the other cursed," Grendel suspects that "he, the old Shaper, might make it true, by the sweetness of his harp, his cun-
ning trickery" (p.47). The monster is trapped by his imagination, or by the Shaper's imagination, trapped by the mythology which shapes the Shaper's songs. True or not, the myths are nonetheless "real because of the Danes' desire, and Grendel's desire as well, for them to be real or actually (as opposed to potentially) true. "It came to me with a fierce jolt that I wanted it," Grendel intuits, "As they did too, though vicious animals, cunning, cracked with theories. I wanted it, yes! Even if I must be the outcast, cursed by the rules of his hideous fable" (p.47). Grendel, himself one of the "vicious animals, cunning, cracked with theories," through his shared imagination with the Shaper, desires to discover himself, to discover a meaningful identity, even if it is an identification with Cain and with evil. The outcast monster returns to his cave to sleep it off, but the dark presence returns to wake and haunt him. "The thing was all around me, now, like a thunder charge," Grendel recounts, "'Who is it?' I said. No answer. Darkness" (p.47). Unable to sleep any longer, Grendel gets up and "falls" in his mind to the dragon.

In Chapter Five, Grendel visits the dragon to learn more about the Shaper. This dragon, like the Beowulf-dragon in Chapter Four (the "presence") and at the end of the novel, is a tempter--"serpent to the core" (p.53), but unlike Beowulf, this dragon tempts Grendel toward dismissal of the old scop and his vision. "You want to know about the Shaper," the dragon nonchalantly confirms. "Illusion"
(p.53), he bluntly and coolly states. After a brief
digression on the omniscience of dragons, unlike men,
including Grendel, who have "no higher faculties than memory
and perception" (p.53)—faculties vital to the Shaper, or
any Shaper—the dragon defines men as "Counters, measurers,
theory-makers," but insists that these activities are merely
"Games, games, games!" (p.55). The dragon continues:

"They only think they think. No total vision,
total system, merely schemes with a vague family
resemblance, no more identity than a bridge and,
say, spiderwebs. But they rush across chasms on
spiderwebs, and sometimes they make it, and that,
they think, settles that!...They'd map out roads
through Hell with their crackpot theories, their
here-to-the-moon-and-back lists of paltry facts.
Insanity—the simplest ever devised! Simple facts
in isolation, and facts to connect them—ands and
buts—are the sine qua non of all their glorious
achievement. But there are no such facts.
Connectedness is the essence of everything...They
sense that, of course, from time to time, have
uneasy feelings that all they live by is nonsense
....That's where the Shaper saves them. Provides
an illusion of reality—puts together all their
facts with a gluey whine of connectedness. Mere
tripe, believe me. Mere sleight-of-wits. He
knows no more than they do about total reality
--less, if anything: works with the same old
clutter of atoms, the givens of his time and place
and tongue. But he spins it all together with
harp runs and hoots, and they think what they
think is alive, think Heaven loves them. It keeps
them going--for what that's worth" (pp.55-56).

Thus the dragon dispenses with the Shaper! But Grendel
fights the dragon's position—he cannot forget the harp. "I
don't believe you," (p.61), he tells the dragon. Yet
Grendel is slipping. With a vain, final effort, he begins:
"Let me tell you what the Shaper said...He said that the
greatest of gods made the world, every wonder-bright plain
and the turning seas. He said--" (p.63), but the dragon
interrupts. "Ridiculous," he counters, and when Grendel asks "Why?" the dragon questions the monster in return:

"What god? Life-force, you mean? The principle of process? God as the history of chance?" (p.63). Grendel's "lesson" is complete. "In some way that I couldn't explain," he feels forced to admit, "I knew that this scorn of my childish credulity was right" (p.63).

Grendel begins Chapter Six by affirming the dragon's position on the Shaper. "Nothing was changed, everything was changed, by my having seen the dragon," he cryptically, but sweepingly, states. He then explains: "It's one thing to listen, full of scorn and doubt, to poets' versions of time past and visions of time to come; it's another to know, as coldly and simply as my mother knows here pile of bones, what is" (p.65). Grendel is no longer under the spell, he thinks, of the Shaper's magic. He discovers that the scop's singings has a new effect upon him: "...it no longer filled me with doubt and distress, loneliness, shame. It enraged me" (p.66). In the preceding chapter, the dragon had defined Grendel's relationship to the Danes in such a way as to more than justify this new rage that he feels, by informing Grendel of his meaningful and vital role as antagonist to the Danes--his necessary function as catalyst in the "reaction" and interaction between himself and the Danish community:

"You improve them, my boy!...You stimulate them! You make them think and scheme. You drive them to poetry, science, religion, all that makes
them what they are for as long as they last. You are, so to speak, the brute existent by which they learn to define themselves. The exile, captivity, death they shrink from—the blunt facts of their abandonment [sic]—that's what you make them recognize, embrace! You are mankind, or man's condition" (p.62).

After he is thus "converted" by the dragon, Grendel responds strongly to his newly suggested role as "shaper" of the Danes. Having completed his first official raid of Hrothgar's hall, Grendel comments:

I felt a strange, unearthly joy. It was as if I'd made some incredible discovery, like my discovery long ago of the moonlit world beyond the mere. I was transformed. I was a new focus for the clutter of space I stood in: if the world had once imploded on the tree where I waited, trapped and full of pain, it now blasted outward, away from me, screeching terror. I had become, myself, the mama I'd searched the cliffs for once in vain (p.69).

Grendel is referring here to his childhood memory of being stuck in a tree which he had recounted in Chapter Two. This event in Grendel's youth was the crisis which separated him irrevocably from his mother in his mind and planted the seed for his solipsistic world-view. Previous to getting trapped in the tree, Grendel had said of his mother;

I was her creation. We were one thing, like the wall and the rock growing-out from it.—Or so I ardently, desperately affirmed. When her strange eyes burned into me, it did not seem quite true. I was intensely aware of...the shocking separateness from me in my mama's eyes. I would feel, all at once, alone and ugly, almost—as if I'd dirtied myself—obscene (p.12).

As Grendel, stuck in the tree, had searched for his mother to rescue him, he had narrated:

Thing after thing tried, cynical and cruel, to foist itself off as my mama's shape...each thing
trying to detach itself, lift itself out of the general meaningless scramble of objects, but falling back, melting to the blank, infuriating clutter of not-my-mother...If she were there, the cliffs, the brightening sky, the trees, the stag, the waterfall would suddenly snap into position around her, sane again, well organized; but she was not, and the morning was crazy (p.14).

From this experience, Grendel ultimately had divined "that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist" (p.16). He had realized that, in his mother's eyes, he was "her focus of the general meaninglessness" (p.17), but that from then on she would no longer be his "focus of the general meaninglessness." Grendel had himself become the "new focus for the clutter of space I stood in;" he had become himself, "the mama I'd searched the cliffs for once in vain" (p.69). "I had become something," The monster exults in Chapter Six, "as if born again. I had hung between possibilities before, between the cold truths I knew and the heart-sucking conjuring tricks of the Shaper; now that was passed: I was Grendel, Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings!" (p.69).

Grendel supposedly no longer credits the scop's shaping of reality, but immediately after this dogmatic denial, he lapses a bit and almost realizes his own "conjuring tricks" and "heart-sucking" shaping of reality in "song," when he parenthetically ponders: "(talking talking, complaining complaining, filling the world I walk with words)" (p.69).

On a deeper level, Grendel is still trapped by the Shaper, while on the surface he is still influenced by the words of the dragon--he is caught between the Scylla of Thesis and the Charybdis of Antithesis with no Synthesis in sight! The
monster's dilemma at this point is obviously of central importance to the interpretation of Grendel. Under these contradictory influences, Grendel next contemplates, aided by the antics of Unferth, the "lies" of heroic poetry.

When Unferth first challenges Grendel, rather dramatically, in Hart, the monster ironically comments: "I've never seen a live hero before. I thought they were only in poetry. Ah, ah, it must be a terrible burden, though, being a hero...Everybody always watching you, weighing you, seeing if you're still heroic...Sooner or later the harvest virgin makes her mistake in the haystack" (pp.72-73). Grendel continues this harangue against heroism with the cynical observation: "And the awful inconvenience...Always having to stand erect, always having to find noble language! It must wear on a man" (p.73). The monster is well aware of the hero's dependency upon words to shape his "heroic" reality. Unferth seems to share Grendel's pessimism, to a degree, about heroic poetry, when he responds to Grendel later, after swimming to the monster's underwater cave: "Oh, I heard what you said. I caught your nasty insinuations. 'I thought heroes were only in poetry,' you said. Implying that what I've made of myself is mere fairytale stuff" (p.76). "Poetry's trash," he continues, "mere clouds of words, comfort to the hopeless. But this is no cloud, no syllabled phantom that stands here shaking its sword at you" (p.76). (Ironically, from the reader's perspective, Unferth, in actuality, is only a "syllabled phantom"—a
character in a novel who exists only in words. "You talk of heroism as noble language," Unferth argues, "It's more than that, as my coming here has proved. No man above will ever know whether Unferth died here or fled to the hills like a coward. Only you and I and God will know the truth. That's inner heroism" (p.76). Grendel is unimpressed—-as well he should be, Unferth is obviously not the paragon of courage and heroism—-Unferth's "inner heroism" is merely wishful thinking!

Earlier, when Unferth had first challenged Grendel in the meadhall, the Dane had echoed the common medieval heroic sentiment, abounding in Beowulf, that the hero would live on in song after an heroic death, achieving a kind of immortality through fame or reputation. "This one red hour," Unfeth had resounded, "makes your reputation or mine!" (p.72). And later, after Unferth has arrived in Grendel's cave, he whispers, exhausted, "It will be sung year on year and age on age that Unferth went down through the burning lake...and gave his life in battle with the world-rim monster" (p.75). (Of course, in Beowulf itself, no such song was ever sung, because only Unferth's sword Hrunting "went down through the burning lake," and it was carried by Beowulf to fight, not Grendel, but Grendel's mother; however, like Unferth, its owner, the famous blade was of little, if any, use to the noble Geat.) Grendel immediately notes the contradiction between this statement and the one Unferth had just made about anonymous "inner
heroism." I would have liked it," Grendel complains, "if he'd stuck to one single version, either that they would know and sing his tragedy or that they wouldn't. So it would have been in a poem, surely, if Unferth were a character, good or evil, heroic or not" (p.77). (Ironically, Grendel is himself remembered "in a poem"—the heroic Beowulf—as "a character, good or evil, heroic or not," and, as a result, "his tragedy" has ever since been known and sung.) The heroic act, Grendel comprehends, is not nearly as important as the heroic words which give it meaning and immortality, or reality. "You think me deluded," Unferth goes on, "Tricked by my own walking fairytale" (p.77)—Grendel would have answered with an emphatic "Yes!" "Except in the life of the hero," the Dane concludes, "the whole world's meaningless. The hero sees values beyond what's possible. That's the nature of a hero. It kills him, of course, ultimately. But it makes the whole struggle of humanity worthwhile" (p.77). (The word "hero" here could easily be replaced by the word "Shaper." The poet, by nature, also gives the world meaning by seeing "values beyond what's possible," and although his death is just as meaningless as the hero's, his art somehow makes "the whole struggle of humanity" he sings of more "worthwhile." For example, "the nature of a" Shaper, which Grendel inherits in Chapter Twelve, "kills him, of course, ultimately." Before he dismembers the monster, Beowulf will tell Grendel: "...the hand that makes you" (fingers on harpstrings, hero-swords, the acts, the eyes of queens).
Grendel's response to Unferth's summation of the hero is sardonic: "And breaks up the boredom" (p.77).

Having concluded the dialogue, Grendel denies Unferth an heroic death and carries him, asleep, back to Hart in humiliation. "So much for poetry," he concludes. By this point, Grendel has arrived at another crisis in his "primary education"--he has become totally cynical: "So much for heroism. So much for the harvest-virgin. So much, also, for the alternative visions of blind old poets and dragons" (p.78). Thus, halfway through his narrative, Grendel claims to have discarded, on the one hand, the vision of the Shaper, and, on the other hand, the vision of the dragon as well. But Grendel will eventually achieve a new, deeper identification with both the Shaper and the dragon (or a dragon), an identification in which the two extreme positions are modified and harmonized by the vision of the Beowulf-dragon, when he graduates from his "higher education."
II. Grendel's "Higher Education":

Grendel's "Apprenticeship" to, and "Succession" of, the Shaper, and His "Career" as a Shaper.

In Chapter Seven of Grendel, the reader discovers that Grendel, despite his denial of the visions of the dragon and the Shaper, is still heavily influenced by the dragon's nihilistic philosophy and is also, simultaneously, actually beginning to behave more and more like the Shaper—he begins to sing. Grendel's singing or poetry is, at first, mere doggerel, but by the end of the novel, his shaping will evolve into fairly sophisticated (for a monster at least) alliterative lyric. He dimly begins to understand that the Shaper is necessary to provide balance and form, or meaning, for the reality of the Danish community, and that, in the dragon's terms, Grendel himself is indispensable to the Shaper, because, as the subject of many of the Shaper's songs, he defines, to a large degree, the Shaper's reality. Grendel and the Shaper together perform the vital function of the scop to define society, in this case, by balancing Hrothgar (good) against Grendel (evil) in a kind of moral dialectic. "Balance is everything," Grendel begins the chapter, "My enemies define themselves (as the dragon said) on me. As for myself, I could finish them off in a single
night...yet I hold back. I am hardly blind to the absurdity. Form is function. What will we call the Hrothgar-Wrecker when Hrothgar has been wrecked?" (p.79). The "form" that determines Grendel's "function" is the name by which he is called by the dragon in his definition of Grendel, by the Shaper in his songs, and by the monster himself--"Hrothegar-Wrecker." Certain limits to Grendel's reality have been set by the Shaper's song of Cain and Abel. Grendel, as the monstrously evil descendant of Cain, is, by definition, the destroyer of the Danes and the scourge of Hrothgar's hall. This is a "no-win" situation for Grendel. After he has destroyed Hart and eaten all of Hrothgar's thanes, what will he be called? What, more simply will he be? By the act of naming in artistic creation, God, Gardner, the Shaper, and Grendel all define or "create" reality. The monster's first poor attempts at composition reveal his concern over the inevitable tragedy of his relationship with Hrothgar:

"Pity poor Hrothgar,/Grendel's foe!/Pity poor Grendel,/O,O,O!/Thinks old Hrothgar/Makes it snow! Balance is everything, tiding out rhyme...Pity poor Grendel,/Hrothgar's foe!/Down goes the whirlpool;/Eek! No, no!" (p.80). Here Grendel nicely associates "balance" with "rhyme"--the relationship between art (shaping) and reality (meaning). His last stanza even more nicely demonstrates his realization of the balance or definition that is achieved by the Shaper's use of Hrothgar and Grendel as literal representatives of the opposite abstract forces of
good and evil by transposing the last syllables of the names of the monster and the king—"Grengar/Hrothdel's foe!"

Grendel further discusses this concept of balance in terms of his periodic raids on Hart. He understands that his reputation as "the Hrothgar-Wrecker" depends on the availability of Hrothgar's thanes for killing and eating. The monster desires to kill more and more danes, but "alas, he has killed his quota for the season. Care, take care of the gold-egg-laying goose! There is no limit to desire but desire's need. (Grendel's law.)" (p. 80). He is forced, Grendel explains, to "cut down my visits, conserving the game" (p. 81). The monster will repeat this idea in Chapter Eleven, shortly before his death: "I might set aside Hrothgar's whole kingdom and all his thanes if I did not, for sweet desire's sake, set limits to desire" (p. 138-139). And in his fear of Beowulf and the Geats, Grendel, "for once unsure of victory," will consider that he "might set limits to desire: go to sleep, put off further raids till the Geats go home" (p. 139)—of course, he will not follow his own sound advice.

In regard to Grendel's poetry, the reader will recognize a growing artistic sense or sentient awareness on the monster's part which will progressively evolve from the novel's midway point after Chapter Six throughout the last six chapters of Grendel, as evidenced by Grendel's use of more experimental narrative techniques. For example, from Chapter Seven onward, Grendel (or Gardner—the Shapers in
Grendel inevitably overlap) will use italics and parentheses much more frequently than in the first six chapters. In Chapter Seven, besides introducing poetry as poetry (as opposed to poetic prose), Grendel will introduce, anachronistically, cinematic terminology to set off narrative scenes from each other: "Cut A" (p.81), "Cut B" (p.95). In Chapter Eight, he will use dramatic techniques to narrate the scenes which include Hrothulf—"SCENE: The Arrival of Hrothulf at Hart" (p.97), "SCENE: Hrothulf in the Yard. Hrothulf speaks" (p.98)—frequently allowing the characters monologues or soliloquies in verse. The priests' dialogue, in Chapter Nine, will also be presented in dramatic form. Grendel will take advantage of several other authorial "tricks of the trade" as well—by changing from a first-person to a third-person point-of-view occasionally, by drifting into poetic prose or poetry frequently, by telling the story less logically and more by association as he goes, and by using, at times, disconnected, short paragraphs or by, now and then, abandoning paragraph form altogether. It is not necessary to catalogue all of the narrative techniques and their variations to be employed by Grendel in the last six chapters of the novel, or to describe in any more detail those just mentioned. Grendel's artistic progression, as reflected by the technical evolution of his narrative, will simply demonstrate, on a higher (or lower) frequency, the monster's growing identification with the Shaper, whom Grendel ultimately, in a sense, will become
"apprentice" to, and finally "succeed" (or has been
"apprentice" to, and simultaneously "succeeding" from the
beginning of the novel—his awareness of the fact only
dawning in Chapter Seven and not crystalizing into complete
enlightenment until Chapter Twelve).

The primary focus of Grendel's attention in Chapter
Seven is Wealtheow. In the terms of the dragon's philosop­
hy, Grendel counts as one of his "numberless blessings" the
fact that "I have not committed the ultimate act of
nihilism: I have not killed the queen...Yet" (p.81).
Grendel contemplates committing this act because, as he
admits: "She tore me apart as once the Shaper's song had
done" (p.87). The Shaper and Wealtheow are connected thus
in Grendel's mind (in a similar way as the Shaper and
Unferth were connected by heroic song, and the Shaper and
the dragon were connected by their "alternative visions") by
the effect they both have upon his monstrous sensibilities.
Grendel is also aware of the similarly strange effect the
queen has upon Hrothgar, the Shaper, and Unferth—an effect
which is easily transferred to Grendel himself, as well.
Grendel observes the power the queen has over the king, when
he describes Hrothgar watching Wealtheow "with thoughtful
eyes, moved as he'd been by the Shaper's music, except that
it was different: not visions of glorious things that might
be or sly revisions of the bloody past but present beauty
that made time's flow seem illusory, some lower law that now
had been suspended. Meaning as quality" (p.88). Wealtheow
also moves the Shaper deeply: "The Shaper sang things that had never crossed his mind before: comfort, beauty, a wisdom softer, more permanent, than Hrothgar's" (p.89). In regard to Unferth, the Shaper and Wealtheow are connected in Grendel's mind in a somewhat polar manner. There is a tense moment in the meadhall when some thane makes a spiteful joke in reference to the well-known fact that Unferth, like Cain, was a "brother-killer." As Unferth considers retaliation, Grendel observes:

I knew, for one, that the brother-killer had put on the Shaper's idea of the hero like a merry mask, had seen it torn away, and was now reduced to what he was: a thinking animal stripped naked of former illusions, stubbornly living on, ashamed and meaningless, because killing himself would be, like his life, un-heroic. It was a paradox nothing could resolve but a murderous snicker. (p.89).

The tension caused by this paradox within Unferth, for which the Shaper is partly responsible, aggravated by the Dane's cruel joke, might have resulted in violence but for the queen's conciliatory words: "That's past" (p.90). Like all of the Danes, Grendel is profoundly affected by Wealtheow. "Whatever their excuse might be," Grendel explains, "I had none, I knew: I had seen the dragon" (p.93). Here Grendel directly undercuts his rejection of the dragon's vision at the end of the preceding chapter—he cannot forget what the dragon has taught him. "And yet I was teased," he continues, concerning the queen, "teased toward disbelief in the dragon's truths" (p.93). Here Grendel indirectly undercuts his rejection of the Shaper's vision which encompasses both Wealtheow and Unferth.
The queen inspires even Grendel with optimism for the future. "A glorious moment was coming, my chest insisted," Grendel predicts, "and even the fact that I myself would have no part in it--a member of the race God cursed, according to the Shaper's tale--was trifling" (p.93). Grendel cannot forget what the Shaper has taught him either. Unfortunately, precisely because Grendel is "a member of the race God cursed," the "glorious moment" which is coming, and in which Grendel definitely will have a part, will be his own death at the hands of Beowulf. Be that as it may, Grendel confesses that he now watched Wealtheow "as once I'd listened to the sigh of the Shaper's harp" (p.93). "How many times must a creature be dragged down the same ridiculous road?" Grendel asks, complaining, "The Shaper's lies, the hero's self-delusion, now this: the idea of a queen!" (p.93). In a rage, Grendel decides to go ahead and commit "the ultimate act of nihilism." "I would kill her, yes!" he exclaims, "I would squeeze out her feces between my fists. So much for meaning as quality of life! I would kill her and teach them reality...and nothing alive or dead could change my mind!" (p.94). But, "I changed my mind," the monster informs the reader, "It would be meaningless, killing her. As meaningless as letting her live" (p.94). The dragon's philosophy, which enables Grendel to commit acts of nihilism, also enables him to refrain from committing the same acts, since both doing and not-doing are equally without meaning. At the end of this chapter,
Grendel repeats his idea of balance with which he began the chapter, when he describes his never-ending ambivalence (now toward the queen): "I hung balanced, a creature of two minds; and one of them said...that she was beautiful" (p.95). Like his decision to kill Wealthow, Grendel "absolutely and finally" decides to kill himself, "But the next instant," Grendel, unlike Unferth who was "stubbornly living on... because killing himself would be...unheroic" (p.89), narrates, "for no particular reason, I changed my mind" (p.95). Even for a monster and nihilist, "Balance is everything."

In Chapter Eight, Grendel focuses on Hrothulf within a dramatic framework (as mentioned previously), in which the central characters frequently speak in verse, demonstrating, again, Grendel's progress as the Shaper's "apprentice." In the beginning of the chapter, Grendel, in an aside of sorts, describes himself rather poetically: "(Thus poor Grendel, /anger's child,/red eyes hidden in the dark of verbs, /brachiating with a hoot from rhyme to rhyme.)" (p.97). This is obviously better fare than the poetry offered the reader in Chapter Seven, but more importantly, it reveals, once again, Grendel's growing understanding that his vision or perception of reality depends upon his ability to grope through "the dark of verbs"—he must name the ever-changing processes of reality in order to "stop" them and perceive reality at any given moment in time—and that his very existence depends upon his creative vocalizations to which
he must ever cling in order to shape meaning for that existence. After Hrothulf has arrived at Hart for the first time, "The Shaper sings," exhorting the Danes: "By deeds worth praise a man can, in any kingdom, prosper!" (p.98 and Beowulf Ll. 24-25). Grendel responds to this optimistic dictum, propounded by the Shaper to encourage the Danes and especially the newly-arrived Hrothulf toward good deeds, with an ambiguous "So." (p.98)—whether Grendel means "It is so." or "So what." is left for the reader to judge. Grendel is quick to realize that Hrothulf's presence bodes ill for the kingdom of the Danes despite the Shaper's optimism—he realizes that conflict will come inevitably between Hrothulf, who is Hrothgar's nephew, and Hrothgar's two young sons, for the throne. Echoing the Shaper, and functioning as a Shaper himself in terms of the Shaper's social function of providing a meaningful order for living in the community, Grendel propounds a "Theorum [sic]: Any action (A) of the human heart must trigger an equal and opposite reaction (A)," commenting that "Such is the golden opinion of the Shaper" (p.98). This Newtonian theorem sets the tone for the whole of Chapter Eight and the actions and triggered reactions of political intrigue to come to the court of Hrothgar, and, at the same time, echoes the idea of balance which the monster had propounded in Chapter Seven. Although Grendel ironically refers to the Shaper's opinion as "golden," he appears to accept it. Indeed, his own inner conflict between the contrasting realities of the dragon and
the scop, and his constant reactionary switching of philosophical stances as a result, demonstrates it.

Grendel, no stranger to violence himself, is well aware of the inevitable violence to come which will destroy the Danes because of Hrothulf's presence at the court—the Shaper's theorem will prove regrettably true. "They all knew what was coming," Grendel maintains, "though nobody believed it...Except, of course, old Hrothgar. Violence and shame have lined the old man's face with mysterious calm" (p.105). Hrothgar, more than anyone else, except, of course, for Grendel himself, understands the fact of violence. He knows that "peace must be searched through ordeal upon ordeal, with no final prospect but failure. Lesson on lesson they've suffered through, recognizing, more profoundly each time, their indignity, shame, triviality" (p.106). Grendel then asks himself, in the reader's place, why he still hounds Hrothgar even though he well understands Hrothgar's tragic position. "Why should I not?" he asks in return, "This nobility of his, this dignity: are they not my work? What was he before? Nothing! A swollen-headed raider, full of boasts and and stupid jokes and mead...I made him what he is. Have I not a right to test my own creation?" (pp.106-107)—the dragon's influence again. But as Hrothgar is, in a sense, Grendel's creation, so Grendel, in a similar sense, is his own creation. Just as Hrothgar, although against his will, finds meaning in opposition to Grendel, so Grendel, by choice, finds meaning in opposition to Hrothgar. Like
Hrothgar, Grendel amidst: "I too am learning, ordeal by ordeal, my indignity. It's all I have, my only weapon for smashing through these stiff coffin-walls of the world" (p.107). Grendel's "war" with Hrothgar is a conception of the monster's mind which shapes his life and potential death with meaning—in the same way as his words (cf. "pale skin of words that closes me in like a coffin"—pp.11) shape his life and potential death with meaning. Indeed, this kind of shaping seems, almost invariably, to be in response to the inevitability of death. "Something is bound to come of all this," Grendel affirms, "I cannot believe such monstrous energy of grief can lead to nothing!" (p.107). Of course, Grendel's "monstrous energy" will lead to something—his enlightenment and death.

In Chapter Nine, all that Grendel says specifically of the Shaper is that "He has a fever" (p.112). The Shaper is old, and the time is drawing near for a successor. Although, on the literal level, the Shaper already has an apprentice to succeed him, on a symbolic level, the harp will be passed on the Grendel. In a manner of speaking, Grendel's entire narrative has been accompanied by the old Shaper's harp. The Shaper's fever is ominous for Grendel—death is drawing near to the monster as well. Thus the identification of Grendel with the Shaper continues to deepen. The principle focus of Chapter Nine, however, is on the Danish priesthood, made up of Shapers of a different sort than that of sick old scops, and especially on Ork,
"eldest and wisest of the priests" (p.113). Ork and the Danish priests shape their world or reality with theology, in much the same way as the Shaper shapes his world or reality with song. At midnight, Grendel, unseen by the blind Ork, hides within the circle of the Danes' idols and pretends to be the priests' most feared deity, the Great Destroyer (ironically, Grendel is in fact a "Destroyer," although the appellation "Great" may be better applied to another "Destroyer"—Beowulf). Grendel, in this disguise, demands that Ork expound upon the "King of the Gods" (p.113). Ork actually believes that Grendel is the Great Destroyer and obediently begins to theorize about the King of the Gods. He gets so carried away that, Grendel narrates, "I notice, with surprise, that the priest's blind eyes are brimming with tears...I raise my fingers to my mouth baffled...Ork is now weeping profusely, so moved that his throat constricts. I observe in wonder" (pp.114-115). Ork's faith astounds Grendel. Although Grendel's impersonation of the Great Destroyer is a sham and a lie, Ork still shapes his reality around the "fact" of the god's presence, actually achieving a kind of enlightenment, finding new meaning in the religion that Grendel is in the act of proving false. Like the Shaper, Ork shapes his reality around "lies" and yet attains to a certain kind of "truth."

A bit off the subject, Ork continues his oral examination by expounding upon "the ultimate evil" in a manner that will be particularly relevant to Grendel later. Ork
theorizes:

"The ultimate evil is that Time is perpetual [sic] perishing, and being actual involves elimination. The nature of evil may be epitomized, therefore, in two simple but horrible and holy propositions: 'Things fade' and 'Alternatives exclude.' Such is His mystery: that beauty requires contrast, and that discord is fundamental to the creation of new intensities of feeling" (p.115).

Grendel himself is the "discord" created to generate "new intensities of feeling," he is the required "contrast" to "beauty." Later, in Chapter Eleven, Grendel will reveal his awareness of this fact when he describes the Danes' unhappiness "that the Geats had come to save them" (p.139), and especially when he then describes the priests' unhappiness, who had "been saying for years that the ghostly Destroyer would take care of things in time" (p.139). Grendel, at that time, will imagine Ork "brooding, no doubt, on the dark metaphysical implications" of Beowulf's intervention— "Things fade; alternatives exclude"—and conclude: "Which­ever of us might exclude the other, when the time came for me and the stranger to meet, the eyes of the people would be drawn to the instance, they would fail to rise to the holy idea of process" (p.139). This is precisely the idea Grendel does rise to in the final chapter of the novel.

After Ork has finished sermonizing and "falls forward, arms thrown out in front of him, and weeps with gratitude," Grendel is greatly confused, and admits: "I have trouble deciding what to do" (p.115). Grendel has just witnessed a holy event--the shaping of a meaningful reality (Orks' theories) out of nothing (Grendel's "lie" or impersona-
tion)—creation *ex nihilo* a la the Shaper—and he is stunned. But before Grendel can recover, three priests come to chide Ork for being out late at night and babbling of such silly things as visions. They are soon followed by a fourth young, drunken priest who is ecstatic over Ork's "vision of the Destroyer!" (p.118). All of this is too much for Grendel—he had heard similar "nonsense" from the Shaper before, and now he possibly identifies himself too closely with Ork, as he did with the Shaper, whose "reality" based on a "lie" is still in some mysterious way "true" (Ork *did* speak to someone who identified himself as the Great Destroyer, and his conclusions *were* sound)—and he backs away, because "Even a monster's blood-lust can be stifled by such talk" (p.118).

Grendel deals with the Shaper's death in Chapter Ten. At the beginning of the chapter, Grendel informs the reader that "The Shaper is sick" (p.121). The monster goes into great detail describing the Shaper's last hours. He reminds the reader of the presence of the Shaper's apprentice who will officially succeed him, as he "sits by the old man's bed and plays pale runs on the old man's harp" (p.125). Poignantly, Grendel describes how the blind, dying Shaper "turns his blind head, rising from confusion to listen" (p.125) to the upcoming, younger Shaper playing the old man's own dear, ancient harp. This scene metaphorically illustrates the continuity of meaning which art provides, transcending death. As human life continues by means of the
ancient life/death cycle, so too does art continue, providing meaning for humanity by means of memory and tradition. The function of the Shaper's art could well be defined as a continual "rising from confusion." The old Shaper once brought meaning to the Danes' confusion through song, and now the young Shaper brings meaning to the old scop's confusion as he dies. And, of course, all of Grendel's narrative is a "rising from confusion" for the monster as he grapples with the confusion inherent in the process of his own living and dying. Although, at least artistically, as evidenced by the very fact or existence of his own narrative, Grendel understands, or at least sympathizes, with the old Shaper ("my chest filled with some meaningless anguish"—p.125), he is still fighting this understanding and sympathy with his conscious mind. "Where are all his fine phrases now?" (p.125) he cruelly asks. In a pragmatic sense, the transcendence of art over death is; as far as the individual artist's death is concerned illusory (except, possibly, on a metaphorical level in terms of remembrance, tradition, evolution, etc.), and although art is passed down from one generation of artists to another, there seems to be a gradual loss of former glory—the young Shaper can only "play pale runs on the old man's harp." Despite his exalted vision of art, the old Shaper must die. The Shaper's vision of a meaningful existence for man must cease in the face of man's inevitable return to chaos and non-existence.
In the face of death, the gift or use of art is taken from the old man and given to the younger apprentice (or to Grendel, more importantly, where it will also be taken from him at his death). Immediately prior to his death, the Shaper, functioning more like a poet/priest or prophet now than a scop, begins to "sing" for the last time: "I see a time...when the Danes once again---" but he cannot continue and Grendel observes that "His voice trails off; puzzlement crosses his forehead" (p.126). The Shaper can no longer "see" (fortunately so, since the Danes' future is grim) as he slips into the darkness of death--"his eyes, once webbed with visions, are shut" (p.125). Appropriately, Grendel describes how, in preparation for the Shaper's funeral, "The old women are arranging him, putting gold coins on his eyelids to preserve him from seeing where he goes" (p.127). Art brings meaning to life, but it is helpless to aid man in "seeing where he goes" after death. The death of the Shaper troubles Grendel deeply (possibly Grendel realizes that the Shaper's death prefigures his own), and the monster thinks about the mutability of time:

...because now the Shaper is dead, strange thoughts come over me. I think of the pastness of the past: how the moment I am alive in, imprisoned in, moves like a slowly tumbling form through darkness, the underground river. Not only ancient history--the mythical age of the brother's feud--but my own history one second ago, has vanished utterly, dropped out of existence. King Scyld's great deeds do not exist 'back there' in Time. 'Back there in Time' is an allusion of language. They do not exist at all. My wickedness five years ago, or six, or twelve, has no existence except as now, mumbling, mumbling, sacrificing the slain world to the omnipotence of words, I strain my memory
Grendel realizes that, as he continuously shapes the present moment with words, he must to a much greater extent depend upon words to re-shape or give any present reality at all in the form of memory to the past, since "'Back there in Time' is an allusion," as well as an illusion, "of language." He understands the Shaper and identifies himself with him even more now. Grendel accepts "the omnipotence of words" and begins to comprehend the primary motivation for the scop's shaping of art—or, for that matter, the dragon's shaping of philosophy, Unferth's shaping of heroism, Wealtheow's shaping of queenly virtue, or Ork's shaping of theology—in other words, Grendel understands the reason for man's shaping of reality in general—i.e., to give meaning to the passing of time in the face of death. The language of man, especially of man's art, is constantly involved in naming the "slain world," thus "sacrificing" it, because as the speaker or artist names the present moment, the moment is past, but, although it is past, it is now, in a sense, preserved, since named or remembered.

The death of the Shaper frightens Grendel because it has not fully dawned on him that he and the young Shaper will simply continue where the old Shaper left off—the loss will not be final after all. "I snatch a time when I crouched outside the meadhall hearing the first strange hymns of the Shaper," Grendel eulogizes, "Beauty! Holiness! How my heart rocked! He is dead" (dp.128). At the funeral,
Grendel describes how "The Shaper's assistant, cradling the old man's polished harp" (pp.128-129) (the harp is "polished" because art must go on, building on its traditions, ever honing its craft), sings the sad story of the revenge of Hengest upon Finn (i.e., the Finnsburg episode recounted in Beowulf Ll. 1068-1159). "The people listen silent and solemn to the old Shaper's song on the young man's lips" (p.129)—the young scop has received his inheritance (as has Grendel—he sings third-hand in his narrative what the young Shaper sings second-hand from the old Shaper) —"So he sings, looking down, recalling and repeating the words" (p.130) of his master. This ominous lay of revenge and betrayal reminds Grendel of the inevitable tragedy to come to the Danes through Hrothulf, emphasizing to him the importance of the Shaper's death: "End of an epoch, I could tell the king./We're on our own again. Abandoned" (p.130). Not only had the old scop given meaning and purpose to Hrothgar's dismal reality, but he had also given meaning and purpose to Grendel's dreary existence—so now they are both abandoned and on their own again. But Grendel will soon fully realize that, far from being abandoned, he has inherited the Shaper's harp as well as has the young apprentice, and that he is now capable of performing the Shaper's function on his own—his "career" has begun! Actually, Grendel has been capable, to a degree, all along of doing so—he has been shaping reality in a meaningful way throughout his narrative.

In Chapter Eleven, Grendel narrates the arrival of
Beowulf and describes his own mixed sensations of eager joy and dread as the time for their fated confrontation approaches. By the end of the chapter, both Grendel and Beowulf will be prepared and will await the encounter almost mechanically, as if moved by an outside force or some law of nature. Grendel will describe the feeling graphically:

It is the business of rams to be rams and of goats to be goats, the business of shapers to sing and of kings to rule. The stanger waits on, as patient as a grave-mound. I too wait, whispering, whispering, mad like him. Time grows, obeying its mechanics, like all of us. So the young Shaper observes, singing to the few who remain, fingertips troubling a dead-man's harp. Frost shall freeze, and fire melt wood; the earth shall give fruit; and ice shall bridge dark water, make roofs, mysteriously lock earth's flourishigs; but the fetters of frost shall also fall, fair weather return, and the reaching sun restore the restless sea....

(pp.144-145 and Beowulf Ll. 1131-1137 [*]).

Thus the new Shaper will describe the mechanical alternation of winter and spring. The fatal conflict between Grendel and Beowulf is, in Grendel's mind, as inevitable as the cyclical progression of the seasons, "obeying its mechanics," mechanics which "all of us" must obey, so Beowulf and Grendel must also obey the mechanics in and of time which rule them, as they wait. Grendel stresses this idea throughout Chapter Eleven. He describes the Geats as "quick as wolves--but mechanical" (p.134) and notes that "they moved like one creature, huge strange machine" (p.136). Grendel himself feels this mechanical compulsion and is aware inside himself of the stirrings of nature. While he
meditates in his cave upon the confrontation to come, he muses: "Half awake, half asleep, I felt as if I were myself the cave, my thoughts coursing downward through my own strange hollows...or some impulse older and darker than thought, as old as the mindless mechanics of a bear, the twilight meditations of a wolf, a tree..." (p.137). This impulse which drives Grendel toward Beowulf and death generates both joy and fear within the monster. Before Grendel had actually known that Beowulf was coming, in Chapter Nine, he had still sensed the coming of something he should fear: "Something is coming, strange as spring. I am afraid" (p.110)—he had been afraid, unknowingly, of the rebirth he will discover in death when he is painfully "born again" by the hands of his fatal midwife in Chapter Twelve—Beowulf. In Chapter Ten, Grendel had heard an old woman tell "of a giant across the sea who has the strength of thirty thanes. 'Someday he will come here,' she tells the children" (p.124). Grendel, by Chapter Eleven has been warned. When he actually sees Beowulf for the first time, Grendel fights these fearful intimations: "'Come ahead,' I whispered. 'Make your play. Do your worst.' But I was less sure of myself than I pretended" (p.136). At the thought of the Geats, Grendel also admist: "...my chest filled with an excitement like joy, I tried to think whether or not I was afraid of the strangers, and the thought made no sense" (p.137). Grendel's "thought made no sense" because the feeling or impulse which moves him inexorably
toward his last raid on Hart and his deadly duel with Beowulf is "older and darker than thought" (p.137) and over­rides the power of his reason. At the end of this chapter, Grendel fully articulates his ambivalence toward Beowulf: "I grew more and more afraid of him and at the same time-- who can explain it?—more and more eager for the hour of our meeting" (p.144).

Grendel's ambivalent impulse troubles him:

Afraid or not, I would go to the meadhall, I knew. I toyed, of course, with the ridiculous theory that I'd stay where I was safe, like a sensible beast. 'Am I not free?—as free as a bird?' I whispered, leering, maniacal. I have seen—I embody—the vision of the dragon: absolute, final waste. I saw long ago the whole universe as not-my-mother, and I glimpsed my place in it, a hole. Yet I exist, I knew. Then I alone exist, I said. It's me or it. What glee, that glorious recognition! (The cave my cave is a jealous cave.) (p.138).

Unfortunately, Grendel will find his solipsism unhelpful when he comes to grips with the leader of the Geats, because Beowulf is an intruder into Grendel's universe who also actually exists in his own right. He has come to enter Grendel's "cave" of reality and pull him forth from his protective "womb" into the reality of death (or "new birth"), where darkness settles "over the world like a coffin lid" (p.139) and Beowulf waits "as patient as a grave-mound" (p.144). Indeed, Grendel is certainly not "as free as a bird"—he is trapped in and by the mechanics of time. It is just a matter of time before Hero meets Monster in predetermined conflict. "For the world is divided," Grendel axiomizes, "into two parts: things to be murdered
and things that would hinder the murder of things: and the
Geats might reasonably be defined either way" (p.139). From
the Geats', i.e., Beowulf's point of view, Grendel would be
defined as a thing to be murdered. The "murder" of Grendel
is predetermined by several factors: by myth---the constant
warfare between the race of Cain and the race of Abel, i.e.,
between heroes and monsters, by the legend of Beowulf
solidified in alliterative verse in Beowulf approximately
ten centuries previous to Gardner's own shaping of the
legend in Grendel, and by the words both Grendel and
Beowulf have spoken which shape their respective spheres of
reality, spheres which must, of necessity, collide in a
battle to the death. As Beowulf and Grendel's words are
trapped by time when they are spoken in time, so their words
trap them in time, as they are defined moment by moment by
their own words---a fact which they both well understand.
Both Beowulf and Grendel are ceaselessly driven by this
understanding of the effect of their words in time. By
their words (Beowulf's boasting to Unferth and the Danes,
and Grendel's words of eager anticipation---"I am mad with
joy.--At least I think it's joy. Strangerrs have come, and
it's a whole new game"---p.133) they are driven almost in-
sanely toward confrontation: "whispering, whispering, mad
like him" (p.144), as Grendel describes himself in reference
to Beowulf. Like Grendel's whispering, Beowulf's spoken
words generate his own reality.

Grendel is particularly affected by Beowulf's voice.
After he had first heard it, Grendel had stated:

His voice, though powerful, was mild. Voice of a dead thing, calm as dry sticks and ice when the wind blows over them...He smiled as he spoke, but it was as if the gentle voice, the childlike yet faintly ironic smile were holding back, some magician-power that could blast stone cliffs to ashes as lightning blasts trees (p.135).

Beowulf's voice had surprised Grendel here in much the same way as the dragon's voice had surprised him earlier in Chapter Five: "The voice was startling. No rolling boom, as I would have expected, but a voice that might have come from an old, old man" (pp.49-50), "It was as if he'd been dead for a thousand years" (p.51). Grendel will continue identifying Beowulf and the dragon with each other, as he does here, throughout the rest of the novel. Judging from his voice, Beowulf is a Shaper of great power--his strength is not only in his grip. After Beowulf's own version of his swimming match with Breca, in response to Unferth's insulting version of the tale, Unferth and the Danes laugh "as was right," Grendel agrees, "It was preposterous" (p.141). But after Beowulf continues and tells of his swimming for five nights and of his killing of nine sea-monsters, Grendel states: "The stranger said it all so calmly, so softly, that it was impossible to laugh. He believed every word he said...He was insane" (p.142). Beowulf's "lies," like those of the Shaper, carry great power and have a reality all of their own, even if they are "insane." Beowulf does not stop there in his self-defense, but goes on to remind Unferth in front of all the Danes of
his Cain-like murder of his own brothers, and, Grendel confesses, "Whether or not they believed his wild tale of superhuman strength, no thane in the hall would attack him again and risk the slash of that mild, coolly murderous tongue" (p.142).

Beowulf's words seem to have a life of their own. Earlier in the chapter, while Beowulf had talked to the Danish coastguard, Grendel had found himself "merely looking at his mouth, which moved--or so it seemed to me--independent of the words" (p.136)--a detail he finds important enough to repeat when Beowulf speaks to the Danes in the meadhall: "His mouth did not seem to move with his words" (p.143). Thus, it is not Beowulf that exists, exactly, as much as his words. Beowulf, after all, has the "Voice of a dead thing," and his Geats are "walking dead men" (p.134), and "His mind, as he spoke, seemed far away, as if, though polite, he were indifferent to all this--an outsider not only among the Danes but everywhere" (p.135). Grendel also describes Beowulf's voice as possessing an "almost inhuman indifference" (p.142). Beowulf's words are disconnected from himself, indifferent even to himself. As Beowulf creates his own personal reality with words, his words, existing now outside of himself, in turn (like some kind of semantic feedback), create the hero Beowulf. Unlike Grendel, who creates the world he inhabits with words around himself, and the Shaper, who creates a meaningful world with song for himself and his community, Beowulf, not himself
creating his world and giving it meaning with words around or for himself or anyone else, is created, actively, by his own words which act on their own initiative almost as if directed by an outside creative force. Thus, Beowulf is the ultimate Shaper; he is a Singer who is created by his songs, not a Singer who creates his own songs—and this inversion is, in Grendel's mind, insane. But Beowulf's "insanity" works to Grendel's disadvantage. Hrothgar realizes that "The madman's single-mindedness would be useful in a monster fight" (p.142).

Grendel comes face to face with this "madman's single-mindedness," comes to a new understanding of himself and the world, and comes, of course, face to face with death in Chapter Twelve. In his eagerness to meet Beowulf, Grendel exhibits a bit of Beowulf's "insanity" himself, when he exclaims: "I am swollen with excitement, bloodlust and joy and a strange fear that mingle in my chest like the twisting rage of a bone-fire" and "I am blazing, half-crazy with joy" (p.147). In his excitement to face Beowulf, Grendel narrates his actions from a more heightened perceptual awareness than usual. After breaking down Hart's door, Grendel narrates: "I trample the planks that a moment before protected the hall like a hand raised in horror to a terrified mouth (sheer poetry, ah!)" (p.147) (the image of the door as a mouth comes from Beowulf L.724). Grendel realizes that his highly excited and sensitive state of mind causes him to perceive or shape the world in a rather exalted fashion.
After eating his first and only Geat, Grendel reaches for Beowulf unwittingly, ever conscious of the shaping process going on in his own mind: "(whispering, whispering, chewing the universe down to words)" (p.148). Grendel's theory of perception—that words shape the universe—based primarily on his solipsistic and somewhat nihilistic philosophy, reaches a crisis point when Grendel perceives that Beowulf is a dragon—not a shaping of reality Grendel would willfully contrive! "I jump back without thinking (whispering wildly: jump back without thinking)" (p.148), Grendel narrates, still enmeshed in consciously shaping his perceptions, when Beowulf grabs his arm from his bed. Beowulf rises from bed still gripping Grendel's arm, "his hand still closed like a dragon's jaws on mine...as if his crushing fingers are charged like fangs with poison" (p.148), and Grendel feels his arm slowly being torn away, telling the reader: "I am suddenly awake. The long pale dream, my history, falls away" (p.148). Grendel's philosophy is being challenged by a potent outside force; he is being awakened from his "pale dream" (cf. "pale walls of dreams"—p.4, "pale skin of words"—p.11) of solipsism. He suddenly finds himself disoriented and in a strange world, a foreign "cave," as it were, not "The cave my cave is a jealous cave" anymore, but "The meadhall" which "is alive, great cavernous belly, gold-adorned, bloodstained, howling back at me, lit by the flickering fire in the stranger's eyes" (p.148). Once before, in Chapter Eleven, Grendel had described "the
pale flash of fire" (p.142) in Beowulf's otherwise empty eyes, but without making this next connection: "He has wings. Is it possible? And yet it's true: out of his shoulders come terrible fiery wings" (p.148).

From the beginning of Chapter Eleven, Grendel has had intimations of Beowulf's "dragonness;" intimations which will be more fully understood by the monster and confirmed when Grendel will finally make his most astounding shaping of reality in Chapter Twelve—he shapes Beowulf into a dragon! Referring to his instinctive sensations of curiosity before he has actually seen Beowulf, but after he knows that someone or something is coming, Grendel had commented: "It drew me as the mind of the dragon did once" (p.133). Beowulf's face had been, at first sight, strangely familiar to the monster: "He had a strange face that, little by little grew unsettling to me: it was a face, or so it seemed to me for an instant, from a dream I had almost forgotten" (p.135). Concerning Beowulf's age, Grendel had noted that, like the dragon, "You'd have thought he had centuries" (p.135). While Beowulf had been talking to the coastguard, and Grendel had been "Staring at his grotesquely muscled shoulders," the monster had admitted: "I found my mind wandering. If I let myself, I could drop into a trance just looking at those shoulders: (p.136). Grendel had wondered "if the body of the stranger were a ruse, a disguise for something infinitely more terrible" (p.136). Referring to "the crazy old peasant" Red Horse who had
counseled Hrothulf in Chapter Eight, encouraging revolution, Grendel had suspected that "He had never conversed with a dragon," adding the ominous question, "And the stranger?" (p.138). In the meadhall after Beowulf had spoken to Unferth and the Danes, Grendel had almost placed Beowulf:

...the harder I stared at his gleaming shoulders, the more uncertain I was of their shape. The room was full of a heavy, unpleasant scent I couldn't place. I labor to remember something: twisted roots, an abyss...I lose it (p.143).

What Grendel had been trying to remember was his encounter in Chapter Five with the first dragon. At the end of Chapter Four, Grendel had entered a trancelike state in order to visit the dragon: "I made my mind a blank and fell, sank away like a stone through earth and sea, toward the dragon" (p.48). Looking into the dragon's eye in Chapter Five, Grendel had narrated: "His eye burst open like a hole...The eye was terrible, lowering toward me. I felt as if I were tumbling down into it--dropping endlessly down through a soundless void. He let me fall, down and down toward a black sun and spiders, though he knew I was beginning to die" (pp.52-53). Not only had Grendel associated the dragon with an abyss and with death, but he had also associated the dragon with a certain smell. "Futility, doom, became a smell in the air," Grendel had explained in Chapter Six, after having seen the dragon, "pervasive and acrid as the dead smell after a forest fire" (p.65). The smell of the dragon had thus become a metaphor in Grendel's mind for the dragon's profound influence upon
him. After his conversation with the dragon, Grendel had also perceived, or, more specifically, "smelled," the Danes differently: "All around their bubble of stupidity I could feel the brume of the dragon" (p.67). While feasting on the Danes' blood, Grendel had again recalled "the burnt-blood scent of the dragon" (p.70). Grendel, after teasing Unferth in Hart, had noted, as well, that "The dragon-scent in the room grew stronger, as if my teasing were bringing the old beast near" (p.73). In Chapter Seven, Grendel had described "The scent of the dragon. Heavy all around me, almost visible before me, like my breath" (p.81). Later, while Grendel had been thinking of Wealtheow, he had stated that "The smell of the dragon lay around me like sulphurous smoke" (p.88). At the end of Chapter Nine, Grendel, sluggish from the winter, had become restless. "I would fall, if I could, through time and space to the dragon," Grendel had contemplated, but then, suddenly, returning to the image of the abyss, had remembered: "I recall something. A void boundless as a nether sky, I hang by the twisted roots of an oak, looking down into immensity. Vastly far away I see the sun, black but shining, and slowly revolving around it there are spiders" (p.119). When Grendel's death had first begun to approach him in Chapter Ten, he had commented: "The scent of the dragon is a staleness on the earth" (p.121). Thus, all that Grendel had experienced with the first dragon comes back to him in the presence of Beowulf.
When Grendel, in the midst of the fight with Beowulf in Chapter Twelve, sees dragon-wings on Beowulf's shoulders, he forgets, out of desperation, his theory of a universe shaped by words only around himself, in which he alone exists: "I jerk my head, trying to drive out illusion. The world is what it is and always was. That's our hope, our chance. Yet even in times of catastrophe we people it with tricks. Grendel, Grendel, hold fast to what is true!" (p.148). Grendel can find no comfort in his solipsistic nihilism in the face of death, so he appears to abandon it. In Chapter Four, Grendel had apparently done the same thing. When "the harper's lure" had tempted him to accept a different perception of reality than his own, Grendel had rejected, for a moment, his own solipsistic theory of perception, along with the Shaper's theory, for a more absolute theory based on "the dark of what was and always was" (p.46). Now, Grendel refuses to believe, at first, despite his vocalized perceptions, that Beowulf is a dragon. When Grendel slips on the blood of the freshly eaten Geat, giving Beowulf the advantage as the hero pins the monster's arm behind his back, Grendel narrates: "I am spinning—Wa!—falling through bottomless space—Wa!—snatching at the huge twisted roots of an oak...a blinding flash of fire...no, darkness" (p.149). Grendel perceives the abyss associated with the first dragon again, now associated with the Beowulf-dragon, and becoming more and more clearly associated with death. When Beowulf has Grendel in a death-grip, he begins to
whisper to the monster. "I will not listen," Grendel insists, "I continue whispering. As long as I whisper myself I need not hear" (p.149). Thus two separate spheres of reality formed by the whispering of words come into fatal conflict, but Beowulf's dragon-whispering is the stronger, and Grendel hopelessly repeats again and again: "His syllables lick at me, chilly fire" (p.149).

Beowulf begins his whispered "higher education" of Grendel by paraphrasing parts of the first dragon's speech on the meaningless randomness and chance nature of the universe ("A meaningless swirl in the stream of time, a temporary gathering of bits, a few random specks, a cloud... Complexities: green dust, purple dust, gold. Additional refinements: sensitive dust, copulating dust..."—p.149, cf. p.60), but then continues along a new path, as if rejecting, or at least correcting or expanding, the first dragon's conclusions. "The world is my bone-cave. I shall not want..." Beowulf whispers, taunting Grendel with his own image of his solipsistic universe, while "Flames slip out at the corners of his mouth" (p.149). Grendel is being forced to accept the fact that Beowulf is a dragon. Beowulf continues:

As you see it is, while the seeing lasts, dark nightmare-history, time-as-coffin; but where the water was rigid there will be fish, and men will survive on their flesh till spring. It's coming, my brother. Believe it or not. Though you murder the world, turn plains to stone, transmogrify life into I and it, strong searching roots will stick your cave and rain will cleanse it: The world will burn green, sperm build again. My promise. Time is the mind.
Beowulf, strangely, both denies, or at least alters, and affirms Grendel's understanding of the shaping of reality, frightening Grendel because his words remind him again of that first dragon: "I have been betrayed before by talk like that" (p.150) (actually, the talk is quite a bit different). Beowulf stresses that time is not on Grendel's side—the real, self-existent mechanics of time and nature will trap and kill Grendel as surely as spring follows winter. No matter how much Grendel attempts to "murder the world" or "transmogrify life into I and it" with his words and perceptions, he will still fulfill his own mechanical function within time and space, according to the movings of nature's machinery. All that Grendel has both struggled against and wanted at the same time to believe in—"(fingers on harpstrings, hero-swords, the acts, the eyes of queens)," in short, meaning in the universe (i.e., meaning generated in time—"Time is the mind, the hand that makes"—by Shapers who perceive the mechanical workings of the universe will work with them in harmony to shape a meaningful total reality)—will ultimately kill Grendel through the vehicle of Beowulf. Grendel's solipsism will not save him. The world outside Grendel which does exist in its own right without Grendel's "help" will assert itself and "strong searching roots will crack" the "cave" of his egocentric universe—roots which remind the reader of "the
huge twisted roots of an oak" from which Grendel had hung and now hangs again over the abyss, once associated with the first dragon and death, now associated with the Beowulf-dragon and death.

Parts of Beowulf's whispered speech are very similar to the speech of the young priest in Chapter Nine who had responded positively to Ork's theological discoveries made in the presence of Grendel in the guise of the Great Destroyer: "Can't you grasp it, brothers?" he had asked the other scoffing older priests, "Both blood and sperm are explosive, irregular, feeling-pitched, messy--and inexplicably fascinating! They transcend! They leap the gap!" (p.118). Of course, Grendel had been repelled by the young priest's optimism at the time due to a misunderstanding of the life/death cycle and of his own place in it. Life goes ever on, and Grendel, even if he dies or tries to "murder the world," cannot stop it. The cyclical death of nature is invariably intertwined with its recurring rebirth: "The world will burn green, sperm build again" and "where the water was rigid there will be fish." Unfortunately for Grendel, Beowulf's lesson in this kind of "natural philosophy" will be considerably more graphic, and effective, than the young priest's homily.

Admittedly, throughout the novel, Grendel has had an understanding, however incomplete, of the mechanics of time and nature. Grendel's awareness of a mechanical compulsion to fight Beowulf has been noted, but Grendel had shown an
awareness of the larger mechanics of nature in time from the very beginning of the novel—after all, his entire narrative, as explained in the introduction, is structured around the procession of the Zodiac. In Chapter One, Grendel had described the ram's blind reproductive drive, "charging his brains with the same unrest that made him suffer last year at this time, and the year before, and the year before that" (pp.1-2). (Grendel had made a similar observation about the bull that had attacked him in Chapter Two, who had "fought by instinct, blind mechanism ages old"—p.16.) Grendel had hated the ram because it had reminded him of the annual fecundity of spring, "the same as I hate these brainless budding trees, these brattling birds" (p.2). In reference to his monstrous habits, and like the ram, Grendel had excused himself as "One more dull victim, leering at seasons that never were meant to be observed" (p.2). Here the reader had observed the first hints of Grendel's solipsistic view of the world bordering on nihilism. "The sun spins mindlessly overhead," Grendel had ranted, "the shadows lengthen and shorten as if by plan. Small birds, with a high-pitched yelp, lay eggs. The tender grasses peek up, innocent yellow, through the ground: the children of the dead." Grendel had observed the life/death cycle from the start, but only at the end of the novel will he find his place in it as one of "the children of the dead." The monster had gleefully described two locations in this mindlessly mechanical nature where he had performed two of
his countless atrocities—the killings of Athelgard and a nameless old woman: "It was just here, this shocking green..." and "Here, where the startling tiny jaws of crocuses snap at the late-winter sun like the heads of baby watersnakes" (p.2). Grendel's imagery here had revealed his attitude toward nature—disgust. He had killed as automatically as the ram had reproduced: "So it goes with me day by day and age by age...Locked in the deadly progression of moon and stars" (p.3). The spring had stirred Grendel just as it had stirred the ram: "The first grim stirrings of springtime come...and even under the ground where I live...I am aware in my chest of tuberstirrings in the black-sweet duff of the forest overhead" (p.4). Grendel had longed to resist these "tuberstirrings" but, he had admitted, "when my soul can no longer resist, I go up—as mechanical as anything else—fists clenched against my lack of will, my belly growling, mindless as wind, for blood" (p.4). (Nearer the end of the novel, in Chapter Eight, Grendel had asserted, in order to justify his continued persecution of Hrothgar, simply that "I'm a machine, like you"—p.107, addressing the reader, but also addressing Hrothgar and his thanes, whose fighting, Grendel had observed in Chapter Three, was "as mechanical as anything else": "The fighting went on all that summer and began again the next and again the next...I watched it season after season" (pp.30-31). Grendel had felt "naked to the cold mechanics of the stars" under which "space hurls outward, falcon-swift, mounting
like an irreversible injustice, a final disease" (p.4). He had felt threatened by the "mechanics of the stars," mercilessly propelling him, but he had refused to give to them any more meaning than he himself had ascribed to them. But nature, Grendel had lamented, was constantly "whispering patterns of words my sanity resists" (p.4) in an attempt to "torment my wits toward meaningful patterns that do not exist" (p.6).

Grendel resists Beowulf's whispered argument in Chapter Twelve and refuses to believe that his death is inevitable, like the alternation of winter and spring, because, if it is inevitable, there must be some sort of order inherent in the universe making it so--an idea he is reluctant to accept. So Grendel tries to hold on to his peculiar perception of reality by continuing his eternal "whispering, whimpering, whining" (p.150). "If you win," Grendel tells Beowulf, "it's by mindless chance. Make no mistake. First you tricked me, and then I slipped. Accident" (p.150). Grendel vainly maintains his belief in a chance, random universe, governed by accident, in which only he himself provides any meaning. In Chapter Two, Grendel had claimed:

I understood that the world was nothing: a mechanical chaos of casual, brute enmity on which we stupidly impose our hopes and fears. I understood that, finally and absolutely, I alone exist. All the rest, I saw, is merely what pushes me, or what I push against, blindly--as blindly as all that is not myself pushes back. I create the whole universe, blink by blink (p.16).

Grendel had tried to communicate his "understanding," unsuc-
cessfully, to his mother, of "the meaningless objectness of the world, the universal bruteness" (pp.22-23). "The world resists me and I resist the world," he had told her, "That's all there is. The mountains are what I define them as...The world is all pointless accident...I exist, nothing else" (p.22). At the end of Chapter Two, Grendel had summed up his philosophical discourse thus:

What I see I inspire with usefulness...and all that I do not see is useless, void. I observe myself observing what I observe. It startles me. Then I am not that which observes! I am lack. Alack! No thread, no frailest hair between myself and the universal clutter!

(p.22).

But Grendel had been wrong, as he eventually discovers—he had defined himself out of existence, and any philosophical system which defines existence as nonexistence is absurd. Beowulf ignores Grendel's invocation of "Accident" in Chapter Twelve, and continues to teach him—this time by giving Grendel an ironic lesson in the monster's own philosophy, and, at the same time, by forcing Grendel to become a true Shaper. "Grendel, Grendel!" Beowulf begins, "You make the world by whispers, second by second. Are you blind to that? Whether you make it a grave or a garden of roses is not the point" (p.150). So much for the tongue-in-cheek theoretical background of Grendel's lesson. Beowulf continues (as Grendel narrates):

Feel the wall: is it not hard? he smashes me against it, breaks open my forehead. Hard, yes! Observe the hardness, write it down in careful runes. Now sing of walls! Sing! Sing words! Sing raving hymns! I howl. Sing! 'I'm singing!' Sing words! Sing raving hymns! You're crazy.
Ow! 'Sing!' 'I sing of walls,' I howl. 'Hooray for the hardness of walls!' *Terrible,* he whispers. *Terrible.* He laughs and lets out fire. 'You're crazy,' I say. 'If you think I created that wall that cracked my head, you're a fucking lunatic.' Sing-walls, he hisses. I have no choice (pp.150-151).

Grendel's theory of shaping would indeed require that he had created the wall that cracked his head with whispers or words, but Grendel now, under duress, thinks differently. Having no choice but to obey Beowulf, Grendel does sing, and what he sings is a vast improvement over the doggerel verse he had "sung" in Chapter Seven. He has learned, by necessity it must be admitted, true shaping. He sings: "The wall will fall to the wind as the windy hill/will fall, and all things thought in former times:/Nothing made remains, nor man remembers./And these towns shall be called the shining towns! *Better,* he whispers, *That's better*" (p.151). And better it is. Grendel sings of the inevitable passing of man and his walled towns under the sun, but the shining, if blurred, memory is retained through the transcending shaping of art—poetry. In the context of meaning inherent in an ordered (as evidenced by the orderly progression of the Zodiac and the cycle of the seasons), although possibly indifferent, universe, man must find a place by creating orderly meaning of his own through language. But one order should not exist without or oppose the other—man's order is generated by the universal order. Grendel's total understanding is, however, slow to come—he still is fighting what Beowulf is trying to teach him.
"He's crazy," Grendel maintains, stating:

I understand him all right, make no mistake. Understand his lunatic theory of matter and mind, the chilly intellect, the hot imagination, blocks and builder, reality as stress. Nevertheless, it was by accident that he got my arm behind me. He penetrated no mysteries. He was lucky (p.151).

Grendel would still prefer an accidental universe.

As Grendel's arm is finally torn off, Beowulf "stretches his blinding white wings and breathes out fire" (p.151) in victorious exultation. Grendel runs from him, but cannot escape--"The night is aflame with winged men" (p.151). The monster's somewhat understandable, and perhaps unavoidable, obsession with and delusions of dragons almost drives him insane, perhaps does--he sees them everywhere. The "winged men" here are reminiscent of the shapes Grendel had seen in the snow in Chapter Nine where "children go down on their backs in the drifted snow and move their arms and, when they rise, leave behind their impressions, mysterious and ominous, of winged creatures" (p.109). In the same chapter, Grendel had described a hart's antlers (the meadhall Hart should be remembered now) thus: "They're like wings, filled with otherworldly light" (p.110). The milestones in Grendel's life and learning seem to have been consistently marked by the presence of dragons! Running from the meadhall in Chapter Twelve, Grendel cries, "No, no! Think!" trying to clear his head of the "winged men," and he does: "I came suddenly awake once more from the nightmare" (p.151) (cf. "I am suddenly awake. The long pale dream, my history,
falls away."—p.148). "Darkness" is what Grendel awakes into, and the chilling realization: "I really will die!" (p.151). (Grendel's realization here has come full circle—in Chapter One, Grendel had stated: "I am aware of my potential: I could die"—p.5.) "Every rock, every tree, every crystal of snow cries out cold-blooded objectness," he continues, "Cold, sharp outlines, everything around me: distinct, detached as dead men. I understand" (pp.151-152).

In the preceding chapter, Grendel had theorized that "The mind lays out the world in blocks, and the hushed blood waits for revenge. All order, I've come to understand is theoretical, unreal—a harmless, sensible, smiling mask men slide between the two great, dark realities, the self and the world--two snake-pits" (p.138). Now, for Grendel, as for Unferth earlier, who "had seen" his "idea of the hero like a merry mask...torn away" (p.89), the mask is pulled away with his arm. He sees a world totally detached from himself, without his verbal aid existing, ordered by the forces of life and death outside of himself which govern him, and which Beowulf finally reveals to him. But Grendel fights the awareness yet. "It was an accident," he weakly insists, "I will cling to what is true. 'Blind, mindless, mechanical. Mere logic of chance!'" (p.152). But it is useless. Grendel begins to fall into the void he recognizes from his encounters with the dragons, fully realizing now that the abyss is death—Grendel's education from the dragons was an education in dying! "I stumble again and with
my one weak arm I cling to the huge twisted roots of an oak," he narrates, "I look down past stars to a terrifying darkness. I seem to recognize the place, but it's impossible" (p.152). "Accident" (p.152), he whispers, still meekly clinging to a lie. But Grendel suddenly comes to a startling understanding of his own death.

"I will fall," Grendel divines, and then explains:

I seem to desire the fall, and though I fight it with all my will I know in advance that I can't win. Standing baffled, quaking with fear, three feet from the edge of a nightmare cliff, I find myself, incredibly, moving toward it. I look down, down, into bottomless blackness, feeling the dark power moving in me...moving me slowly to my voluntary tumble into death (p.152).

Although death, one of the unopposable outside forces of nature, moves Grendel toward itself, Grendel comprehends, in a moment of lucid insight or enlightenment, that it is still a "voluntary tumble" he is taking--Grendel, by an act of the will, concurs with death. "Is it joy I feel!" Grendel incredulously asks--he has achieved true knowledge, he has found meaning in his "accidental" death, he has found his place in the larger order of the universe, he has "graduated." This joy Grendel discovers had been prefigured as early as Chapter One in the novel, where Grendel had described a Danish funeral after one of his devastating raids. As the funeral pyre had burned, Grendel had observed the mourners, noticing "something that looked like joy. The song swells, pushes through woods and sky, and they're singing now as if by some lunatic theory they had won" (p.9). The monster did not understand then, but he does
now. "Poor Grendel's had an accident...So may you all"
(p.152), Grendel tells the watching animals, and so they
shall--everything living must die. But Grendel's "accident"
is not simply death, it is also, and primarily, enlighten-
ment; it is meaning in death--retroactively, in life; it is,
finally, the poetry or shaping, kin to the Danes' funeral
song, that he has discovered in the school of his murderer--
so may we all.
CONCLUSION

Since it has been suggested in the introduction to this essay that John Gardner's *On Moral Fiction*, in a real, though not a chronologically literal, sense, "anticipates" *Grendel*, as theory anticipates practice, a brief summation of the relevant ideas in his major book of criticism and their intimate relationship to the meaning of the novel should provide a useful conclusion to this study of the Shapers in *Grendel*. Gardner begins *On Moral Fiction* by aligning his view of the function of art and the artist with "The traditional view...that true art is moral: it seeks to improve life not debase it" (p.5). Such art is "moral in its process of creation and moral in what it says" (p.15). According to Gardner, art is "a game played against chaos and death, against entropy." On one hand, "It is a tragic game...because our side must lose," but, on the other hand, it is a game that "rediscoveres, generation by generation, what is necessary to humanness" (p.6). Art fulfills this task of rediscovery by presenting "valid models for imitation, eternal verities worth keeping in mind, and a benevolent vision of the possible which can inspire and incite human beings toward virtue, toward life affirmation as opposed to destruction or indifference" (p.18). All of this sounds very much like what one would expect a medieval
scop to do for his society--thus obviously relevant to Grendel. Gardner's treatment of Homer further encourages this identification. Gardner observes this "rule" in Homer's heroic poetry: "The gods set ideals, heroes enact them, and artists or artist-historians preserve the image as a guide for man" (p.29). As far as Homer is concerned, Gardner informs the reader:

Every hero's proper function is to provide a noble image for men to be inspired and guided by in their own actions: that is, the hero's business is to reveal what the gods require and love... And whereas the hero's function...is to set the standard in action, the business of the poet (or 'memory' or 'epic song'...) is to celebrate the work of the hero, pass the image on, keep the heroic model of behavior fresh, generation on generation (p.28).

Gardner could as easily have been speaking here of Beowulf himself, the Beowulf-poet and of the scop in Beowulf itself (or of the Shapers in Grendel) as of Homer.

Gardner suggests the close relationship between art and reality, which is also a central theme in Grendel, in On Moral Fiction, when he deals with the romantic poets who "imitated in finite art the divine creative act" (p.37)--in other words, the romantic poets were Shapers too. "Art instructs," Gardner implies, because it creates its own reality or "nature," thus giving meaning to reality or nature outside of art's craft, since "Nature follows craft" (p.39)--i.e., art reveals order in nature, and, in this sense, nature imitates art. As Gardner puts it: "...the mind does not impose structures on reality (as existentialists claim) -- arbitrarily maintaining now this,
now that— but rather, as an element of total reality—a capsulated universe—discovers, in discovering itself, the world" (p.122). This seems to be just what Beowulf teaches the monster in Grendel. The structure which art builds to reveal the world's larger structure, the structure within which mankind must discover meaning, is myth (as Grendel learns, by example, from the Shaper): "Real art creates myths a society can live instead of die by...a properly built myth is worthy of belief" (p.126). The mythology or "world" that "the artist creates, by the energy of his mind," which parallels and illuminates the larger world of everyday reality, is, as Gardner stresses, still, "a world that isn't there, a dream" (p.203)—even if it is "true."

Also relevant to the concept of the Shaper in Grendel is Gardner's treatment in On Moral Fiction of "the figure of the poet-priest, found in every old society" (p.155). Gardner begins by stating that "it is impossible to distinguish between the primitive artist and the primitive holy man," and that "If they differ now, it is because they have adapted to different functions" (p.155). He explains this difference in function thus:

When a critic takes the story of a poet-priest, analyzes it and interprets it and insists that every word is literally true, a matter of doctrine and history, never to be altered, the poet-priest is reduced to a priest, and the critic is a theologian. If the critic, on the other hand, interprets the story as metaphoric expression of a philosophical idea, the poet-priest is made a poet (pp.155-156).

To further illustrate this separation of the roles of artist
and priest, Gardner tells a "fable." "There was once a wise old poet-priest" (Adam), he begins, "who had two sons" (Cain and Abel), "to whom he taught all his stories, all his dances, and all his magic" (p.164). The older son (Abel) "was a literal-minded, intensely loyal person who believed all the stories and tried to live by them" (pp.164-165). Eventually "he discovered that he too could make up stories, really further elaborations of the principles he'd learned from his father's stories without knowing it" (p.165). He married "an intelligent, literal-minded girl (the first analytical philosopher), and soon they had a son, who...became the first theologian." The son "interpreted his father's stories and made of their principles a set of laws" (p.165). Now Cain also "listened to his father's stories with extreme care and turned them over and over in his mind, not so much because they were useful or true (he supposed they must be more or less true, one way or another) as because they reminded him of everything he liked and made his feelings about things clearer to him" (p.165). As Cain grew older, he began to resent his now-wealthy older brother and to desire his brother's wife. He "hated the way his brother and his followers told the old man's stories: they missed the point," and he resented the fact that "his brother's son began turning the stories into laws, especially since one of the laws was that everybody had to work" (p.165). So, even though Cain was "a lazy oaf," he grudgingly became a farmer. Inevitably, Cain won his
sister-in-law's heart and killed his brother Abel. When "a voice yelled at them out of heaven, 'Cain! Where's your brother?!'" Cain and his brother's widow fled. Eventually "they had a son who listened eagerly to his father's stories," and because "He had his father's indifference to their literal truth, his mother's penchant for analysis...he became the world's first literary critic" (p.166).

Gardner's amusing fable has an obvious application to Grendel, in that it supports the identification of the Shapers in the novel (the Shaper himself, Beowulf, and especially Grendel) with Cain and his cursed progeny--all artists and critics who face the hopeless (i.e., cursed) task of providing meaning for themselves and their fellows in the face of death, through art--shaping. Thus Grendel, child of Cain par excellence, represents Gardner's artist or Shaper par excellence, who, through the accident of art, discovers a meaningful reality or existence even on the threshold of Death's door.
Earl Shorris, in his article "In Defense of the Children of Cain," Harper's, August 1973, presents an interesting interpretation of John Gardner's use of the Cain and Abel myth in Grendel. "History is too rich in prophets," Shorris begins, "the whine of doomsaying is in our daily life. We need writers who will defend us against the sins of God by revising the dream history of our kind" (p.90). "John Gardner believes and denies the past," Shorris continues, "he shakes the order on which mythical history has been predicated, setting man above the gods" (p.90). After this rather exalted praise of Gardner's fictional intentions, Shorris gets more to the point: "A theme, almost an obsession, runs through his work; he begins at the beginning--Eden--and concentrates on the great sin, the murder of Abel" (p.90). The primary thrust of Shorris' article, as its title implies, is the dubious assertion that Gardner makes it a point in his fiction to defend "the Children of Cain." "Since we are the children of Cain," he explains, "the builders of cities, Gardner defends us by revising our interpretation of Cain's art" (p.90).

According to Shorris, Gardner's "revising" of the myth goes something like this: Cain murdered Abel out of jealousy because God, "some sort of primitivist," preferred
the offering of "the nomadic Abel" to the offering of "the civilized....Cain" (p.90). (The degree of Cain's "civilization" might be a matter for debate.) God's preference is arbitrary: "It makes no sense; the unnamable is irrational, capricious. How can Cain have faith in caprice?" So Cain, "realizing the absurdity of the world, rebels; raging, he kills his brother" (p.90). As a result, God marked Cain and cursed him. "Gardener cannot retract the curse," but, as Shorris claims:

...he rejects the guilt, telling us that Cain and the children of Cain are the human sufferers of this world, the compassionate ones, those whose very being is the most intense. On the outskirts of Eden we learned doubt, the possibility of evil, loneliness, and the ultimateness of this world. The children of Cain, staggering through life, stinking and groaning under the burden of primordial guilt, knowing they must overcome both themselves and their fate, are capable of love and perception; they are humanists (p.90).

Because of all of these marvelous qualities of the children of Cain, "John Gardener teaches us to love them" (p.90). How could we help it?

Having laid the foundation, Shorris goes on to treat Grendel specifically. "In Gardner's version" of Beowulf, Shorris states, "Grendel becomes the hero. But the novel is more than a mere overturning of Beowulf, a comic revolution in which we prefer the monster to the humans" (p.90), because "Gardner makes of that hairy, stinking, man-eating beast a sentient, bittersweetly witty, and altogether lovable being" (p.91). "The recognizable humanity of Grendel juxtaposed with the stupid, destructive, warlike
behavior of the humans," Shorris suggests, "makes the monster the representative of the beings we would like to be" (p.91). Continuing his praise of the monster, he adds that "Grendel will not submit, the monster is relentlessly human, individual, imperfect, curious, and loving" (p.91). This portrait of Grendel is just too good to be true—he is still a monster, after all. Shorris also sees "the old, omniscient, and magnificently sardonic dragon" in a good light. "The dragon," Shorris believes, "comes from a time before Cain, before Prometheus; it knows when it will die, and that is everything" (p.91). Shorris takes the dragon's words at face value for Gardner's words—a risky business for both dragon-slayers and critics (although the knowledge of death "is everything" in Grendel's case).

After Grendel hears "the songs of the shaper in Hrothgar's mead hall, learning that he is the child of Cain in a world divided between the blessed and the cursed," he meditates upon the ramifications of "the songs of the shaper, thinking that words shape the world, make humanity, reality, failing to understand the dragon's claim that the shaper makes only illusion" (p.91). Both Shorris and the dragon (now in league) dismiss the Shaper too quickly. In the fight with Beowulf, Grendel loses all hope of defeating the Geat when he "slips and falls, giving the advantage to Beowulf—an accident, the caprice by which the absurd world works, the godly choice made on the outskirts of Eden repeated" (p.91). (The "accidental" nature of Grendel's
death is questionable—merely a childish excuse on Grendel's part to save face.) "Poor Grendel, poor us," Shorris laments, "death is defeat, the prophets were right," but soon changes his mind when he realizes that "rebellion is also a way to die: Grendel ends defiant. There is no despair that cannot be overcome" (p.91). There certainly is a kind of overcoming of despair at the end of Grendel, but is it actually a "rebellion" or "defiant"?

Echoing the beginning of his essay, Shorris concludes that Gardner is a "true seer" who "knows only the past," and whose novels are each a "backward journey," in which "the narrator meets himself face to face," because "after Prometheus, after Eden, in ignorance, there can be no vision but history" (p.92). "Then let history be rewritten from a humanistic point of view, Mr. Gardner seems to say," says Shorris, who doesn't stop there "quoting" Gardner. "Let the gods be shown for what they are," Shorris continues, "unmask fate, raise man to a place from which he can face absurdity without trembling; then the children of Cain will have the courage to be, to rebel, to enter the forge of life and emerge defiant, free, and more merciful than the gods" (p.92). As majestic as Shorris' interpretation of Grendel may be, one cannot help but have reservations. The case is surely oversimplified--Cain cannot possibly be totally free of guilt--he has blood on his hands (Grendel too has blood a-plenty on his hands)! Might one not as easily suggest that Grendel does not defiantly revel in the curse he has
inherited from Cain in death as much as accept and transcend it?
Appendix II: The tripartite Soul.

John Gardner's critical interpretation of Beowulf has obvious relevance to his own fictionalized "version" of the ancient tale in Grendel. One of Gardner's primary concerns, which surfaces in both works, is the Fall. The myth of the Race and Curse of Cain is an important aspect in both works of this theme. In connection with the Fall, Gardner stresses the medieval notion of the tripartite soul in his interpretation of Beowulf (a notion which comes up, although not as obviously, in Grendel). An understanding of Gardner's interpretation of Beowulf in terms of this medieval doctrine is quite useful to the critic who wishes to interpret Grendel. In his article "Fulgentius's Exposito Vergiliana Continentia and the Plan of Beowulf: Another Approach to the Poem's Style and Structure," Papers on Language and Literature, (1970), which also appears in a slightly different form in his book The Construction of Christian Poetry in Old English (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1975), Gardner emphasizes "the importance of the idea of the tripartite soul to the larger structure, the allegory, and the meaning of Beowulf" (p.227). The basic thesis of Gardner's article and of his interpretation of Beowulf is simply that the Beowulf-poet may have been influenced by Fulgentius's work, or something
in the same tradition, *Expositio Vergiliana Continens*, which interprets the *Aeneid* as if it were a Christian allegory.

Fulgentius interpreted the *Aeneid* in terms of three concepts: *arma*, *virum*, and *primus*. According to Gardner, these three concepts correspond to the three parts of the tripartite soul: the irascible, concupiscent, and rational souls. *Arma* thus "means any good quality, virtue, or moral excellence relating to things physical...in other words, means fortitude, valor, and the like--functions of the irascible soul" (p.231). *Virum* "can only refer to what is intellectual--the functions of man's rational part" (p.231). *Primus* "relates to the sensual" and "has to do with the proper use or enjoyment of things," in other words, it is "a function of the well-ordered concupiscent soul" (p.231). The idea of the tripartite soul was "a preoccupation of early Church writers, from Augustine to Hugh of St. Victor and Bonaventura, and of artists and poets down to the close of the Middle Ages" (p.230). "In *Beowulf,*" Gardner claims, "the Fulgentian scheme of the *Aeneid* reappears intact" (p.231).

Gardner focuses on one passage in particular to illustrate his point--*Beowulf* Ll. 1724b-1752. In this passage, Hrothgar, after telling him the story of Heremod's treachery, warns Beowulf not to become too proud of his power and glory, or too greedy for more wealth after he comes into his kingdom, lest the Devil destroy him.
Gardner's explication of this passage follows:

...the Beowulf-poet extends old Germanic ideas, making pagan speakers say more than they know how to mean. The pagans knew the difference between selfishness and selflessness and understood the wrongness of selfish pride like Heremod's; but certainly Hrothgar could not know the theory of the tripartite soul, the basis of his reasoning to Beowulf. According to Hrothgar, God gives man wisdom, land (i.e., possession), and eorlsceipe (i.e., manliness, bravery, courage). God gives, in other words, those things which pertain to the rational, concupiscent, and irascible parts of the soul (following Hrothgar's ordering of elements). This may seem an overreading, but the sense of the lines which follow seems unmistakable. When things go well for a man for a long time, his weard--his rational part--may fall asleep. A murderer very close to him, inside him in fact, prompted by the devil, strikes. As did Heremod, the man becomes angry-hearted (the malfunctioning of the concupiscent soul). What happens next, from Hrothgar's pagan point of view--for the poet has given him the Christian-Platonic system, but not revelation--is that the proud man grows old and weak, and (possibly murdered, like Heremod, for his cruelty and stinginess) he dies. To the Christian audience, Hrothgar's statements have a broader meaning: failing in wisdom, sinking to sinful wrath and covetousness, man dies to the life hereafter. The symbolism of the meadhall has of course been inverted--or extended: what stood, before, for the macrocosm now stands for the microcosm as well. As the hall is guarded (for example, by Hrothgar), a man is guarded by his rational part. As the hall may be attacked by a monster (for example, Grendel) when the guardian trusts too much in himself (cf. 1769 ff.), a man may be overcome by pride, an effect of the tyranny of the irascible and concupiscent aspects of the soul over the rational (p.242).

Gardner echoes the above passage. Connecting "Heorot and the tri-partite soul," Gardner comments that "at Heorot watchmen fall asleep, drunk on beer, allowing devil-like Grendel to have his way, while within the human soul, according to Hrothgar, se weard swesfe [the watchman (intellect) falls asleep] and a murderer all too near (Satan or the passions) comes and kills" (p.16). In the light of these explications, it is enlightening to compare part of the passage from Beowulf with a parallel passage in Grendel. In Joseph F. Tuso's Norton Critical Edition of Talbot E. Donaldson's translation of Beowulf (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1975), Hrothgar describes a ruler who prospers well "until his portion of pride increases and flourishes within him; then the watcher sleeps, the soul's guardian; that sleep is too sound, bound in its own cares, and the slayer most near whose bow shoots treacherously. Then is he hit in the heart, beneath his armor, with the bitter arrow—he cannot protect himself—with the crooked dark command of the accursed spirit" (pp.30-31—Beowulf Ll. 1740-1747). The parallel passage in Grendel reads: "The watchful mind lies, cunning and swift, about the dark blood's lust, lies and lies and lies until, weary of talk, the watchman sleeps. Then sudden and swift the enemy strikes from nowhere, the cavernous heart" (p.138). The passage hardly needs comment. When one of man's three souls falls, the other two also fall. The rational soul ("the watchful mind" or "the watchman") falls when it "lies" to itself about the
concupiscent soul ("the dark blood's lust") and goes to sleep. The irascible soul falls when "the enemy strikes," seeing that the irascible soul is weakened.

"On the poem's cosmic level," Gardner, in "Fulgentius's Exposito Vergiliana Continentia and the Plan of Beowulf," views each of the three monsters in Beowulf—Grendel, Grendel's dam, and the dragon—as representatives of the three souls in their fallen states: "the three focal monsters are figures of perverted rationality, perverted irascibility, and a double perversion, irascible and concupiscent" (p.243) respectively. Gardner elaborates on this in "Guilt and the World's Complexity" again: "Beowulf fights first a creature of perverse rationality (a criminal, a 'hell-counsellor,' a hater of order), then a creature of perverse irascibility (an avenger who seeks to glorify wrong, that is, win vengeance for a criminal), and finally a creature of perverse concupiscence (a dragon whose nature is to seek out gold and sit on it)" (p.18).

In this same article, Gardner goes into some depth in regard to Beowulf's fight with the dragon, suggesting that Beowulf's tripartite soul may not have been all that it should have been. The attack of the dragon and the destruction of public meadhalls angers Beowulf the king quite a bit, though probably not to the degree of perverse irascibility; he is jealous of the dragon's gold for his people, which may or may not signify perverse concupiscence; and Beowulf insists upon fighting the dragon alone, not
taking his counsellors' sound advice to rely upon strength in numbers, which may reveal a bit of perverse rationality (p.20). There is, of course, no need to insist that any of Beowulf's three souls are particularly perverse, but Gardner goes on to strengthen the case against the perfect integrity of Beowulf's tripartite soul when he discusses the passage in which the messenger relaying Beowulf's death to the Geats recounts the Ongentheow episode (Beowulf Ll. 2922-2998). Because Beowulf was involved, however indirectly, in the raid against the Swedes in which Ongentheow was unjustly killed, his soul is tainted. The death of Ongentheow is in itself an example of the fallen tripartite soul. Ongentheow was killed by "Eofor (Boar, a creature famous for irascibility) and Wulf (Wolf, a creature famous for its ugly eating habits, ravenous concupiscence), two sons of a man called Wonred (Dark-counsel)" (p.21). Ongentheow is a victim of "the Heremod principle among men, fallen reason, the supremacy of the passions" (p.21). "Beowulf dies," Gardner suggests, "because when Ongentheow was murdered, he was there, fighting in the foremost...and despite his attempt to make amends by granting asylum to Ongentheow's heir--Beowulf is tainted" (p.21). Beowulf is also possibly tainted by his association with Cain. This idea crops up in Grendel as has been discussed in the text of the essay, but Gardner, referring to the number thirty in Beowulf (Grendel kills thirty thanes--Ll. 122-123, Beowulf has the strength of thirty men--Ll. 379-390, and Beowulf carries thirty suits
of armor—Ll. 2361-2362), suggests that "If the numerical echo has any significance it would seem to be that Beowulf is in some way a little like Grendel, mixed up with Cain" (p.21). Even if Beowulf is not actually guilty of perverse rationality, irascibility, or concupiscence, "he is nevertheless mysteriously guilty. His errors...are as inescapable as...original sin...if he bears any guilt at all, it is strictly guilt by association" (p.21)—by association with Adam, Cain, and the murder of Ongentheow. Gardner's suspicions concerning Beowulf's impeccability certainly assert themselves in Grendel, where Beowulf is definitely not the apotheosis of sweetness and light.

There are hints of all this abounding in Grendel. Grendel has serious doubts about the soundness of Beowulf's rational soul. "He was insane," Grendel decides, because he had a "madman's single-mindedness" (p.142). Three times Grendel calls Beowulf "crazy," and once "a fucking lunatic" (pp.150-151)—he is convinced anyway. The monster makes similar judgments about nearly everyone else's rational soul. Unferth is "a maniac" (p.74), Hrothgar "made lunatic noises and drooled" (p.94) when Grendel attacked the queen, the young priest is "crazy" (p.121), and even Grendel's own mother "no longer shows any sign of sanity" (p.127). "You're all crazy...you're all insane" (p.127) Grendel bellows at the Danes generally. The dragon, on the other hand, primarily has problems with his concupiscent soul—he is greedy. Grendel describes him as "a miser caught at his
counting" (p.50). The dragon advises Grendel "to seek out gold and sit on it" (p.63). The great lizard is also a nasty creature, who has trouble controlling his irascible soul because "he...loved viciousness" (p.62). The Shaper shares some of the dragon's greed because he only sang "for a price" (p.35), "for the praise of women...and for the honor of a famous king's hand on his arm" (p.42), which suggests a disturbed concupiscent soul. The Shaper's rational soul may also be implicated because he sings "lies" (p.36)—not to mention the fact that the reactions the Shaper evokes from the Danes cause Grendel to describe them as "men gone mad on art" (p.36). The irascible souls of the Danes are faulty as well. Grendel observes that "no wolf was so vicious to other wolves" (p.27) as the Danes were to each other. Their concupiscent souls are equally guilty. Grendel describe one group of Danes "stealing the other group's gold...or sneaking into bed with the other group's wives and daughters" (pp.30-31). The dragon describes the reasoning of the Danes' rational souls as "the simplest insanity ever devised" (p.55). Of course, Grendel, monstrous descendant of Cain that he is, is no better.

All three of Grendel's souls are suspect. Especially suspect are his irascible and concupiscent souls. He speaks of his "murderous lust" (p.5) and of his "bloodthirsty ways" (p.41), and claims that, "Like all of you," referring to his readers, "Bloodlust and rage are my character" (p.107). In the final chapter, Grendel aptly describes the turmoil in
his fallen soul (or souls): "I am swollen with excitement, bloodlust and joy and a strange fear that mingle in my chest like the twisting rage of a bone-fire" (p.147). Grendel's planned method of killing Wealthow ("I would begin by holding her over the fire and cooking the ugly hole between her legs"—p.94) clearly reveals the perversion of his concupiscent soul. Finally, concerning his rational soul, Grendel asks himself, "has it occurred to you my dear that you are crazy?" (p.79). In *Grendel* everyone is infected to the core of their respective tripartite souls by the Fall of Adam, and many by the Curse of Cain as well. Sin perverts the rational, irascible, and concupiscent parts of the dragon, the Shaper, Beowulf, Grendel, and the whole Danish tribe. So it goes in a fallen world.

To support the suspicion that Gardner's use of the medieval doctrine of the tripartite soul as a key to the interpretation of *Beowulf* may be applicable to *Grendel*, one need only look at how Gardner interprets several other medieval poems. In his edition of *The Complete Works of the Gawain-Poet* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1965), Gardner translates and interprets "Pearl," "Purity," "Patience," "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," and "St. Erkenwald." In the introduction to these poems, Gardner goes into great detail describing the medieval notion of the tripartite soul (cf. pp.38,54). His interpretations of these poems thus depend quite a bit upon this doctrine, especially of "Pearl" (cf. pp.56-58, and n.58 on pp.343-344) and "Sir
Gawain" (cf. pp.71,74-78,82-84). In "Pearl," the Jeweler's three souls fall short of his Pearl's expectations, and in "Sir Gawain," the three souls of Gawain are tested by Sir Bertilak's wife and all three fall when Gawain accepts the magic girdle (his rational soul is deceived by the lady's cunning, his irascible soul becomes afraid of death, and his concupiscent soul longs to continue to possess life overmuch). The three souls also correspond to the three hunts and the three temptations, the three strokes, and the Green Knight's three colors (green, red, and gold). To a lesser degree, the idea of the tripartite soul appears in Gardner's translation and interpretation of The Alliterative Morte Arthure and Other Middle English Poems (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1971) (cf. the lengthy note on p.290 to L.3352 of the Morte Arthure). In other words, precedence has been set for Gardner's use of this doctrine.
Notes

1 John Gardner, *Grendel* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1978). All references from *Grendel* will be noted (p._ _) in the text of the essay and in the appendices. All references from *Beowulf* in the text of the essay and in the appendices are from C.L. Wren's edition of *Beowulf* revised by W.F. Bolton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973) and will be noted (*Beowulf L._ _ _) .

2 Of necessity, many of Gardner's other works have been ignored in this essay because they are either outside of its scope or simply irrelevant. To be specific, Gardner's four children's books (*A Child's Bestiary; Dragon, Dragon and Other Timeless Tales; Gudgekin the Thistle Girl and Other Tales; The King of the Hummingbirds: And Other Tales*), three of his critical works (*The Construction of the Wakefield Cycle, The Life and Time of Chaucer, The Poetry of Chaucer*), and two of his miscellaneous fictions (*Frankenstein, In the Suicide Mountains*), have all been silently passed over.

3 In her article "John Gardner's Novels: Affirmation and the Alien," *Critique*, 18,iii (1976), Susan Strehle, referring to the Sunlight Man, Agathon and Grendel, comments: "Each is an eccentric, estranged from a society he improves through the biting wit of his alienation; each is pitted against righteousness and complacency; each is an artist of sorts: the Sunlight Man with magic, Agathon with fictionalized narrative, and Grendel with poetic myth" (p.88).

4 In an interview conducted by Joe David Bellamy and Pat Ensworth contributed to Bellamy's *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1974), Gardner explains: "In *Grendel* I wanted to go through the main ideas of Western Civilization --which seemed to me to be about...twelve?--and go through them in the voice of the monster...with the various philosophical attitudes...and see what I could do, see if I could break out" (p.173). In response to Bellamy's next question, "Do you go through all twelve major ideas in that book?", Gardner responds: "It's got twelve chapters. They're all hooked to astrological signs for instance, and that gives you nice easy clues" (p.173). Strehle, who is heavily influenced by this interview in her article, suggests that the sundry philosophies expressed by different
characters in the novel (such as imperialism, mysticism, materialism, solipsism, anarchism...), "as single-minded claims to truth...are meant to be rejected in favor of the seasonal cycle which provides the frame of the novel" (Strehle, p.94).

This "seasonal cycle which provides the frame of the novel," is easily discerned in Grendel--each astrological sign is clearly identified in each of the twelve chapters. For example: Chapter One--Aries ("The old ram"--p.1), Chapter Two--Taurus ("there was a bull"--p.15), Chapter Three--Gemini ("Every sheep and goat had its wobbly twins"--p.36, "a two headed beast"--p.37), Chapter Four--Cancer ("I backed away, crablike...like a crab retreating in pain"--p.41), Chapter Five--Leo ("No use of a growl, a whoop, a roar, in the presence of that beast!"--p.49, "He lifted a wrinkled paw with man-length talons for nails"--p.50), Chapter Six--Virgo ("Sooner or later the harvest virgin will make her mistake in the haystack"--p.73), Chapter Seven--Libra ("Balance is everything"--pp.79,95), Chapter Eight--Scorpio ("sweet scorpion"--p.98), Chapter Nine--Sagittarius ("one of Hrothgar's bowmen"--p.110), Chapter Ten--Capricorn ("a great horned goat"--p.121), Chapter Eleven--Aquarius ("I kiss the ice on the frozen creeks"--p.133, "by water they came"--p.133, "are you the same man that went swimming that time with young Breca"--p.140), Chapter Twelve--Pisces ("where the water was rigid there will be fish"--p.149, cf. "Beware the fish"--p.130, "He had no more beard than a fish"--p.135).

The identification of the twelve chapters of Grendel with Gardner's twelve "main ideas of Western Civilization" is more difficult than pinning down the twelve chapters' astrological associations, which really do not provide the reader with the "nice easy clues" necessary to delineate Gardner's twelve-fold conception of intellectual history. Thus my suggestions are merely shots in the dark and rather arbitrary. For example: Chapter One--fatalism?/Chapter Two--solipsism and/or nihilism; Chapter Three--imperialism; Chapter Four--aestheticism; Chapter Five--materialism and nihilism; Chapter Six--heroism?; Chapter Seven--elitism; Chapter Eight--anarchism; Chapter Nine--mysticism; Chapter Ten--nihilism, existentialism?, fatalism?, aestheticism; Chapter Eleven--nihilism, fatalism, elitism?, solipsism?; Chapter Twelve--existentialism, aestheticism. All of this is a bit too tentative, and probably not of great value, but hopefully it is at least suggestive.

This is also a subtle allusion to, and offhand endorsement by Gardner of, the "oral-formulaic" theory of Beowulf-criticism (cf. "he sang...twisting together like sailors' ropes the bits and pieces of the best old songs"--Grendel p.35, "the words stitched together out of ancient songs, the scenes interwoven out of dreary tales, made a vision without seams"--Grendel p.42).
In the Ballamy, Ensworth interview, Gardner demonstrates that he is aware of this moral dilemma when he comments, concerning the Shaper, that "The Shaper tells the truth although he lies" (Bellamy, p.175). He explains: "The Shaper comes along in a meaningless, stupid kingdom and makes up a rationale. He creates the heroism, the feeling of tribal unity. He makes the people brave. And sure, it's a lie, but it's also a vision. Grendel is seduced by the Shaper: he wants to be a part of that vision. Unfortunately, he can't get in because he's a monster" (Bellamy, p.179).

For Earl Shorris's ideas on Gardner's use of the myth of the Race and Curse of Cain, see Appendix I: The Race of Cain.

Norma L. Hutman's article, "Even Monsters Have Mothers: A Study of Beowulf and John Gardner's Grendel," Mosaic, 9,1 (1975), is helpful on this point, particularly where she links Beowulf, Grendel and Unferth to Cain. "Beowulf slaying Grendel slays his own dark origins," she writes, "much as he slays the archetypal Cain who stands against the entire ordering of society, Beowulf's heroic context, when he defeats...Unferth" (p.26).

For Gardner's use of the idea of the Fall in Grendel and in his interpretation of Beowulf, see Appendix II: The Tripartite Soul.

This idea was sparked by Judy Murr's article, "John Gardner's Order and Disorder: Grendel and The Sunlight Dialogues," Critique, 18,1i (1976), in which she stated that "Grendel emerges to find himself posited against myth. He fights against the Shaper's song, the myth that the world is ordered and that fact is transformed by song" (p.99).

The idea that Grendel himself becomes an artist is well-expressed by Strehle in her article, where she claims that "In spite of his view of life as accidental and art as a 'gluey whine of connectedness,' Grendel becomes an artist" (Strehle, p.93). (Actually, it was the dragon who had defined art as a "gluey whine of connectedness"—Grendel p.55.) See also p.94 where she treats Grendel's artistic/poetic development from doggerel to alliterative lyric.

Grendel's use of the adjective "golden" here and his associations with gold throughout the novel are both symptomatic of the monster's very human obsession with, and moral ambivalence toward, Mammon. Although Grendel ironically calls the Shaper's opinion "golden" at this point, he also uses the image of gold more positively in regard to the Shaper in other places. Grendel praises the Shaper's songs because they seemingly turn "dry sticks to gold" (p.41). But even if the Shaper's "phrases" are
"magnificent, golden," they are still "all of them...lies" (p.36). And if, in a sense, the Shaper's labors were "beyond the need of any shaggy old gold-friend's pay" (p.42), the Shaper yet "would sing the glory of Hrothgar's line and gild his wisdom and stir up his men to more daring deeds, for a price" (p.35)—it could not be denied that the Shaper "sang for pay" (pp.41-42). Grendel is aware of some mysterious evil which adheres to gold and corrupts men—symbolically, the Shaper is blinded by the gold he extracts in payment for his songs, because when he dies, the mourners put "gold coins on his eyelids to preserve him from seeing where he goes" (p.129).

The dragon, of course, unambivalently represents the evil aspects of gold. "My advice to you, my violent friend," the dragon counsels Grendel, "is to seek out gold and sit on it" (p.63). There is also something about the dragon's greedy laugh ("nyeh heh heh"—p.50) that disturbs the monster. Earlier, Grendel had observed of the Danes that "the goldworkers had an honored place. I remember one of them especially: a lean, aloof, superior man of middle age. He never spoke to the others except to laugh sometimes—'Nyeh heh heh!'" (p.25). Grendel is aware of his own devotion to Mammon in the form of the Danes he feasts upon—he is careful not to expend this resource too quickly ("Care, take care of the gold-egg-laying goose!"—p.80). Interestingly, both Beowulf and the dragon list gold as one of the "random dust specks" (p.60) (cf. "random specks"—p.149) which make up the ephemeral universe. "Complexities:" says the dragon, "green dust as well as the regular king. Purple dust. Gold" (p.149). When Grendel discovers in Hart that he is going to die in this kind of a universe, represented by the meadhall, he describes both as "alive, great cavernous belly, gold-adorned, bloodstained, howling back at me" (p.148). In some rather indecipherable way, Grendel associates gold with all that threatens, disgusts, or puzzles him—and gold is somehow mixed up in his mind with his ultimate awareness of reality. It is difficult to draw any conclusions from all of this, but it is food for thought. See also Appendix II: The tripartite Soul, especially the comments about the perverse concupiscent soul.

To carry this idea even further in order to stress this phenomenon (albeit a little absurdly), which is of utmost importance to Gardner's conception of "shaping" in Grendel, Gardner here takes the Finnsburg legend which the Beowulf-poet himself had inherited second-hand (and had put in the mouth of his scop in Beowulf) and puts it in the mouth of Grendel who merely paraphrases what the Shaper's apprentice had learned from the Shaper, who himself had received this legendary chapter of Danish history from the long line of Shapers who had sung before him—each of these "Shapers" are merely links in one vast chain, stretching back into the distant mythic past.
Gardner, in the Bellamy, Ensworth interview, supports this idea. "When the first Shaper dies," he comments, "a kid is chosen to succeed him, but the real successor is Grendel...at the end of the novel Grendel himself becomes the Shaper" (Bellamy, p.179).

Similar ideas are expressed in Murr's article. She states that "Grendel inevitably confronts Beowulf (remember, he is doomed by myth)...Grendel's greatest adversaries in the battle are the illusion of the mythic hero, the magical trap of the Shaper's song, and his own propensity to believe something other than the cold truth" (Murr, p.101). Also relevant is an idea expressed by Hutman in her article concerning the relationship between Beowulf and Grendel as works of art. "John Gardner's Grendel," she claims, demonstrates "the perfect rapport possible between two workings of a single myth" (Hutman, p.19). She also suggests that "Beowulf is itself uniquely a summation, for it exemplifies the meeting of myth as subject matter (folklore, legend, the accounts of history) and myth as meaning (the artist's interpretation of legend, history, etc.)" (Hutman, p.30).

In Strehle's article, she says of Grendel's alliterative lyric: "Not only has Grendel achieved a successful poetic form, but he has arrived at a vision of human experience" (Strehle, p.93). In broader terms, Grendel's "poetry functions...to turn the form of the narrative into a metaphor for its concerns; as Grendel becomes the heir of the Shaper's vision, he also becomes the heir of his craft" (Strehle, pp.94-95). (One could argue that although he does become heir to the Shaper's craft, the vision Grendel becomes heir to is not exactly the Shaper's but Beowulf's vision, which is a synthesis of both the Shaper's and the dragon's visions.)

In the Bellamy, Ensworth interview, Gardner comments: "In the last pages of the book Grendel begins to apprehend the whole universe: life and death, his own death" (Bellamy, pp.179-180). And in response to Bellamy's question, "Then Grendel understands that the role of the Shaper—the role of the poet—is to apprehend, to feel, the whole universe?" Gardner simply answers: "Yes" (Bellamy, p.180).

"Beowulf bangs his [i.e., Grendel's] head against the wall and says, feel," Gardner states in the Bellamy, Ensworth interview, "Grendel feels—his head hurts—so Beowulf makes him sing about walls...Poetry is an accident, the novel says, but it's a great one. May it happen to us all" (Bellamy, pp.179-180). "Though he dies by accident," Strehle echoes in her article, "Grendel has also arrived at the fortuitous accident of poetry" (Strehle, p.93).
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