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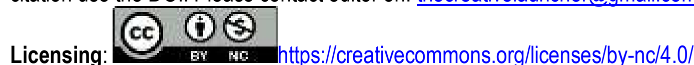
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Conference Article

Spatial Violence of the "Halls" in Old English and Old Norse Poetry

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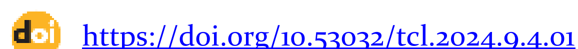
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Abstract

In the recent years, the scholarship of Urban Space has primarily focussed on the postmodernist discourse, but this essay, by connecting the Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse culture, takes up the subject of early mediaeval literature and the narrative of violence in urban spatial discourse. A leitmotif that keeps on figuring in Old English and Old Norse poetry is that of the 'hall' - a transcultural conjunctive space for transaction or exchange of both material goods such as fighting men, treasure and the like, and the non-material items such as martial honour, power, comradeship and the like. Though such a space easily seems to be a dispositif heterotopia, this essay explores how its (non-crisis) heterotopic motif, with the true manifestation of the 'hetero'- an encapsulation of the 'diversity of an emplacement of a cityscape', is ruptured by an unmasking of violence that is ironically disrupting this trans-culturalism yet uniting the heteroglossic discourses by dominating this space. The space of Gunnarr and Högni's hall and

Heorot are both equally stained with the blood of the unjustly slaughtered victims: the murder of Gunnarr and Högni by Atli in the former case, and the murder Hrothgar's men by Grendel's mother in the latter case. Murder and bloodlust, the polarised 'evil' or 'othered' character(s) not only unite the literary space of these two tales but also unite the cultural space of the Danes and the Anglo-Saxons, through the metaphor of the 'hall'. This is reinforced by the fact that the disruptive force of revenge in both cases takes place 'outside' the halls, 'the area of unity': in the former case, Guðrún does not burn Atli in the hall but kills him outside and buries him, and in the latter case, in the 'den' where Beowulf ventures to battle and kill the monster. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore how the othered discourse of violence actually assumes the central role and problematizes the narrative of dispositif heterotopia through the spatial metaphor of 'hall', a miniature cityscape, by acting as a both uniting and disrupting force.

Keywords: Violence, Heterotopia, Trans-Culturalism, Hall

For most Mediaeval scholars, the halls for the Anglo-Saxon and later for the Vikings are a focal point where the communal exchange takes place, a place whose symbolic presence in the lives of its residents is equivalent to its physical presence, a theme quite evident in Wanderer who is haunted by the fond memories of 'mead halls'. The halls symbolised a mutual reciprocity of treasures, belongings, duties and obligations, that loyally bound the retainers to their lords. It is also a physical space for intercultural diaspora and a transcultural discourse, thus, effectively, a world within a world almost creating a Foucauldian non-crisis heterotopia that is not disturbing from the outset. Yet it is disrupting in its formations of the Other, because its very existence postulates the external world as the 'outside' replete with hostile foreign bodies that somehow threaten the safety, security and order that the halls represent.

Stephen Pollington connects the concept of halls to a range of traditions focused on hospitality towards strangers, casual entertainment, and the cultivation of broader social networks. For him, halls served as centers of 'fosterage,' both among kin and between unrelated groups. In the higher social strata, fosterage within a network of peers was a strategic way to strengthen political alliances with potentially advantageous partners. A notable example is the future King Hákon of Norway, who was fostered by the English King Athelstan. As a social institution, the hall functioned to control or direct violence and encourage group unity.

When a young man joined the service of a warlord—who led a social group bound by voluntary mutual support rather than blood ties—the traditional bonds of kinship were often relaxed. Within this warband culture, bonds of trust and loyalty were crucial, both in a vertical sense between a leader and his followers and in a horizontal sense among fellow warriors. While loyalty to kin was always acknowledged, oaths to one's lord were considered to take precedence over family ties. This is vividly demonstrated in an entry from the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (s.a. 755), which recounts an incident where a lord and his warriors were besieged by an enemy. Members of the attacking force, who discovered that their kin were among the besieged, offered them a chance to abandon their comrades and join the attackers. This offer was rejected with disdain, as the Chronicle records: "Then they said that no kinsman was dearer to them than their lord and never would they follow his slayer." In these warrior bands, loyalty to one's leader was expected to outweigh loyalty to kin. Such groups often formed the basis of political

leadership, especially in the early Anglo-Saxon period, where leaders of these groups could gain and maintain power and manage violent forces. They marked their unique social status by celebrating in halls of their own. (Pollington).

While Pollington views halls as effective mechanisms for curbing physical violence and preventing feuds, David DiTucci offers a contrasting perspective, emphasizing that violence remained a central strategy of power throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Some kings not only failed to contain feuds and redirect conflict resolution to their courts but also participated in feuds that ultimately undermined their authority. In Northumbria, for instance, royal feuds impeded any single dynasty from establishing enduring rule, as they were persistently threatened by the specter of usurpation.

During the early English period, disputes were occasionally resolved through violent means, with feuds providing a legitimizing framework by embedding such violence within a social scenario that is acceptable and imposing rules that circumscribed the extent of violence for it to be deemed socially valid. However, this does not imply that the Anglo-Saxon society was inherently violent or barbaric. Rather, the feud was one among several methods employed by the Anglo-Saxon people to resolve conflicts—others included negotiation and adjudication by legal authorities. (Di Tucci).

Laurajan G. Gallardo instantiates such violence from Germanic history, the predecessors that motivated the Anglo-Saxons in their ways. She observes that violence played a significant role in shaping the culture of the Germanic peoples and was widespread, as evidenced by Tacitus's accounts. He describes the Germanic tribes as having "fierce blue eyes, red hair, huge frames—fit only for a sudden exertion [...]. They are less able to bear laborious work" (710). Tacitus's portrayal heavily emphasizes their combat techniques and distinctive attitudes towards warfare. For example, he notes that German women and children were expected to be present during battles. Their presence served two key roles: to motivate and support the warriors and to bear witness to their courage (Tacitus 712). She also discusses the existence of certain Anglo-Saxon charms intended to prevent violence and how the Pagan elements within these charms became interwoven with acts of violence during the Christianized era.(Gellardo).

Elaborating on the intersection of the elements of the cultures of a Pagan past and a Christian present, Amanda N. Boeing argues how *Judith* presents the unique confluence of the two, and how the violence, a force of destruction, inflicted on the Assyrians, is rendered 'holy' in God's service. She writes,

> ... in the story, God's will is to commit an act of violence to secure the victory of Judith's people which would have been attractive to those that admired the Germanic glory of the battlefield. Because Judith is obedient to God's wishes and fighting for the "good" side, the Hebrew side, the blatant heroic imagery in Judith's character and her act of violence could be attributed to her righteousness. This line of reasoning likely would have settled any lingering discomfort from the pagan values that might have been imposed on the story, considering it is not a traditional Anglo-Saxon myth but a book of the Bible. (Boeing).

Diverging from all these arguments of violence, which focus only on its physicalised aspect, John P. Hermann contends that the erratic nature of violence, oscillating between the extremes of fundamental oppositions, reflects the psychological dynamics at play within the

text. The internal conflict among individuals produces a remnant of aggression that can be directed against perceived evil—whether an external foe or an internal, psychological threat—which must be eradicated to form a Christian identity or society. Engaging with early medieval poetry, therefore, involves observing the violent processes involved in the formation of an era, where current psychological and social conditions are interwoven with ancient writings. It is precisely through the reimagining of these texts that contemporary readers are afforded a glimpse into the culture-specific use of tradition. (Hermann).

While in his brilliant examinations of halls, Pollington acknowledges the dispositif role of the halls, what he fails to see is their imitative function. The halls were communities of warriors within communities and they mimicked the activities of the community in which their retainers were born into. Thus, the halls are what for Foucault would be a dispositif non-crisis heterotopia (Foucault) for the physical and psychological space of the halls include numerous communities or emplacements within themselves and their mimicry of the life 'out' of the halls is distinct insofar as in their attempt to emulate those lives, they project them as foreign othered races looming in the dark whereby even a layman might be transposed to a monster by the sheer fact of his dwelling "outside" the "light" of the halls. Their monstrosity is, therefore, largely moulded not by the deformities in their bodies-albeit that are also denigrated later- but by their lairs. However, this does not take into account the disparities within the halls as such emplacements defy "the power to juxtapose in a single real place several spaces, several emplacements that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault). Therefore, the image of "beorhtan beorsele" or "bright bear-hall" is radically disrupted. In its place, the image of a multitude of emplacements themselves constituting countless conflicting voices, cultures and people springs forth and the question of a transcultural unity becomes a concern. This is where violence steps in. Although all these scholars acknowledge the intercultural diaspora, especially the mingling of the Pagan and the Christian elements, [thus gradually merging a host of originally separate poly-vocalities leading to a cultural polyvalence of holy symbols and objects], except for Boeing [who partly acknowledges the ritualistic Christianised aspect of violence], these scholars lay overemphasis on the destructive impulsive side of violence which conceals its flip side, namely its unitive function which they fail to acknowledge. This is because it is paradoxically through violence that these radically distinctive voices and in fact, the idea of the 'sacred' are unified, both in grief and in the act of 'othering'. Thus, this paper, through the employment of Rene Girard's theory of sacrificial violence attempts to explore how the othered discourse of violence assumes a ritualistic sacrificial role that ultimately binds the multivalent and intercultural voices in the society together by the same thread, as formulated in Old English and Old Norse Poetry.

One of the most famous appearances of the monstrous is in the Old English epic, *Beowulf* through the grotesquely deformed Grendel. He is a creature 'othered' who nevertheless shapes the identity of the community itself. The fact that his lair is 'outside' the hall segregates the world of the civilised Self from that of the barbaric Other. However, it is not a mere segregation but a creation of identity since without rendering Grendel as the Other, the mead-hall residents cannot come to the formation of their individual identities. The reason for this lies in a ritualistic appropriation. This is quite similar to Hrimgerth in *Helgakvitha Hjorvarthssonar* of the *Poetic Edda* who is the manifestation of the 'other' side of femininity, the

uncouth feminised parts visually represented into a bodily gestalt. However, her misogynistic appeal is what makes Singerlinn all the more beautiful. "The most beautiful woman in the/entire world" is in clear antithetical juxtaposition with the "corpse-hungry sorceresses". The "monster", the witch who dwells on the land and "ought to be lying nine miles below the earth/with a tree's roots" inside her, is in direct opposition to Eylimi who rides "on the waves and winds". Like Hrimgerth, Grendel's body is multiply significant. He is both the sacrificed and the sacrificer simultaneously. His murder of the sleeping and unsuspecting from the same group of people every night at the same time with the same motto of terrorising Hrothgar almost adds a repetitive significance to it. This is almost ritualistic in its rites and the trope of daily murders for satiating the bloodlust of a malevolent and squalid monster can be referred to as sacrifices. This is true insofar as the violence he inflicts on the community helps in keeping at bay intercommunal and intra-communal acts of violence. Thus, these serve as forces uniting the communities of the mead-halls. Such action visibly takes place through Nithhogg in *Voluspa* of the *Poetic Edda* who is said to "suck the corpses of the fallen", the "oathbreakers", the "murderers" and "those who seduce others' lovers". This is because like Grendel, the violence Nithhogg inflicts on the humans, helps to keep unjust violence by the unsound of mind, within certain limits. Such force is also verily evident in old *The Finnsburg Fragment* where Jutish warriors fight against their kin, not out of loyalty to their lords but out of power-thirst for seizing the throne (as instantiated by Gefwulf) and out of a desire for revenge. This is because the community lacks an Other to whom the evil impulses of the community can be sacrificed and even if by woe, it keeps the community together. Beowulf's arrival from a different clan of Danes from a faraway mead hall serves as a veritable instance of unity among intercommunal people through ritualistic violence. However, Beowulf's murder of Grendel transposes his identity from the Other sacrificer, the creature of the dark to the sacrificial surrogate victim who has "too little" in common with the thanes of Hrothgar's Hall. This is quite similar to Loki in Lokasenna of the Poetic Edda who is both the sacrificer Self and the sacrificed Other. He is the sacrificer insofar as "too much" in common with his fellows to be a sacrificial victim. Namely, he is a divine being, and his murder of Aegir's servant, Fimafeng can read as an attempt to channelize the dark baleful impulses of him and all the gods, especially that of Bragi and Iðunn who ostensibly later refrain from verbal combat with Loki. He is the othered sacrificed insofar as his being unwelcome in the feast of Aegir can be read as an attempt of the gods to treat him as the surrogate victim. Such is owing to the fact that through him, the evil desires of their community could be fulfilled yet avoid discord among all of them, [as besides his only singular commonality with them of being a god], Loki has "too little" in common with them as he is perpetually a stirrer of strife. Thus, as Girard argues, when this slippage becomes "too large" and their commonality "too little", then the reverse of prevention of violence is achieved, i.e., intercommunal and inter-communal violence multiply abundantly and the distinction between sacrificial and non-sacrificial violence is diminished, as instantiated by hanging of Grendel's severed arm in the mead-hall. Thus, this is the reason immediately after Grendel's death, Gendel's mother poses a threat. She does not represent the sacrificer. But she is an embodiment of the disunity and malevolent impulses of one to another that has been transferred to her, i.e. the Other from the civilised Self. The poem, as a result, is not then multiplied with inter-communal conflicts in the space of the hall. But it is an embodiment of the very same impulses

plaguing the hall from 'outside'. This protects the unity of the hall, albeit again through these evil impulses and violence as like Grendel. The threat of Grendel's mother serves as the root of this unitive force. Such a transposition of the evil impulses of the community to Grendel is reinforced by Beowulf's murder of her "outside" the space of the halls. This is where it assumes the role of a sacrifice and Grendel's mother represents, like Grendel in his later stage, a sacrificial surrogate victim. Though it differs from him in the sense that unlike him, she neither has "too little" or "too much" in common with the community [both entailing in undesirable slippages], she embodies a perfect balance whereby, she, or the violence she embodies is sacrificed by Beowulf far away from the community. The fact that Beowulf kills her underwater testifies to her murder as an act of sacrifice since water in the Old Testament was an element of sacrifice and cleansing (e.g Exodus 30:18-21, Leviticus 16:4 and 24, 17:15). However, such an act, as desired, does not provoke violence but disrupts the unity of the community hall altogether because the force (Grendel or his mother) that united the two community spaces, Spear-Danes with the community of Geats, has at the moment vanished. This is substantiated by Beowulf's return to his people of Geats, thus symbolising a caesura in the mutual relationship of the two communities.

Violence, as Girard argues, is a sociological phenomenon of undifferentiation, taking place in an absolutely similar society harbouring twinship among its members. It goes unsaid then that such violence serves as an integrating purpose though it ironically brings about disintegration, a peace stemming from chaos, and absolute assimilation rooted in sheer dissimilation. This is best enunciated by Shakespeare, as Girard argues. "The metaphor of the floodtide that transforms the earth's surface into a muddy mass is frequently employed by Shakespeare to designate the undifferentiated state of the world that is also portrayed in Genesis and that has been attributed to the sacrificial crisis. In this situation no one and nothing is spared; coherent thinking collapses and rational activities are abandoned. All associative forms are dissolved or become antagonistic; all values, spiritual or material, perish." This is true because "...in the case of twins, symmetry and identity are represented in extraordinarily explicit terms; nondifference is present in concrete, literal form, but this form is itself so exceptional as to constitute a new difference. Thus, the representation of nondifference ultimately becomes the very exemplar of difference, a classic monstrosity that plays a vital role in sacred ritual, and ultimately leads to the necessity of finding a suitable substitute for primitive violence, a surrogate sacrificial victim" (Girard).

Such is verily evident in the poem *Judith* where initially and apparently the two armies seem to be clearly distinguished from one another; the Hebrews being the army of God and the Assyrians that of the Devil. That is why, the former, in a mission of liberation of mankind, is fighting against the forces of the latter. However, the structural and linguistic parallels between the two armies are too overwhelming to be entirely overlooked. Structurally, both armies are portrayed with similar heroic imagery, with two clans presided by a lord, in the case of the Assyrians, Holofernes, and in the case of the Hebrews, Christ. Strikingly enough, despite their clear thematic distinction, several times the same word has been employed to denote both lords. For instance, in these lines, the same word "Þēodne", translating to "ruler", is used both for Holofernes and for Christ. The first two instances point out its usage for Christ and the latter for Holofernes.

“. . . Hēo ðār ðā ġearwe funde mundbyrd æt ðām mǣran Þēodne...”	“. . . She, then, well found Protection from that mighty rule . . .”
“. . . wornum ond hēapum, ðrēatum ond ðrymmum þrungon ond urnon onġēan ðā Þēodnes mæġð . . .”	“. . .multitudes and companies Of troops and armies pressed forward and ran Towards that Ruler’s maiden . . .”
“. . . Hīe ðæt ofstum miċlum ræfndon rondwiġġende, cōmon tō ðām rīċan þēodne”	“. . . They, him, very hastily Obeyed, shield-armed warriors, came to that powerful ruler”
“. . . Beornas stōdon ymbe hyra þēodnes træf þearle ġebylde”	“. . .warriors stood Near the ruler’s tent, fiercely encouraged”

Similar is the case with the word “dryhten”. It is used twice for Holofernes and four times for Christ. The first two instances are of Holofernes and the latter of Christ.

“. . . þēah ðæs se rīċa ne wēnde eġesful eorla dryhten . . .”	“. . .though the powerful one nothing suspected, The terrible lord of earls . . .”
“. . . ac hē him þæs ðinges ġestӯrde Dryhten, dugeða Waldend . . .”	“. . . but he restrained him from that thing Lord, Ruler of Hosts . . .”
“. . . him fēng Dryhten God fæġre on fultum . . .”	“. . .the Lord God Helped them fairely . . .”
“. . . Hogedon þā eorlas āweċċan hyra winedryhten; . . .”	“. . .Then the earls thought to awaken Their friendly lord . . .”

Also, notably, the motif of the socio-cultural space of halls is recurrent in both armies. Holofernes and his thanes are twice labelled as “fletsittendum” “hall-sitters”, though this might or might not encompass the physical space of the halls. The word reflects the exchange and reciprocity of presents and obligations among the lord and his retainers, and an atmosphere of feasting, camaraderie, and enforcement of the codes and values of a martial culture. The descriptions of “būnan ond orcas” or “cups and pitches” at the “wīnġedrince” “wine-drinking” feast further testify to the mutual bonds fostered in halls. As I have argued above, these gleeful images are always accompanied by images of war and coercive power that reinforce violence as the only source of their unity, remains true. Even now, what keeps them united is their common rejoicement of the prospective ravishment of Judith by Holofernes. But, the similarity of these apparent images of peace with that of the Hebrews cannot be overlooked. Thus, likewise, Hebrews are said to be “burhsittendum” or “city-sitters” when they have come to the gates of Bethulia, and the city is referred to as “medobyriġ” or “mead-city” [noticeably similar to “meduseld” or “mead-halls”]. Therefore, Bethulia, for the Hebrews, becomes a Christianised metaphor for the Pagan halls where the concept of mutual reciprocity remains the same, Such

is instantiated by the exchange of the war spoils, especially gold. Thus, "halls" transcend the constraints of spatio-temporality and attain a conceptualised metaphorical status standing for intra-cultural exchange motorised by violence. This is instantiated by absolute undifferentiation of the Hebrews and the Assyrians in matters of bloodlust and plunder. It is noticeable that how the phrase "ræfndon rondwiġġende" or "brave shield-armed soldiers" , referring to the thanes of Holofernes, is surprisingly similar to "eorlas æscrōfe" or "spear-brave earls" , referring to the Hebrews. Furthermore, the thirst for violence of the Hebrews themselves much like the Assyrians whose leader they brand as "stercedferhðe" is shocking enough.

". . . wiston bēġen	". . .They both knew
þæt him ðā þēodguman þōhton tilian	That these men of nation intended to provide
fylle on fǣgum. Ac him flēah on last	With the feast of fated. But the eagle flew at the track
earn ǣtes ġeorn, ūriġfeðera,	Eager for food, dewy-winged,
salowiġpāda sang hildelēoð	Dark-coated, sang war-song,
hyrnednebba. . ."	horny-beaked. . ."

Therefore, the structural and linguistic assimilation of the two armies makes way for thematic assimilation as both parties become militants of their gods. As a consequence, both of them are motivated by a similar goal, act with the similarity of intent and stratagems and make a quest for capturing the same place, namely, the holy land of Bethulia. Now, this is precisely the place of absolute non-differentiation, so much so that one becomes a socio-cultural and political twin of the other. But, as Girard argues, for a city or people to survive, its physical and psychological double must be eliminated. This leads to a sacrificial crisis as a sacrificial victim cannot be an identical copy of the people it represents, ie, there must be a slippage, but in an adequate amount. Therefore the final way of ensuring the survival of the two cities is simply the discovery of a surrogate sacrificial victim, to whom the evil impulses of the cities would be directed (Girard 89). However, for one to be a surrogate sacrificial victim, he must be placed in the adequate balance of representation, which can be easily attained by the mechanism of transposition, ie, transposing the universal flaws, evils, and the impure from the larger whole to part of it who would be burdened with the embodiment of all of it and which in *Judith's* case is Holofernes. He is intentionally vilified in the poem to be a surrogate sacrificial victim so that catharsis can be brought about through his sacrifice. Thus, Judith's act of beheading him is a ritualistic practice, as instantiated by her prayer to the Lord to endow her with enough strength and hatred just prior to her beheading of him. Holofernes' sins are representative of both the Assyrians as well as the Hebrews and the fact that he is depicted to be a potential ravisher is in a way a channelisation of biological human impulses through him which also contributes to the escalation of his sin and the audience's hatred of him. Furthermore, Judith is repeatedly termed as "mægð", which is commonly translated as 'maiden', but it does not necessarily must be so. For instance, the same word is used in *Beowulf* to describe what Grendel's mother was not, "....ne mægð scyne" but Seamus Heaney translates this phrase as "nor lovely woman" and not "maiden". Possibly, such ambivalence of meaning in Judith was intentional on the poet's part as it reflected both the seat of erotic impulses in man which works within himself and the Hebrews while addressing her (but channelised and expressed through only Holofernes) and the

appropriate address for a holy pious woman with the expulsion of such desires inherited from Adam. Similar is the case with the word "mōdiġre" or "brave". Judith is described as "þurh Iūdithe glēawe lāre,/mæġð mōdiġre..." , or "through Judith's wise counsel,/ maiden brave" but the same word "mōdiġre" is employed twice with respect to the Assyrians, once with Holofernes himself "hū se stīðmōda styrmde ond ġylede/mōdiġ ond medugāl,..." or "how the bold one raged and yelled/ proud and flushed,..." and at the other time, with one of his soldiers, " ...nymðe se mōdiga hwæne..." or "...unless the proud one...". It again creates ambiguity concerning the poet's standing in for the view of all mankind, as the view is implicitly misogynistic, perceiving all women as descendants of Eve and thus foolishly proud or the terms are simply employed for the sake of proper alliteration and remain distinct in meaning. Therefore, Holofernes is the prime manifestation of a scapegoat in the poem who is ritually slaughtered, though the mass of non-differentiation is not brought to mutual peace as fierce warfare ensues following the sacrifice. According to Girard's theory, this is owing to the fact that Judith has not ritually cleansed herself following the sacrifice (44). Thus, the bloodshed in the sacrifice is bound to have an inverse effect on the sacrificer, which is fierce warfare ensue between the two groups. Though it ends in the triumph of the Hebrews over the Assyrians, inversion is a process where whatever might be the number, several of the Hebrews are also fated to be slain.

As in *Judith*, the presence of a surrogate victim for sacrifice forms a crucial part of cultural practices, and thus, its absence can be momentous. It can lead to the endless multiplication of violent acts and crimes that are both intercommunal and intra-communal. It results in a reverting to the original victim for sacrifice instead of the surrogate victim, which might be many in number, and thus collective murder ensues. This is quite evident in *The Finnsburg Fragment* where no sacrificial victim is selected but two groups engage in a fight of mutual reciprocity. The fight is an instance of collective sacrifice where reciprocity of violence is endlessly repeated, and if Tolkien's theory is to be followed (Neidorf), it itself is, in fact, a magnified view of a larger entirety because it was both preceded and succeeded by acts of communal violence, preceded insofar as it was instigated by the defeat and banishment of the Jutes by the Half-Danes and their ruler Hnæf from their royal hall; succeeded insofar as Hengest avenges Finn and his Jutish thanes by murdering all of them in their royal halls and taking his wife Hildeburh, a Danish princess, along with them. In the event of Jutish warriors fighting against their own clan, these acts of intra-communal violence in the royal halls [as instantiated by the fight between Guthlaf, the father, and Garulf, the son and an instigator of attack on Hnæf's hall] reinforce the leitmotif of violence as a unitive force. Ironically, on the one hand, it assumes the role of Self by usurping and the Other and, on the other hand, it does not constitute peace but constitutes a prevention from the relapse into the sacrificial crisis. This is because the way the Self functions here is precisely by providing a fillip to the cyclical nature of destructive and generative violence. It is generative insofar as the prevention of the sacrificial crisis indicates a perpetuation of the ritualistic repetition of unceasing acts of violence to be committed across generations till the time the act becomes merely mechanical and commemorative. This is instantiated by the fact that the murder of Hnaef transfers complete authority to the now new ruler of the Danes, Finn, the king of the Frisians, and the latter's death in turn transfers power to again a new ruler, Hengest and thus the constructive cycle continues. The cycle becomes destructive insofar as the lack of a surrogate sacrificial victim always claims the lives of the major

portion of the able-bodied in the community and the only resort of the rest is mourning for the dead, as instantiated by Hildeburh who orders the burning of her brother, Hnæf and her son in the same pyre. Therefore, the discourse of violence initiates a cycle of slaughter en masse, on the one hand, and regeneration, on the other, and in both cases, the violence evoked is ritualistic. Though in the former case, the distinction is sometimes blurred, and accompanied through rites not elaborate or ceremonial but repetitive, internalised and normativised to the extent that violence as an act becomes normalised to be multiplied freely in the society.

The sacrificial crisis is not limited to the poem Judith and Finnsburg Fragment alone but is a universal literary phenomenon found across cultures, as evident in *Voluspa* of the *Poetic Edda* which best reflects the world as a mass of undifferentiated matter. Thus Ginnungagap, or the magical void becomes a primitive metaphor for complete non-differentiation, an aetiological symbol- the centre or the repository of all differences, all monstrosities, and from which evidently a new order will emerge. The creation of the universe from this void can be translated as the performance of an originary rite, the ancient rite of violence whose memory has faded from the repetitive cycles of destruction and generation, as instantiated by the Æsir-Vanir war. The fact that Gollveig was thrice burnt but she thrice rose from the ashes is a testament to the endless continuation of this sacrificial cycle. The cycle of the creation and destruction of the gods, furthermore, demonstrates the precise threat that Grendel prevented, ie, the relapse of the universe into the mass of non-differentiation. Therefore, non-differentiation becomes a metaphor for the terrible, and the monstrous whilst the cycles of sacrificial violence betoken life, regeneration, and continuity. This aspect of utter monstrosity is embodied by Loki. As Norrøn Filologi suggests, although he is not explicitly described as monstrous, the text strongly implies such a notion through the use of poisoning as a form of punishment—reminiscent of various Old Norse tales where poison and serpents are used as tools of retribution. Intuitively, death by poison—especially in prolonged agony—carries a particularly cruel undertone. Such a harsh punishment indicates a significant wrongdoing, assuming that "Baldrs and skoti" indeed refers to Loki, as seems likely. This can be interpreted as a response to a blatant breach of the divine order, which serves as the foundation of the "society" created by the gods. Consequently, this breach triggers a defensive response from the disrupted social order, with both the transgression and its response evident. However, it remains uncertain whether Loki is entirely stripped of his social status or merely subjected to punishment. The fact that Loki is confined beneath the earth, away from the realm of structured society, and associated with causing natural calamities could be seen as a form of othering, potentially supporting the idea of his monstrous characterization. (Pohland). Despite Filologi's otherization of Loki, it can be argued that his evil and violence are the true fountainheads of unity in the *Poetic Edda*. In most of the poems, it is towards Loki's evil forces that the "benevolent" powers of the other gods are directed and thus he not only resolves the sacrificial crisis by always playing the scapegoat but also creates a binarized view of the universe for the integrative force of violence to unite. This is instantiated by Loki's role in *Þrymskviða* of the *Poetic Edda* where Loki's bracing of his status as an outcast unwelcome in the company of hierarchically "higher" gods is an effective demonstration of the perpetuation of his state as a sacrificial surrogate victim as he no longer rallies against the so-called "benevolent" forces of other gods but accepts his status. Additionally, his shrewd mediation between the antagonising

poles of hostile gods manifests the sustenance of the force of violence binding the communities of the hall [Asgard].

Therefore, this paper highlights how the discourse of emplacements within heterotopias, the portrayal of safe, invulnerable, and apparently united communities within the royal halls, is only a literary and illusory construct. The halls were actually not centres of monolithic gatherings and feasts under the sovereignty of a single lord, but a stronghold of the intersection of diverse cultures, communities, and people whose differences were marked. Thus, what united the voices of these multitudes was not camaraderie during times of peace, but a rite of sacrifice- a certain kind of violence that threatened not to destroy but to purge and unite. This is substantiated by both Old English and Norse poetry. Despite this, the threat of reciprocal 'impure' violence cannot be entirely ignored and is eternally present but mostly, checked by ritualistic violence. This takes place when the factor of sociological twinship-which albeit is a terrible monstrosity- is no longer present, and one of the communities having a stake in acts of violence is either transcendental or omnipotent or both. In these cases, though unevenly matched and victory for the lesser party or parties become(s) a chimeric reality, futile yet mimetic violence ensues entailing complete annihilation of mankind. Impure violence, unlike the ritualistic integrating role of its counterpart, only disrupts the narrative here. Thus, Girard observes:

> ...the intervention of the god coincides with the loss of generative unanimity and the inevitable slide into reciprocal violence. When the transcendental element descends to the human sphere it is reduced to immanence, transformed back into mimetic fascination. Reciprocal violence now demolishes everything that unanimous violence had erected. And as the institutions and interdictions based on generative unanimity perish, violence roams at will, unchallenged and unchecked. (Girard)

Instances of reciprocal violence are not altogether absent from Old English and Old Norse poetry. For instance, in *Skírnismál* of the *Poetic Edda,* the sexual violence veiled in the hall of Geymir under a coerced marriage of Gerðr, the daughter of Gymir, to Freyr is graphic and at a place, where all resistance, as demonstrated initially, is helpless. However, Gerðr's threats are no less violent from the onset and they begin as:

Skirnir said:

"Do you see this sword, girl, this slender, pretty sword,
which I have in my hand here?
I will cut off your head from your neck
unless you go along with me."

Gerth said:

"I will never endure the threats of any man.
And I think if Gymir finds you here,
you brave men will come to blows...." (Crawford)

This afore-mentioned particularly poignant exchange infallibly demonstrates the rampant reign of reprehensible coercive violence that threatens to subjugate and repress one into another's domination. This inevitably leads to reciprocal violence but to no avail, as the lack of twinship always creates a hierarchy of power and thereby, predestines one to victory and other to a destructive violent end.

Similarly, in the poem *Waldere*, unchecked violence ensues in the fight between the men of Hagena and Guthhere, the king of the Burgundians, and Waldere, due to the former's unrestrained greed for gold. The violence is reciprocal insofar as the treasure was stolen and the lord [Atila] betrayed. Thus, in the cyclical functioning of destructive violence, Waldere is bound to be overtaken by men mimicking his past behaviour. But his reverting to fight for his life and the eventual peace at the end, not merely attest to the heroic image that the poem presents but also testifies to the completion of the reciprocal system of violence. Such is owing to the fact what has been initiated by him is mimicked, therefore, its sanctity violated, and destroyed everyone in some way or the other, by the sheer magnitude of its impurity. Thus, as no clear victory is achieved except a vague pact of peace, the violence committed in these murderous encounters is sheer destructive, and unrestrained. It lacks the quality of a sacrificial ritualistic violence that brings the cycle of violence to an end, which in case of an annihilatory violence, as instantiated by the truce, is only transitory and a harbinger of cruel violence anew.

Thus, this essay, through the framework of Girard's theory of sacrificial violence attempts to exemplify how violence, in contradistinction to its conventional notions of being a destructive force, acts as a force of unity and integrity, putting together heteroglossic voices into an insulated non-crisis heterotopic emplacement of the Anglo-Dane "halls". This paper endeavours to fill the scantiness of literary scholarship with respect to Early-Mediaeval literature produced in the discourse of Urban Space, an arena largely monopolised by the post-war discourses.

Endnote:

[1] Hume and Stratyner are of the view that halls were places of fealty and safety, a shelter from the outer harsher world.

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