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**Waste Studies - A New Paradigm for Literary Analysis
Something is Rotten in the Denmark of *Beowulf* and *Hamlet***

Susan Signe Morrison
Texas State University – San Marcos

Abstract

The field of Waste Studies emerges out of a conversation increasingly focused on filth, rubbish, garbage, litter — even excrement — all of which are central to how we see and treat the world and those who inhabit it. In a world in which material prosperity and life itself are inevitably linked to pollution and the production of waste, how can we humans - ourselves sources of waste both bodily and in terms of all that we discard - understand and cope with it? From the garbage-filled moats of the Middle Ages to the overflowing landfills of today, waste has been and continues to be an enduring issue.

In the Kuhnian model of scientific revolutions, paradigm shifts occur when there is an accumulation of too much superfluous matter (data/information) that cannot be explained or subsumed into or under the existing paradigm. This superfluous material is waste, until a new paradigm emerges into which the excess can be subsumed, processed, and thereby understood. Waste is everywhere; we need to understand how we theorize, manage, and are implicated in waste. The paradigm shift is now.

Those who handle filth, literally or figuratively, become tainted by it morally and socially. If the scholarly action of analyzing references to filth and excrement is a suspect act, how can we talk about it? An inherently cross-disciplinary approach, Waste Studies borrow from those writing on rubbish, garbage, and excrement to offer ethical and moral frameworks for us to pay attention to, understand, and act on bodily, cultural, and societal waste — material aspects of our world. There is a veritable canon of anthropological, archaeological, sociological, and theoretical works that address waste as a category. Waste Studies force us to confront our own ethics, ethical position, and subjectivity.

This paper will 1) explain the approach of Waste Studies; 2) apply it to *Beowulf* and *Hamlet*, and 3) conclude by contextualizing waste within ethical and moral criticism.

Origins are key for Waste Studies since, in historicizing, we find it necessary to create waste, disposing of inconvenient moments from the past. Within each literary work, figures are discarded by the political victors: Grendel and his mother are aggressively defeated by the mercenary Beowulf; Claudius sends his nephew and rival Hamlet to be executed. Both texts emerge from periods concerned with the establishment of a new religious order: Christianity after paganism and Protestantism after Catholicism. Traces from earlier periods exist, littering society and culture.

Waste stalks *Beowulf* — in the many deaths of living beings and in the decay and destruction of culture and civilization. Cultural artefacts become trash, insignificant in the wake of violence. Waste lards Shakespeare's play as well; the leftovers are even literal - funeral meats are to be used for a wedding celebration. The famous "digressions" in *Beowulf* - the detritus, rags and tatters, recycled moments from the past - remind the poet's listeners of tragic events in the past, events that haunt the present. Ophelia spreads the detritus of popular discourse, the rags and litter of culture. Though in both works female sexuality becomes the privileged space sanctioned for the most virulent physical and verbal garbaging, male bodies are likewise subject to filth. The waste of the other is irreconcilable, but forces us to confront our own ethics, ethical position, and subjectivity. *Beowulf* enjoins us to remain thoroughly mindful of our own inevitable decay. The graveyard scene in *Hamlet* illustrates a fundamental aspect of death, that all our bodies become garbage. The "civilizing process" is just that — a process — never a finished state. Part of our civilizing process is to recognize the value of that which we deem uncivilized and to see ourselves in that threatening, filthy alterity.

A new theoretical approach — Waste Studies — considers the body and culture by borrowing from those writing on rubbish, garbage, and excrement. Waste Studies offer ethical and moral frameworks for us to pay attention to, understand, and act on bodily, cultural, and societal waste — material aspects of our world. Specific moments of waste in two foundational texts in English literature — *Beowulf* and *Hamlet* — remind us that the origins of the Anglophone literary canon are sedimented in waste.

Why Waste Studies? The Paradigm Is Now

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The field of Waste Studies emerges out of a conversation increasingly focused on filth, rubbish, garbage, litter — even excrement — all of which are central to how we see and treat the world and those who inhabit it. There is a veritable canon of anthropological, archaeological, sociological, and theoretical works that address waste as a category, such as Zygmunt Bauman's *Wasted Lives*, Michael Thompson's *Rubbish Theory*, Allan Stoekl's *Bataille's Peak: Energy, Religion, and Postsustainability*, Gay Hawkins' *The Ethics of Waste*, and John Scanlan's *On Garbage*, all of which argue how, in varying ways, we have disciplined ourselves with regard to dirt. The split between the mind and body articulated by the Cartesian slogan "Cogito, ergo sum" reinforces a hierarchy that privileges reason over matter. Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo*, supported by Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* and William Ian Miller in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, has influentially categorized dirt in an intimate relationship to order and boundaries.

Waste deserves, indeed demands attention. Shapeless and seemingly endless in production, trash continually creeps into the borders of our lives (Allen 4; Morrison 155). In the Kuhnian model of scientific revolutions, paradigm shifts occur when there is an accumulation of too much superfluous matter (data/information) that cannot be explained or subsumed into or under the existing paradigm (Kuhn 52-65). This superfluous material is waste, until a new paradigm emerges into which the excess can be subsumed, processed, and thereby understood. Waste is everywhere; we need to understand how we theorize, manage, and are implicated in waste. The paradigm shift is now.

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

(*Hamlet* I, iv, 90; my emphasis).

The history of Western culture has been characterized as the history of "disposal, of garbaging" (Scanlan 8-9). History constructs the past "as a ruin" (Frantzen 47). As Scanlan writes, the "imaginary graveyard of progress ...buries the past as if it was simply useless rubbish" (129). Familiar to both the *Beowulf* poet and Shakespeare, the land constituting present-day Denmark is the site of origin for their Germanic ancestors — the Jutes and Angles — yet distant enough to allow enough freedom to impose meanings of origins and identity. Yet we should be wary of the "desire for origins," as Allen J. Frantzen has written, to justify our "pure" beginnings (22-5, 108-11, 123-4). Waste Studies question the categories of origins. In the search for our origins, we necessarily create waste. Walter Benjamin criticizes the fetish of traditional historiography for a coherent unified narrative, one that necessitates the denial of the "'refuse' and 'detritus' of history" (Butterfield 6).ⁱ Waste Studies highlight that which has been rejected. The originary time and space of the Angles and Jutes, distant from the poet's location, can be manipulated and

exploited to signify anything, a fiction of national identity. Both works are rooted in a Denmark that works as a cipher and displacement for England itself.

While the manuscript of *Beowulf* is dated from about the year 1000, the orally formulated poem itself certainly emerges in the centuries when Viking incursions and settlements were endemic. *Hamlet* was written after the tumultuous sixteenth century when internal foes threatened national security. The works echo one another in uncanny ways. *Beowulf*, famously structured according to the battles with the three monsters (Grendel and Grendel's mother in the land of the Scyldings and the dragon in Beowulf's native land of the Geats), at its core concerns the brutality that accompanies political turmoil. Violence likewise facilitates the disruption of the reign of old Hamlet: the brother Claudius has poisoned the rightful king before the play even opens. Within each work, figures are discarded by the political victors: Grendel and his mother are aggressively defeated by Beowulf; Claudius sends his nephew and rival Hamlet to be executed. When this plan fails, he schemes, a plot that concludes with virtually universal carnage. The ultimate conquerors in each work come from the north: the Swedes in *Beowulf*, the Norwegians in *Hamlet*. Heinrich Böll extolled the first writer of the Western tradition as having been the "progenitor" not only of the European epic, but of rubble literature itself: Homer, who "tells of the Trojan War, of the destruction of Troy, and of Ulysses' homecoming – a literature of war, rubble, and homecoming. We have no reason to be ashamed of these labels" (273). As the site of origins grounding our Anglophone literary tradition, Denmark, the locus of the action, is, as it were, a space of waste and destruction, given presence in the "rubble literature" of *Beowulf* and *Hamlet*.

Both texts emerge from periods concerned with the establishment of a new religious order, Christianity after paganism and Protestantism after Catholicism. The vexed question of just how Christian *Beowulf* is continues to plague readers of the poem. The pagan elements are amply evident in references to sacrifice made at heathen temples in an attempt to stave off Grendel's violent attacks and in the thick tapestry of Germanic mythology decorating the poem. Hrothgar's eloquent speech before Beowulf's ultimate departure invoking God suggests a diachronic positive progression — *from* paganism *to* monotheism — one the original text recipients were meant to approve of. The culture's origin, the poem seems to suggest, is grounded in paganism, an impotent and corrupt system, one that is to be rejected, so that it can be triumphant in monotheism (see Niles, 153). Yet the only direct Biblical allusions are those lines linking Grendel and his mother to Cain's kin and to a monotheistic God.

Hamlet was written in the wake of the enormous religious convulsions of the sixteenth century. The Reformation left “debris” and “wreckage” from English Catholicism in its wake (Chapman 131 n. 8). Manuscripts were reduced to the level of “waste paper – or waste parchment” (Aston 245), being used for everything from scarecrows, fire-lighters, mending material, wrapping paper, and even toilet paper (Frantzen 47). Yet the “symbolic residue” of medieval Catholicism, its vestiges impossible to utterly trash, was still present in Protestant England (Marotti 227).ⁱⁱ This debris and wreckage of the Reformation functions on both a literal level – the ruined abbeys, burnt manuscripts, disfigured and destroyed artefacts – and a figurative level – what Stephen Greenblatt’s discussion of Purgatory traces in *Hamlet*, and Alison Chapman’s discussion of Catholic debris observes concerning Ophelia’s songs. When historical breaks take place, such as the revolutions in Eastern Europe of 1989 and 1990, the past becomes purged along with heads of state, both literally and figuratively. The idea of progress demands, as Scanlan argues, that “the past must also be seen as garbage too.” The massive stone statues commemorating Marx and Engels or Saddam Hussein, for example, were toppled and trashed in an eagerness to erase recent history: “[E]very act of differentiation – every ‘clean break’ with the past, creates garbage; results in leftovers.” The leftovers in *Hamlet* are literal: “The funeral bak’d meats/ Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables” (I.ii.176-181). Dispossessed, Hamlet seeks to understand the rewriting of history. The trashing of the past is an integral strategy of progress; yet the “debris of a life [somehow] continues as the ghost of the present” (Scanlan 163, 87, 92). The debris from the past literally [re]appears as a ghost in the present. The Ghost must be “purg’d” (I.v.13),ⁱⁱⁱ but so must Claudius and his sins – all foul corruption must be sluiced from individual bodies, souls, and the body politic. The new regime erases Hamlet *père* most effectively by marrying the new king to the queen of the former leader. This link both legitimates a new illegitimate leader and acts as a trace of the past. Hamlet himself is detritus from the past – the son of the dead king – who threatens the present order and must be disposed of. Claudius outsources this dumping of Hamlet to the English king via his designated sanitation workers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They, in turn, evoke the spectre of Wittenberg, and hence act as traces of the origins of the Reformation.

Waste stalks *Beowulf* – in the many deaths of living beings and in the decay and destruction of culture and civilization. Just as man is doomed to die, the permanence of his art is transitory as well. Objects are material, tangible things doomed to decay. Once deteriorated and without utilitarian value, cultural artefacts become trash, insignificant in the wake of violence. Goods hoarded don’t help the dying man; they are “laf”, a surviving remnant (1688); like the human body itself, they are “læne,” transitory or on loan

(1754). Once fetishized objects will eventually tarnish and decay (“Sceal se hearda helm hyrstedgolde/ fætum befeallen,” 2255-6). As the Last Survivor tells us, even the iron coat of mail decays like its warrior owner (“ge swylce seo herepad sio æt hilde gebad/ ofer borda gebræc bite irena/ broснаð æfter beorne“ 2258-60a). Treasures are consumed by rust (3049). Like a toxic waste dump, the concealed treasure, hoarded by the dragon, comes back to haunt Beowulf’s people, poisoning their existence. Even the dragon’s gold that precipitated this disaster is fated to be burned as waste (3010-15). The burial of treasure underscores how it is useless (“unnyt,” 3168).

Waste lards Shakespeare’s play as well. There are countless examples of Mary Douglas’s “matter out of place” in *Hamlet*. Not stable in Purgatory, Hamlet’s father appears on the battlements. Funeral meats are to be used for a wedding celebration. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are famously out of place—killed for Hamlet. Claudius himself is out of place—he is the wrong man as king, in an illegitimate bed. Gertrude, likewise, lies between the incestuous sheets with the murderer of her husband. Polonius, not Claudius, is behind the arras. Claudius is praying, not fornicating, so Hamlet cannot kill in hopes of sending his soul to hell. Hamlet and Laertes are *in* Ophelia’s grave, not above it. The poisoned wine is drunk by the wrong person; meant for Hamlet, Gertrude consumes it. The wine itself is not that of the Eucharist, suggesting eternal life; it is the wine of death with no hope. The final scene is one of consummate wastage, the many bodies on the stage, dead and bloodied. The very land fought over in Poland is “a little patch of ground/ That hath in it no profit but the name...I would not farm it...” (IV.iv.18-20). Hamlet comments, “Two thousand souls and twenty thousand ducats/ Will not debate the question of this straw!/ This is the th’impostume of much wealth and peace,/ That inward breaks...” (IV.iv.25-28). The “impostume” is an abscess filled with corrupted matter or pus; so, too, is the very venture of colonization. The land in Poland, acknowledged to be useless waste, is scrapped over until soldiers die in defence of it. All these moments signal the rot, filth, and detritus that constitute Denmark, its politics, and its unfortunate inhabitants. Denmark itself is a passageway, the intestine, in the play’s faulty geography, between Norway and Poland.

Traces — waste — from earlier periods exist and transform, littering society and culture. There never is a clean break to signify “after.” The poets express the precarious new state by evoking waste and destruction. The so-called “digressions” of *Beowulf* remind the poet’s listeners of tragic events in the past, events that haunt the present. In these digressions we learn that King Hreðel of the Geats took in his seven-year-old grandson, Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, for whose feud with the Wylfings Hroðgar paid compensation. The tragic death of Herebeald at the hand of his brother, Hæðcyn, brings

about the father's Hreðel's heartbreak and death. The fratricide poses an impossible dilemma: as father of the slain man, Hreðel is obliged to exact revenge; as father of the killer, he must uphold kinship solidarity. Beowulf reminisces about the attack by the Swedes (2426-2509), which the messenger later recapitulates and recycles, predicting that this time the Swedes will destroy the Geatish kingdom. Another kingdom riddled with destruction and doom is that of Heremod, the stingy and murderous king of the Danes, who is eventually put to death by the Jutes (901-915, 1709b-23a). In the Lay of the Last Survivor (2247-66) the speaker recalls the former glory of his now deceased people, expressing the sense of impending doom for once glorious kingdoms poignantly and succinctly (2262b-66). Continually reminded of how any success in the present (the poem's present or our present) will inevitably be followed by decay, our "social sympathy" is at play when we hear of other doomed societies. These digressions function as the "entrails, bits, [and] scraps" that constitute "garbage" (Scanlan 14). The "sampling" by the hall minstrel or *scop* suggests that stories emerge through the act of recycling. Digressions are detritus, rags and tatters, recycled moments from the past composted to be consumed by two audiences: the one present in the text and us. They exist simultaneously in the past — to the actors of the main "frame" — *and* in the present, a present that becomes our present too.^{iv}

This is also evident in Ophelia's snatches of song that are like recycled garbage. She spreads the detritus of popular discourse, the rags and litter of culture, to make a fecund compost of meaning. The mad Ophelia sings bits and pieces of various ballads; these include an adaptation of the *Walsingham Ballad* (IV.v.23-26, 29-32, 36, 38-40), a song about a dead pilgrim and the living bereaved lover. In invoking Walsingham, the shrine dedicated to the Virgin Mary that was destroyed in 1538, Shakespeare reminds us of the shrine's wasted past. Memory is trash from the past. Ophelia, wasted in body and mind, exists as a trace of the Walsingham Virgin: profaned, laid waste to, destroyed. Just as reformers trashed Our Lady of Walsingham by sexualizing her as "Our Lady of 'Falsingham'", so to by talking trash, Ophelia becomes it herself; speaking detritus, she becomes detritus.

Shakespeare doubles words, using two opposite meanings simultaneously. This artificial conjunction creates meaning out of place, an analogue for matter out of place like Douglas's dirt. Claudius's doubling language reflects how he is two-faced: "Therefore our sometime sister, now our queen...With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage" (I.ii.7, 12) and later "But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son —" (I.ii.64). The multiplication of roles and shifting of family position suggests familial and political chaos. Doubled words multiply with Hamlet's disdainful reference to his "uncle-father and aunt-mother" (II.ii.376). The doubling, an unnatural border

crossing of categories, besmirches the "incestuous sheets" (I.ii.157) of the court. Clear distinctions are muddled; the viscous yoking troubles the convulsed court. The "both/and" of doubled words reminds us that the past is never wholly eliminated; history is not teleological and progressive, but simultaneous, hybrid, sedimented, multiple, and heterogenous (Cohen 2-3).

Waste Studies complicate long-held binary oppositions. The body is not a bounded, enclosed (see Horner) object out of which disgusting fluids and solids are ejected. The matter within us touches an exterior; our bodies, then, embrace a world beyond the envelope of our skin. In *Beowulf* the monstrous body is made concrete in the female figure of Grendel's mother, who is archetypically aligned with nature. In the Middle Ages, women's bodies came to represent what was frail and weak about bodies in general (Murray 1-26) and, in some virulently misogynistic comments, were even associated with excrement itself. The giant's sword Beowulf propitiously finds by chance in the mere lair of the monsters succeeds in killing Grendel's mother. Beowulf subsequently uses it to behead the dead Grendel, whereupon the sword's blade melts (1615b-1617b) due to the blood of the "ellorgæst" or alien spirit (1621), a term used to describe both Grendel and his mother (807, 1349, 1617). When Beowulf later regales Hygelac with his adventures, Beowulf only mentions beheading Grendel's mother, not Grendel, in the mere surging with blood or gore (2138-2140). Clearly, he wishes to emphasize *her* dismemberment, not her son's. The blood that succeeds in melting the hilt could be Grendel's mother's blood, not Grendel's own as is usually assumed, given the association with filth that women's blood long had. Consider Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies*. In his discussion of *menstrua*, he writes, "From contact with this blood, fruits fail to germinate... plants die, trees lose their fruit, metal is corroded with rust, and bronze-objects go black. Any dogs which consume it contract rabies" (Blamires 44; Isidore, XI. i. 140-141). The *Penitential of Theodore* (of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury, late seventh century) explicitly forbids menstruating women from entering a church or taking the Eucharist on pain of fasting for three weeks (Bx 8558 fol. 152r ; B77.04.06). Even the compassionate Pope Gregory in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* acknowledges a woman's menstrual flow to be "an illness" (Sherley-Price, 84). It too much to conjecture that the monks transcribing *Beowulf* would have known of the negative and legendary corrosive powers of women's blood? Grendel's mother "matters" (Oswald 64) in this poem; indeed, her matter "matters".

Filth pervades *Hamlet*, literally and metaphorically. The unredeemed body controls *Hamlet*, as we hear in Hamlet's lament: "O that this too too sullied flesh would melt..." (I.ii.129). Even the poison poured into Hamlet's father's ear did "curd" (I.v.69) his blood and cause his "smooth body" to break

out "[m]ost lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust " (I.v.72-73). When Hamlet speaks to the Ghost, invisible to Gertrude, she comments on his "bedded hair, like life in excrements,/ Start up and stand an end" (III.iv.121-2). "Excrements" meant not only feces, but nails and hair; still, the multiple connotations of the word reinforce the rubbish, filth, and excess suggested by the play. The body is reduced to its elemental basics, centered in its intestines and filth. Hamlet assures Claudius that the dead Polonius is at supper: "Not where he eats, but where a is eaten. A certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots. Your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service – two dishes, but to one table. That's the end..." One end suggested here is the anus. Hamlet continues: "A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king, and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm...Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (IV.iii.19-31). Nobility of birth is reduced to sewage. Even humans, "in apprehension how like a god", are ultimately a "quintessence of dust" (II.ii.306, 308).

Yet female sexuality becomes the privileged space sanctioned for the most virulent verbal garbaging — talking dirt about women. Rosencrantz communicates to Hamlet that Gertrude "desires to speak with you in her closet ere you go to bed" (III.ii.322-3). "Closet" was used for "sewer" in Scots in the 1530s and possibly could have been carried into London by James's court. These scatological echoes culminate in Hamlet's prediction that, if Gertrude believes Claudius's "unction" (III.iv.147), "It will but skin and film the ulcerous place,/ Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,/ Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven,/ Repent what's past, avoid what is to come;/ And do not spread the compost on the weeds/ To make them ranker" (III.iv.149-154). The bodily decay inherent in ulcers and stinking excremental compost all taint her sexuality. Filth befouls female sexuality.

Waste provides us with a reason for acknowledging affinity among all people, one we normally deny. Waste is the great leveller, linking us all. Excrement is a way to acknowledge the body and, with it, acknowledge how "[t]he restoration of the subjective life of one's own body serves to place the self in the world with other subjective bodies" (Holler 169). These openings provoke ethical and moral agency. As Lévinas argues, ... I become a responsible or ethical 'I' to the extent that I agree to depose or dethrone myself — to abdicate my position of centrality — in favour of the vulnerable other. (190, 192).

The display of Grendel's arm in the hall, like a hunting trophy, is the visible sign of culture's triumph over the monstrous (833b-6b). Only by destroying

Grendel's bodily integrity, can the humans reassure themselves of their own. The monster is partial and disturbing, making "us" whole and "normal". The hanging of Grendel's arm as a trophy serves to reinforce the fictive wholeness of the human body. Yet Grendel, constructed as a monstrous other, as waste, by the humans, is oddly similar to those who seek him out for destruction, as the horrific discovery of Æschere's head exposes. We are all simultaneously whole and fragmented; we all contain our inevitable potential to become trash. Anyone could become an exile; anyone could become "monstrous" and fragmented. It has been pointed out that the monsters emulate human behavior; Grendel's mother is only doing what the humans do—avenging a killed loved one with another killing. When imitative behavior is practiced by those perceived as outsiders (as other or waste) to the dominant culture – in this case, for example, monsters imitating humans – the emotional response of the dominant culture is not empathy but hatred. While, as Hrothgar explains, the people at Hrothgar's court had heard tell of a woman associated with Grendel (1345-1351), no one had expected her to attack; no one had empathized with her, imagining *her* grief, anger, and desire for revenge for her son. Grendel's mother, in choosing Æschere to behead, on the other hand, clearly could empathize with Hrothgar; she deliberately chose his most beloved companion, knowing the pain it would induce in him. Though Grendel's mother resembles a woman ("idese onlicnæs" 1351), the narrator nudges us to view her as other, if only in her environs. Like the water of the mere, her position is murky. This both/and, both like a woman yet not a woman, this hybridity, produces the "uncanny", and renders her powerful, vulnerable, eerie, and even – possibly – sympathetic.

In *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, Polish sociologist Zygmunt Baumann writes of how our planet has become too full to absorb both human waste and the wasted bodies of rejected peoples (5). Who are "wasted" humans? Those who are unemployed or redundant, for example; they are unnecessary; they have "been disposed of *because of being disposable*". "Redundancy" shares its semantic space with "rejects", "wastrels", "garbage", "refuse" – with *waste*" (10-12). The wasted, "untied to any place, shifty, unpredictable" (66), can turn up anywhere and threaten the pristine borders of our constructed inviolability. As Bauman sarcastically yet profoundly points out, "It is always the excess of *them* that worries *us*" (45). If the body politic functions metaphorically in *Hamlet*, who constitutes "them"? Hamlet himself, a malingerer who does and contributes nothing, not even revenge, is valued as nothing. Hamlet is, himself, the rot at the heart of Denmark, the rot we all contain.

Beowulf points up how, when cultural codes fail and war ensues, colonization occurs. These colonizing forces are as terrifying as the monstrous

forces men try to subdue. There are numerous moments in the poem alluding to the conquering of various tribes. Even the originary moment of Scyld's arrival suggests an unspoken and silenced conquest and oppression. In the opening (3-6), Scyld Scefing and his campaigns are mentioned and how those conquered must pay tribute ("gomban gyldan" 11a). We are told about how Beowulf lands on Finland; Ecgtheow goes to the South-Danes; Breca goes to the Brondings. Colonizers recur naturally, that is, inevitably, within the economy of the poem. The most successful adaptive culture is that of predatory colonizers, such as the Swedes, who will take over the Geats, as forecast at the conclusion of the poem. Yet the figures we empathize with are the victims of colonization and restrictive cultural codes, including Hildeburh in the Fight at Finnsburg passage and the father voicing his anguish in the Father's Lament, who are impossibly caught between death and revenge. In the final lines of *Beowulf*, the Geatish woman, with her hair bound up, utters a lament, full of the knowledge of her people's inevitable destruction. Her lament is only alluded to; her actual words are not related. The visionary wisdom of this wordless lament has been rendered literally invisible in that the lines are not even extant due to the deterioration — the decay — of the physical manuscript itself. This creates an aesthetic impression that echoes within the reader/listener: all humans — victims and victimizers — end up as waste. In the final lines of poem (3156-82), Beowulf's people construct a monument, into which they place rings, jewels and ornaments from the hoard. This serves as a valediction for the ephemeral nature of the poem itself. Even the manuscript containing *Beowulf* barely survived a fire; pages were scorched and are crumbling. The poem, oscillating between bleak and grim determination and religious injunctions, remains, in the end, our only solace. Through it, the reader is enjoined to remain thoroughly mindful of her own inevitable decay.

The graveyard scene in *Hamlet* illustrates a fundamental aspect of death, that it is the "'garbaging' of the body." Hamlet senses, as Scanlan articulates, that "[T]he things we destroy (things that did have a value) are also made void; and the point is that all things, all objects, begin from nothing (garbage) and eventually return to nothing (garbage again)" (Scanlan 9, 98). As he holds up Yorick's skull, Hamlet reflects upon how he had hung upon his lips: "Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft" (V.i.182-3). The disappearance of this flesh and decay of the body to bone signifies how we all return, ultimately, to dust. When Hamlet reflects on Yorick's skull, now tongueless and eyeless, and on the fate we all face, he points out how we end in an end: "To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why, may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till a find it stopping a bung-hole?...Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto

he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?" (V.i.196-205). This blasphemous parody of the Eucharistic Proclamation ("Christ has come. Christ has risen. Christ will come again") nihilistically reduces man to matter without form, flesh without soul. "Bung-hole," meaning a "the hole in a cask, which is closed with the bung [or cork]," comes to have the transferred meaning of "the anus" as early as 1571. Once Hamlet points out how we all end in an end (surely a pun Hamlet would not be averse to), in the anus that suggests our affinity, does he, fully embodied, act. Waste is a way to acknowledge the body; and, with it, comes an awareness of the interconnectedness of one's own body with those of others, enabling compassion for others.

Waste Studies allow us to value, recycle, understand, even confront waste – a sign of our mortality. Part of our civilizing process is to recognize the value of that which we deem uncivilized and to see ourselves in that threatening, filthy alterity. Grendel is viewed as waste, as garbage, and dispensable. Yet he, the monstrous other, is an indispensable part of the sustainable ecology of that culture. He, like his counterparts, the human colonizers who invade, kill, raid, and conquer, exists as part of a cycle of destruction and mastery within which human achievement is, in its turn, doomed to failure. Hamlet, similarly, is seen as the uncanny trace from the past that disturbs the economy of Claudius's body politic. Claudius's court can only exist if it rejects the past – the garbage and waste of the previous regime. Yet Claudius's plan to cleanse Denmark of the Hamlet regime maddens Hamlet and sickens the realm, rendering it weak and open to conquest. As in the attempt of the Danes to "fælsian" (432) or cleanse Heorot, Claudius ultimately succeeds only in destroying everyone, including himself.

Reading in terms of waste may help us to understand our lives differently. Rather than seeing waste as wholly immoral or unethical, we need to understand it as enfleshed in our own material bodies. Waste Studies do not deal with signs or signifieds; it deals with materiality and the outcomes of that materiality. Waste is the opposite of no real consequences; it *is* real. That is why we have to be responsible. There is an ethical dimension to creating waste; Waste Studies call our attention to ecological matters and can lead to moral agency and ethical action. The demonization, privatization, and societal repression of waste can limit us and harm our planet. As Bauman writes through Lévinas, we need to act for the distant and future Other; our morality needs to be the ethics of "self-limitation" (*Postmodern Ethics* 220). Let's make waste matter.

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ⁱ Butterfield cites Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project: Walter Benjamin*, Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, trans. (Cambridge, MA and London, 1999), "Translators' Forward," p. ix.

ⁱⁱ Marotti cites Elizabeth Mazzola [*The Pathology of the English Renaissance: Sacred Remains and Holy Ghosts* (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne, 1998), pp. 7, 3].

ⁱⁱⁱ All references to William Shakespeare, *The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare: Hamlet*. Harold Jenkins, ed. (London: Methuen & Co., 1982).

^{iv} These present digressions into the past function as quasi-Proustian stereopticon moments, in which meaning is created in the present only through its conjunction with the past.