

## The Conquest of a Dragon by the Stranger in Holy Combat : Focusing on the Mighty Hero Beowulf and Thor

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### 1. Introduction

A detailed and comprehensive analysis of the myths and legends of the conquest of a dragon or a gigantic serpent has been made by Joseph Fontenrose, who deals with stories from ancient Greece, Egypt, the Near East, India and various other regions. In one of the best known stories, Apollo, the god of prophecy, overcomes a dragon beside a spring in Delphi, in order to establish his oracular shrine there. As Fontenrose noted, the monstrous and savage creature is female (*drakaina*) and bears no name in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, but in later traditions after the lyrical poet Simonides (556-468 BC), the dragon, whom Apollo kills by shooting a hundred arrows, has become male and is called Python (Fontenrose, 14-15).

Apollo, while still a boy, came to Delphi while Ge or Themis still ruled the shrine and spoke the oracles. A dragon named Python, who guarded the shrine for the goddess, opposed Apollo on his arrival. The god fought him and after shooting many arrows from his bow finally killed him. Apollo then went to Tempe, or to Crete, to be purified of blood pollution, and thereafter came back to Delphi to take possession. He founded the Pythian games to celebrate his victory over Python (Fontenrose, 15).

One notes that Python, originally conceived as a she-dragon, is defined here as "a guardian for the goddess" in Delphi. This combat myth may reflect historical fact in that the people who had adored Apollo perhaps intruded into Delphi and despoiled the former dwellers of their sacred place.

Another divine combat myth is told about the chief god Zeus, who overcomes a gigantic monster named Typhon, which was anthropomorphic in the upper half of its body and serpentine below. As the ogre is called *drakōn* "dragon", Fontenrose classifies him as a dragon-like monster (Fontenrose, 70).

According to the version told by Apollodorus, all the gods except Zeus fled to Egypt in the wake of a formidable attack by Typhon, the fire-spitting dragon. After a desperate struggle and a crisis in which Typhon robs Zeus of his adamant sickle and severed his sinews, Zeus, with the aid of Hermes and Pan, regains the power to wage battle by hurling thunderbolts. The monster finally fled to Thrace, where Typhon made the last counter-attack in vain, and was fatally wounded by the incessant divine thunderbolts, bleeding copiously in the Mount Haimos ("Bloody Mountain"). Although the ogre

managed to flee across the Sicilian Sea, Zeus pinned him down with Mount Etna which the god casts on top of him (Fontenrose, 73-74).

Typhon corresponds to Typhoeus in the version of Hesiod, who tells us that the monstrous being was born of the union of Gaia, the mother of the Titans, and Tartaros. Thus Typhon or Typhoneus represents the powers of chaos and the earth mother, while Zeus as father of the Olympians succeeds in restoring order.

Like Typhon in Greek myth, the archenemy of the gods in ancient India was Vritra, "who in the world's beginning encompassed the waters of chaos and kept them from flowing forth" (Fontenrose, 194). It was Indra, a weather god, who finally slays this monstrous being by hurling his thunderbolts and shooting arrows. Thus, as Fontenrose has noticed, fatal weapons of Indra correspond to the divine instruments of Zeus and Apollo respectively.

According to Calvert Watkins, Vritra, being called ahi, was not a dragon, but a serpent. And the name Vritra or Indo-Iranian *\*uṛ-tra* is derived from the root *ṛḡ-* "block, obstruct, close, cover". Emile Benveniste differentiates three basic themes in the Vedic combat myth: "(1) a religious motif, the exploits of a victorious god; (2) an epic motif, the struggle of the hero with a reptilian monster; (3) a mythical motif, the freeing of the waters". Thus, for Benveniste, (1) an Indo-Iranian warrior god, with the epithet *\*uṛ tra-jhan-* "smashing resistance" embodies "the potential of victorious offensive, irresistible force", and theme (2) occurs universally, even outside the Indo-European world. Watkins, however, opposes such a rigorous differentiation of themes. Instead he takes heed of the extremely conservative aspect of "the formulas themselves as the actual vehicle for the long term preservation of tradition" (Watkins, 298-99).

Watkins indicates that, in spite of the difference in the surrounding circumstances and motives for the dragon slaying, the kernel of the myth remains the same and the verbal form is "incredibly persistent": in a verb-object formula "kill serpent", the cognate verb of IE *\*g<sup>h</sup>hen-* "to smite, slay" in each language comprises the bi-directional concepts 'kill serpent' or 'be killed by serpent' (Watkins, 301-03). The roots, such as Vedic *han-*, Avestan *jan*, and Hittite *kuen*, for instance, bear the common characteristics of the verbal formula expressing dragon slaying.

In Old Germanic literature, on the other hand, Watkins discovered an interesting fact that the lexical expression for "killing (a serpent)" was renewed: Germanic verbs *\*kwaljan* (OE *cwellan*) and *\*wigan* (OE *wegan*; ON *vega*) replaced IE *\*g<sup>h</sup>hen-* as the formulaic verbs. The verb *\*kwaljan*, the causative formation of *cwelan* "to die", is apparently an innovation confined to Old English. The verb *\*wigan* is related to Go *weihan* "to fight", *weihs* "holy; divine", *weihs* "village", ON *vé* "sanctuary; temple", and so on. Go *weihs*, OE *wic* "village" and ON "abode" are cognate with Lat *vicus* "village" and Gr *oikos* "house", which can perhaps be traced back to IE *\*uei-k-* "to bind; to enclose". This association of ideas is probably due to the wattled structure of the house

as well as the village in primitive times (Tucker, 257). The above terms for village and community (*Gemeinschaft*), according to Jost Trier, originally meant the “settlement of a specific group of men” (*Mannring*) which was enclosed with some fence or wall and hallowed to set it apart from the surrounding profane areas (de Vries 1977, 649).

## 2. The Holy Combat

Why on earth would an act of fighting (Go *weihan*) be connected with the idea of holiness (Go *weihis* ; ON *vé*)? Jost Trier suspects that the people might have enclosed some special place in a circle and hallowed it as a place of battle (de Vries, 650). The name *Vingbórr* for Thor is quite significant in this respect. In certain contexts, this cognomen is used to denote Thor who brandishes the hammer Mjöllnir and kills giants (Þrymskviða 1) and who often makes an expedition to conquer his antagonists (Alvissmál 6). At any rate, Thor was worshiped as the god who protects *Miðgarðr* “the encircled and middle world” as well as *Ásgarðr* “the world of the gods *Æsir*” from the giant-races and the *Miðgarðr*-serpent. The name *Vingbórr* corresponds to the runic letters *Wigiponar* engraved on the buckle of stirrups (7th century) which was found out in Nordendorf near Augusburg. The name *Véorr* for Thor (Hymiskviða 11) may be connected with the holiness represented by the ON word *vé*. *Vingbórr* can be interpreted as “the holy god Thor” (de Vries, I, 311) or, to my mind, as “Thor who wages a holy battle” and the first element *ving* is related to ON *veig* “strength; strong drink; a (magically powerful) woman.” Scholars consider that *veig* “strength”, which can be closely connected with the verb *vega* “fight over; smite; slay,” originally meant “fertility” or “latent power of making plants flourish” and that the ambiguity of *veig* might result from the following evolution of meaning: “an enclosed area” > “a group of men” > “a feast where warriors attend” > “strong beverage offered at a feast” (de Vries 1977, 651).

These arguments urge me to recognize the significance of the mythological account in which Thor as a guardian of *Ásgarðr* accepts the challenge of drinking up a voluminous cup in the hall of the giant *Útgarðaloki* (Gylf 46). Probably, to drain the *vttis-horn* “sconce-horn cup” of “strong drink” (*veig*) in a single gulp might be a demonstration of his latent power of “to smite” (*vega*) his antagonists. Thor’s attempt, however, in this myth, is frustrated, because the tip of the horn offered extended into the sea. It turns out later that *Útgarða-loki* practiced the magic of optical illusions (*sjón-hverfingar*) to dupe Thor and his party (Loki and Thjalfi) into undergoing humiliation and defeats in the different competitions, such as speedy eating, running, drinking, lifting, and wrestling (Gylf 47-48).

In the Eddaic poem *Völuspá* (The Prophecy of a Sibyl), we find a miraculous story in which a supernatural woman named *Gullveig* “a woman decorated with gold”, impaled with spears, was burnt to death three times in the hall of *Hár* “the High” (another name for *Othin*), but was restored to life on each occasion (str. 21). The story tells how the

event caused the *folk-víg* “total war” for the first time in this world. In other words, when acts of violence were repeatedly practiced on *Gull-veig* who belonged to the Vanir, the “total war” (*folk-víg*) occurred between the Æsir and the Vanir. As mentioned above, the act of waging battle represented by the word *víg*, etymologically related to *veig* “(supernatural) power; (magical) woman”, was connected with the idea of holiness. In strophe 22, Gullveig is given another name *Heiðr* “the shining one” and described as the *völva* “sibyl” who practices a sort of shamanistic magic named *seið*. Thus she can be imagined as a “magically powerful woman” (*veig*) with “shining beauty” and decorated with gold (*gull*) which allures people and cause a magical deception.

The total war (*folk-víg*) between the two divine races seems, at first, to be going in favor of the Vanir who “had the ability to prophesy the outcome of battle” (*víg-spár*). As the poetess says, the Vanir could override the *völlr* “battle-field” (str. 24). The word *völlr*, used sixteen times in the Poetic Edda, holds the implies a fierce battle, death, and slaughter with profuse bleeding in its context. Thus we might form a picture in which the furious attack by the Vanir places the Asir on the defensive. They hold an assembly to take appropriate measures (str. 25). This desperate situation is reversed, when “Thor wrathfully smote (*vá*) alone” (str. 26). The close association between *veig* “magical power” and *víg* “a holy battle” is set up in the one strophe which tells about the preliminary stage of battle (str. 21). Quite naturally, it is in the final stage that Thor who could *vega* “smite” his antagonists by “brandishing his weapon” (*vega*) and participate in the war.

Thor was praised as “strongest of all the gods and men” (Gylf 21). The 10th century Icelandic poet named Thorbjörn the <*dísar-skáld*> also offers a verse: “Thor courageously protects the divine world Ásgarðr together with Yggr’s (Othin’s) followers” (Skáldskaparmál 11).

### 3. The Sacred Battlefield

The poet(ess) gives an account, in the final strophe of *Völuspá*, of how the murky dragon named *Níðhöggr* comes flying over the *völlr* “field”, carrying corpses in his wings. The dragon’s flight over the “field” betokens the finale of the narrative of Ragnarök “the doom of divine powers (or gods)” or a termination of battles and conflicts in this world, the telling of which offers a marked contrast to that of the first “total war” (*folk-víg*) in this world, which would enable the Vanir to overrun the *völlr* “battlefield”.

Thus, in the Eddaic Poetry, the word *víg* “battle” occurs in a close association with the *völlr* “field”. To offer another example, the wise giant named *Vafthrúðnir* asks a question: “What is the field (*völlr*) called where Surtr and the gracious gods fight a hard battle (*víg*)?” And Othin responds: “The field (*völlr*) is called *Vígríðr* (the field of a desperate struggle)” and “the place which is predestined as their field (*völlr*) is one ‘great hundred’ rests wide in every direction” (*Vafthrúðnismál* 17-18). Surtr, meaning “the

swarthy one," is a fire demon who originally protected Muspell or the southern domain of flame and heat, and is said to make a furious assault with his flaming sword, on the gods at the time of Ragnarök. One *röst* is a unit of the distance between two resting-places on a journey on foot, meaning about four or five miles. Taking it into account that the duodecimal system was once a popular way of counting in ancient Scandinavia, *hundrað rasta* might signify "a distance of 120 rests". At any rate, such an ideally spacious field area (*völlr*) was allocated in advance for the last battle between the gods and demonic beings. What shape should we imagine from the expression of "the field with the width of one great hundred rests in every direction", an exact square or a circle?

According to the Norse myths, Midgardr with the literal sense of "the middle domain" is positioned in the middle between Ásgarðr or "the inner world of the Æsir gods" and Útgarðr "the outer world of giants". This cosmography reflects the basic idea that the world can be articulated into the three domains of inside, middle, and outside, but actually the problem is not so simple. The second element *garðr*, related to the verb *garða* "to enclose", had the meanings of "fence; wall", "an enclosed area", "court-yard", "homestead", and "fortress". Thus Miðgarðr is so ambiguous that the word usually signifies "the middle-located and enclosed domain where human beings are meant to dwell" and may also refer to the fence or the stronghold itself which encircled the middle world, as in the following account:

(1) She (The earth) is circular on the outer side, and the deep sea lies enclosing the periphery. And they (gods) disposed the strand of the sea to be the land in which the giant-races should dwell. On the inside of the earth, however, they constructed a stronghold surrounding the world in preparation against attack by the giants. And they employed the 'eyelashes' (*brár*) of the giant Ymir to fabricate the stronghold, and so they named the fortification Miðgarðr. (Gylf 8)

As I have already argued, the account of how the stronghold was fabricated with Ymir's eyelashes to serve as an effective defense against the giants' onslaught may be based upon the magical principle that "like cures like" (Mizuno 1987b, 113). Moreover, we might detect an analogy between the circular earth and the eye which keeps close watch over the surrounding areas. In brief, the fortification Miðgarðr forms a circular boundary which may demarcate the inner world from the outer one. Ideally speaking in the light of this cosmography, the *Vigrðr* in which gods and demonic beings should fight the final and desperate battle at Ragnarök can be envisaged as the sacred field which was bounded within a circle.

**4. The Dragon as an Exclusive Possessor of Treasures and the Hero as a Stranger**  
Sigurdr, son of Sigmund, who belongs to the Völsungar, is quite famous among the

legendary heroes who conquered a dragon or a serpent. Before accomplishing the feat, he had been fostered by the smith named Reginn. The story goes that Hreidmarr, Reginn's father, was hoarding tremendous treasures which had fallen into his hands, without distributing any of them to his two sons (Mizuno 1987a). Then Fafnir killed his father and changed himself into the figure of a dragon to seize all the treasures in the field Gnitaeiðr. When Reginn, Fafnir's brother, forged the famous sword Gramr ("the hostile one"), he handed it over to Sigurdr and incited him to slay Fafnir. Sigurdr then dug a burrow under the path that the dragon usually passed along on his way towards the water, and lay in ambush there. Thus, when the dragon Fafnir, spitting poison, passed over the burrow, Sigurdr, aiming with his sword at the heart from below, stabbed him to death.

It is worthy of note that the smith (person [B]) serves as the instigator in the killing of the dragon, beside the hero himself (person [A]). Eventually, in this legend, person [A] takes possession of the whole treasure by slaying person [B]. And the hero, after making a journey, gets married to Guðrun. His apparent happiness, however, invites the tragedy in which Sigurdr is killed by a conspiracy of his brothers-in-law.

It turns out that the hero assumes the character of the dragon by becoming "a hoarder of treasures". Moreover, the narrative structure suggests that the acquisition of treasures by vanquishing the dragon is closely associated with that obtaining the beautiful and noble woman Guðrun in marriage. The same traits can be noticed in the story of Ragnarr Lodbrok, though we have no space to deal here with this parallel.

In the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* also, a dragon is depicted as the exclusive possessor of hereditary treasures. After fifty years of peaceful reign by the Geatish king Beowulf, a certain retainer who had been expelled for some unknown reason steals a golden goblet from the dragon's barrow located in the earth by the sea. When the robber begs his lord Beowulf to forget his anger by offering him the goblet, the strategy apparently succeeds (2278-85). The dragon, having guarded the enormous hoard of treasures for three hundred years, becomes so furious that, spewing out flames, he burns down the splendid hall of Beowulf.

The old king Beowulf, though aware in the back of his mind of his approaching death, goes out to encounter the dragon, together with his eleven followers. He daringly makes a vow, before his retainers, to exert his strength to win the dragon's hoard. In the battle, however, the sword named Nægling turned out to be ineffective against the dragon, and is finally broken (2680-82). With Beowulf thus in grave danger, his young retainer Wiglaf joins in the struggle to support him, with his sword "aimed at the under-part of the dragon's body". Wiglaf's sword has a special history in that it was inherited from his father Weohstan, on whom the Swedish king Onela had bestowed it as a memento of Eanmund, Onela's nephew. At any rate, owing to Wiglaf's feat of valor, the raging flame which the dragon had spewed out started to dwindle. Beowulf, then recover-

ing consciousness, draws his dagger and kills the dragon. Beowulf is fatally wounded, however, on account of the dragon's poison and finally passed away. As a consequence of the feat of Beowulf, performed with the aid of Wiglaf, the Geatish kingdom was able to procure all the treasures which the dragon had once possessed, though they were to become useless for the people.

In this story of the dragon fight, the finale sounds quite ominous. A prophetic utterance is offered: "At the news of Beowulf's death, the army of the Sweons (Swedish) will proceed to attack the Geats, implying that the Geatish kingdom will find itself in great peril of downfall. Despite differences in detail, the dragon-fight stories of Sigurðr and Beowulf obviously display a number of structural similarities:

- [1] A dragon is an exclusive possessor of treasures.
- [2] Both heroes assume the character of a stranger: Sigurðr, though a prince of the Völsungs, performs his feat while staying with Reginn. Beowulf, though a Geatish king, confesses that he traces his own descent from a different tribe, that of the Wagmundings.
- [3] A certain man, whether the smith Reginn or the anonymous robber, induces the hero to oppose the dragon with the definite aim of obtaining the hoard.
- [4] The special sword turns out to be an effective weapon against the dragon. In this respect, we can suppose a common background of smithery culture in both stories.
- [5] The hero gives the dragon a mortal wound by attacking him "from below" or aiming a blow at the "lower part" of the body.
- [6] The feat is accomplished through some collaboration between the hero and his aid. The helper serves as a smith, like Reginn, who bestows a distinguished sword on the hero, or as a youthful warrior, like Wiglaf, who brandishes his excellent sword in the battle.
- [7] The hero who vanquishes the dragon eventually takes on the character of his antagonist by taking possession of the dragon's hoard.
- [8] As a result the conquest of the dragon leads to another new conflict, probably over the dragon's treasure.

To add a few comments regarding [4] and [5], as the name Ecgtheow, father of Beowulf, meant "a servant of the edge (of a sword and a spear)", he seems to have something of the smith. Still we do not know exactly why Beowulf's sword turned out ineffective in close combat with the dragon. In contrast, his retainer Wiglaf delivers an effective blow to the "lower part of the dragon's body with his sword, in the same way as Sigudr attacks his antagonist "from below".

The second characteristic [2] is also noteworthy. Beowulf originally belonged to the Wagmundings, but has been brought up among the Geats since the age of seven, when his grandfather Hrethel adopted him. Eventually Beowulf ascends the throne, rather ironi-

cally owing to the unfortunate deaths of the Geatish royal family, such as Herebeald, Hrethel, Hūthcyn, Beowulf's former lord Hygelac, and Heardred (Mizuno 1989, 35). After a reign of fifty years, Beowulf as an old king has to oppose the dragon. When he is dying after the battle, Beowulf repents that he has no sons to whom he would willingly bequeath his inheritance (2729-33). Moreover, Beowulf seems to place full confidence in Wiglaf, calling him "the last survivor of our tribe, Wagmundings" while giving him the gold necklace as well as his helmet and corslet (Mizuno 1999, 395). In other words, Beowulf remains extremely proud of his own descent from the Wagmundings until the last moment. Thus, unlike the story of Sigurðr, Beowulf's conquest of the dragon does not lead to the acquisition of a beautiful lady, but to his own death. In this respect his heroic character is rather similar to that of Thor.

Christine Rauer suspects that the stories of Sigurðr of the Völsungs cannot constitute a parallel for the *Beowulf*-dragon fight, laying stress on the stark contrast between the youthfulness of Sigurðr who performs his feat alone, and the elderly Beowulf accompanied by his warriors (Rauer, 42). In my view, however, the sword-brandishing warrior Wiglaf, Beowulf's only aid, can be compared to the smith Reginn, who bestows the sword Gramr on Sigurðr, inciting the hero to slay the dragon Fafnir. It is also worth noting how Hilda E. Davidson (II, 39) points out close parallels among the dragon-conquest stories of Sigurðr, Frothi Hadingsson, Ragnarr Loðbrókr, and the Sigemund episode in *Beowulf* (884-97). The Danish prince Frotho, for instance, is depicted thrusting the sword into the 'soft underbelly' of the dragon (*Gesta Danorum*, II), just like Sigurðr. In this respect, 'the young warrior' Wiglaf who unerringly aimed his blow at the 'somewhat lower part' of the dragon (2699), might be identified as the authentic vanquisher, rather than 'the old king' Beowulf, whose sword was shattered, when it struck at the head (2679-81), the probably invulnerable part of the dragon.

##### 5. The Heroic Character of a Guardian

In the poem *Beowulf*, the hero's exploits consist of conquering three kinds of monsters: Grendel, his dam and the dragon. The verb (*ge*)-*wegan* "to fight", which is cognate with ON *vega*, is used only once in the context in which Beowulf is destined to stand against the dragon who burnt down "his finest house" (2326):

- (2) Thus he (Beowulf) survived,      the son of Ecgtheow,  
       each hostile battle,              each furious attack.  
       through courageous deeds,      until the day came  
       when he dared              'to fight' (*gewegan*) against the serpent.      (2397-400)

Thus Beowulf "full of fury (*torne gebolgen*) goes out to the dragon's barrow together with his eleven retainers. One notes, the dragon, called a *wyrm* "serpent" here, is not always

described as a detestable monster, but as the furious *weard* "guardian" who has protected the gold-hoard in the earth for long years or as the *gearo guð-freca* "a warrior ready for battle" (2413-15), just like Beowulf himself.

The appellation *weard* for the dragon marks a striking contrast with the *folces-weard* "guardian of the people" used of Beowulf (2513). To offer other examples, while the *beahhorda weard* "guardian of ringed treasures" and the *rices weard* "guardian of kingdom" refer to the Danish king Hrothgar, the kenning of *beorges weard* to "the dragon who occupies the hoard in a barrow" (2524 ; 2580 ; 3066). Beowulf as a ruler shares the character of "guard ; protector" with the hostile dragon.

The ON *vörðr* is cognate with the OE *weard*. Remarkably, the god Heimdallr who had the responsibility of protecting the gods from the attacks of mountain-giants is called *vörð goða* "a guard of gods". Heimdallr is said to have extraordinary powers of hearing and eyesight: "He needs less sleep than a bird. He can see, by night just as by day, a distance of a hundred 'rests'. He can also hear grass growing on the earth and wool on sheep and everything that sounds louder than that" (Gylf 27 : tr. A. Faulkes). Heimdallr, in other words, could completely keep watch within a range of "one hundred (or great-hundred) rests". This account reminds us of that of the *Vigriðr* with the width of "one (great-) hundred rests in each direction", in which the gods and demons were to fight the fatal battle at Ragnarök. At the critical moment, Heimdallr as the guard of the divine world is said to "blow mightily on Gjallarhorn and awaken all the gods" (Gylf 51).

To return to our main theme, Beowulf and the dragon who are both called the *weard* have the great responsibility of defending their own respective territories. Thus it is quite understandable that the dragon as the "guard of treasures" became furious on noticing the intrusion of the Geatish robber and assaulted the Geatish kingdom. It is also proper for Beowulf as the "guard of the people" to launch a counterattack, when informed that his royal house was destroyed by the dragon. Before his encounter with the dragon, Beowulf seems to be sensible of his own approaching death :

- (3) Then the battle-brave king (Beowulf) sat down on the headland,  
 and the Geatish treasure-dispenser (Beowulf) wished his hearth-companions  
 happiness and prosperity. His heart was terribly sad, restless,  
 and prepared to die in the battle ; Drawing so near was the 'fate' (*wyrð*),  
 that should unerringly greet the old man  
 to seek the treasure of soul, and to drive the body  
 asunder from life ; It is not much longer  
 that the living body of the hero would be clothed in the flesh. (2417-24)

Fate (*wyrð*) seems to decree that, in the end, Beowulf should die from the poison of the dragon whom he kills. In a similar way as Beowulf is called *frea Scildinga* "a warrior on



Frisian battle, and the prince Heardred who was said to be too young to rule the country by himself (2371 ; 2377) dies a premature death (Mizuno 1989, 35). Thus Beowulf finally ascended the throne by dint of the unfortunate demise of the Geatish royal family, as the poet remarks in conclusion: "The wide kingdom fell into Beowulf's hands" (2207-08).

Beowulf and his Geatish warriors are properly called *gistas*, or *gast(as)* "guest(s)" among the Danes (1602 ; 1800 ; 1893), and are seemingly regarded as no more than "strangers" even among the Geats, when coming back from the expedition (Mizuno 1987c, 15 ; 1989, 33) :

- (6) Hygelac was informed at once  
of Beowulf's return from the expedition,  
that the guardian of warriors (Beowulf), with his comrades bearing shields,  
there in the precinct, was returning alive  
and safe through the battle-sport, proceeding to the royal court.  
They made room quickly, as the ruler ordered,  
inside the hall 'for the strangers stepping in' (*feðe-gestum*). (1970-76)

In my past essays, I have offered the interconnected terms of "a fortunate stranger" and "a terrible stranger" in order to differentiate the ambivalent character of the stranger, applying Japanese folkloric concepts to literary analyses: "The former could show his creative and divine aspect as bringer of riches or fortune to the relevant community, as if he were some divinity making a journey from a distant world, while the latter would reveal his destructive and demoniac aspect, as bringer of troubles, disaster or misfortune, as if he were some demon from the other world" (1987c, 13 ; 1989, 12). Actually, as I have argued detail, Beowulf makes an appearance as a fortunate stranger before the Danes to relieve them of troubles and misfortunes, when the people have been in dire distress for twelve years. Contrariwise, for the Geats, who have enjoyed peace and happiness up to that time, the hero reappears necessarily as a terrible stranger to devastate their established order, after performing the exploits of conquering Grendel and his dam (1987d, 13 ; 1989, 33).

As cited above, the *Beowulf* poet informs us of the colossal good fortune of Beowulf in a conclusive way: "Thus the wide kingdom (of the Geats) fell into Beowulf's hands" (2207 f.). His good fortune in ascending the throne, in other words, is based upon the successive ill-fortunes of the Geatish lords and princes in the past (1989, 36). Beowulf can thus be defined in essence as a stranger-king. However, there are no accounts of any expedition or journey made by Beowulf during his peaceful reign, as if the poet had preferred to cover the intrinsic character of the ruler as stranger in a veil of mystery.

Remarkably the dying king Beowulf, soon after killing the dragon who devastated his country, utters his last words, unclasping the golden ring from his neck to give it,

besides his helmet and corslet, to Wiglaf :

- (7) "You are the last survivor of our tribe  
 the Wagmundings ; fate as an inevitable destiny  
 swept away all of my kinsmen  
 and valiant warriors ; I have to pass away after them." (2813-16)

Thus, at the last moment, Beowulf reveals his true feelings, showing that he has been proud of his descent from the Wagmundings. By bequeathing the magical necklace and his favorite weapons for defense to Wiglaf who belongs to the same *cyn* "kindred" as Beowulf himself, he seems to entrust this young hero with the management of the Geats in the future, recognizing him as his heir or as a stranger-king-to-be who should protect his people (*folces-weard*).

It is quite understandable that the dragon is called *se gæst* "the visitor ; the uninvited guest" (2312), when he launches his onslaught on the Geats, spewing fire to destroy the halls. Besides, even in the scene of the battle near the barrow which the dragon has long occupied, the names associated with the "terrible stranger" (*gryre-giest ; inwit-gast ; nið-gast*) are repeatedly used to refer to the dragon (2560 ; 2670 ; 2699). As I have argued, the dragon represents the terrible aspect of the stranger which Beowulf embodies, though he apparently disguises himself as a fortunate stranger who has ruled over the Geats through a long peace (1989, 36).

## 7. The Doom of the Hero

In *Beowulf*, the simplex *draca* "dragon" is used only seven times, and there are only five examples of compounds, such as *fyr-draca*, *lig-draca* "fire-dragon", *nið-draca* "hostile dragon", and *sæ-draca* "sea-dragon" are five examples. On the other hand, the simplex *wyrm* for the "dragon," aside from the compounds, occurs 22 times. The OE *draca* is a loan word from Lat *draco*, which is derived from Gr *drakōn*, originally meaning "shining-eyed." In contrast, *wyrm* is from the common Germanic word (Go *waurms*; ON *ormr* ; OS / OHG *wurm*) which can be traced back to Germ *\*wurmiz*, and further to IE *\*u<sub>2</sub>γmis*. C. Watkins considers the IE *\*u<sub>2</sub>γmis* to be a rhyme formation from *\*h<sub>2</sub>γmis*, partly because of being conscious of taboo ; while the latter, usually meaning "worm", is the reconstructed form based on Celtic, Balto-Slavic, Albanian, and Indo-Iranian (Watkins, 416).

Germ. *\*wurmiz* is regarded as going back to the IE root *\*uer* "to turn ; to wind" (Lehmann, 397). The ON words, such as *verða* "to become," *urðr* "fate" (originally "turning round") and *varða* "to keep watch ; guard", are considered to be derivatives of Germ *\*uert-* which might be traced back to the above IE root *\*uer* (Johannesson, 145-49). Needless to say, OE *wyrd* "fate", OE *weard* and ON *vörðr* "guardian ; watchman," as





in the 'underground' (*grund*),            however eagerly he might wish to hide!  
 Likewise he (Wiglaf) saw            an all-golden standard,  
 the best of handicrafts,            hanging high over the hoard,  
 interlaced by excellent hands;    which gave off such a brilliant light  
 that he could perceive            the 'underground plain' (*grund-wong*),  
 look over the ornaments.    No vestige of the dragon  
 was to be seen there,            as the sword took away his life.            (2764-72)

Wiglaf, whose name literally means "the remnant of battle(s)", survives the desperate battle with the dragon and carefully examines the "radiant" treasures stored in the "underground plain". In contrast to the young hero, the lord Beowulf is not allowed to observe the dragon's hoard. As a consequence Wiglaf is called "the last survivor of the Wagmundings" (1989, 39). The first element of his father's name Weoh-stan or Wih-stan is undoubtedly related to OE *wig*, ON *víg* "fight; battle", and Go *weihs* "holy", as discussed above. It might be possible that the Wagmundings to whom Beowulf also belonged were a closely united band of fearless warriors.

(11)                            It was not so easy a 'journey' (*sið*)  
 that the renowned hero,            son of Ecgtheow  
 could perceive            the 'underground plain' (*grund-wong*);  
 but he should leave here            to dwell somewhere else  
 in another abode,            just as any man must  
 forsake his allotted span of living days.            (2586-91)

In the preceding lines, we are told that Beowulf's sword Nægling proved ineffective against the dragon. Thus the lord urgently needed the help of a dauntless hero Wiglaf, who was to give the fatal blow to the dragon with his sword. The word *sið* is ambiguous, meaning "journey", "venture", "expedition", and "occasion". In view of the context, Beowulf's *sið*, in the line 2586, could be interpreted doubly as "his expedition with the aim of overcoming the dragon" and "his journey destined for the other world." His inability to perceive the "brilliant" treasures in the *grund-wong* implies that Beowulf becomes set apart from worldly wealth from this point, and also that, in my view, he was destined to leave for some other place but the "paradisaal world" (*wong*), to which it was imagined the chosen heroes were sent after death. At any rate, we can recognize the basic idea of the Old Germanic paradise or "the watery and shining field" partly in the description of the dragon's abode. In addition, the "sun-shine" element of the paradisiacal *wang* is replaced by the "brilliance" of treasures in *grund-wong* near the waters.

It is noteworthy that the word *wang* with its connotation of the "sacred field", also refers to the place of battle with Grendel and his dam. Grendel's dam, as Beowulf's

second antagonist, is said to have ruled the region of the waters in the *grund-wong* for fifty years (1494–500). The *nið-sele* “hall of hostility” which she occupies is described as completely safe from waters: “No water causes any harm to the hall, nor could a violent current of waters attack the abode with a vaulted roof” (1514–16). Significantly, the period of the female monster’s reign corresponds to that of the Geatish ruler Beowulf.

It is inside the hall named Heorot “Hart”, which is praised as “the most splendid residence” (146), that Beowulf fought the first monster Grendel. The monster had repeatedly committed acts of violence and slaughter for twelve years, having occupied the Danish hall every dark night (146–49 ; 166–67). Hearing a rumor, Beowulf came over from the Geats, leading fourteen warriors, to visit the king Hrothgar who was in such a dire distress. The poet describes the battle at night, calling both the hero and the monster *ren-weadas* “guardians of the hall”: “They furiously fought to rule over the residence” (769–70). The hero finally succeeded in cleansing the court by conquering Grendel. Soon after returning to the Geats, however, Beowulf calls the battle-place “that *wang*” in his own report of the battle before Hygelac:

- (12) “My lord Hygelac,                    the great encounter  
       is now not unknown            to many people,  
       as to what a hard period in battle        Grendel and I  
       suffered in that ‘field’ (*wang*),        in which he drove  
       the victorious Scyldings        to fall into afflictions and miseries  
       continually for life.            I took revenge thoroughly for everything. . .” (2000–05)

As is revealed by these proud words, Beowulf becomes a fortunate stranger who relieved the Danes from the apparently everlasting torments. Thus it is in the paradisaic *wang*, in common, that Beowulf had the “great encounter” (*micel gemeting*), fiercely struggling with Grendel, his dam, and the dragon.

To sum up, these three great fights amount to a “holy battle” (OE *wig* ; ON *viðgr*) waged by the “stranger” (*gast*), with the connotation of retrieving the “sacred field” (*wang*) rich in waters and brightness. The third feat of conquering the dragon, however, could be accomplished only at the cost of Beowulf’s own life, because this fatal antagonist, bearing the character of the *weard* of treasures and the terrible stranger, represents the true character of Beowulf or his alter ego.

## 9. The Four Elements of Earth, Water, Fire, and Air

The dragon’s abode is given the names of *eorð-sele* “earth-hall”, *eorð-hus* “earth-house”, or *dryht-sele dyrne* “mystical retainers’ hall”, the last of which sounds ironical, because the *dryht-sele* is used elsewhere (485 ; 767) to refer to the hall Heorot where all the Danish loyal retainers once gathered around their lord. Needless to say, no retainers

are in attendance in the dragon's hall. In this respect, the dragon, who has occupied the "earth-hall" by himself for three hundred years, can be defined as a sort of mock-king.

In contrast, Beowulf clearly had a certain number of retainers, but lost "his own house" together with his *gif-stol Geata* "the throne where the king should bestow gifts on his Geatish retainers," on account of a great fire caused by the dragon (2324-27). In the absence of the retainers' hall and his throne, Beowulf has been unable to perform his duty as a king. In the conflict with the dragon, Beowulf is obliged to become an intruder into the dragon's "earth-hall," with some irony. In short, the appellation of "terrible stranger" for the dragon (*gryre-giest* ; *inwit-gæst* ; *nið-gæst*) holds true also of Beowulf himself. Recently Joyce Lionarons correctly indicates that "the roles of host and guest reverse themselves : in order to slay *his* monstrous guest, Beowulf and his men must seek out the dragon in its barrow, become 'guests' (or what Watkins terms 'anti-guests') in the dragon's 'anti-hall'" (Lionarons, 35). Surprisingly, however, while developing her arguments in one section entitled 'Hosts and Guests in *Beowulf*', apparently based upon my stranger theory (Mizuno 1989), Lionarons does not make any properly explicit reference to my primary contribution to this theme, and distorts my detailed discussions, as if I had maintained that only similarities or the common character between Beowulf and the monsters as strangers must be "indicative of hidden evil on Beowulf's part" (Lionarons, 39).

It had been believed since ancient times that the earth, which was often represented as the mother goddess, presided over life and death (Neumann, 39-74). Tacitus, for instance, depicts Nerthus as *terra mater* "Mother Earth", who was revered among the different peoples of the Jutland peninsula and the north of Germany. According to Tacitus, "a sole priest could perceive the moment of the goddess' advent" on a sacred chariot, which was placed in a holy grove of a certain island (*Germania* 40). Then the priest would "accompany the cows-drawn chariot" and go around various places "which befits the goddess to pay a visit and receive hospitality". It was an opportune time of 'the propitious festivity' (*laeti dies*) for the people who would have been "profoundly conscious of 'peace and quietude' (*pax et quies*) and cherish them deeply" during that period (Mizuno 1996, 84-85). The Latin name Nerthus has been regarded as the counterpart of Njörðr, the Nordic god who was believed to "control the direction of wind, and preside over sea and fire" (Gylf 23). We are told that Njörðr is "so rich and wealthy that he may bestow either lands or movable riches on those who invoke him in prayer for something". Freyr, son of Njörðr, is said to "rule over rain and sunshine and thus over the 'fertility' (*ávöxtr*) of the earth" (Gylf 24)

In this respect, it is very significant that the dragon's abode is called *eorð-sele*, or *eorð-hus*. The dragon, with the name *eorð-draca*, seems to embody the powers of the earth. Besides, in the poem *Beowulf*, the earth is regarded as the place in which treasures are produced and held in store. To cite an appropriate passage, an anonymous man, who

bears some resemblance to the dragon, in the way that he is called the *hringa hyrde* “guard of jewels”, makes the following utterance to the earth herself, when burying a vast amount of treasure in the “barrow”.

- (13) “Now, the earth, get hold of the possessions of warriors,  
 now that the heroes may not! Indeed, in bygone days  
 valiant men procured them out of you. . . Death in battle  
 or awful miseries took away life  
 from everyone of my people ; those who had enjoyed the feast  
 gave up this world. . .” (2247-52)

This utterance seems to reflect the belief that the arms and ornaments worn by warriors, which were originally produced by use of the material of the earth, should be returned to the Mother Earth as a source of life, now that the former owners have left this world. Behind the funeral practice of burying various treasures and personal belongings with the corpse, there lies the worship of the earth which would bring back wealth and fertility, as I have supposed (2001b, 97). As mentioned above, the dragon is given the name *beorges weard* “guard of the barrow”. We may be allowed to recognize that this anonymous man shares the common character with the dragon, who has kept guard over treasures in the barrow for three hundred years, without dispensing any part of them.

Thus the character of the dragon exhibits a stark contrast with that of *Njörðr* who was believed to grant ‘movable riches’ to the men who fervently pray to him. *Gefn*, meaning “the Provider”, is another name for the goddess Freyja, daughter of Njörðr, who reportedly wept “tears of gold”, when wandering about in many places to visit ‘strange’ (*ókunni*) peoples in search of her traveling husband (Gylf 35). This Norse myth suggests that Freyja assumed the basic character of providing her favorite ‘strangers’ with the riches, while making a journey. Contrariwise, the ‘earth-dragon’ as the exclusive hoarder continues to stay in the barrow beside the sea, until he, violently ‘furious’ (*abelgan* : 2280) to know that the plated cup is stolen from his ‘treasure-house’ (*hord-ærn* : 2279), mounts an attack on the Geats. In short, the dragon can be defined not only as the mock-king, as discussed above, but also as the anti-thesis of Njörðr, the chief of the Vanir, whom the people once adored as divine providers of wealth and fertility.

Taking note of the depiction of the dragon’s lair from which the hot ‘stream’ (*stream* ; *burne*, 2545-46) appears to issue, Christine Rauer acutely remarks that the puzzling passage might imply a fusion of “conflicting source material” (Rauer, 39) of streaming fire, air, and water. Furthermore, I have offered my view that the ‘flying’ dragon, spewing out ‘fire’ in its ‘seaside’ abode, embodies not only these ‘three ever-shifting elements’, but also the magical power of the earth as represented by the name *eorð-draca* (2002 ; 2001d, 113). In other words, the basic character of the Beowulf’s dragon

is molded, to my mind, especially on that of the Nordic god Njörðr, who presides over the motion of 'winds or air, sea, and fire'.

The anonymous man, who was expelled from the Geats, presents the golden cup to Beowulf, his former lord, with the entreaty of appeasing his anger (2281-86). The robber eventually succeeds in effecting a 'reconciliation' (*frioðo-wær* : 2282) with Beowulf, probably when the latter received the piece of dragon's treasure. To offer a bitter irony, while his robbery of the goblet incurs the dragon's fury, his bestowal of it serves to appease Beowulf's indignation. This observation readily reminds us of another passage which tells about the anger of God. Being informed that his own residence, including the 'gift-throne of the Geats' (*gifestol Geata* : 2327), is burned out by the dragon's fire, Beowulf, in self-reproachful mood, worries about "having bitterly offended the eternal God" (2324-32).

I have argued elsewhere that Beowulf's pang of conscience might come from "his involvement in some serious evil-doing in his younger days, which would have transgressed the 'old law' (*ealde riht* : 2330). I have supposed there that Beowulf as an outsider among the Geatish royal family might be involved in the Hæðcyn's apparently accidental killing of Herebeald, in the light of a comparative study of the Norse myth of Baldr and the Lydian legend of Atys (Mizuno 1989). Loki as the outsider among the gods, whose character appears similar to Beowulf's, instigates Höðr to celebrate Baldr's invulnerability by shooting a mistletoe at him, and eventually put Baldr to death. In this myth, the mistletoe Loki fetched from near Valhöll "the palace of the slain warriors" appears to be harmless, but actually becomes a fatal weapon (*Gylf* 49). Similarly, Atys, the ideal prince and the promising youth, is killed by an apparent accident, when Adrastus, the stranger from Phrygia, with the previous conviction of killing his brother, shoots a javelin at a furious boar and misses the mark (*History of Herodotus*, I. 34-46). In short, Beowulf's involvement in the killing of Herebeald, the eldest son of king Hrethel and the most promising prince, as I have explained (1989, 24-25), signifies a transgression against the sanctity of the first function of sovereignty, in terms of Georges Dumézil. I insisted also that Beowulf's single withdrawal from the Frisian battlefield, where his lord Hygelac was slain, could be a breach of warrior ethics or the Dumézilian "second sin" (Mizuno 1989, 3-4). And recently I have offered my view that Beowulf's third sin lies in his love relationship with Hygd, wife of Hygelac (1999c). My primary concern throughout these essays was thus to maintain that Dumézil's theory on 'the three sins of the Indo-European warrior', as exemplified in the heroic careers of Indra, Heracles, and Starkað (Dumézil, 65-107), could be applied to illuminate the basic character of Beowulf (Mizuno 1999, 397). In this respect, the single act of receiving the golden cup as a token of reconciliation may illustrate that Beowulf has become to affiliate himself with the 'sinful' exile who is said to have been "tormented by his own sin" (*syn-bysig* : 2226) and have "escaped from 'hostile blows' (*hete-swengeas* : 2224)".

Through her survey of the sixty-three examples of hagiographical dragon-fights, Christine Rauer observes that none of the dragons, even fire-spitting ones, spew out fire against the saint in the confrontation itself, differently from the episode of the Beowulf-dragon struggle (Rauer, 63). This contrastive difference seems, in a sense, quite natural and can be explained readily: as fire necessarily involves the basic image of hellfire, it becomes a devouring element directed at the pagan and 'sinful' hero Beowulf, but definitely not toward the Christian saint (Mizuno 2002b).

#### 10. Thor with the Divine Power to Oppose the Miðgarðr Serpent.

In the light of the above arguments, it is very significant that the dwelling place of Thor is called *brúð-heimr* "the Domain of Power" or *brúð-vangr* "the Power-Field". ON *vangr* is cognate with OE *wang*. *brúð-heimr* can be interpreted as the source place of "divine power" (*ás-megin*) for Thor who is said to protect the world of the Æsir gods. His residence *Bilskírnir* with the literal meaning of "the brilliance of eyes" is said to be "the greatest construction that has ever been built" and have 540 rooms in it. Strange as the number 540 may sound, we might see it as the multiplication of  $3 \times 3 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5$  or  $12 \times 9 \times 5$ . In brief, the number of rooms is based on the sacred and complete numbers 3, 9, and 12, which might connote the magical power of the impregnable fortification of Thor, protector of the human and divine worlds.

As to the *grund-wang* "underground-plain" the dragon occupied, the first element of the compound is cognate with ON *grunnr*. Remarkably the Norse myth tells us that Thor hauled up the Miðgarðr-serpent, with a fishing line, from the *grunnr* "deep bottom" of the sea (Gylf 48). In the chapter in question, the word *grunnr* is used three times, as is shown below:

One time Thor changed himself into a young boy and paid a visit to the giant Hymir. Next morning when Hymir prepared to go out fishing to the sea, Thor asked Hymir to let him go rowing out in company. At first Hymir flatly refused, but at last yielded to his proposal. Taking out the biggest ox named Himinhrjótr fed by Hymir, Thor cut off the head to put to use as his own bait.

The both rowed the boat competitively with such great force that they got so far out, against Hymir's will, on the dangerous sea where the Miðgarðr-serpent lay, which Hymir worried about. Taking out a sturdy fishing line, and fitting a strong hook, Thor fastened the ox-head onto it and threw it away into the sea. Then the hook reached far down to the *grunnr* "deep bottom".

Soon afterwards the Miðgarðr-serpent bit the ox-head with its huge mouth, but the hook stuck deep into its mouth. He was rushing about so wildly that Thor got furious and exerted his *ás-megin* "divine power" fully and held out with such great force that his raced legs broke through the boat and stretched deep down into the

*grunnr*. Thor at last hauled the serpent up to the gunwale.

No one who had not seen it for himself could imagine how horrible the scene was: Thor and the serpent stared each other for a moment. Just when Thor raised his hammer in the air, Hymir, thrown into a panic, cut the fishing line with his knife, so the serpent sank down into the sea. But Thor cast his hammer down after the fleeing monster. Some people say that his hammer struck its head off near the *grunnr*. In my (the narrator Hár's) belief, however, truly speaking for you, the Miðgarðr-serpent remains still alive and lies in the surrounding ocean. And Thor swung his fist to hit Hymir so hard on the ear that the soles of his feet could be seen, when he had been hurled against the board. Then Thor waded through the waters back to the land. (The synopsis from Gylf 48).

The name of the ox *Himinhnjótr*, meaning "the one rushing over the heaven," sounds ironical, in view of the account that only its head fell to the "bottom" of the deep sea. We know of a mythological account in which Thor wades across the rivers, while the other twelve gods ride on their horses, to gather every morning at the court of judgment near the spring of *Urðr* "Fate" (Grm 29). Recently I have discussed the decisive differences between Thor and the other gods, dealing with this myth (1999b). It is of vital importance that the above story ends in Thor's wading through the waters. It can be supposed that Thor was worshipped as the god of thunder who presided over rains and the regions of waters, such as the sea and rivers. In this respect, the Miðgarðr-serpent as an enemy who is forced to lie in the middle of the waters might be said to be the alter ego of Thor. Such an affinity between the heroic god and his sworn enemy can also be recognized between the storm god Susa-no-wo and the serpent named Yamata-no-orochi in the Japanese myth (Mizuno 1987c, 148-53; 2001b, 106).

Undoubtedly, ON *grunnr*, OE / OS / OFr. *grund*, and OHG *grunt* are cognate, and these Germanic words mean both "bottom of the sea" and "bottom (or abyss) under the earth", except for the ON word. Noticeably, they refer not only to the "vertically deep bottom", but also to the "horizontally wide plain" on the earth, as in the above citations from *Beowulf*. When the latter meaning became dominant, the former being eliminated, ON *grunn* "shallow; shoal" probably became related to the above series of words. From this viewpoint, the story of Thor moving through the sea by walking on the *grunnr* "bottom" is a variant of the myth in which he repeatedly walks on the *grunn* "shallow" of rivers (2001b, 106).

According to the outlook of the world in Norse myth, as cited in passage (1), "the earth is circular on the outer side, and the deep sea lies enclosing the periphery". In short, the whole world is here comprehended as a round island encircled by the sea. The Miðgarðr-serpent is one of the three demonic beings, along with Fenrir-wolf and Hel, all born of the union between Loki and the giantess Angrboða ("the one bearing miseries or

troubles"). The gods once received prophecies saying that these demons might cause great disaster and misfortune to the world. In fear of the realization of these prophecies, Othin cast the Miðgarðr-serpent out into "the deep sea which encircles all lands", but "the serpent grew so enormous that he lies in the middle of the ocean encircling all lands, biting his own tail" (Gylf 34).

"The middle of the ocean", in which the gigantic serpent is forced to lie, may indicate the middle domain between Miðgarðr, the human world, and Útgarðr, the dwelling place of giants. In other words, the serpent forms a sort of boundary between the inner and the outer world, and is absolutely set apart from the inner and middle world, in spite of assuming the agnomen Miðgarðr "middle-earth". The odd image of the serpent biting its own tail suggests a circular fortification of the outer world. In this respect, the Miðgarðr serpent offers a striking contrast to the stronghold with the same name Miðgarðr which was reportedly fabricated from the "eyelashes of the giant Ymir" (Mizuno 2001b, 108). In brief, when the serpent was expelled into "the middle of the ocean" or to the boundary of this world, it means, to my mind, that the middle-world entitled Midgardr itself was split into an inside and outside.

*Jörmun-gandr* "a matchlessly gigantic rod", *Mold-pinurr* "the earth-loop" or *Mold-pinull* "the earth-rope" are other names for the Miðgarðr-serpent. It seems that the globally enormous serpent, who was placed under the magical restraint of being made to bite his own tail in the *grunnr* "deep bottom," might be regarded as the ruined figure of some god who originally ruled over life, death and fertility (2001b, 116). The extraordinary vitality of the world-serpent is revealed in the final comment: "He remains still alive and lies in the surrounding ocean", even after suffering the decisive blow from Thor's hammer. While the world-tree Yggdrasill forms a vertical axis in the middle of the world, the serpent occupies the farthest boundary on the horizon, encompassing the whole earth. Very remarkably, Thor assumes the figure of "a young boy", before setting out on a journey to visit Hymir. For Thor, son of *Jörð* "Earth", the Miðgarðr-serpent is the "other self" (alter ego) whom he had to suppress at any cost in his younger days (2001b, 106).

Thor was adored as the guardian of the human and the divine world, that is, the inner world. By contrast, the gigantic serpent is the guardian of the outer world. This scheme basically corresponds to the relationship between Beowulf as the *weard* "guardian" of his people and the dragon as the *weard* of the *grund-wong*. In both stories, the contrastive relationship between the conquering hero and the conquered monster can be compared to the two sides of a coin.

## 11. The Hero of Matchless Strength

Thor possessed three kinds of invaluable weapons: the hammer Mjölnir, girdles of power, and a pair of iron-gloves. Among these, when Thor wore the *megin-gjarðar*

“girdles of power”, his *ás-megin* “divine power” reportedly doubled (Gylf 21). In other words, the source of the “divine power” of Thor who was praised as “strongest of all the gods and men” lies latently in the “girdles of power”. Obviously he can be defined as a god of extraordinary “might” (*megin*). Similarly Beowulf, when young, is described as “the strongest in ‘power’ (*mægen*) of mankind in those days” (196-97) or “possessing ‘powers’ (*mægen-craft*) of thirty men in his physical strength” (379-80). Clearly, as ON *megin* and OE *mægen* are cognate, these matchlessly mighty heroes in their respective worlds perform the feat of killing the serpent-dragon.

When he grew old, however, Beowulf seemed naturally to need the help of a young retainer in accomplishing the feat, as is revealed in the utterance of Wiglaf: “Although our lord (Beowulf) intended to perform this exploit by himself, ... (an ellipsis)... Now the day has come, when our king (Beowulf) requires the ‘power’ (*mægen*) of good warriors” (2642-48). The embodiment of youthful *mægen* is no one except Wiglaf himself.

In the confrontation with Grendel, Beowulf is still said, partly with Christian coloring, to have “firmly believed in his own high-spirited *mægen* and the favor of ‘God’ (*Metod*)” (669-70). The poet sings also in praise of God: “The Lord bestowed comfort and support upon the soldiers of the Geats, so that they might utterly overcome their enemy (Grendel) through the ‘strength’ (*cræft*) of a single man” (696-700). “The sigle man” in this narrative openly indicates Beowulf. Although God in the both passages refers to the one God of the Old Testament, the word *metod* is cognate with ON *mjötunðr* “fate”, with the original meaning of “the one who predisposes or makes a judgment”. Thus *Metodes hyldo*, with the Christian meaning of “the favor of God”, in which Beowulf earnestly believed before encountering Grendel, could be altered from the primary meaning of “the felicitous dispensation of Fate”. To give another example to illustrate the ambiguity of *metod*, this word is employed in a similar way to denote both the “fate (*wyrd*) who keeps every man under control” and “God who rules over all mankind” (2526f. ; 1057f.).

Likewise, the *Beowulf* poet expresses the Christian idea that the *mægen* the hero demonstrates in battle is an “ample gift granted by God” (1270-71 ; 1716-17). On the other hand, a general truth is offered: *mægen* “physical strength” will decline as the man grows older. To the young hero Beowulf, for instance, who defeated Grendel and his dam, king Hrothgar utters the following ominous admonition, in his sermon: “The present reputation of your *mægen* is only for a while” (1761-62). Also with regards to Hrothgar himself, it is implied that his reputation as a blameless king will afterwards be tarnished, “around the time when the age which unerringly impairs many will take away the joy of his *mægen*” (1885-87).

Thus in the battle with the fire-dragon, the reference to Wiglaf as one who “demonstrated courage, ‘strength’ (*cræft*) and boldness at the crisis of his king (Beowulf)” implies that the old king Beowulf could not overcome the dragon by his *mægen* alone (2696-97). The *cræft* Wiglaf exerts here, however, probably has the nuance of “strategic ability”,

especially in view of the following description of Wiglaf, who, in supporting Beowulf, struck the lower part of the enemy's body with his sword, "having no thought of blowing the dragon's head" (2697-702). In contrast, Beowulf's favorite sword was broken asunder, "when he smote the dragon on the head with his 'utmost force' (*mægen-strengo*)" (2677-82).

As has been supposed, the Old Germanic people believed that latent supernatural powers existed in various things such as the sun, the moon, stars, noble heroes, corn or seeds, and so on. The *ás-megin* Thor often exerted, for instance, can be defined as the "extraordinary power of the awe-inspiring divinity". The *megin-rúnar* means "magical power enclosed in runic letters", and the *jarðar megin* is the "inherent fertility of the earth" (de Vries 1970, I, 275). Without doubt, such Old Germanic belief in "latent power or tremendous might" is represented by the OE *mægen* and ON *megin*, as argued above. Introducing Takeo Matsumura's essay on Japanese mythology, I have indicated that the Old Japanese people held a parallel belief in supernatural power (1982, 112). One of the most typical words illustrating this old belief is *chi* in *shio-tsu-chi* "spirit of currents", *ko-chi* "spirit of the east wind", *chi* "spiritual power of blood", and *chi-chi* "spiritual power of milk". *Fi*, *mi*, *tama*, and *mono* in the words of *musu-fi*, "universally generative spirit," *wata-tsu-mi* "spiritual deity of the sea", *mi-tama* "divine spirit", and *oh-mono-nushi* "god of divine or demonic possession" are other examples for it (Matsumura, 241). In my past essay, I attempted to investigate the Germanic cult of "spiritual and magical power" represented by the ON word *veig*, mainly dealing with the Norse myth about Gullveig as "goddess of death and rebirth" or "the prophetess involved in the cult of spiritual power".

To sum up, we can suppose a common religious background behind the myths of the 'magically powerful' woman Gullveig and the 'mightiest' god Thor who has another name *Vingþórr* "Thor, the god of holy battle", since the first element *ving* is related with *veig* "strength; (strong) drink; (magically powerful) woman". Also we have seen the close relationship between the act of fighting (Go *weihan*) and the idea of holiness (Go *weihs*; ON *vē*), in our survey of the related words. The ON verb *vega* "fight; smite" primarily means "to brandish weapons forcibly". I would like to suggest that the act of putting up a fierce fight with 'extraordinary strength' was connected with some magical behavior which, in their beliefs, would boost fertility or the 'inherent power' of the earth. Just as the "watery, sunny, and fertile field" (*wang*) was the battle-field for the 'mightiest' hero Beowulf, the *þrúð-vangr* "Field of Power" appropriately refer to the dwelling place of Thor, whose mother was *Jörð* "the Earth". The people might have believed that the "fertility of the earth" (*jarðar megin*) increased after the fierce battle, in which the strength and powers (*mægen* or *megin*) of the hero were boosted to the utmost to be directed against his enemy.

Thor, called *Ökubórr* "driving Thor," reportedly makes a journey in a chariot drawn

by his two goats. On the journey toward the land of the giant Útgardaloki, for instance, the traveling deity Loki accompanies Thor on the goat-drawn chariot. When setting off for a duel with the giant Hrungnir, Thor goes along with the swift runner Thjalfi who serves as a scout. On the other hand, Thor is said to wade across the rivers to attend the divine court near the spring of *Urðr* "Fate" every morning. Thus Thor habitually walks or drives the goat-drawn chariot, but never rides a horse. At any rate, on account of his various expeditions, Thor is often absent from the divine world. The myths tell us that, whenever the gods who suffered a crisis and called for him, Thor hurried back soon.

A general survey of the myths about Thor reveals that he can be defined as a stranger-deity in the Norse divine world. Thus we can establish a basic scheme in which the hero who accomplishes the feat of killing the serpent-dragon assumes the character of a stranger, whether he is intrinsically terrible or fortunate.

## 12. The Finale of the Holy Combat against the Serpentine Dragon

According to the prophetic narrative of the Ragnarök, the *Miðgarðr*-serpent was to be released from the 'magically encircled bondage' (Mizuno 2001b, 95) of having to bite his own tail and was in its fury to make a raid, coming over the waves. After a fierce struggle, Thor as the guardian of the human and the divine worlds finally slays the serpent, but meets his death on account of the poison spat out by the serpent. Seen from the cosmological perspective, at the moment when the respective guardians of the inner world and the outer world kill each other, the "middle-earth" should necessarily vanish, with the old world being destroyed into chaos. As I have suggested, such must be the kernel of the narrative on the Ragnarök or "the doom of the gods" (2001b, 116).

Similarly Beowulf, who has killed the "earth-dragon" dies of the poison spat out by the dragon. Then, before the Geatish people, the so-called mysterious messenger utters a prophecy declaring that, on hearing of his death, the Swedish people (the Sweons), filled with hatred, would launch an assault on the Geats (2999-3003). Moreover, during the cremation for Beowulf, an anonymous lady, mourning over his death, sings a lamentation out of fear at her premonitions of disasters, such as "the enemy's raid, a large number of slaughters, a dreadful host of army, and the coming days of humiliation and captivity" (3148-55). Such a woeful song, which may intimate the downfall of the Geatish kingdom soon after the death of Beowulf as a conqueror over the dragon, assuredly corresponds to the prophetic words of the Ragnarök.

Thor as the god of "divine power" (*ás-megin*) and Beowulf as the hero of "strength" (*mægen*) died desperately struggling with the serpent-dragon as an embodiment of the earth, in some sacred field named *Vigrðr* or the *wang*. Their holy battle of conquering the demonic beings might have resulted in a purification of the soil and a invocation of the "fertility of the earth" probably by bleeding the victims. It was because of such a magical duty, to my mind, that the battle-god and the hero assumed the character of a

stranger.

At the close of the Ragnarök, the narrative tells how the earth will emerge anew from the sea, some time after the destruction of the old world. Then the plain will become "green and fair", and "crops will grow unsown". Thus the story reveals the old belief that a number of deaths bring forth tremendous fertility of the land. Around that time, Móði and Magni, sons of Thor, are said to return carrying their father's hammer Mjöllnir (Gylf 53). Undoubtedly, in view of their names of *Móði* "the furious one" and *Magni* "the strong one", they share the extraordinary strength of Thor. Similarly we may conclude that Wiglaf or "the last hero who could survive many struggles", apparently being entrusted with the kingdom after Beowulf's death, retains some vestige of the "heroic strength" even in the declining period of the Heroic Age. The heroic battle represented by the words *vfg*, *vega*, and *(ge-)wegan* is nothing but an eruption of "latent powers" (*megin*; *mægen*). It would often require the sacrificial death of the hero himself. When the potency of a stranger-king who had to wage the magically holy battle was declining, a young hero with new vigor must necessarily make an appearance, just like Wiglaf "the last victor of combats". However, after the dragon fight, Wiglaf plunders "an armful of golden cups and dishes, as much as he wanted", from the dragon's hoard, including the "noble standard" (2774-77). This account reveals that the single victor took on the character of the dragon as a terrible stranger and an exclusive hoarder anew.

\* The main part of this paper, the English version of Mizuno 2001d, was read at the International Conference of Comparative Mythology, with the united theme of the "Oni (Japanese devils) and Demons", which were held at Nagoya University on 28-30 Sept., in 2001. The often-cited work Gylfaginning in the *Prose Edda* is abbreviated here as Gylf.

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