Character from Archetype:
A Study of the Characterization of Beowulf
with Reference to the Diction of Direct Speech
in Beowulf.

Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
University College London, October, 1995

by
Dong-Ill Lee
ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to measure the development of Beowulf's character in Beowulf. Direct speech works as a primary source for this enquiry since it takes us closer to the speakers' inner state of mind than do any other elements in the poem. My examination of the diction of the speeches in Beowulf reveals that the eponymous hero, though he is taken from a folk-tale archetype, has an individual character which develops through the poem. Young Beowulf displays faultless courage and adheres to the heroic code. However, he is still developing and has not yet learned how to restrain some of his more inappropriate emotions. His responses to his interlocutors show that he has mental insight and the ability to master his circumstances. Although, on his arrival in Denmark, he is already an established, confident hero, he is still a youth and his adventures in this country contribute to his continued mental growth. Old Beowulf's reflections later reveal a reappraisal of his life in which he achieves a spiritual awakening and goes beyond the Germanic ethics that have hitherto governed his life to a new awareness of spiritual values. In this development through the poem, Beowulf reveals the individualized traits whereby the poet has built him up from an archetype into a character.

This study focuses on three kinds of evidence: firstly, semantic evidence, which is gathered from Beowulf and other Old English poems; secondly, the sub-text of direct speech, in which the underlying intentions of the poem's protagonists can be found; thirdly, contextual considerations, which also help to reveal the true meaning of the words and actions of people in Beowulf.
I declare that this thesis is all my own work and to the best of my knowledge, all quotations and ideas from other sources have been fully acknowledged.

Dong-Ill Lee
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title-Page</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The Implication of Speeches before the Battle with Grendel</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Conclusion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Beowulf's Arrival in Denmark</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The First Challenge with the Coastguard and Wulfgar</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) The Exchange with Hrothgar: a Hidden Conflict of Psychology</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Beowulf's Flying with Unferth</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) Unferth's Rivalry, Sense of Inferiority and Heroic Ideology</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) The Purpose of Unferth's Word-Play</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Beowulf's Reply: his Lack of Self-Restraint</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) Beowulf's Defence of his Early Achievement</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Conclusion</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Beowulf's Youth and Social Status</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(a) The Credibility of Beowulf's Sluggish Period</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) Beowulf's Status When he Arrives in Denmark</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) The Textual Evidence for Beowulf's Sluggish Period</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During my study of Beowulf I have received invaluable guidance and help from various people. I would like to thank the many scholars who have led me to the world of Beowulf and to embark upon this PhD, and who have contributed to my understanding of the poem, in particular Dr. Jane Roberts, Mrs Palmer, Mrs Kingston and Dr. Richard North of the University of London.

I am deeply grateful to the unknown poet of Beowulf who inspired me to search for the aesthetic meaning of the poem and eventually led me beyond this to experience the spiritual universe of Beowulf himself.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor Dr. Richard North, whose expert scholarship and encouragement enabled me to complete this thesis.

Special thanks to my parents and relatives in Korea for their constant prayers and support, and to my Christian brothers and sisters for their kindness.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to my beloved wife Mi-Young and my daughters Honey and Eungee, as their patience, care and solace made it possible for me to finish my thesis.
## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>And</td>
<td>Andreas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASPR</td>
<td>The Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, ed. Krapp and Dobbie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beo</td>
<td>Beowulf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BT</td>
<td>An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, ed. Bosworth and Toller. All references to dictionary entries by word stated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ</td>
<td>Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSASE</td>
<td>Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descent</td>
<td>Descent into Hell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EETS</td>
<td>The Early English Text Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El</td>
<td>Elene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>English Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex</td>
<td>Exodus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>The Fall of the Angels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen</td>
<td>Genesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guth</td>
<td>Guthlac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husb</td>
<td>Husband's Message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JEGP</td>
<td>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JGP</td>
<td>Journal of Germanic Philology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JNT</td>
<td>Journal of Narrative Technique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jud</td>
<td>Judith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jul</td>
<td>Juliana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LSE</td>
<td>Leeds Studies in English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Klaeber</td>
<td>Beowulf, ed. Klaeber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldon</td>
<td>The Battle of Maldon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All quotations of Beowulf are from Klaeber's Beowulf (3rd. ed.) and all translations are mine except as otherwise noted. All quotations from Old English poems are from ASPR. Other translations of Old English poetry outside Beowulf are mine.
'Character from Archetype: A Study of the Characterization of Beowulf with reference to the diction of direct speech in Beowulf.'

1

Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to measure Beowulf's heroic character in Beowulf, by discovering and then analysing sub-texts in which Beowulf's heroic rival-consciousness, reward ethos, revenge ethos and spiritual awakening can be deduced from the dialogue in this poem. Many scholarly attempts to discover the meaning of the poem have so far been carried out with insufficient emphasis on the diction; the sub-text, that is to say the underlying meanings of this poem's speeches, may be found by analyzing the psychological element in characters' behaviour which reflects their conscious response to the social milieu. In one way or another the poem Beowulf belongs to the late antiquity of the heroic age, of which the social ethos is based on 'shame culture' rather than 'guilt culture', as Dodds keenly observed.¹

In order to aid the reader's understanding of my argument, I shall present a short summary of the story of Beowulf. The poem begins with the genealogy of the royal house Danish, from the mythic reign of Scyld Scæfing to the glorious and peaceful reign of Hrothgar, symbolised by his creation of the great hall Heorot. The harmony of the hall is broken by the nightly attacks of the monster Grendel, which continue for twelve years (Beo 1-193). Beowulf, the nephew of King Hygelac of the Geats, after

hearing of Grendel's depredations, sets sail for Denmark with fourteen followers. He presents himself to Hrothgar, outlines his lineage and vows to cleanse Heorot by killing Grendel barehanded. Although Beowulf's martial credibility is challenged by Unferth, Hrothgar's spokesman, his response establishes his strength and ability to fight Grendel (Beo 194-709). That night the monster Grendel attacks Heorot and kills one of the Geats; Beowulf mortally wounds him and he flees to his lair. The next day, there is a great rejoicing at Heorot and Beowulf is acclaimed as a great hero. Hrothgar symbolically adopts him as a son. But the fragility and brevity of the new peace is emphasized in the poet's retelling of the tale of Finn. Hrothgar's wife, Wealhtheow, then asks Beowulf to aid her sons in the future (Beo 710-1250). That night Grendel's mother attacks Heorot, killing one of Hrothgar's retainers. The next day, in revenge, Beowulf attacks Grendel's mother in her underwater lair. Beowulf returns triumphant with the sword hilt and Grendel's head. In the midst of great rejoicing at the hero's return Hrothgar delivers a long speech about the dangers of pride, the mutability of the world and his own prosperity and trouble. After exchanging gifts, farewell speeches and promises of loyalty, Beowulf and his men return to their homeland (Beo 1251-1962). On his return, Beowulf tells Hygelac of his adventure. He also predicts that the intended marriage between the Danish princess Freawaru and the Heathobard prince Ingeld will not end the tribal feud. Beowulf then hands over his gifts from Hrothgar to Hygelac and his Queen, who in return bestows gifts upon him (Beo 1963-2199).

In the remaining part of the poem, the poet jumps ahead to the time when Beowulf has ruled for fifty years after the deaths of Hygelac and his son Heardred. Tragedy strikes again, this time in the shape of a dragon which ravages Beowulf's realm. Beowulf decides to fight this dragon single-handed. Beowulf recalls the battles after his return to Geatland; the death of Hygelac; Beowulf's refusal of the throne; and his generous offer to stand as regent to the younger Heardred; Heardred's death at the
hands of the Swedes; and how Beowulf avenged his death. Beowulf delivers a farewell speech and then recounts a résumé of the history of the Geatish royal house. Then Beowulf faces the dragon. His sword fails him and he is overwhelmed by fire. All his companions retreat into the woods except a young warrior named Wiglaf, who comes to his aid. Wiglaf deals the dragon a decisive blow which Beowulf follows up with a knife wound, but Beowulf is fatally wounded. Wiglaf tends the dying Beowulf and brings the treasure out of the cave at Beowulf's request. Beowulf gives thanks to God for having won the treasure and requests a burial mound to be built in his honour. The poem ends with Beowulf's funeral pyre, at which the hero is mourned and praised with great ceremony (Beo 2200-3182).

The ethos of this world appears to confine one's life and even one's spirituality to the demands and needs of society. Within this relationship between social demands and an individual's response to them, we are constantly induced to wonder whether or not one man's action is purely motivated by his own will. Beowulf's moral sense has been challenged by some critics; however, we must keep in mind that Beowulf's actions, both verbal and physical, reflect the moral obligation of his society: heroes are valued by the result of their deeds, not by that of their attempts. If this view is accepted, then defining a moral standard by which to judge Beowulf is difficult; doubts arise as to how much he was faithful to accepted social principles or how worthy he is of moral admiration beyond the heroic age. I believe the answer partially can be drawn from a detailed study of Beowulf's deeper mind, together with the examination of physical and verbal manifestations of his thought in response to his social milieu.

---

2 This is a moral principle of the heroic age identified by the classicist Dodds. See Dodds The Greeks and the Irrational, pp. 28-50.
In addition, as Tolkien observed, the concepts of youth and age are both central to the theme and action of Beowulf. Though this poem seems to lack the sense of a linear development, I assume that the Beowulf-poet provides a fair picture of Beowulf's mental and physical growth by roundabout means such as digressions and episodes. The first part of my thesis will contain a study of Beowulf's mental growth from a state of lack of self-restraint, which is based upon his exchanges with other figures in Denmark. In the semantic discussions that support this study, the diction of courtly speech will play a major role.

(a) The implication of speeches before the battle with Grendel

No one would deny that speeches are a vital element in projecting character in any literary work. However, modern readers are likely to be confounded by the poet's use of archetypes in Beowulf, which appears to fall short of the modern definition of character in which 'the emphasis is upon a fully developed person functioning in diverse social and family situations'. It is quite true to say that any effort to observe 'a fully developed person' in Beowulf will end in failure. This is mainly because the poem is a product of elaborate artistry of which the focus lies in the mixture of a balance and a contrast between two parts. Clearly, much of the linear development of

---

5 This view was first originated by J. R. R. Tolkien in 'Beowulf: The Monsters and The Critics', PBA, 22 (1936), 245-96 (pp. 271-2). Later this view was followed in R. W. Chambers, Man's Unconquerable Mind: Studies of English Writers, from
personae in Beowulf is frequently interrupted by the insertion of various digressions and the repetitive descriptions of actions similar to each other in outline and in heroic ideology. In addition, the chance to look into the depths of the mind through the form of expressed thought, which is a major constituent in defining the term of character, seems exceptionally scarce in Beowulf. The relative scarcity of expressed thought in this poem is rightly perceived by Shippey as characteristic of the poet's presentation.6

Despite the lack of what might be called 'characterization' in Beowulf, a persona still remains in this poem as a means of combining the poem's two halves: young Beowulf with old Beowulf. The importance of this persona is pointed out by Klaeber, who declares that 'the poem of Beowulf consists of two distinct parts joined in a very loose manner and held together only by the person of the hero'.7 As for the hero's character, Arthur G. Brodeur has called attention to the hero's consistency of character in both parts (certainly an important element of unity): 'we do not see his temper change or his character develop'.8 A similar view on the stasis of characterization is shared by E. M. W. Tillyard, who also sees no inner conflict or motivation of character in Beowulf.9 One may well wonder whether the view of stasis and the lack of inner conflict is always true in the presentation of personae in

---


Beowulf. However, an analysis of Beowulf's speeches will reveal inner conflict and the fluctuation of emotion, contrary to the general view of the hero's static nature.

Much emphasis will be given in this thesis to Beowulf's lack of self-restraint and to the fact that there is a high degree of tension between Beowulf and his challengers, as a result of heroic competitiveness and pride. On the surface all speeches except Unferth's seem very decorous and courtly. But beneath this formality there runs a thread of psychological conflict, which in turn proves that those involved in the speeches are presented as being bound by the moral principle guiding the comitatus. To a large extent, speeches before the battle with Grendel unveil the inner conflict of personae in response to an external threat to their heroic values. Beowulf, Hrothgar and Unferth try to judge and measure out the psychology of their counterparts and endeavour to adjust their positions to a heroic standard in accordance with unpredictable circumstances. In this sense, that of the mutability of their minds, the presentation of Beowulf, Hrothgar and Unferth before the action can be compared to that of modern characters. Both Beowulf's lack of self-restraint and his sudden fluctuations of mood are indications that he is not projected as a prototype of sapientia from his first appearance onwards in the poem. By contrast, the following speeches, after the action and in the second part of the poem from line 2200, do not show any sign of the lack of self-restraint. The complete control of mind and emotion in the

---

10 R. E. Kaske defines fortitudo as 'physical might and courage', and sapientia as an eclectic term covering mental abilities such as 'practical cleverness, skill in words and works, knowledge of the past, ability to predict, prudence, understanding, and the ability to choose and direct one's conduct rightly'. Kaske believes that from the beginning of the poem Beowulf is presented as the model of sapientia. See R. E. Kaske, 'Sapientia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf', SP, 55 (1958), 423-56 (p. 425-31).
second part stands in sharp contrast to previous demonstrations of Beowulf's immaturity. His mental growth from youthful champion to wise king encourages us to say that this hero is one who can develop. The progression of these speeches before the action is symbolic of Beowulf's passing through his own 'rites of passage'. Apart from the growth of the hero, all the speeches before the action may be regarded as dominated by the one theme of heroic competitiveness. However, as the theme of heroic competitiveness does not come to the surface explicitly in this poem, its underlying continuity might be called sub-textual. The context of each speech will be examined in terms of the sub-text of heroic competitiveness or of rival-consciousness. Until the scene of Beowulf's fight against Grendel the context of Beowulf's speeches is a principal component in the favourable image formed of Beowulf, who is portrayed as undergoing the 'formal, ritualistic crossing of the thresholds'. At the outset Beowulf is depicted as passing through a series of verbal challenges; these can be viewed as 'the rites of passage' in contexts where Beowulf's mental capability is tested in the face of symbolic challenges which prove his true heroic quality. However, this application of a classical feature, notably the emergence of an archetypal figure through rites of passage, is distinguished at the beginning of Beowulf not by actions but by the exclusive use of speeches containing various symbolic meanings. Unlike the poetic doctrine in the Poetics of Aristotle, in which characterization is assumed to proceed from action rather than from speeches, the speeches in the first part of Beowulf can be read as a substitution for action.


12 Duncans, 'Epitaphs for Æglæcan', p. 123.

13 Stephen Halliwell, trans., The Poetics of Aristotle (London: Duckworth, 1987),
the fight with Grendel, the thematic development of the poem as a whole is illustrated in the exchange of speeches. In this way, the speeches become a major structural framework in the poem. In addition, alongside this role as part of the framework, almost every speech seems to have a hidden factor which Shippey calls the 'extralinguistic frame'.

Shippey's concise phrase encompasses a much wider implication about the quality of the speeches in *Beowulf* than it appears to do, largely because even details of linguistic features are intimately related to the thematic motif of the poem: namely who is Beowulf? What kinds of moral principle and social ethos are embedded in the formation of the speeches? It is quite true to say that *Beowulf* is not about an individual as such but about a man of archetypal proportions, whose significance, in the broadest and deepest sense, is social'. In keeping with this social dimension, Beowulf's speeches, marked by courtly custom, demonstrate at the outset that he is to a large extent subordinated to an obligation generated by the social ethos. In general, a society demands that its members adhere to specific moral principles. The social background of Beowulf is the society of Germanic heroic ideology conventionally known as the *comitatus*, in which duties of loyalty and revenge become a binding force on the individual.

The modern term of individuality appears to have no place in the heroic ideology of the *comitatus*; the lives of members of Germanic society are defined 'only in terms of their functions in relation to God and to the kindred and *dryht* in whose

ch. 6 pp. 36-39.
Thus the two-way relationship between the lord and his retainers is supposed to take precedence over the individual's position in society. The core of this moral principle, as Smithers says, appears to be the 'nexus between fate on the one hand, and a man's honour and unremitting exercise of courage on the other'. In this society, in this way, heroes are constantly called on to respond to an ineluctable obligation to prove themselves in war. From this point of the 'unremitting exercise of courage', heroes are shown as men of action more obviously than men of thought or reflection.

However, it is possible that this action-oriented morality generates some irrationality and irresponsibility. This moral side effect of the heroic code has long been a controversial element in some of Beowulf's actions; in the first two fights with Grendel and his mother, Beowulf is portrayed as a man ignoring military tactics; in the abandoning of weapons and in the daring dive into the mere, and in the final battle against the Dragon, he can be blamed for irresponsibility when he exposes himself as a king to external danger. Nonetheless, Beowulf's actions motivated by headstrong decisions can hardly be denounced as a flaw or a weak point in his character, simply because these seemingly irrational and irresponsible actions are the physical manifestation of his strong commitment to a heroic ideology which demands immediate action instead of rational contemplation. This judgement seems to have a common ground with Dodds' definition of the Christian sense of guilt as opposed to the archaic sense of guilt; he says, 'pollution (i.e., the archaic sense of sin or guilt) is the automatic consequence of an action, belongs to the world of external events, and

operates with the same ruthless indifference to motive as a typhoid germ'. Contrary to the archaic definition of sin, the involvement of the will and inner consciousness should come first in judging a man's moral conduct in the concept of Christian sin. A certain degree of amoral force works in *Beowulf* in the name of the heroic ethos such as the duty of loyalty and revenge. This exemption from moral questions of right and wrong has some affinity with the underlying meaning of 'ruthless indifference to motive' caused by external force. Those two contrasting views of a Christian and an archaic concept of moral judgment probably take literary form in *Beowulf*, a Christian poem concerning a pagan society, as an apparent discrepancy between Beowulf's inner character and his social role in relation to the outer world. This discrepancy becomes particularly clear, as his speeches (up to Unferth's challenge) project the formality of the heroic world on one hand and reveal his lack of self-restraint on the other. However, this lack of self-restraint in his own verbal presentation of himself can be understood if we see a sub-text, or 'rivalry-consciousness' based on the heroic competitiveness existing between different tribes and duelling warriors. Though the full scale of heroic competitiveness is well presented through the verbal exchange between Beowulf and Unferth, it is in his speech to the coastguard that Beowulf's lack of self-restraint first appears.

(b) Conclusion

Although the general consensus is that Beowulf is an archetype, throughout this thesis I shall argue that the study of Beowulf's speeches reveals him to be a more fully

---

18 Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 36.
developed persona or embellished archetype than is usually believed. In ch. 3, I shall also argue against the generally held negative view of Unferth's character, claiming instead that he is an honourable defender of Danish pride. Unferth's skilful use of speech is also examined in ch. 3, and here I shall analyze the hidden syntax and underlying meaning of his speech for how it expresses his heroic ideology and diminishes the heroic identity of Beowulf. For example, his speech contains the implicit inference 'as you [Beowulf] failed in the swimming contest with Breca, you will fail to destroy Grendel'. I shall argue that Unferth's character contains enough individuality for us to consider him as more than a mere agent provocateur.

At the outset, Beowulf emerges as a man with a strong commitment to the heroic code that his society demands. At the same time he is presented as showing a degree of immaturity, mainly characterized by his lack of self-restraint, towards his counterparts. This is particularly evident in his tactless comments concerning Hrothgar's gloomy future (discussed in ch. 2) and the inaction of the Danes (in ch. 3). Kaske's view of Beowulf's sapientia also becomes questionable when the underlying meaning and the manner of Beowulf's speech are fully examined. It is quite true that Unferth provides a hostile test of Beowulf's sapientia, but Beowulf's speech can perhaps be interpreted in part as the speech of a person full of turbulent emotion and excessive courage rather than sapientia. I shall argue that this turbulence cannot be regarded as a fault in Beowulf's heroic disposition. This feature of Beowulf's character is discussed in ch. 2 and 3, with particular reference to the sub-text of rival-consciousness.

Central to my thesis is the claim that the concept of rival-consciousness, which is found in the sub-text of many exchanges, is crucial to our understanding of the main figures in Beowulf. For example, when Beowulf tells Hrothgar of his youthful exploits, Hrothgar counters with his statement that he ruled his country when he was 20...
young. Hrothgar's reply clearly shows he is conscious of the rivalry that exists between him and Beowulf.

The study of the diction in direct speech will form an important part of my argument. I contend that words such as wlonc, dolgip and beot have been understood in a negative sense which does not give proper regard to their context in heroic society. I am opposed to the generally held view that the swimming-contest with Breca is a juvenile folly. On the contrary, I claim that Beowulf rightly regards this contest as a sign of youthful high spirits, as an adventure fitting for youth (geogoô). I shall justify this interpretation with a close examination of the meaning of geogoô, both within the context of Beowulf and in the wider context of Old English poetry. In particular, in ch. 3, I shall argue that the diction of the speech in which Beowulf uses geogoô is one which carries no negative connotations at all.

Ch. 4 is concerned with Beowulf's social status at the time of his arrival in Denmark. Here I shall argue that, contrary to the view of most critics, Beowulf is already a confident and proven hero before he embarks on his Danish adventure. Evidence for this view is provided by the study of the epithets for Beowulf and his band and the implications of the terms of geogoô and duguô. I shall distinguish six stages in Beowulf's development: his young life prior to his arrival in Denmark; his childhood, early geogoô, middle geogoô and his time as mature geogoô in Denmark; his elevation to the status of mature warrior (duguô) on his return to the Geats; and finally his rule as king. In ch. 5, I shall consider the importance of the verb mæpelode which is used to introduce almost all of Beowulf's speeches. My view is that mæpelian means 'to make a public speech' and that it is associated with courtly speech in heroic society. This verb demonstrates Beowulf's noble status. The examination of Beowulf's speeches demonstrates his keen awareness of his interlocutors' social rank and their consciousness of rivalry. Beowulf is sensitive to the underlying meanings of the speeches of others, and especially in the cases of Unferth and Wealhtheow, he tailors
his responses to match their manner and syntax. For example, Beowulf's response to Unferth's taunting speech demonstrates his awareness of the heroic ideology and of Unferth's threat to Beowulf's heroic identity as this can be found in the underlying meaning and hidden syntax of Unferth's speech. A similar awareness of diction is demonstrated in Beowulf's reply to Wealhtheow, which I shall examine in ch. 5. With the exception of his occasional lack of self-restraint, Beowulf is usually presented as a master of circumstance. I shall show this mastery particularly in ch. 6, where I examine the manner in which Beowulf portrays Hondscio's death to Hygelac. In ch. 7, I shall examine Beowulf's inner state of mind with particular reference to the meaning of ealde riht ('the ancient law'). I shall argue that Beowulf recognizes that he did not live up to this ancient law (which includes the code of revenge) at the time of Hygelac's death. This realization lies heavily in Beowulf's heart, demonstrates his maturity as a hero, and marks the culmination of his development from an immature youth to an old, mature king.
Beowulf's Arrival in Denmark

This chapter shows how Beowulf overcomes obstacles by means of his verbal skill. Beowulf is keenly aware of the social standing of the other figures in this poem and he employs different modes of speech accordingly, in order to avoid offending their pride. However, the formality and dignity of Beowulf's speeches sometimes conceals a lack of self-restraint which can be detected only in the sub-text. This sub-text can be revealed if we examine the vocabulary and diction of certain key speeches. It will be argued in this chapter that Beowulf's lack of self-restraint, a negative feature in this figure makes him into a 'character' with greater depth than may be expected in an idealized heroic archetype.

(a) The first challenge with the coastguard and Wulfgar

Having stepped ashore in Denmark, Beowulf introduces himself to the local coastguard according to the custom of courtly speech. A speaker is expected to state first either his chieftain's name or his own paternal genealogy when revealing his identity. The beginning of Beowulf's speech shows that he is strongly aware of this custom, which is a product of heroic society designed to enhance the mutual tie between both a lord and his comitatus and the blood ties between father and son or relatives:

We synt gumcynnnes Geata leode
ond Higelaces heorðgeneatas.
Wæs min fæder folcum gecyj)ed,
æpele ordfruma, Ecgbeow haten;
[We are people of the Geatish nation and hearth-companions of Hygelac. My father was renowned among peoples, a noble leader in the battle front named Ecgtheow]

In this speech, Beowulf first introduces himself and his band with the epithet 'hearth-companions of Hygelac' and then proudly and deliberately recalls his father's reputation as a leader. With formulaic expressions concerning paternity and tribal background, a man's step-by-step revelation of himself is typical of courtly speech. Most important of all, a warrior is introduced as subordinate to his military band. In this sense, through his speech, Beowulf demonstrates his strong commitment to the idea of putting the group before the individual. Irving believes that Beowulf's response meets the formal demands of this occasion and by Beowulf's references to the nation and the king before his own father (Ecgtheow), Beowulf places himself in the aristocratic class. \(^1\) The beginning of Beowulf's speech starts with the plural pronoun *we*, proving that he upholds the social code demanded in heroic society. This mood, a mixture of politeness and humility, is characteristic of Beowulf's heroic disposition.

In front of Hrothgar and the Danish people, after the first victory over Grendel, Beowulf is again presented as a man quite willing to emphasize the value of his military band rather than himself:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{We \textsc{haet ellenweorc \quad estum miclum},} \\
\text{feohtan fremedon, \quad frecne geneðdon} \\
\text{eafð uncuþes.}
\end{align*}
\]

\((\text{Beo } 958-960a)\)

---

[With great goodwill we undertook to fight, undertook this deed of valour, and bravely ventured forth with mysterious powers]

In the context of Beowulf's speech and the previous battle scene, the plural pronoun we merits rhetorical, but not metrical stress. Recalling the fierce battle scene between Beowulf and Grendel, as a faithful witness, the reader clearly knows that Beowulf's companions did not contribute at all to bringing about such a glorious victory. That battle was solely one man's struggle and one man's victory. In spite of his own adventure, Beowulf does not forget to enhance first the value of his band by sharing his victory with his companions. Apart from his own speech, characterized by this kind of extreme formality, generosity and politeness, Beowulf is represented in seven instances as an involved member of his group. From the outset, when Beowulf is about to embark on the expedition to Denmark, the Geats advance towards the ship together; firstly:

Hæfde se goda Geata leoda
cempan gecorone þara þe he cenoste
findan mihte; fiftyna sum
sundwudu sohte;

(Beo 205-208a)

[The hero had chosen warriors from the people of the Geats, from the boldest he could find; with fourteen men he went to the ship]

This kind of group movement is more clearly demonstrated later when Beowulf is hastily summoned to a council, and goes to the king's chamber with his company, right after the savage attack of Grendel's mother. At this crucial moment, with his help needed once again, Beowulf is described as advancing towards the chamber with his band:

eode eorla sum, æþele cempa,
self mid gesiðum þær se snotera bad,
[one of the earls, the princely champion himself, went with his companions, where the wise man waited]

In this second example the epithet æhele cempa as a subject meaning 'princely champion' and the active verb code, 'went' and the preposition mid, 'with', are all conjoined to emphasize an active movement of a certain military band rather than an individual.

A third example occurs when Beowulf and his band walk from the beach to Hygelac's stronghold after they have successfully accomplished their exploits in the Danish country and returned to their land:

Gewat him ôa se hearda mid his hondscole
sylf æfter sande sæwong tredan,

[Then the hardy hero himself walked on along the shore with his companions, treading the wide beaches and the meadows by the sea]

Even in this scene of glorious marching, Beowulf is not separately described. Instead he is integrated into the movement of a group. This presentation of group movement, representing the oneness of the comitatus as an ideal of the heroic code, is thus well expressed even in minor movements. Fourthly, Beowulf and his band are ready to set off when Wulfgar invites the Geats into the presence of Hrothgar:

Aras þa se rica, ymb hine rinc manig,
þryðlic þegna heap; sume þær bidon,

[Then the mighty chieftain rose with many a warrior round him, a splendid band of followers; some waited there]

In the previous examples, the group is described in terms of Beowulf and his band. In other cases, the group is referred to by the single pronoun 'they', with their unity
sometimes emphasized with 'together'. In a fifth example, after Beowulf and his band successfully pass the first confrontation with the coastguard, their advancement towards Hrothgar's hall is again described as a group movement:

Guman onetton,

sigon ætsomne, ọh ọt ọt hy [s]æl timbred,

(Bo 306b-307)

[The warriors made haste, they went together until they (could descry) the timbered hall]

A sixth example, one with use of the adverb ætsomne, 'together', is seen again in the scene where Wulfgar allows Beowulf and his band to go into Hrothgar's hall:

Snyredon ætsomne, ọh secg wisode,
under Heorotes hrof;

(Bo 402-403a)

[Together they hastened forward under the roof of Heorot, as the warrior guided them]

A seventh example of group involvement, a victorious marching scene, comes after the fierce confrontation between Beowulf and Grendel's mother:

Ferdon forô ñonon Ọpepelastum
ferhọpum fægne,

(Bo 1632-1633a)

[They went forth from that place along the foot-worn tracks, glad in their hearts]

As is shown above, the solidarity of Beowulf's military band is emphatically conveyed by the terms mid and ætsomne. According to Calvin Kendal's exposition of the meter of Beowulf, ætsomne, both in both lines 307a and 402a, belongs to xAX, in which A represents a fully stressed syllable with alliteration. 2 I do not think this metrical

repetition is coincidental. On the contrary, the poet, conscious of the demands of metrical grammar, is also mindful of its importance for semantic emphasis in projecting the solidarity of Beowulf's band. In the same context, I think the preposition *mid* in lines 1313a and 1963b should be given a rhetorical stress as its use serves to enhance the integration of Beowulf's warrior band.

As we have seen, the stylistic feature of presenting group movement is in keeping with the politeness and humility in Beowulf's speeches whereby he puts his band before himself. However, such an air of formality and politeness suddenly diminishes, as Beowulf, when he speaks to the coastguard, turns his attention to the possibly disastrous future of Hrothgar:

— gyf him edwenden æfre scolde
bealuwa bisigu  bot eft cuman—,
ond þa cearwyłmas  colran wurðþþ;
oððe a syððan earfoðþraþge,
þreanyd þolað, þenden þær wunað
on heahstede  husa selest.

(Beo 280-285)

[if a change, a remedy of the torment of miseries should ever come for him, and then, the surges of sorrow will grow cooler; or else he should ever after suffer unendurable hardship and inescapable misery, as long as that finest of halls lasts in its lofty place]

On the surface, Beowulf's description of Hrothgar's suffering in these lines

3 Bruce Mitchell regards *þenden* in line 284b as meaning 'as long as' instead of 'while'. I think this interpretation fits the reading in which Hrothgar's suffering is intensified: compare the paraphrases 'suffer "while" the hall lasts' with the stronger emphasis of 'suffer "as long as" the hall lasts'. See Mitchell, *Old English Syntax* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), II, 340-41 (sect. 2636)
does not seem to be intended to insult Danish pride. If this were Beowulf's intention to insult the Danes with a deliberate lack of self-restraint, he would be touching on a very delicate matter in the heroic world. Having witnessed his cautious, polite approach made in formal speech, we can easily perceive that Beowulf is keenly aware of Danish heroic pride. As a result of this awareness, Beowulf introduces himself as a foreign envoy wishing to pay a visit to Hrothgar, whilst keeping hidden his real intention to face Grendel. This technique of playing down his role seems to be Beowulf's means of not damaging the pride of the Danish comitatus. Beowulf's effort not to hurt Danish pride is repeatedly emphasized as he puts himself in the position of the Danes, who are seeking help under the terrifying threats from Grendel; Beowulf says, *wes pu us larena god!*, 'be good to us in respect of counsels!' (Beo 269b). This reversal of role, Beowulf as the pupil (supplicant) and the coastguard as the teacher (counsellor), seems designed to avoid any gratuitous conflict with the coastguard. This cautious approach is expressed in Beowulf's apparent reduction of his role to the position of a benevolent adviser: *burh rumne sefan ræd gelæran*, '(I can) instruct good counsel with well-disposed mind' (Beo 278). In contrast with the previously expressed role of a messenger or a delegate, which Beowulf stated with: *Habbaô we to bæm læran micel ærende*, 'We have a great errand to the famous ruler' (Beo 270), this new role of a counsellor appears to provide a more defined mission. However, Beowulf has not yet revealed his intention to cleanse Heorot.

As mentioned already, Beowulf's persistent effort to play down his role and conceal his martial intentions in Heorot demonstrates that he is endeavouring to eliminate any possibility of wounding Danish pride. Beowulf is mindful of conveying his and his band's harmless intention, as he emphasizes in the words which I have underlined below:

*We *burh holdne hige hlaford ðinne,*
*suð Healfdenes, secean cwomon,*
There does not seem to be a distinctive semantic gap between rumne sefan, 'generous mind' and holdne hige, 'friendly heart'. With reference to line 1726a, Klaeber interprets rumne sefan (Beo 278a) as 'wisdom' or 'magnanimity'. A similar phrase appears in Hrothgar's subsequent speech:

    hu mihtig God    manna cynne
    burh sidne sefan   snyttru bryttad,
    eard ond eorlscipe;

(Boe 1725-1727a)

[how mighty God deals out to mankind wisdom, lands and rank, in His magnanimity (vast spirit)]

There appears to be no difference between rum and sid in rumne sefan and sidne sefan, the basic meaning of which is 'spacious'. However, the true semantic value of these phrases differs in accordance with their contexts. In lines 1725-7a, God is presented as an almighty ruler who is capable of endowing mankind with almost everything. Here an image is evoked of an omnipotent ruler with absolute authority. In contrast, in the scene above, where rumne sefan (Beo 278a) is used, Beowulf, confronted by the coastguard, is trying to pass through this first barrier by appealing to the well-disposed mind of the coastguard. Considering Beowulf's intention of playing down his redemptive role by presenting himself first as a pupil and then as a benevolent adviser, Klaeber's interpretation of sefa in rumne sefan as 'wisdom', or 'magnanimity' does not fit the context. Rendering sefa in rumne sefan, 'wisdom', or even worse 'magnanimity' might bring out a strong air of condescension or authority that Beowulf does not intend at all. Even in his dealing with a lesser thane, as M. W. Pepperdene says,

---

4 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 139.
Beowulf is 'careful to avoid any hint of condescension'. This tendency to use words and phrases punctiliously becomes a characteristic feature in Beowulf's tone of speech, as Ward Parks notes, to 'avoid a descent into the scurrilous'.

This cautiously calculated façade of politeness is undermined, however, as we examine lines 283-285 quoted above. Here Beowulf seems to set out a hypothetical situation in which Hrothgar will suffer for evermore unless he accepts advice from Beowulf. This description of Hrothgar's future torment begins with an alternative conjunction or, on line 283, which is used to control the interrelation between the syntactic and the semantic. Two hypothetical situations are set out with the use of gyf and or, but they are correlated in terms of cause and effect. The first one suggests a glimpse of hope: 'if a change, a remedy of the torment of miseries should ever come for him, and then, the surges of sorrow will grow cooler' (Beo 280-82).

In this conditional clause, Beowulf hints that his good counsel will bring a real edwenden, 'change', to Hrothgar. However, the tone of his speech is not very confident, because he cannot be sure that his plan will be accepted. Also the repetitive use of the subjunctive mood in æfre scolde...cuman, 'should ever come' (Beo 280b-81) is interpreted probably correctly as a sign of humility by Shippey. However, as we examine the figurative meaning of the last line of his speech, which starts with or, we are led to assume that the tone of his speech is more confident, eliminating any suggestion of failure. According to C. L. Wrenn, the scene in this speech to the coastguard changes with considerable subtlety 'from the confident present (Beowulf is

---

5 M. W. Pepperdene, 'Beowulf and the Coast-guard', ES, 47 (1966), 409-419 (p. 413).


sure of what he can do) to the hypothetical (he could not be so sure that his plan would be accepted), and finally to the confident future (he knows what must ensue if his advice is rejected). I agree with this view that the last part of Beowulf's prediction for Hrothgar's gloomy future is delivered in a mood of confidence. On the surface, Beowulf's confident diction can be seen as an attempt to enhance the coastguard's trust in Beowulf's capability. But it should be borne in mind that this confidence is devoted to depicting a chief's miserable condition. Hrothgar is pictured as a helpless man, deprived of any prowess in the face of Grendel's attack. This image suggests that Hrothgar has fallen prey to a gloomy situation not of his own choosing. Therefore, this picture of Hrothgar's mental and physical restriction is used to emphasize an incapacity or inability to perform a certain action. This image of paralysis, of being devoid of the will to respond to a challenge, is a significant motif distinguishing a non-hero from a true hero in Beowulf. In a Germanic heroic society, a warrior is in a sense free to choose not to act, or to evade a particular course of action. 'Heroic life', as Irving remarks, 'is consistently presented as a series of such radical choices'. Only through this concept of action and inaction does Beowulf emerge as a real hero in comparison with the hesitancy and cowardice of lesser men.

Furthermore, the image of Hrothgar's imposed passivity grows, as words indicating a period of tribulation (a syðan earfoðprage, holað, henden þær wunad) are combined to intensify the nature of his suffering (þreanyd). These two lines containing the words above are well worth examining in terms of the metrical grammar and semantic value of each word:

odde a syðan earfoðprage,


9 Irving, A Reading of Beowulf, p. 7.
or else he should ever after suffer unendurable hardship and inescapable misery, as long as (that finest of halls) lasts there]

It was Cosijn who threw doubt on the interpretation of *brag* as meaning 'time'. Cosijn conjectures *brag* means (if derived from *prihan, brenhwan*) not only "time", but also "oppressiveness, oppression". The cause of his difficulties in deciding whether the true meaning of *brag* is 'time', or 'oppression, torment, distress' is the meaning combined with that of *earfoô*. *Earfoô* means 'hard, difficult' according to BT. Thus, if Cosijn's view is adopted, *earfoô* can be interpreted either as 'hard time' (time of hardship) or 'hard torment' (unendurable hardship). In terms of metrical weight, the primary stress falls on *earfoô* instead of *brage* because ea-, as is shown by this line's metrical type A, alliterates with a, 'ever' and is a fully stressed syllable. It is likely that this metrical value of *earfoô* as a stressed syllable is connected with the semantic value of *earfoô*brage. In the light of the importance of this stylistic feature, it might be assumed that *earfoô* has greater semantic value than the noun *brag*. Thus, if *brag* is rendered as 'torment, distress', it might be concluded that the intensity of torment or oppression is primarily intended to be conveyed through the use of *earfoô*brage. Thus the most appropriate rendering of *earfoô*brage is probably 'unendurable hardship'.

---

10 Kendall, *The Metrical Grammar of Beowulf*, p. 243, 244.

However, there is a similar semantic difficulty in the compound *breanyd* which follows *earfoéprage*. Neither BT nor Klaeber's glossary shows any differences in defining the meaning of *brea* and *nyd* as they are rendered equally as 'affliction' or 'distress'. This combination of *brea* and *nyd* is regarded as just a repetition of the same meaning. In terms of semantic value, there is no difference except that the primary metrical stress falls on *brea*, as it has a fully stressed syllable with double alliteration. Thus, with metrical grammar also taken into consideration, *nyd* is relegated to second place. Regarding this seemingly unnecessary use of *nyd*, the question might arise: what is the function of *nyd* here? Firstly, we can think of the metrical pattern in which the absence of *nyd* causes a breach of the metrical type. Secondly, as in the case of *earfoéprage*, *nyd* is attached to intensify the meaning of 'distress'.

Hence the appropriate rendering of *breanyd* will be something like 'unspeakable state of the oppressed mind'. In this respect, Garmonsway's interpretation of 'inescapable distress' is most appropriate. In addition, *breanyd* is considered a variation or an apposition of *earfoéprage*, since they have similar meanings. But there are some substantive differences in meaning between *earfoéprage*, 'unendurable hardship', and *breanyd*, 'inescapable distress'. In this case, the use of variation or apposition between these nouns is not a case of a substantive variation in which the second phrase contains a more substantial or detailed meaning than the first. In this paragraph, the words which are used to describe Hrothgar's mental state, *earfoéprage* and *breanyd*, are reinforced equally by the metrical emphasis of fully stressed syllables with alliteration. With their intensified meanings, they are evenly distributed over two consequent lines. It can be concluded, therefore, that this distribution of two terms with equal semantic weight is designed to intensify the image of Hrothgar's imaginary torment.

As well as this, Hrothgar's mental agony is brought to mind by Beowulf's ironical use of words: that is, Hrothgar is doomed to suffer in *on heahstedehus*. 
selest, 'the finest of halls in its lofty place' (Beo 285). If Hrothgar's mind is doomed to be confined, as is entailed by the contextual use of oðâte in the context above, then the visual image conjuring up physical disability suggests a complete picture of paralysis. Ironically, given its meaning, husa selest functions in context as a place for mental affliction and at the same time becomes a noble man's physical imprisonment. The idea of a chieftain's suffering inside the finest of halls surely brings about a semantic incongruity; therefore the sense of irony arises. This ironical use of words is here used to formulate a picture of Hrothgar's failure as leader of a comitatus. In heroic society such pungent remarks about mental and physical limitation can be construed as shameful for a warrior. It appears that Beowulf, through this hypothetical situation, unconsciously draws a picture of a non-hero rather than describes a future hardship.

Therefore, Beowulf's description of Hrothgar's suffering in the best of halls contains two meanings; one is the superficial sense of Hrothgar's misery, the other the implicit sense of Hrothgar's failure as a hero. It might be assumed that Beowulf controls his speech to deal with the coastguard without 'jeopardizing his dignity or self-respect'. Needless to say, in Beowulf's speech to the coastguard, the image of an unsuccessful hero is directed towards the leader of the Danes, not to the coastguard. However, such a description of Hrothgar's suffering would cause a serious verbal quarrel if it were delivered to a person of a higher rank than the coastguard, since the degree of consciousness of Danish heroic pride depends on warrior hierarchies. It is likely that Beowulf's image of Hrothgar's torments, though it slips out due to his over-confidence, also slips out because Beowulf does not think the coastguard sufficiently aware to perceive the non-heroic implication of the description.

Concerning this first exchange of speeches, Shippey observed that both the coastguard and Beowulf show mutual respect by adopting the appropriate roles

12 Pepperdene, 'Beowulf and the Coast-guard', 418.
respectively of Officious Inspector (not Personal Challenger) and Modest Petitioner (rather than Officious Volunteer); thus he concludes that the question of dominance between them is not raised. However, Shippey's view of 'the question of dominance' appears to be challenged by Beowulf's caution in dealing with the coastguard. Beowulf's keen assessment of the coastguard's speech and his position appears to conform with Pepperdene's observation of the coastguard as 'a man of limited social and political importance among the thanes of Hrothgar's retinue'. Beowulf's awareness of the lesser position of the coastguard is well reflected in his apparent attempt to pass through this checkpoint without revealing his true purpose by hinting at a humbler role such as that of a messenger or an advisor. Beowulf's equivocation over his purpose seems to be a conscious plan elaborately designed on the grounds that the coastguard does not care about Beowulf's real intention in Denmark. This is confirmed by the coastguard's second speech when he does not pursue Beowulf's real motive. This proof of Beowulf's psychological dominance becomes apparent when he introduces himself to the coastguard without giving his name. His attitude here is in sharp contrast to his attitude towards Wulfgar to whom he gives his name: Beowulf is min nama (Beo 343b). Thus Beowulf's response to Wulfgar is direct and personal. In the face of Wulfgar's challenge Beowulf intends to enhance the formality in courtly speech by clarifying his identity. Where Beowulf identifies himself to the coastguard through his chieftain and father, such an anonymous indirect introduction can be a breach of speech etiquette to those who have no intimate knowledge of Beowulf. However, the anonymous introduction does not seem to annoy the coastguard, so the presumption by Beowulf that he is a man who does not pay heed to such a delicate

---


14 Pepperdene, 'Beowulf and the Coast-guard', 413.
social formality appears to be correct. In this context, the image of Hrothgar's inaction and limitation may be taken not to cause any feeling of displeasure in the coastguard.

There is a clear gap of social rank between the coastguard and Wulfgar, though both of them are treated as holding some important position in Hrothgar's court. The poet introduces the coastguard as begn Hrothgares, 'Hrothgar's thane', and the coastguard introduces himself as endesæta, 'coastguard'. The literal meaning of endesæta as 'one stationed at the extremity of a territory (i.e. coastguard), indicates that this official task is not regarded as a minor duty, since the man is deployed there to give a forewarning of invasions from abroad. Concerning his duty as watchman, Pepperdene rightly observed that the duties and responsibilities of the coastguard have been increasing since the depredations of Grendel have weakened the internal strength of Denmark, making the country vulnerable to attacks from neighbouring states.¹⁵

Besides, it is noticeable that the coastguard is not merely a coastguard, but also the captain of a band of watchmen. Being impressed by Beowulf's heroic appearance and noble manner, the coastguard orders his companions to guard Beowulf's ship:

\[
\text{Swylce ic maguþegnas mine hate} \\
\text{wiþfeonda gehwone flotan eoweme,} \\
\text{niwþyrwydne nacan on sande} \\
\text{arum healdan,}
\]

(Beo 293-296a)

[Moreover, I will order my companions honourably to guard your ship against all enemies, your fresh-tarred vessel on the beach]

¹⁵ Pepperdene, 'Beowulf and the Coast-guard', 411.
Here the coastguard is regarded as a commanding leader of maguþegnas. Klaeber glossed magoþegn as 'young retainer' or 'thane' whilst Garmonsway glossed it as 'young squire'.

Their youthful age is stressed in both of the renderings above, since mago is believed to share the same etymological root with Goth. magus (puer,servus), OS magu (child) and Icel. mögr (a son, a man). But BT does not gloss the meaning 'young' when magu is combined with þegn. Amongst a wide range of meanings, 'thane, vassal, retainer, follower, warrior, servant', BT glosses magu as 'servants' in line 293a maguþegnas. In the poem Beowulf, Wiglaf, Æschere and Beowulf's companion Hondscioh all share the same epithet maguþegn in the Danish land. Except for Æschere, the other three, Beowulf, Wiglaf and Hondscio can be regarded as relatively young in comparison to their counterparts. Hrothgar tells Beowulf of the death of his dear companion Æschere:

Dead is Æschere,

Yrmenlafes yldra broþor,

min runwita ond min rædbora,

eaxlgestealla, ðonne we on orlege

hafelan weredon,

(Beo 1323b-1327a)

[Æschere is dead, Yrmenlaf’s elder brother, my trusted counsellor, my adviser and my shoulder comrade, when we in battle defended our heads]


This paragraph shows that Æschere accompanied Hrothgar for a long time as a shoulder companion in battle. Hence the meaning of 'young' does not fit the mature warrior Æschere:

```
magoþegna bær
þone selestan sawolleasne
þara þe mid Hroðgare ham eahtode.
```

(See 1405b-1407)

[(she) bore lifeless the best of followers of those who watched over the home with Hrothgar]

In the light of contextual considerations, magoþegna in line 1405b denotes all of Hrothgar’s retainers regardless of their ages. In the same context, maguþegnas in line 293a, composing the band of the Danish watchguards, denotes warriors with lesser military rank who are attached to the coastguard again regardless of their ages. Apart from this role of leader of the Danish watchguard, the coastguard belongs to a courtly class of þegn. This term þegn is widely used, denoting a class containing several subclasses even in Beowulf. þegn is applied to the cup-bearer in line 494b and the scop in line 867b, each of whom, though their symbolic roles are significant enough, contributes towards courtly entertainment. In this sense, the duty of these men is not initially regarded as military service. þegn is also used to indicate Beowulf’s chosen band, whose job is solely devoted to military service: þrydlic þegna heæp, 'mighty band of warriors' (See 400a, 1627a); and Hrothgar’s retainers as well: þegna gehwylc, 'each of the retainers' (Beo 1673a). In addition, þegn is used to denote a distinguished member of warriors from a noble family: Higelaces þegn (Beowulf) (Beo 194b, 1574b), Higelaces þegn (Eofor) (Beo 2977b), þegne geselaðe (gave to Wiglaf) (Beo 2810b). As is shown above, þegn is used from the ordinary warrior to the most distinguished member of a military band. The coastguard’s military rank falls somewhere between these two as he represents the band of the Danish coastguard. But
the coastguard is regarded as holding a lesser military rank than Wulfgar, who comes from a noble family and is a well known warrior:

\[ \text{\textit{hæt wæs Wendla leod,}} \]

\[ \text{wæs his modsefa manegum gecyôed,}} \]

\[ \text{wig ond wisdom:}} \]

(\textit{Beo} 348b-350a)

[he was a chief of the Wendels; his courageous mind, his prowess and wisdom were well known to many]

Besides this noble background and established reputation as a warrior, Wulfgar has the duty of \textit{ar}, 'herald or messenger', which means he is closely associated with Hrothgar. The fact that Wulfgar is open and direct with the King further indicates his high position. This spatial closeness to the chieftain hints that Wulfgar is considered by Hrothgar to be one of his most favoured warriors. The most distinguished members of Hrothgar's comitatus, the king's nephew Hrothulf and the spokesman Unferth, are also closely placed to Hrothgar as a token of their importance in the court: Unferth is at the foot of Hrothgar \textit{æt fotum sæt} (\textit{Beo} 500a); Hrothulf sits next to Hrothgar \textit{seaton suhtergefæderan} (\textit{Beo} 1164a). Despite the difference in their social ranks, the coastguard and Wulfgar are commonly introduced as men accustomed to courtly customs. The poet tells us that the coastguard asked Beowulf about the landing of the Geats in the Danish land with formal words \textit{mæbelwordum} (\textit{Beo} 236b). This term hints that, though the coastguard's speech took place outside Hrothgar's hall, the coastguard is following the manner of words used in \textit{mæbel}, 'council, assembly, formal meeting'. It is thus quite probable that, though the coastguard is deployed at the frontier of the territory, he has been brought up at court and has been influenced by its traditions. The textual evidence shows that Wulfgar, like the coastguard, is also well accustomed to the courtly manner. Wulfgar stands in front of Hrothgar to deliver his speech: \textit{cuba he duguðe beaw}, 'he knew the customs of
a courtly retainer' (Beo 359b). Given the place in which Wulfgar stands, at the heart of
the hall, _duguo deaw_, 'customs of a courtly retainer', includes not only _mepelword_,
'formal words', but overall courtly etiquette required in the court amongst the
members of the _comitatus_. Even in their actual speeches, the coastguard and Wulfgar
demonstrate the courtly manner to which they are accustomed. By facing Beowulf and
his military band, both the coastguard and Wulfgar are immediately impressed by the
brave advancement and noble appearance of the Geats. But in fact their intuitive
judgement of Beowulf and his band as noble retainers, not exiles, is largely based on
their keen perception cultivated by long experience of courtly custom. The coastguard
and Wulfgar are able to perceive the worthiness of strange warriors both by their
manner and their weapons and armoury. Through their speeches, delivered in the form
of questions, the coastguard and Wulfgar pay extra attention to the armoury of
Beowulf's band by referring to coats of mail, shields, helmets and battle shafts. The
coatguard observes that Beowulf's incomparable nobleness is greatly enhanced by the
weapons he holds:

_Næfre ic maran geseah_

eorla ofer eorpan, ðonne is eower sum,
secg on searwum; nis þæt seldguma,
wæpnum geweorðad,

(Beo 247b-250a)

[Never have I seen a mightier noble upon earth, a warrior in armour, than is one of
you; he is no mere retainer (hall-man) dignified by weapons]

This paragraph provides a substantial clue to distinguishing between a mere warrior
and a mighty champion in heroic society. According to the coastguard's conclusion,
Beowulf, honoured by his weapons, is contrasted with _seldguma_, 'hall-man', whose
duty is probably confined to the service of the hall, as contrasted with a man of
warlike deeds. It is almost a courtly custom in heroic society that the value of warriors is measured by their weapons and armour, at least until their military history is revealed. A victory through difficult exploits is rewarded by precious weapons and armour. As this rewarding ceremony is normally held in public, the recipient's honour is widely proclaimed. In this context of weapon-related courtly custom, the phrase *wæpnum geweorðad*, 'dignified by weapons', is used as a formulaic expression to indicate the martial worthiness of a warrior. In accordance with this courtly custom, Beowulf gives a precious sword to the coastguard as a token of gratitude. The consequence of this sword-offering is rendered in the poet's comment:

```
He þæm batwearde  bunden golde
swurd gesealde,  þæt he syðpan wæs
on meodubence  mæþme þy weorðra,
yrfelafe.
```

(Beo 1900-1903a)

[To the boat-keeper Beowulf gave a sword bound round with gold, so that henceforth he was more honoured on the mead-bench for that treasure, that heirloom]

It is quite certain that Beowulf gave this sword to the coastguard in the expectation that the recipient would be exalted by his companions. Being brought up in courtly surroundings, Beowulf knows well how to treat his fellow warriors honourably. Here again, the phrase *mæþme þy weorðra*, 'more honoured for that treasure(sword)', has the same contextual meaning as *wæpnum geweorðad*, 'honoured by weapons'. With regard to the coastguard's social rank, it should be remembered that a key phrase

---

18 Cecil Wood believes that *seldguma* should be interpreted as 'coward', thus making the coastguard's exclamation 'that's no coward, that one' a recognition of Beowulf's martial status. See Cecil Wood, 'Nis þæt Seldguma: Beowulf 249', *PMLA*, 75 (1960), 481-4 (p. 484).
*weapnum geworðad* is emphatically mentioned in his speech. In turn, this kind of speech habit proves that the captain is well aware of heroic custom. Wulfgar's speech conforms more closely to the courtly customs than does the coastguard's. Like the speech of the coastguard, Wulfgar's first speech shows that his attention is mainly drawn to the weapons and armoury which Beowulf's band has brought:

\[
\text{Hwanon ferigeað ge fætte scyldas,} \\
\text{græge syrcan, ond grimhelmas,} \\
\text{heresceafa heap?}
\]

(Boe 333-335a)

[Whence have you brought these plated shields, these hauberks, grey and visored helmets, this pile of battle-shafts]

Wulfgar, possibly ignorant of Beowulf's past history, is much impressed by the weaponry of Beowulf's band. Quite reasonably this weaponry, which may be different from the ordinary, appears to give Wulfgar a clue that this band is not an ordinary one. Right before this reference to the impressive arms of Beowulf's band, the poet says that they are not commonly furnished with their weapons: *wæs se irenjæget weapnum gewurðad*, 'The troop clad in mail was made more honoured by its weapons' (Boe 330b-331a).

Here, the splendid appearance which indicates a noble military band is again reinforced by the formulaic expression *weapnum gewurðad*. Like the coastguard, Wulfgar himself measures the worthiness of Beowulf's band by using an expression almost identical to *weapnum gewurðad*:

\[
\text{Hy on wiggetawum wyrðe þinceað} \\
eorla geehtlan;
\]

(Boe 368-369a)

[In their war-trappings they seem worthy of the high esteem of nobles]
This paragraph proves that Wulfgar's conviction of the noble state of Beowulf's band is largely based on his examination of their armour. In keeping with Wulfgar's judgement, it is later said that the coat of mail Beowulf puts on is of exceptional value. Beowulf begs Hrothgar to send his corselet back to Hygelac if he is slain in the battle:

Onsend Higelace, gif mec hild nime,
beaduscruða betশ, ḷæt mine breost wreð,  
hrægla selest; ḷæt is Hrædian laf,  
Welandes geweorc.

(Beo 452-455a)

[But if battle carries me off, send to Hygelac this best of war-dresses, most excellent of corselets, which protects my breast; it is Hrethel's heirloom, and the work of Weland]

Both the value and the splendid decorations of Beowulf's corselets, which evoke an impressive visual appeal to the watchers including the coastguard and Wulfgar, cannot be emphasized too much. In heroic society it is almost a maxim that the worthiness of the armour corresponds exactly to the worthiness of its owner.

So far, I have shown, through the usage of specific terms reflecting the customs of courtly speech, that both the coastguard and Wulfgar should be regarded as worthy members of heroic society. However, the content and style of their speeches as exemplified by the expression 'honoured by weapons or armour', demonstrate there is a certain social gap between the captain and Wulfgar. This social gap plays a key role in understanding the hidden intentions, that is the sub-text, beneath the exchanges between Beowulf and his interlocutors the captain and Wulfgar.

With regard to the purpose of Beowulf's landing, his two counterparts show quite different responses through their speeches. After asking Beowulf's company who they are, the coastguard ends by asking why they came into the Danish land:
hwanan eowre cyme syndon, 'whence you have come, and why' (Beo 257b). To this question Beowulf answers in a roundabout way, hiding his real intention in order not to hurt the pride of the Danish comitatus. Beowulf's cautious approach is to first explain his task as an envoy with a great errand (micel ærende) and then of councillor to Hrothgar (ræd gelæran). However, as will be seen in the subsequent speech of the coastguard, the coastguard is seemingly content with Beowulf's indirect answer and does not raise a question again to find out Beowulf's true intention. In this way, the coastguard is presented as not paying particular attention to the purpose of Beowulf's band as long as he recognizes them as warriors of good intention. About the manner of the coastguard's speech, Pepperdene argues that the coastguard is rude and offensive. Firstly, his praise of Beowulf is tactless because on two occasions it excludes Beowulf's band (he praises Beowulf alone in Beo 247b-51a and again when he predicts Beowulf's safe return to his ship in Beo 296b-300); secondly, he accuses Beowulf and his band of being possible spies in Beo 251b-54. By excluding Beowulf's band from his praise, the coastguard not only insults the band but by implication insults the leader who hand-picked them. I do not agree with Pepperdene that the coastguard displays rudeness towards Beowulf and his band, but I do believe his speech reveals a lesser degree of courtesy and formality than Wulfgar's. The difference in style of speech is merely evidence that the coastguard is a lesser thane than Wulfgar, who observes the courtesy and etiquette of formal speech.

The exchange of speeches between Beowulf and Wulfgar shows a different attitude. Like the coastguard, Wulfgar starts his question with: Hwanon ferigeað ge fætte scyltas, 'From where and why have you brought these plated shields' (Beo 333). But in his subsequent speech, Wulfgar seems not to pay any particular attention to the purpose of the coming of Beowulf's band:

19 Pepperdene, 'Beowulf and the Coast-guard', 413-15
Wen' ic ðæt ge for wlenco, nalles for wræcsidum,
ac for higeþrymmum Hroðgar sohton.

(Beo 338-339)

[I believe you have sought out Hrothgar, not from exile, but from high-spirited mind (/ pride) and from magnanimity]

Wulfgar perceives that Beowulf's company is not in exile, since they arrive with bold appearance, furnished with splendid weapons. This judgement is possibly due to Wulfgar's personal experience of exile, which is supported by his different tribal background, as Wendla leod, 'prince of Wendles'. However, the real point in this paragraph lies in the fact that Wulfgar has already perceived the real intention of Beowulf's band. Wulfgar says that Beowulf's band came for wlenco, 'from high-spirited or pride' and for higeþrymmum, 'from magnanimity'. Of these two terms wlenco should be given special attention in the understanding of heroic poetry. The full implication of wlenco will be discussed in the following chapter. In summary at this stage, wlenco is used to describe a heroic disposition in those who are eager to seek out warlike deeds through dangerous adventures. Were it not for such warlike exploits, and more importantly, without subsequent victory, motivated by wlenco, 'pride, glory, high-spirits', there cannot be a true hero. Like the usage of wæpnum geweorðad, wlenco is fittingly regarded as a key component of courtly speech. Being brought up in a heroic society as his noble lineage indicates, Wulfgar is well aware of heroic custom, in which warriors motivated by wlenco are constantly looking for new adventures. With reference to wlenco in his speech, it can be assumed that Wulfgar knows that Beowulf and his band, motivated by 'pride or glory', came to the Danish land to fight against Grendel. It is reasonable for Wulfgar to make this connection between the coming of Beowulf's company and a supposed fight against Grendel, as he was one of those humiliated by Grendel's savage attack. Such a bold group of foreign warriors ready to take up a dangerous task which the Danes gave up could
come as a serious blow to Wulfgar, who is a herald and who is also praised as wlonc hælēð, 'proud warrior' (Beo 331b). The subsequent request, delivered in front of Hrothgar to grant an audience to Beowulf's band clearly demonstrates that Wulfgar, impressed by the high-spirited mind of Beowulf's band, does not feel envious, but behaves in a true heroic manner:

no ðu him wearnge geteoh
ðōnra gegncwīda,  ðlǣdmæn Hroðgar!

(Beo 366b-367)
[do not refuse to grant them your reply, O gracious Hrothgar!]

Once again the strength of Wulfgar's mental power to comprehend a situation is proved in this request scene. It should be remembered that Wulfgar is not in a position to beg Hrothgar to grant favours to Beowulf's band. As his official duty of a herald indicates, his job might have ended in simply delivering the intention of Beowulf's band. On the contrary, Wulfgar begs Hrothgar to accept the exchange of words with Beowulf's band. Wulfgar's request is much emphasized by his exclamatory calling of Hrothgar glǣdmæn Hroðgar!, 'O gracious Hrothgar!'. Why does Wulfgar deliver his message in such over-elevated diction? I suggest that Wulfgar is afraid of Hrothgar's possible refusal, one which could be caused by rivalry. It can be assumed that the exploits of Beowulf's band in the Danish land could pose a serious threat to the pride of the Danes. As chief of the Danes, Hrothgar might feel such a humiliation more intensely than ordinary warriors, as the Danish incompetence is highlighted by the daring eagerness of Beowulf's band to take over what the Danes have already given up. Wulfgar is thus capable of looking into the possible emotional upheaval in Hrothgar's mind with regard to the rival-consciousness in heroic society.

In this context, Wulfgar's speech, bearing this underlying meaning, emerges as another speech to contain a sub-text, in the manner of the speech of Beowulf to the coastguard. The fact that Wulfgar's speech contains both a surface meaning and an
underlying meaning indicates that the deliverer of that speech has a higher degree of mentality than those whose speeches lack sub-text. As is shown in two occasions, Wulfgar is presented as a master of situations. It can be concluded that Wulfgar differs from the coastguard in social rank since he is able to put two meanings into a single speech, with more references to heroic terms such as wlenco and higepryrmum. In addition, Wulfgar's consciousness corresponds to his military rank, which is higher than that of the coastguard, who does not show any hint of rival-consciousness in his speech. Sub-text becomes a characteristic feature of all the major speeches by major figures in Beowulf. Unlike Wulfgar's speech, the coastguard's is delivered in a straightforward way, without double meanings. As regards sub-text here, the only possible passage in the coastguard's speech worth examining is the beginning part of his speech, delivered right after Beowulf's description of Hrothgar's imaginary suffering:

\[
\text{Æghwæþres sceal} \\
\text{scearp scyldwiga gescad witan,} \\
\text{worda ond worca, se þe wel þenceð.} \\
\text{(Beo 287b-289)}
\]

[The keen warrior who can think rightly must know the difference between words and deeds]

No critics have so far convincingly explained the full implications of this passage. Kaske believes that the coastguard regards 'the hero equal to all occasions through his fortitudo (deeds) and sapientia (words)'. Greenfield argues that the coastguard is differentiating between 'empty words' and 'words embracing deeds'. In contrast,
Wrenn proposes that 'It is possible that the statement is not to be assigned to a person, but is rather one of those general moralizing comments which occur so often in Old English Poetry'. With regard to 'the so called "gnomic use" of sceal, implying continuity or habit', Wrenn appears not to connect the statement in question and the real situation highlighted by the exchange of speeches between Beowulf and the coastguard. I believe that the real implication of this statement should be understood in accordance with the degree of the coastguard's recognition of the double meanings of Beowulf's speech, especially the last part concerning Hrothgar's possible future suffering. Beowulf's gloomy image of Hrothgar's torment, uttered carelessly due to his over confidence about his future task, may arouse two responses from the hearer (the coastguard). Being stirred by the picture of the imaginary humiliation of his lord Hrothgar as a model of an impotent chief, the coastguard might take Beowulf's statement very seriously. This interpretation assumes that the coastguard would have a high degree of rival consciousness. Yet the other parts of the coastguard's speeches do not show that he has this feeling to such a high degree. Also, it is doubtful whether or not the coastguard is capable of fully understanding the underlying meaning of the imaginary scene. The other possible interpretation is that the coastguard grasps within the limits of his mentality the underlying meaning of humiliation, but he does not care very much, since he is very impressed by the extreme confidence of Beowulf's speech. In this context, the coastguard's response in lines 287b-289 might be regarded as reflecting his complete confidence in the integrity of Beowulf's words and deeds. In a sense, the coastguard convincingly fortells the successful result (deeds) of Beowulf's More', in the Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in Honour of Morton W. Bloomfield, ed. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalamazoo Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982), pp. 45-51 (p. 51).

exploits in the Danish land on the basis of his speech (words). To the coastguard, such a tone of confidence, together with Beowulf's manner and brave appearance, works as an important clue to predicting the result of Beowulf's subsequent adventure.

However, considering the semantic implication of his description of Hrothgar's suffering, Beowulf is regarded as showing a certain lack of self-restraint. On the deeper level, what Beowulf describes in lines 283-285 is an utter paralysis of Danish courage: both the noble chief and husa selest, 'the finest of halls' (Beo 285b) represent an ideal combination of the comitatus, but its leader's torments in that place symbolize a collapse of Danish prowess. Though the description is focused on Hrothgar, its thematic implication is much wider than first appears, since one man's trouble indicates the general condition of the tribe's fighting prowess. It seems unclear whether or not Beowulf intends to judge the condition of Danish military capability, but the underlying meaning appears to point to their lack of this quality. In this context this last part of his first speech is not directed either to the coastguard or to Hrothgar but to all members of the Danish comitatus. As H. D. Chickering noticed, Beowulf's 'self-confidence verges on rudeness'; the description of Hrothgar's future agony is regarded as an implicit verbal hyndo, 'humiliation', as opposed to physical hyndo from Grendel.23

(b) The exchange with Hrothgar: a hidden conflict of psychology

Beowulf's lack of self-restraint manifested in this form of verbal hyndo, becomes gradually apparent in his speech to Hrothgar:

(Sea-farers say that this hall, this most noble building, stands empty and useless to everyone)

Here Beowulf seems to describe the desolation of the hall, but on a deeper level his remarks are understood to evoke the image of Danish paralysis. Unlike the first verbal hynðo in which the central image is focused on the chief, Hrothgar, here the best hall becomes a thematic embodiment representing the collapse of the Danish comitatus. This interpretation becomes possible only when the implication of a hall in the heroic world is fully perceived. On the surface, the hall is nothing but a place to live; but the hall, in Germanic heroic society, is expected to play a key role as the setting for all kinds of heroic activities: vows of allegiance are exchanged there, heroic boasts made, feasts held, mead drunk and treasures distributed. In essence the binding force of the comitatus is conceived in the hall. In this sense, the hall symbolises the heart of the heroic world, and it also becomes a physical embodiment of the heroic code. Swanton rightly points out that the hall (Heorot) is the symbol of the pride of the whole nation, not just the court.24

In Beowulf's description, the hall, as an embodiment of civilization, is portrayed as having lost its principal function. The loss is highlighted by the combination of two adjectives idel, 'empty', and unnyt, 'useless'. Beowulf's technique

of deepening the sense of degradation by joining words characterizing the condition of the Danish hall is also a notable feature in his description of Hrothgar's suffering. Hrothgar's physical and mental state, deprived of martial prowess, is pungently portrayed with the terms *æarfoþræge, breanyd, bólæð* (*Beo* 283-284). In these two cases the descriptive power is largely due to the intensity of these expressions. Ironically this intensity increases the sense of Beowulf's sarcasm towards the Danish *comitatus*.

However, the image of Heorot's paralysis appears not to provoke any serious disputatious reaction among the Danes, because Beowulf attributes the source of the tale to the hearsay of sailors. In the speech to the coastguard, the underlying image of Hrothgar's paralysis is uttered on an intellectual level beyond the understanding of the coastguard: therefore, the implication of Beowulf's remarks may not be fully perceived by him. Likewise, this reference to hearsay is conceived so as not to bring about a harsh response from Hrothgar.

However, if Beowulf were keenly aware of both courtly etiquette and of the thematic implications of his description, he should restrain himself from making such a statement in front of Hrothgar and the Danes. Also, Beowulf's deliverance of this disgraceful description of Heorot, right in front of its creator, is inappropriate to the circumstances he faces, in which he endeavours to 'win the King's consent by impeccable tact, flattery, and courtesy'.

Beowulf's cautious approach is well demonstrated in the following begging speech to Hrothgar:

```
ic þe nu ða,
brego Beorht-Dena, biddan wille,
eodor Scyldinga, anre bene,
```

---

I beg of you one boon, prince of glorious Danes, protector of Scyldings, do not refuse me this, defender of warriors, noble friend of people.

This excessive use of four different epithets for Hrothgar proves that Beowulf is strongly conscious of the need to gain Hrothgar's consent for his adventure at Heorot. Brodeur explains these remarkable syntactical and semantical variations in Beowulf's four epithets for Hrothgar as indicating the 'affectionate relationship between Hrothgar and his retainers'; Hrothgar's 'lordship over them'; Hrothgar's 'generosity'; Hrothgar's 'renown' respectively. This shows Beowulf's immense ability to control the situation by his use of words. In my view, Beowulf's four epithets add up to an image of the ideal lord who has the perfect relationship with his followers. Beowulf knows well that his military exploit depends on Hrothgar's decision. However, there lies a more complicated psychological implication beneath this simple decision. Clearly Beowulf perceives what is going on in Hrothgar's mind. On Hrothgar's side, the acceptance of Beowulf's proposal demonstrates the failure of Danish military prowess. What worries Beowulf, according to Irving, is that his 'very presence is potentially an insult to a humiliated people'. This view of the presence of Danish heroic pride contrasts with Brodeur's comments on the Danes: 'These Danes had suffered too much and too long to nurse a pride of which few shreds were left them.' It seems to me that Brodeur ignores a possible related sub-text: heroic competitiveness. Throughout the poem, it is


27 Irving, A Reading of Beowulf, p. 53.

28 Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf, p. 145.
repeatedly demonstrated that heroic pride is held in high esteem by the Danes. Apart from the remarkable example of Unferth's taunting speech (the implications of which will be discussed later), Hrothgar's reply immediately following Beowulf's first speech at Heorot suggests that the Danes are people with a high degree of pride:

\[ \text{Ful oft gebeotedon beore druncne} \]
\[ \text{ofe ealowæge oretmecgas,} \]
\[ \text{þæt hie in beorsele bidan woldon} \]
\[ \text{Grendles guþe mid gryrum ecca.} \]

(Beo 480-483)

[Very often warriors, after the drinking of beer, pledged themselves over the ale-cup that they would await in the beer-hall the combat with Grendel with terrible swords]

The whole framework of this speech is designed to preserve the Danish pride. Hrothgar recalls the efforts of his deceased warriors by conjoining words evoking heroic spirit: gebeotedon, beore druncne, oretmecgas and beorsele. Hrothgar's recollection of beot is significant, as the pledging of oaths is a prerequisite for heroic deeds. Hrothgar's use of these connotative words is part of his desire to show affection and respect for his retainers. In particular, the beer drinking implies not only the literal act of consumption, but also the ritual swearing of vows. This drinking custom is especially important in clan society, since it is understood as a 'symbol and a confirmation of mutual social obligation', according to E. A. Thompson.

The implication of beer-drinking is well embedded in the various epithets for hall or seat: meoduheal, 'mead-hall', beorsele, 'beer-hall', winæm, 'wine-hall',

29 Fred C. Robinson, Beowulf and the Appositive Style (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), p. 77
calubenc, 'ale-seats'. The use of these compounds with their first elements denoting mead, beer, wine and ale, appears to prove that courtly life in heroic society is dominated by drinking. In his comment on lines 1024b-25a, Beowulf gebah ful on fletce, 'Beowulf' received the cup of that hall', Klaeber observes that Beowulf's acceptance of a drinking cup is 'no doubt in obedience to well regulated courtly custom'.31 In heroic poetry the 'courtly custom' is frequently manifested in terms of making vows. When Wealththeow brings the cup to Beowulf, he ceremonially receives it and then makes his formal vow to rescue her people or die in the attempt:

Ic gefremman sceal
eorlic ellen, oþe endedæg
on þisse meoduhealle minne gebidan!

(Beo 636b-638)

[I will perform the deed of heroic valour, or meet my last day in this mead-hall]

Similarly, in The Battle of Maldon, the commemorative battle-poem probably composed c. 991-1000, Ælfwine encourages those dispirited warriors at the fall of Byrhtnoth by recalling their heroic boast over the drinking of mead:

Gemunaþ þa mæla þe we oft æt meodo spræcon,
þonne we on bence beot ahofon,
hæleð on healle, ymbe heard gewinn

(Maldon 212-214)

[Remember all those speeches that we uttered over mead, when we raised vows upon the benches, heroes in the hall about hard strife]

Here we can note that the vow to serve the leader is said to be made when the warrior drinks the mead, as if the acceptance of the drink confirms the binding of the oath. Robinson denies that beore druncne (Beo 480b) means 'inebriated' (with beer),

preferring the translation 'having drunk the (lord's) beer', in which a ritual is implied. Thus the conjunction of gebeotedon and beore druncne in Hrothgar's memory is meant to stress the essential heroic quality inherent in his retinue even under the threat of Grendel. In addition, this attempt to put forward the vivid heroic spirit of his people is much enhanced by the use of ful oft, 'very often', which emphasises the numerous occasions of the heroic efforts of the Danes.

Most of all, it is assumed that Hrothgar's recollection of his warriors' effort is motivated by Beowulf's symbolic description of Heorot (Beo 411-3a), and is intended to defend the pride of his country. Hrothgar's emphatic use of 'very often' and the subsequent reference to ritual vows made by his retinue seems to show that Hrothgar has perceived Beowulf's unwitting sarcasm beneath his literal description of Heorot. Here the sub-text of heroic competitiveness comes to the surface, as Hrothgar adopts a technique of verbal counterattack. This technique, here designed to defend the pride of Hrothgar and his country, emerges again when Hrothgar tells of his youthful reign of his country:

\[\text{ðæ ic furþum weold folce } \text{Deniga} \]
\[\text{ond on geogoðe heold } \text{ginne rice}, \]

\text{(Beo 465-466)}

[then I had just begun to rule the people of the Danes and held in my youth the spacious kingdom]

This may be in response to Beowulf's earlier words:

\[\text{hæbbe ic mæða fela} \]

\[\text{---} \]

32 Robinson, \textit{Beowulf and the Appositive Style}, p. 77.

33 I agree with Robinson who regards the passage (Beo 480-3) as expressing Hrothgar's respect, gratitude and admiration for his deceased retainers. See Robinson, \textit{Beowulf and the Appositive Style}, p. 77.
ongunnen on geogoðe.

(Beo 408b-409a)

[I have undertaken many glorious deeds in my youth]

Doubtless Beowulf's remarks about his youth are designed to convey the credibility of his martial prowess to Hrothgar in order to gain consent for the battle with Grendel.34 However, Hrothgar's recalling of his youth is meant to set out an equal balance between the youthful achievements of Beowulf and himself. Hrothgar, like Beowulf, tries to establish his heroic credentials by means of verbal counterattack. In particular, these two parts of Hrothgar's speech (the youthful rule and the recollection of the efforts of the Danes) reflect Hrothgar's consciousness of the heroic pride of the Danes in the face of the sudden appearance of Beowulf, who dares to undertake a martial exploit on their behalf. With the presence of Beowulf in Denmark, Hrothgar's dilemma deepens, though he recognizes Beowulf's arrival as God's providence (Beo 381b-2a). This is why Hrothgar, on receiving the message of Beowulf's arrival from Wulfgar, instead of jumping out of his seat with joy, calmly and unexpectedly recalls Beowulf's youth and pedigree:

Ic hine cuðe cnihtwesende;
waes his ealdfæder Ecgtheow haten,

(Beo 372-373)

[I knew him when he was a youth, his noble father was called Ecgtheow]

This reflective response can be contrasted with the dramatic one of the coastguard who intuitively singles out Beowulf and his band by addressing them in a panegyric:

34 Malone contends that Beowulf describes his many youthful exploits to Hrothgar in order 'to convince the king, that here at last is the man he needs'. See Kemp Malone, 'Beowulf', ES, 29 (1948), 161-72 (p. 166).
Næfre ic maran geseah
eorla ofer eorhán, ðonne is eower sum,
secg on searwum;

(Beo 247b-249a)

[I have never seen a mightier noble warrior in armour on earth than is one of you]

Wulfgar also expresses his impression of Beowulf's band; Ne seah ic elþeodige þus
manige men modiglicran, 'I have never seen so many foreigners more bold' (Beo
336b-337).

However, this impression of Beowulf diminishes sharply, as we hear of
Hrothgar's quiet response.35 As already seen, Beowulf's coming to Denmark is both a
joy and a challenge to Hrothgar. To Hrothgar, Beowulf's intention to fight against
Grendel could do serious damage to the pride of the Danes. Therefore Hrothgar
appears to defend the pride of his country by way of recalling the successful ruling in
his youth, and stressing the efforts of his comitatus. This attempt to keep up his pride
is illustrated more clearly in his mention of Beowulf's father's debt to him: Siððan þæ
fæhðe feo þingode, 'I afterwards settled the feud with money' (Beo 470). This
recalling of his aid to Ecgtheow seems to be designed to counterbalance Beowulf's
help to the Danes. Hrothgar's words are his most explicit reference to the debt he feels
Beowulf owes him.36 Thus, as Swanton argues, Hrothgar can be regarded not so much

35 Brodeur points out that despite Hrothgar's warm response to Beowulf's offer to
risk his life against Grendel, Hrothgar does not immediately accept Beowulf's
help. This calm response of Hrothgar is also contrasted with that of the coastguard
and Wulfgar. See Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf, pp. 52-3.

36 Bonjour hints that Hrothgar's reference to Ecgtheow's debt to him is possibly
intended for some kind of repayment from the offspring of Ecgtheow. See Adrien
as a 'weak king' relying on the help of a neighbouring state, but as one who accepts 'an expected debt of gratitude'.

The series of remarks discussed above may show that Hrothgar perceives the sub-textual meanings of Beowulf's speech, and at the same time endeavours both to defend and to preserve the pride of his country. It is generally thought that full scale verbal duelling between rival heroes begins with the exchange between Beowulf and Unferth. However, the psychological implications of Hrothgar's reply to the Geatish hero seem to entail a certain amount of verbal duelling already at an earlier stage. But the aftermath of this reply does not come on the surface for various reasons, as we see in the subsequent exchange between Beowulf and Unferth: Beowulf's remarks about the collapse of Heorot are not intended to upset Hrothgar. Also, Hrothgar feels that he does not need to discredit Beowulf, though his pride is challenged by Beowulf's attempt to undertake an exploit and his figurative description of Heorot. On the surface, in the exchange of speeches between Beowulf and Hrothgar, no sign of emotional conflict on the basis of heroic competitiveness can be found. Instead, hidden psychological warfare takes place, as Beowulf's cautious approach is counterbalanced by the sensitive reaction of Hrothgar. In addition, as this exchange ends with Hrothgar's reply, Beowulf is not given a chance to evaluate the full contents of his counterpart's speech. The restrained façade of this exchange disappears as Beowulf faces Unferth on equal terms of social rank and in a combative manner of flyting. Two main factors distinguish the exchange of Beowulf's and Hrothgar's speeches from a genuine style of flyting: the distinctive social gap between the two becomes a hindrance to prevent their speeches from developing into true disputes, and

See also Norma Kroll, 'Beowulf: The Hero as Keeper of Human Polity', MP, 84 (1986), 117-29 (p. 122).
secondly, there lies a thematic dissonance in the intentions of Beowulf and Hrothgar: Beowulf cannot adopt the diction of a flyting, since Hrothgar's speech is centred on public duty. As I shall show in the next chapter, these obstacles are removed in the exchange of speeches between Beowulf and Unferth.
In this chapter the characters of Unferth and Beowulf are examined through the study of their speeches. Usually Unferth is seen as a provocateur. However, the sub-text of his version of the Breca episode suggests that he is motivated both by professional jealousy of Beowulf's self-attested ability to fight Grendel, and a desire to defend Danish pride. His heroic ideology — to demand action rather than words — is also revealed. As to the character of Beowulf, the text reveals two interesting points. Firstly, the lack of self-restraint which has already been noted in ch. 2, is even more evident as Beowulf is forced to insult the whole Danish race. Secondly, Beowulf recalls the swimming contest with Breca with pride, and does not consider it an act of mere boyish exuberance as is generally maintained. The evidence for this comes from a meaning of geogoa, 'youth', which may be found in Beowulf and other sources.

(a) Unferth's rivalry, sense of inferiority and heroic ideology

As Pope points out, in this flyting scene, Unferth is presented as a foil to Beowulf, helping primarily to allow Beowulf to reveal his astonishing prowess.\(^1\) Thus Unferth is probably subordinated to Beowulf, and is robbed of his independent role in heroic

society. Unferth has long been discredited as a symbolic figure of 'discordia' or 'mar-
peace'. As to the view of 'a foil to Beowulf', Robinson seems to have overlooked a

   crucial point, in that Unferth is used to allow Beowulf to reveal in his reply the other
side of his character: that is, the lack of self-restraint that has been discussed already
in his speeches to the coastguard and Hrothgar.

   There is no doubt that Unferth appears as a traditional agent provocateur when
he tries to discredit Beowulf with his own version of the swimming-contest. Unferth's words seem offensive and their impropriety is all the greater when set against the extreme courtesy of Beowulf's reception by the coastguard, Wulfgar and Hrothgar. Yet, the underlying meaning of Unferth's speech seems to shed a new light
on his attitude towards Beowulf. Unferth tries to set out his personal heroic ideology.
This intention becomes gradually evident as he begins to change his attitude towards
both Beowulf and Breca. At the beginning of his version of the swimming-contest,
Unferth taunts Beowulf that his youthful exploits were motivated by his audacious
boasting. But it should be borne in mind that Unferth's sarcasm is directed to Breca as

2 Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of
Unferth', Traditio, 7 (1949-51), 410-15 (p. 411-13). Many critics have taken a
negative view of Unferth: For example, Lawrence believes Unferth is 'a man with
an evil temper'; William W. Lawrence, Beowulf and Epic Tradition (Cambridge:

3 Pope, 'Beowulf 505', 173. Alain Renoir points out that similar scenes to Beowulf's
encounter with Unferth are found in Hrölf's Saga Kraka and Odyssey. See Renoir,
A Key to Old Poems: The Oral-Formulaic Approach to the Interpretation of West-
well as Beowulf. This is proved by Unferth's use of the dual *git* and accusative dual
*inge* which implicate both men in foolishness and stubbornness:

\[\text{ôær git for wence wada cunnedon}\]
\[\text{ond for dolgilpe on deop wæter}\]
\[\text{aldrum neþdon? Ne inc ænig mon,}\]
\[\text{ne leof ne laþ, belean mihte}\]
\[\text{sorhfullne siô, ða git on sund reon;}\]
\[\text{þær git eagorstream earmum þehton,}\]
\[\text{mæton merestræta, mundum brugdon,}\]
\[\text{glidon ofer garsecg; geofon ýþum weol,}\]
\[\text{wintrys wylm[um]. Git on wæteres æht}\]
\[\text{seofon niht swuncon;}\]

\[(\text{Beo 508-517a})\]

[you two ventured the floods for the sake of pride, and risked your lives in deep water
for idle boasting? No one, friend or foe, could dissuade you two from that sorrowful
venture (disaster), when you two swam (rowed) out to sea, there you two enfolded the
water's currents with arms, traversing (measuring) the paths of the sea, made quick
movements with your hands, and glided over the ocean; the sea surged with waves,
the winter's billows. You two toiled in the water's realm for seven nights]

As this speech develops, however, we can see that Unferth begins to single out
Breca from the dual *git* to the singular *he* (Breca). This shifting of subjects seems to
be designed in order first to emphasize Breca's victory over Beowulf then to praise
Breca's achievement which echoes the ideal of the central figure of a *comitatus*:

\[\text{ðonon he gesohte swæsne ðæel,}\]
\[\text{leof his leodum, lond Brondinga,}\]
\[\text{freoðoburh fægere, þær he folc ahte,}\]
\[\text{burh ond beagas.}\]

63
(Beo 520-523a)

[then he, dear to his people, sought his beloved fatherland, the land of the Brondings, his fair stronghold, where he had subjects and stronghold and treasures]

What we hear about now is the glorious return of Breca to his fatherland. Here the previous tone of sarcasm has disappeared completely. At the centre of his speech lies the thematic motif of the ideal comitatus which is encapsulated in the words: swæsne eōel, 'fatherland', freoðoburh, 'stronghold', folc, 'people', and beagas, 'treasures'. Each of these words embodies a key element of the comitatus and together they make up a model society. The addition of the heroic deeds of Breca completes the image, creating an ideal, the perfect society. Now the ideal picture of a heroic society is presented. This scene of Breca's return to his land seems to induce the audience to forget that Unferth had previously reproached him in harsh terms; instead they find themselves listening to a panegyric on Breca. Moreover, Unferth raises Breca to the level of a perfect hero by putting an emphasis on Breca's fulfillment of his pledge to Beowulf:

Beot eal wið þe
sunu Beanstanes soðe gelæste,

(Beo 523b-524)

[The son of Beanstan performed faithfully all the vow that he had made against you]

In a wider context this phrase signifies an heroic ideal. In Germanic heroic society, heroes are continuously singled out by their strong commitment to the pledges and vows they made. As Ælfwine says, in The Battle of Maldon:

Gemun[ap] þa mæla þe we oft æt meodo spræcon,
þonne we on bence beot ahofon,
haelœ on healle, ymbe heard gewinn:

(Maldon 212-214)
[Remember all those speeches we often uttered over mead, when we raised vows upon
the benches, heroes in the hall, talking about hard strife]

At the fall of Byrhtnoth, Ælfwine tries to encourage his companions by reminding
them of their past boasts. Also he warns them in a strong words that the fulfilment of
pledges is an essential quality, which forms part of an heroic ideal: nu mæg cunnian
hwæ cene sy, 'now he can prove it who may be brave' (Maldon 215). And at the end of
Beowulf Wiglaf rebukes his comrades for their ingratitude and cowardice in the hour
of need:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ic } & \text{ðæt } \text{mæl } \text{geman, } \text{þær } \text{we } \text{medu } \text{þegen,} \\
\text{þonne } & \text{we } \text{geheton } \text{ussum } \text{hlaforde} \\
\text{in } & \text{biorsele,} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Beo 2633-2635a)

[I remember that time at which we partook of the mead when we pledged ourselves to
our lord in the beer-hall]

In this context of the need to fulfill one's vows, Wiglaf's companions fail to be true
heroes. In comparison, Breca, in Unferth's speech, emerges as an ideal hero. But it
should not be overlooked that Unferth, through this heroic eulogy, demonstrates his
own heroic ideology: boasts, even if they are foolishly motivated, must be fulfilled. In
the light of this heroic principle, Breca appears to be free from any of the faults which
were pointed out by Unferth. Therefore it is assumed that Unferth's version of the
Breca episode sets out an ethical standard from which Unferth seems to derive his
heroic ideology; as long as a warrior achieves success in the fulfilment of his pledge
he gains credit, despite the motivation of the vow. Unferth's recognition of the
practical result of a heroic exploit is demonstrated by his later response of silence to
the victory of Beowulf over Grendel:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Da } & \text{wæs } \text{swigra } \text{seeg, } \text{sunu } \text{Ec[g]lafes,} \\
\text{on } & \text{gylpspræce } \text{guðgeweorca,}
\end{align*}
\]
sijðan æþelingas eorles cræfte
ofær heanne hrof hand sceawedon,

(Beo 980-983)

[Then the son of Ecglaf, Unferth was more silent in boasting speech about warlike deeds, when, through the hero's might, the nobles had examined the hand on the high roof overhead]

Unferth's acknowledgment of Beowulf's prowess is further emphasized by his generosity in lending his sword to Beowulf:

Næs þæt þonne mætost mægenfultuma,
þæt him on ðearfe lah ðyle Hroðgares;

(Beo 1455-1456)

[That was not the least of mighty aids, which Hrothgar's spokesman lent him in his need]

Drawing from these two instances, it might be inferred that Unferth has a certain favourable disposition, which has some conceptual congruence with mod micel, 'much courage (/great mind)' in the description of Hrothgar's court just before Wealhtheow's first speech:

Swylce þær Unferð þyle
æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga; gehwylc hiora his ferhþe treowde,
þæt he hæfde mod micel, þeah þe he his magum nære arfæst æt ecga gelacum.

(Beo 1165b-1168a)

[Moreover, there sat Unferth the spokesman at the Scylding chieftain's feet; all of them trusted in his spirit, that he had much courage, although in the play of sword blades he had shown no mercy to his kinsmen]
Scholars are continually puzzled at the phrases gehwylc hiora his ferhþe treowde, 'all of them trusted in his spirit', and mod micel, 'much courage (great mind)'. This new revelation of Unferth's nature seems to be contrasted with his lack of spirit in the face of Grendel's attack. Though Unferth is presented as a traditional provocateur, he truly bears a certain degree of heroic spirit, as he struggles to keep up his personal and Danish pride, even though it is threatened by the sudden appearance of Beowulf, who is ready to undertake the fight which Unferth and the Danes have almost given up. In this context, Unferth can be regarded as an upholder of a certain kind of mind or spirit which other ordinary Danes lack. In my view, the puzzlement in this passage arises as we tend to interpret ferhþ as a kind of military spirit, a readiness to dash into dangerous exploits. In the text, however, Unferth fails to show this kind of daring martial spirit or courage, but maintains an exceptional courage and spirit in protecting his and Danish pride from outside challenge. Unferth's spirit would not be incompatible with a literal reading of 'all of them trusted in his spirit'. Possibly this phrase might confirm that by Unferth's effort the Danes are encouraged and much relieved of the shame caused by Beowulf's appearance. If my interpretation is right, then it can be assumed that the Danes do not consider Unferth's fratricide as a serious matter, as long as he appears to be loyal to the code of the comitatus: in this context, mod micel should be rendered as literally as possible. As regards Unferth's involvement in his kinsmen's slaughter, Cosijn proposes that Unferth 'forsook his brothers in a cowardly manner and that Beowulf's accusation of fratricide is

4 Adrien Bonjour claims that Unferth's reaction of 'spite' and 'jealousy' is understandable, given his prominent position. Until someone proves himself able to fight Grendel, it is understandable that Unferth should seek to maintain his 'position of undisputed superiority'. See Bonjour, The Digressions in Beowulf (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1950), p. 18.
exaggerated'. Of course, this alternative interpretation presumes that the meaning of *mæd micel* in 1167a is accepted literally, not in an ironical sense. In this episode from Unferth's past history, unfortunately, his actual deeds are not talked about at all. The only information about Unferth's past is given first by Beowulf and then by the poet. The words they use to describe Unferth's history differ. Unferth issues an insulting challenge to which Beowulf makes a wounding reply stating that Unferth had killed his own brothers. In his reply to Unferth, Beowulf, by using *bana*, 'slayer', hints that Unferth is directly involved in that incident as a killer of his kinsmen:

\[ \text{þeah ðu þinum broðrum to banan wurde,} \\
\text{heafodmægum;} \]

\( \text{(Beo 587-588a)} \)

[although you were the slayer of your brothers, your closest kin]

Granting that Unferth has really been the cause of the death of his kinsmen, doubts will arise as to whether we are to suppose that he literally slew them himself. Had that been the case, one might wonder how he could be occupying a place of trust with Hrothgar.

With regard to the meaning of *bana*, Chambers, though his interpretation on this term is strictly confined to the Finn Episode, warns us that *bana*, 'slayer', is a neutral word with no connotations of criminality. Thus the frequent translation 'murderer' is misleading. But Chambers does not believe this neutral sense of *bana* applies in the case of Unferth, referring to his convincing historical evidence.

---


In a later passage, however, the poet replaces the image of Unferth as killer with the idea of Unferth as an indirect agent in the slaughter:

\[ \text{þeah þe he his magum nære} \]
\[ \text{arfæst æt ecga gelacum.} \]

(Beo 1167b-1168a)

[although he had not been merciful with his kinsmen in the play of swords]

As is shown above, Beowulf's \textit{bana}, 'slayer', is replaced by 'not merciful' to express Unferth's inglorious deed. Here lies a swift and significant conceptual change over two statements: from direct to indirect involvement.

However, even the term \textit{bana}, 'slayer', is used both in a direct and indirect sense in \textit{Beowulf}. In the history of Wiglaf's sword the use of \textit{bana} indicates that Weohstan, the father of Wiglaf, is the direct killer of Eanmund: \textit{æt sæcce weard, væcca(n) wineleasum Weohstan bana}, 'Weohstan had slain (Eanmund), when he was a friendless exile' (Beo 2612b-13). The sense of \textit{bana} in the following passage of Beowulf's reception by Hygelac appears to indicate that Hygelac is the direct killer of Ongentheow: \textit{bonan Ongentheoesc}, 'the slayer of Ongentheow' (Beo 1968a). However, the episode of the battle of Ravenswood and the death of Ongentheow, conveyed by the messenger of the Geats, clearly states that the killer of Ongentheow is not Hygelac but one of his chief warriors, namely Eofor:

\[ \text{Let se hearda Higelaces þegn} \]
\[ \text{brad[n]e mece, þa his broðor læg,} \]
\[ \text{ealdsweord eotonisc entiscne helm} \]
\[ \text{brecan ofer bordweal; ða gebeah cyning,} \]

(Beo 2977-2980)

---

Then, while his brother lay dead, Hygelac's hardy thane (Eofor) swung his broad blade, an ancient sword made by giants, so it broke the massive helmet over the protecting shield; and then the king (Ongentheow) fell down.

From this detailed description of the fall of Ongentheow, it is almost certain that the epithet for Hygelac bonan Ongenbeoes in line 1968a indicates Hygelac's indirect involvement in the killing of Ongentheow. Undoubtedly, the epithet bonan Ongenbeoes could more directly be ascribed to Eofor, who was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with Ongentheow.

With this example of the double sense of bana or bona, it can be fairly assumed that Unferth is not the actual killer of his kinsmen. The sense of Unferth's indirect involvement seems to be further supported by nære arfæst æt ecga gelacum. Unferth 'was not merciful to his kinsmen in the play of sword blades'. Klaeber's view of this passage as 'litotes' is certainly based on the credibility of Beowulf's accusation of Unferth in line 587. However, quite a different meaning can be drawn from the detailed examination of arfæst and gelacum with regard to the death of Unferth's kinsmen. According to BT, arfæst is widely used as 'upright, virtuous, dutiful, kind, merciful, honourable'. Ar is also glossed as many meanings 'honour, glory, rank, kindness, favour, use, help' in BT. With the emphasis of 'help' in ar, I prefer the meaning of 'dutiful, upright, honourable' in arfæst. But the complete conception of arfæst heavily relies on the exact meaning of gelac. Only two examples are shown with regard to gelac, which is glossed as the 'play' of swords, i.e. 'battle' in BT. The sense of 'battle' is clearly indicated in the description of Hrothgar's saddle, given to Beowulf as a reward:

\[
\text{jæt wæs hildesetl hæcyninges,} \\
\text{ðonne sweorda gelæc sunu Healfdenes}
\]

7 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 177.
[that was the war-seat of the mighty king, when Healfdene's son (Hrothgar) wished to take part in the play of swords]

Here *sweorda gelac*, 'in the play of swords' definitely denotes the sense of 'battle' between the Danes and their enemy tribes, not amongst the Danish kinsmen.

Let us turn to *arfaest* with this sense of 'battle' in *gelac* in line 1168a. Putting aside Beowulf's statement, it is not certain what kind of 'battle' is referred to in line 1168a *et ecca gelacum*. Is it a battle between warring countries or a battle within the same tribe as a sign of internal conflict? Unfortunately, the nature of the 'battle' in question is not discussed at all. In this context, it is not a foregone conclusion that Unferth was unmerciful to his kinsmen in the fight against them. Rather it can be rendered as 'Unferth was not dutiful (/helpful) to his kinsmen in the battle against their enemy'. This interpretation might suggest that Unferth did not help his kinsmen, who, unlike Unferth, honourably abandoned their lives in the battle against their enemy. Possibly Unferth's cowardly action, by fleeing away from the battle scene, might contribute to the destruction of his kinsmen.

If my interpretation is right and *bana* is used in the direct sense of 'slayer' by Beowulf, then it might be concluded that Beowulf is exaggerating the real situation by accusing Unferth of fratricide. At the same time critics tend to rely heavily on the credibility of Beowulf's statement about Unferth's involvement in the death of his kinsmen.8 Another example as to the question of the credibility of Beowulf's

---

8 Fred C. Robinson argues that there is no objective account of the Breca episode, but that we are more prone to believe Beowulf's version both because of his character and because it is given 'in terms less imposing and more non-committal than is the case with Unferth's jeering account'. See Robinson, 'Elements of the
statement will be discussed in section (c) below ('Beowulf's reply') with regard to Beowulf's other accusation against Unferth and the Danes for their inaction in the face of Grendel's attack.

Though I thus do not take the meaning of 'brother slayer' at its face value, I agree that both Beowulf's and the poet's comments are primarily intended to bring about the image of Unferth as a dishonourable warrior in the light of his past history.

Despite this unfavourable view of Unferth, which emerges from his past, he remains as the chief protector of his own and Danish pride when he bravely challenges Beowulf in the context of rival-consciousness. This role of the protector of the pride of the Danes has not yet be taken by anybody amongst the Danes. In this sense, Unferth is regarded as having a unique disposition, lacking in most Danes, so he might be deservedly called a warrior of mod micel, 'great courage' by his people.


This view of bravery and rival-consciousness in Unferth's character concurs with Adrien Bonjour's view of Unferth as 'a man of 'exceptional valor, and greatest of Danish champions'. Bonjour supports his claim with four pieces of evidence: first, Unferth's position as hyle; second, his epithet widcuðne; third, the poet's statement 'he does not want any man to surpass him in the achieving of fame' (Beo 503-505); and fourth, his ownership of Hrunting. See Bonjour, Twelve Beowulf Papers: 1940-1960 with Additional Comments (Geneva: University of Neuchatel, 1962), p. 130-32. However, A. G. Brodeur claims that there is no textual evidence that Unferth was 'a man of exceptional valour'. See Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf, p. 154.
The view of Unferth as a man of 'great courage' or 'mind' gains credibility when we consider how he later lends Beowulf his sword, on which Klaeber observes that 'Unferth evinces a spirit of generosity, courtesy, and sportsmanlike fairness toward Beowulf when the latter has demonstrated his superiority'.

The name of Unferth (MS Hunferô) appears to consist of two elements Un- and ferô. Scholars have debated the meanings of these two elements, but without reaching a satisfactory conclusion. Un- can either be a negative particle, meaning as 'un-' or 'no (not)', or an intensifier meaning 'very'. The second element -ferô (in association with ferhô), means either 'spirit, mind, soul', or 'peace' (in association with frið). Thus there are four possible meanings of Unferth: 'no spirit'; 'not-peace'; 'very spirited'; and 'much peace' (though no critics favour this last interpretation). I concur with many scholars who find the semantic evidence inconclusive. I believe that the contextual evidence suggests that the poet is playing on the ambiguity of the name. Unferth's lack of spirit is demonstrated by his refusal to jump into Grendel's mere, which lost him his fame as a warrior (Beo 1470b). Hence the first meaning 'no spirit'

10 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 150.
11 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, pp. 19 (n.l. 499) and 44 (n.l. 1165).
12 Jane Roberts has argued that un- is an intensifying particle, which would make Unferth's name 'commendatory'. See Roberts, 'Old English un- "Very" and Unferth', ES, 61 (1980), 289-92.
13 For more detailed discussions see R. D. Fulk, 'Unferth and His Name', MP, 85 (1987-88), 113-27 (pp. 113-27).
14 In addition, Robinson interprets Unferth's name as 'Un-intelligence' or 'Folly'. See Robinson, 'Elements of the Marvellous in the Characterization of Beowulf', pp. 119-37. My interpretation of the sub-text of Unferth's role finds no evidence of such folly.
can be considered for expressing Unferth's character. Yet also, the meaning of 'not-peace' accords with the mood which Unferth evokes with his taunting speech. But in his defence of his country's pride against the threat posed by Beowulf, he shows himself to be a man of much courage.

(b) The purpose of Unferth's word-play

What is the purpose of Unferth's Breca speech with reference to his heroic ideology? Ward Parks tries to explain this question in terms of heroic competitiveness: 'when Unferth through his narrative account attributes to Beowulf the quality of inferiority at the swimming, this attribution implies an evaluation of Beowulf's heroic competence.' According to Parks, furthermore, what Unferth points out about this episode 'is not that Beowulf was foolish in undertaking this

15 For this meaning 'not-peace' see Morton W. Bloomfield, 'Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth', Traditio, 7 (1949-51), 410-15 (p. 411-12).
16 E. B. Irving and Ward Parks agree that Unferth's aim is to cast doubt on Beowulf's heroic competence. Irving expands on Unferth's strategy. Unferth claims that the swimming-contest demonstrates first, that Beowulf is irresponsible, risking life for a mere boast, and second, that Beowulf was unable to accomplish what he bragged about doing. The inferred conclusion is that the Danes should not believe his boasts or tolerate his presence; 'as a foreign champion whose very presence is potentially an insult to a humiliated people'. See Irving, A Reading of Beowulf (New Heaven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 53, 70.
swimming exploit, but that he lost at it'. Thus Unferth, with his assessment of Beowulf's past incompetence, foretells the failure of Beowulf's exploit:

Donne wene ic to þe wyrsan geþingea,

(Beo 525)

[Therefore I expect from you a worse result]

gif þu Grendles dearest

nihtlongne fyrst nean bidan.

(Beo 527b-528)

[if you dare to wait Grendel at close quarters for the space of a night]

In this prediction of coming warfare, Unferth directly challenges Beowulf's heroic identity, as he publicly doubts Beowulf's heroic competence. However, Ward Parks' view seems to me to fall short of a convincing case for Beowulf's recognition of Unferth's mental ability: þeah þin wit duge (Beo 589b), 'though your mental powers may be great'. This short statement leads the audience to consider what intellectual quality there is in Unferth's speech. It may be assumed that Beowulf clearly perceives Unferth's intention, which is delivered in the form of a verbal disguise: Unferth urges Beowulf to restrain or tone down such daring boasts. Thus a different paraphrase of Unferth's speech might be the following: 'You, daring Beowulf, postpone your bragging until you demonstrate your actual heroic achievement; if you do so, then I will recognize you as a real hero, as I now recognize Breca with his exemplary deeds'. It is likely that Unferth's underlying meaning has a gnomic echo, warning against hastiness of speech and rash boasting, as expressed in Wan: ne to hrædwyrde, 'nor too hasty of speech' (Wan 66b); ne næfre gielpes to geom, 'never too eager to boast' (Wan 69a). The fact that Unferth's speech reflects traditional codes of behaviour suggests

18 Parks, Verbal Duelling, p. 111.
19 Parks, Verbal Duelling, p. 91.
that his speech is not casual but conceived with full intent and awareness of its implications.

As regards the stylistic features of Unferth's speech, Klaeber claims that this and Beowulf's reply 'show the style of the poem at its best'. Klaeber bases his claim on 'the ubiquitous element of variation' in which different terms have the same or similar meanings.

Unferth's speech can be divided into three parts according to his intentions: the first from line 506 to 517a, the second from 517b to 524 (a heroic eulogy for Breca) the last from 525 to the end of his speech on line 528 (Unferth's prediction about Beowulf's failure). In the first part the underlying meaning is encapsulated in the word-play.

On the effect of diction in this passage, Roberta Frank's view ('Unferth's speech is dripping with irony, oblique and mocking, a rhetorical bow-wow') is shared by Brodeur, who points out that the diction is designed to 'stress and ridicule the vehement efforts in the sea of two young men frantically striving to make good a foolish boast'. However, the rhetorical use of diction is not wholly intended to evoke the mocking mood. Instead, it seems to be used to represent Unferth's concealed excessive consciousness of his inferiority, caused by his inaction. Concerning Unferth's psychology, Bonjour proposes that Unferth's undisputed position of superiority would be maintained as long as no one was able to successfully challenge

---

20 Beowulf, Klaeber, p. 150.

This view of heroic inferiority seems to be focused on personal matters rather than the much broader issue of Danish pride. It can be reasonably assumed that Unferth holds a high rank at Heorot on the grounds of his position: *æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga*, '(he) sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings' (Beo 500); and of his entitlement to make scurrilous remarks to a guest of honour in front of the whole Danish people. In addition, the weightiness of his social rank is later proved by Beowulf's public acknowledgment of Unferth's reputation as a *widcuône man*, 'widely famous man' (Beo 1489b). Also, Unferth may be assumed to overhear some crucial remarks about the humiliating description of Heorot and to be upset by Beowulf's daring speech, which manifests an excessive confidence. Considering the importance of his position, therefore, Unferth appears to exhibit 'his loyalty to the other in ways appropriate to his position in this society'.\(^\text{23}\) He is thought to take on a role of symbolic defence representing the Danish warriors' 'anger, pride, frustration, their xenophobia'.\(^\text{24}\) It is unlikely, therefore, that Unferth utters his speech solely for the sake of defending his personal pride.

Before exploring the stylistic use of diction which demonstrates Unferth's psychological inferiority, the words of his speech should be reexamined. Undoubtedly, the figurative tone of his speech is of taunting, mocking, flyting, and is a little rude.\(^\text{25}\) This negative impression is largely ascribed to the unfavourable

---

\(^{22}\) Bonjour, *Digressions*, p.18.


\(^{25}\) G. C. Britton claims that Unferth cannot let Beowulf's boast go unchallenged, and so the question of politeness does not arise. See Britton, 'Unferth, Grendel and the
interpretation of some key words, and to the intervention of the poet. As John Niles points out, the poet expresses his view of Unferth's sudden outburst 'in such a confident tone that they need no further comment or defence—he speaks with the absolute authority—'.

Though the poet's view can be challenged, as he does not keep the tone of 'absolute authority' all the time in the poem, the following intervention scene demonstrates that his judgement is so powerful that no other opinion can be considered:

onband beadurune: wæs him Beowulfes sið,
modges merefaran, micel æfjunca,
forþon þe he ne uþe, þæt ænig oðer man
æfre mæða þon ma middangeardes
gehede under heofenum þonne he sylfa —:

(Beo 501-505)

he
[loosed his secret thoughts of battle. The venture of Beowulf, the brave sea-farer, was a great displeasure to him; for he would not willingly grant that any other man on earth should ever perform more glorious deeds beneath the heavens than he himself]

With this prejudged view of Unferth we are, even before hearing his words, led to a large extent to discredit him as an incarnation of jealousy 'born of his own excessive pretensions'. However, even this negative view of Unferth serves to reveal a hidden disposition which forms his heroic quality. Jealousy can hardly be regarded


as a sign of bad disposition in heroic society as long as it serves to preserve one's pride. We are told, 'he would not allow any other man to accomplish more glorious deeds in the world'. Unferth is here portrayed as a warrior whose mind is charged with the idea of heroic reputation, seeking heroic esteem, committed to the principle of the comitatus, and a man who also intends to preserve his already established social status. Yet, although we cannot say that Unferth is an ideal hero, we are led to agree that he is at least a warrior committed to the principle of the comitatus. This kind of double meaning also becomes a characteristic feature in the speech of Unferth. On the surface a series of words seems to be used to effectuate the sense of rashness and foolhardiness in Beowulf's swimming-contest: for wlence, for dolgilpe, nepdon, belean and swuncon. In the context of Unferth's superficially scurrilous tone, wlence can be interpreted as 'vainglory' or 'foolish pride'. However, throughout the poem, either wlence, wlenco, or its adjectival form wlonc, is used to elicit a positive feeling of heroic pride. On the arrival of Beowulf's band, Wulfgar admires their war-gear and concludes by using the term for wlenco (Beo 338a) that they have visited Hrothgar, not as fugitives and exiles, but for some brave purpose:

Ne seah ic elþeodige
þus manige men  modiglicran.
Wen' ic þæt ge for wlenco,  nalles for wræcsiðum,
ac for higefrymmum  Hroðgar sohton.

(Beo 336b-339)
[I have never seen so many foreigners as bold. I expect that you have sought out Hrothgar, not from exile, but from high-spirits]
It is very clear that wlenco here is used in a decisively praiseworthy sense, meaning 'bravery', 'courage', or 'high-spirit'. However, wlenco is used equivocally in two cases

28 Beowulf, ed. Wrenn, p. 287.
in *Beowulf* which I shall discuss in the following pages. Meanwhile I will examine the term as it appears in Unferth's utterance here and in the description of Hygelac's fatal expedition against the Frisians:

```plaintext
hyne wyrd fomam,
syðan he for wlenco wean ahsode,
fæhðe to Frysum.
(Beo 1205b-1207a)
```

[Fate took him off, when he sought for misery, feud with the Frisians by his proud courage]²⁹

In this passage, however, as we are not told about the motivation of Hygelac's expedition into the Frisian land. In a heroic context, Garmonsway's rendering 'proud courage' seems more appropriate than Clark Hall's 'reckless daring' (the emphasis of which appears to be on Hygelac's lack of justification for his military adventure).³⁰ In a sense Hygelac can be blamed for his rashness in ignoring the responsibility of the leader and risking placing his whole nation in a dangerous situation. However, Farrell's accounts of the Hygelac's raid lead us not to accept this view. Farrell claims that it was part of a Germanic king's job to gather booty through battle. Thus it is very unlikely that the full resources of the Geats would have been committed to his raid. Frequent raids and conflicts were simply a fact of life in heroic society.³¹ Hygelac's


position reflects a conflict between the responsibility of the leader on the one hand and that of the hero on the other.\textsuperscript{32} The generally accepted view of Hygelac is that he is a rash man. This view is largely based on the interpretations of for \textit{wlenco} (Beo 1206a), as meaning 'from reckless daring', and seeing this 'daring' as motivating rash actions. However, the textual evidence is not consistent with this reading. Although the poet says that \textit{Done siðfæt him snotere ceorlas lythwon logon}, 'Wise men did not blame him at all for that expedition' (Beo 202-3a), Hygelac recalls when Beowulf returns to the Geatish court how \textit{ic de lange bæd, þæt ðu ðone wælgæst wihte ne grette}, 'For a long time I begged you not at all to confront the murderous monster' (Beo 1994b-5). This last words show that Hygelac alone thought it unwise for Beowulf to fight Grendel, which reveals him to be a cautious figure. His cautiousness is emphasized by the expression 'For a long time I begged', which indicates how he urged caution on many occasions. As regards the motivation of Hygelac's military exploits, a similar semantic difficulty arises in the use of \textit{for onmedlan}, 'out of pride' or 'out of arrogance':

\begin{verbatim}
ac wæs wide cuð, ðætte Ongenðio ealdre besnyðede
Hæðcen Hreþling wið Hrefnawudu, ða \textit{for onmedlan} ærest gesohton
Geata leode Guð-Scilfingas.
\end{verbatim}

(\textit{Beo} 2923b-2927)

\textsuperscript{32} About the leader's dilemma between responsibility and heroic impulsiveness. See G. C. Britton, 'The Characterization of the Vikings in \textit{The Battle of Maldon}', \textit{N&Q}, n.s. 12 (1965), 85-7 (p. 86-7).
[for it is widely known that Ongenêoeow deprived Hæthcyn, the son of Hrethel, of his life at Ravenswood, when the Geatish people out of arrogance first attacked the warlike Scylfings]

As in the case of Hygelac's for vlence in his military exploit, the meaning of for onmedlan is dependent on a clear understanding of the circumstances of the two warring tribes, the Geats and the Scylfing.

Here are the events in chronological order: when King Hrethel of Geatland dies (out of grief at his son Herebeald's accidental death) the Swedes take advantage of a weakened Geatland and ambush the Geats at Hreosnabeorh; when King Hæthcyn becomes king of Geatland, he leads an expedition into Sweden and captures Ongentheow's queen; Ongentheow quickly retaliates and rescues his queen, kills Hæthcyn and forces the Geats to take shelter in Ravenswood.

In this passage above, if we focus on the disastrous early death of Hæthcyn, then the supposed rashness of his attack on Sweden is explained as for onmedlan, 'out of arrogance'. But the poet provides no contextual evidence that the attack launched by Hæthcyn was a rash action. Perhaps, Hæthcyn's alleged rashness could be supported by ærest, 'first'. But this meaning of ærest becomes untenable in the context of constant warring because each tribe, including the Geats, is always vulnerable to sudden attack from surrounding countries. It has already been noted that it was the Swedes who first attacked in the first war between the Geats and the Swedes. In this context of sudden changes of situation, it might be assumed that the Swedes might have first attacked the Geats unless Hæthcyn first led his expedition into the Swedish land. Thus it might be inappropriate to render for onmedlan as the purely negative 'out of arrogance'. Unfortunately, there is no report of any strategic advantage on the side of the Geats at the time of the ærest attack. Like vlence, onmedla is to be defined in accordance to its contextual meaning.
As regards *wlenco*, Shippey interprets the use of this word in line 508, as a 'strong condemnation' rather than used in a 'praiseworthy' sense as in Wulfgar's speech (*Beo* 338a). But he is very cautious in interpreting *wlenco* as 'arrogance' or as 'courage' in heroic verse, preferring the more neutral sense of 'a man's readiness to risk *edwenden*'. I agree with Shippey's concept of the neutrality of *wlenco* except for line 508. In the context of Unferth's narrative, the neutral meaning of *wlenco* as 'high-spiritedness' fits well into the progression of Unferth's narrative. Breca is one of *git*, 'you two', and is therefore a subject of *wlenco*. This means the negative sense of 'foolhardiness' is not applicable, because later Breca is eulogized for the swimming-contest, that was motivated by *wlenco*. In this way, Unferth is not criticizing the nature of the swimming-contest, which might be possibly motivated by boyish exuberance, but is instead blaming Beowulf for not living up to that *wlenco*, 'high-spirit'.

However, the ambivalence of *wlenco* seems less important earlier in the poem, when Beowulf is ready to participate in a swimming contest without carrying any kind of social and political burden. Thus, Beowulf's rashness in the Breca episode is clearly distinguished from a traditional heroic flaw, which has long been the subject of a controversial argument concerning the characterization of heroic figures such as Byrhtnoth (his *ofermód*), Hygelac (his last adventure) and old Beowulf (his fight with the dragon).

It should be pointed out that the poet of *Beowulf* uses another synonym for *wlenco* when he intends to convey a derogatory meaning. Hrothgar uses *oferhygd*, to describe the moral deterioration of Heremod:


oð þæt him on innan oferhygda dael
weaxeð ond wridað;

(Beo 1740-1741a)

[until a measure of overbearing pride grows and flourishes in him]

After telling Heremod's history, Hrothgar exhorts Beowulf not to be arrogant by using the same term:

ond þe þæt selre geceos,
ecæ rædas; oferhyda ne gym,
mære cempa!

(Beo 1759b-1761a)

[and choose for yourself the better part, the everlasting benefit; incline not to arrogance, famous champion!]

Here, in two cases, the term oferhygd is explictly used in a bad sense. In Beowulf oferhygd is exclusively used with a negative meaning, though it may also be used in a good sense 'honourable pride, high spirit', according to BT. So the question arises as to why the poet put the ambiguous term wlenco in Unferth's speech, when he could have used oferhygd to convey an unambiguous negative meaning. Firstly, we can consider metrical restraints: most synonyms in Old English cannot be interchanged, because it would breach alliteration and metrical types. Suppose wlenco were to replace oferhyda in line 1760: ecæ rædas, wlenco ne gym. Here there is no change of meaning, but the meter of this line is apparently defective, since neither ecæ nor rædas alliterates with wlenco. The same situation occurs when oferhygd replaces wlenco in Unferth's speech in line 508:

ðær git for oferhygd wada cunnedon
(a) w w x Nx N (Nx) N(n)x
(b) w w x (Ax) N(n)x

(a) supposed metrical type
This sentence cannot be accepted for two reasons. One is the breach of alliteration, and the subsequent collapse of metrical contour shown above. It is quite certain that the poet is restricted to a large extent by metrical grammar when he chooses words.

The other possible reason is that the poet intends to manipulate a situation. By making the best use of a word, which bears double senses of good and bad, the poet seems to set out a field of ambiguity. The meanings of \textit{wlonc} and \textit{wlenco} appear to be more ambiguous in this way than those of \textit{oferhyd} and \textit{oferhyd}.

Nobody can denounce Beowulf for his daring in the swimming-contest. On the contrary, such rashness can be construed as a token of his heroic disposition. More important is Beowulf's contest without mentioning his age. As well as the difference in the time spent striving at sea, Unferth's omission of Beowulf's age contrasts with Beowulf's own version. Beowulf's telling of his age with the words \textit{cnihtwesende} and \textit{geogo\-feore} seems to me to be designed to evoke his early heroic quality rather than to concede his early immaturity (this will be discussed in detail in his speech). Beowulf's emphatic repetition of his age is contrasted with Unferth's dubious omission of Beowulf's age at the time of the swimming-contest, probably because this information shows the young Beowulf as already possessing a heroic disposition.

However, this favourable interpretation of \textit{wlence} appears to be challenged as the following line contains \textit{dolgilpe}, which appears to convey a more negative sense of foolish boasting. The compound word \textit{dolgilpe} has the combination of two meanings: 'foolish', 'silly', in \textit{dol} and 'boasting', 'pride', 'arrogance', 'glory', in \textit{gielp}. In

Genesis B the meaning of dol and the adverb dollice has the sense of presumptuous, audacious rather than foolish. Being inflated by excessive pride, the fallen angel believes in his own power and determines to be equal to God. Consequently, the rebellious angel resolves not to praise and serve God any more. In this circumstance, the angel's attitude towards God is more appropriately understood as 'audaciously' rather than 'foolishly':

and spræc healic word
dollice wið Drihten sinne,

(Gen B 294b-295a)

[and the angel [Satan] spoke haughty words, audaciously against his Lord]

oð hie to dole wurdon,

þæt him for galscipe God sylfa wearô

mihtig on mode yrre,

(Gen B 340b-342)

[until they grew too presumptuous, so that the almighty God became angry in his mind because of their pride]

In a heroic context, daring bravery or a presumptuous mind can hardly be regarded as heroic weaknesses: in particular when heroes are called to actions to prove their true prowess, which might risk their lives. Surprisingly enough, the positive meaning of heroic bravery is found in another example of dollice in Beowulf:

forðam he manna mæst mæða gefremede,

dæda dollicra.

(Beo 2645-2646a)

[because he above all other men had achieved the most glorious acts, daring deeds]

Garmonsway's interpretation 'rash deeds' here seems quite inappropriate, since this part of Wiglaf's speech is entirely devoted to Beowulf's past glorious achievements. Thus the meaning of dol or dollice here can be interpreted as other than the sense of
'foolish'. Likewise the interpretation of *gylp* varies according to context. In the Christian context the concept of *gylp* does not seem to contain any positive value. The poet of *Genesis B* regards those blasphemous remarks of the fallen angel as *gylpword* (263):

\[
\text{ne mihte him bedyrned weordan}
\]
\[
\text{þæt his engyl ongan ofermod wesan,}
\]
\[
\text{ahof hine wið his herran, sohte hetespræce,}
\]
\[
\text{*gylpword* ongean, nolde Gode þeowian;}
\]
\[
\text{(Gen B 260b-263)}
\]

[it could not be concealed to him that his angel became presumptuous, raised him up against his master, sought hateful speech, made a boastful speech against him, would not serve God]

Though the angel Lucifer is presented as a warrior fighting with God, the sense of *gylp* here is by no means 'heroic spirit' since his words are motivated by a rebellious intention against God. However, in secular poetry the meaning *gylp* can be reversed. In Hrothgar's description of Heremod's history, *gylp* is clearly used to indicate a crucial moral attribute of the heroic disposition. Heremod becomes a failure as a leader of the *comitatus* when he refuses to dispense treasures proudly to his followers:

\[
\text{nallas on *gylp* seleð}
\]
\[
\text{fætte beagas,}
\]
\[
\text{(Beo 1749b-1750a)}
\]

[he never gives away gold-plated circlets in proud vaunt]

Here the adverbial use of *gylp*, 'proudly' or 'honourably' has no negative sense. Also the sense of an 'unreasonable boast' in *Genesis B* can not be found in Beowulf's resolution to fight with bare hands against Grendel:

\[
\text{gif ic wiste hu}
\]
wið ðam aglæcean elles meahte
gylpe wiðgripan, swa ic gio wið Grendle dyde;

(Beo 2519b-2521)

[if I knew how else I might come to grips with the monster in such a way as to fulfil my boast, as I did against Grendel long ago]

Here Beowulf proudly recalls his daring speech, charged with excessive heroic spirit, which was uttered at Heorot. In the context of heroic competitiveness, Beowulf's daring speech (or great words) can be regarded as foolhardy boasting by his opponent. Thus, in my translation, Beowulf's dolgylp, 'audacious boasting' can hardly be understood as foolish declaration, since it was originally conceived to express his heroic willingness to take on an exploit. Such a boasting speech in a heroic society can act as a binding verbal commitment to act in a heroic manner. This custom of boasting speech is mentioned in the first banquet scene, in which the old spirit of gladness comes back to the Danes in the hall:

ða wæs eft swa ær inne on healle
bryðword sprecen, ðeod on sælum,

(Beo 642-643)

[Then once again, as of old, there were brave words spoken within the hall, the people were in gladness]

Another example of this courtly custom of raising bryðword, 'brave words', which has the same meaning as gylpcwide or gylpword, is shown in Hrothgar's description of his followers' efforts in the face of Grendel:

Ful oft gebeotedon beore druncne
ofe ealowæge oretmecgas,

(Beo 480-481)

[Very often, champions, after the drinking of beer, made a boastful speech over the ale-cup]
Besides, 'boasting speeches', expressed in those terms gilpcwide, gylpword, bryðword, or gebeotian, work as an inspiration to heroic action. In the middle of the fierce bare-handed fight with Grendel Beowulf is reminded of his evening speech, which seems to renew his strength:

Gemunde þa se goda, mæg Higelaces,  
æfensprece, uplang astod  
ond him fæste wiðfeng; fingras burston;

(Beo 758-760)

[Then Hygelac's noble kinsman, calling to mind what he had said that evening, stood erect and grasped him tight, fingers were cracking]

Æfensprece here refers either to gilpcwide in line 640 or to gylpword in 675. The word gilpcwide, referring to the speech at feast, implies Beowulf's decisive resolution to show the courage of a hero, or to die in battle. The word gylpword, referring to the speech made before sleeping, indicates Beowulf's intention to meet Grendel without a sword. But, the exact reference of æfensprece is not as important as the two occurrences of gilpcwide and gylpword which express Beowulf's heroic quality of showing his courage through a fair fight. The most important thing of all is that Beowulf was mindful of gilpcwide or gylpword, 'boastful speech', at the time of desperate fighting in which he was risking his life. A similar situation with regard to 'boastful speech' occurs in Wiglaf's speech, in which he rebukes his comrades for their ingratitude and cowardice in the hour of Beowulf's need:

Ic þæt mæl geman, þær we medu þegun,  
þonne we geheton ussum hlaforde  
in biorsele, ðe us þæs beagas geaf,  
þæt we him ða guðgetawa gyldan woldon,  

(Beo 2633-2636)
(I remember that time at which we drank the mead, how in the beer-hall we pledged ourselves to our lord, who gave us the rings, that we would repay him for the war-equipments)

In this scene Wiglaf reminds his companions of their 'boastful speech' in front of their lord Beowulf. Here the main content of their 'boastful speech' is the promise that they would repay Beowulf for his generosity in dispensing treasures. To put it another way, Wiglaf recalls the almost sacred rule of the comitatus, in which warriors are obliged to serve their lord at the risk of their lives. In this sense, Wiglaf's companions fail by ignoring the obligation to their lord. In contrast, Wiglaf becomes a true hero not only by recalling his 'boastful speech' but by committing himself to heroic obligation through actual deeds. In this way, making a 'boastful speech' indicates a heroic disposition, but a warrior's decision to keep his promises and fulfil them by actions is what defines him as a true hero.

In this context, Beowulf's recalling of his 'boastful speech' in his time of trial proves that he is a real hero committed to his pledge. In the same context, the concept of gyilp in heroic poetry is an important aspect of heroic deeds. Wrenn further suggests that gyilp 'can refer to great deeds as well as to great words'.36 This interpretation accords well with Einarsson's definition; gyilp stresses the glory of the adventure, something to boast of.37

However, that kind of heroic verbal manifestation can also be misunderstood by an opponent like Unferth, whose mind is charged with the consciousness of heroic competition. I agree with Ward Parks in believing that dolgilp implies a lack of judgement and mental control rather than a lack of prowess, yet the real point (of

36 Beowulf, ed. Wrenn, p. 189.
37 Stefán Einarsson, 'Old English Beot and Old Icelandic Heitstrenging', PMLA, 49 (1934), 975-93 (p. 976).
using this term) is not to criticize Beowulf's foolish mind but to emphasize Beowulf's defeat at the swimming-contest. To a large extent, understanding the nature of Unferth's speech depends on the correct interpretations of for wlence, and for dolgilpe. As shown above, those two terms can be used either with a negative or positive meaning in Old English Literature. However, in heroic poetry those terms seem to have favourable meanings. Moreover, Unferth, who is mindful of the heroic customs related to for wlence, because of 'high-spirit', or 'pride', for dolgilpe, because of 'audacious boasting', cannot be assumed to use those terms as 'vain glory', and 'foolish boasting'. Instead, by keeping the favourable meanings, Unferth, in his version of the Breca episode, appears to increase Beowulf's shame: by suggesting that Beowulf in his high spirits made a boastful speech in accordance with heroic custom, but failed to fulfil the pledge at the actual scene of the swimming-contest.

Thus, the application of the favourable meanings of wlence and dolgilpe does not alter Unferth's original intention to emphasize Beowulf's martial inferiority which Unferth's version has also helped to evoke. In his speech, Unferth is intent upon establishing a less heroic image of Beowulf by recourse to the ironic use of words: Beowulf's heroic spirit is, for the time being, much reinforced with the piling of one heroic disposition (wlence) onto another (dolgilpe). Ironically, however, this combination of heroic qualities eventually brings out the image of an unsuccessful warrior, as Unferth announces that Beowulf was defeated at the swimming-contest. It is assumed, therefore, that through this image of failure Unferth reduces Beowulf's heroic quality.

This sub-text of heroic rival-consciousness, which is manifested in the game of verbal disguise, demonstrates that Unferth is a highly conscious manipulator of words. Unferth's psychological inferiority, evident in his consciousness of words, becomes

---

38 Parks, *Verbal Duelling*, p. 111.
more evident in that a series of verbs of action represents Unferth's unperformed action. On this matter of psychological conflict, Irving proposes a useful interpretation: 'It is full of the taunting terms of hot heroic competitiveness: wunne 'struggled';ymb sund flite 'competed in swimming'; he æt sunde oferflat, 'he overcame you at swimming', hæfde mare mægen 'he had greater strength'. All this language is combined 'to stir the quick anger of any proud and touchy rival.'^39 The first eleven and a half lines of Unferth's speech are marked by the ubiquitous verbs of action. The series of verbs of action, such as winnan, cunnian, flitan, seems to serve as a substitute for real heroic actions: Unferth's feeling of inferiority is directly related to his inactivity and his lack of determination. Heroic adventure is the central concept of Unferth's speech: thus the use of verbs of action, charged with exploits of the heroic world, reflects his latent and unfulfilled desire for heroic achievements.

In opposition to Rosier's view of Unferth as 'a composition of drunkard, scurrilous accuser, fratricide, and coward',^40 Ogilvy regards Unferth as a 'type character' by equating him with an essential figure demanded in the development of plot, such as Malvolio of Twelfth Night, or Sir Kay of Arthurian legend.^41 However, Unferth appears to be more than a 'type character' as he exposes his inner mind, characterized by psychological inferiority. Such detailed exposure of person's deeper mind can hardly be regarded as a prominent feature of a 'type character'. Unferth, through his consciousness of words, intends to defend the pride of himself and the Danes, and at the same time reveals his psychological condition. Thus his speech contains of textual and sub-textual frameworks: one is the consciously designed

^39 Irving, Rereading Beowulf, p. 41.

^40 J. L. Rosier, 'Design for Treachery: The Unferth Intrigue.' PMLA, 77 (1962), 1-7 (p. 4).

outwardness in which his intention to defend the pride of the personal and the public is made clear; the other is the unconsciously conceived inwardness in which Unferth's unfulfilled desire is revealed. The restrained desire to be heroic becomes more explicit as he uses more substantial verbs of action denoting the detailed action of adventure such as reon, 'swam', or 'rowed', pehtton, 'enfolded', brugdon, 'made quick movement', glidon, 'passed away', æht, 'possessed', mæton, 'traversed', or 'measured'. Unferth's keen sense of words is repeatedly noticed in the game of verbal disguise, in which he riddles in such a way as to make his meanings dubious. Rowan does not occur in the sense of 'to swim' in poetry outside Beowulf. The sense of 'to touch' or 'to stir' is found in hreran: hreran mid hondum hrimeceld seæ, 'to stir with hands the ice-cold sea (Wan 4); mere hrerendum mundum freorig 'we) drove (/stirred) over the ocean, freezing in my hands' (And 491); and in He ham cymeô—nefne him holm gestyreô, mere hafað mundum 'He shall come home, if the ocean does not steer (/guide) him, he shall control over the sea with hands' (Ex 107).

It is not clear in the above examples whether the men used oars or not, but it is probable that they did as they are thought to be on a boat. However, the image of oars is evoked by the movement of their hands (hondum, mundum, hrerendum). In Unferth's description of the swimming contest 'the references to the adventure as calling for strenuous work with hands and arms tips the balance in favour of "rowed"'. In his translation C. W. Kennedy tries to capture the image of oars in the movement of hands and arms; 'with outstretched arms you clasped the sea-stream, measured the streets, with plowing shoulders parted the waves.' The specification of

42 Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'Beowulf's Adventure with Breca', SP, 72 (1975), 140-166 (p.159)

the movement becomes more concrete as Unferth elaborates by using *earmum behton, mundum brugdon*. The 'strenuous work of hands and arms' is more vividly depicted in the terms 'clasped', 'parted' rather than 'covered', 'made quick movement'. However, the image of 'strenuous work' comes alive in both translations. The overall impact of the 'strenuous work' seems to depend on the choice between 'to stir' or 'to row' and 'to swim'. If the specification of the activity (*earmum behton, mundum brugdon*) is joined with 'to swim' then together with 'strenuous work', an ideal image of heroic activity at sea is created. If, on the contrary, such diligent movement of hands and arms is to be delivered in the sense of 'to stir' or 'to row', then the actual scene is centered on the picture of helpless men striving to control the streams of the waves. It is not likely that Unferth intends to highlight Beowulf's swimming skill in this scene. On the contrary, it is assumed that Unferth ridicules Beowulf's futile effort to control the sea, being entirely dependent on his own hands.

However, Unferth's play on words is counterbalanced by Beowulf's witty response;

Hæfdon swurd nacod, þa wit on sund reon,

(Beo 539)

[we had a naked sword when we rowed in the sea]

By using the same word *reon*, Beowulf hints that they were not helpless in the sea. Though the naked sword is meant to defend them from the sea-monsters' attacks, its symbolic function as oars is metaphorically illustrated to outwit Unferth in their war of words. Though this description of active movement insinuates Beowulf's efforts were futile, the image conjured up by the verbs of action seems to imply Beowulf's physical prowess.

As shown already, Unferth intends to point out Beowulf's lack of martial prowess, rather than to blame him for his audacious attempt to enter a dangerous
swimming contest. Thus the presentation of Beowulf's inferiority by Unferth is a direct insult towards Beowulf who is filled with excessive heroic spirit.

he þe æt sunde oferflat,

hæfde mare mægen;

(Beo 517b-518a)

[he overcame you at swimming, he had more strength]

'Donne wene ic to þe wyrsan gepingea,'

(Beo 525)

[Therefore I expect from you a worse result]

Here lies the underlying message from Unferth by whom, according to Parks, 'a past incident is being summoned up not so much for its own sake as for its predictive value on the coming exchange'.

Thus Beowulf's social value as a hero is cynically presented in a roundabout manner to imply his inability to perform heroic deeds. This scene of verbal challenge from Unferth appears to inherit a tradition analogous to that of Homeric literature. In Book VIII ('The Phaeacian Game') of The Odyssey, Odysseus, sick and tired of physical adventure and longing only to return home, is twice provoked into joining the athletic games first by Laodamas and later on by the more explicitly rude speech of Euryalus. In this second exchange of speeches, there is an attempt by Euryalus to put forward a picture of Odysseus as a failure rather than a hero. Having found logical grounds for intervening with Odysseus' apparently sluggish mind, Euryalus begins to pour out a sarcastic view of Osysseus' state as a warrior by degrading him to the level of a mere skipper: 'I should never have taken you for an athlete such as one is accustomed to meet in the world. But rather for some skipper of a merchant crew, ------or keeping a sharp eye on the cargo when he comes home with

44 Parks, Verbal Duelling, p. 49.
the profits he has snatched. No; one can see you are no sportsman'. Needless to say, this distortion of Odysseus' true identity as a true hero (or sportsman) is designed to prompt Odysseus to show his real capability in the context of the athletic games. In this sense, Euryalus' use of rhetoric coincides well with Laodamas' more direct use of words in delivering a heroic standard guiding warriors' action: 'for nothing makes a man so famous for life as what he can do with his hands and feet'. Again Laodamus' definition of a true hero has a close affinity with Dodds' keen perspective on moral principle in a heroic world based on 'shame culture'. Dodds claims that in heroic society a warrior is judged by his successes. Any attempts that failed were not only worthless but a source of shame. This tradition of 'shame culture' is brought home again to the minds of the audience of Beowulf, in particular when they hear of Unferth's taunting speech towards Beowulf; in this Unferth completely ignores Breca's previous attempt in the swimming contest, based on youthful boasting, as with a panegyric tone he gives much credit to Breca's glorious achievement. In terms both of the classical heroic moral standard and that of Unferth, Breca's attempt should not be condemned at all as long as he proves his martial prowess in practical terms of success. With the same consequence, Beowulf's attempt, regardless of its motivation, can hardly be criticized, nor does Unferth blame Beowulf for his youthful adventure. On the contrary, Unferth intends to demonstrate Beowulf's incapability as a hero, which has been proved by his own version of the swimming-contest. Such a verdict, as can easily be concluded, will inflict an unbearable shame on Beowulf.


Whatever is concluded concerning Unferth's character and status, his appearance at this stage of poem is probably contrived to bring out the more aggressive qualities of Beowulf. Unferth's taunting is therefore a kind of literary device which allows us to see another side of Beowulf's character.

(c) Beowulf's reply: his lack of self-restraint

Beowulf's reply to Unferth's sub-text proves that he is cast into turbulent emotion, endeavouring to stress his superiority in martial prowess. At the same time Beowulf reveals again his lack of self-restraint; this time Beowulf's previously implicit verbal hynðo turns out to be explicit and includes all of the Danes as he openly points out their cowardly attitude towards Grendel's attack:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{jæt næfre Gre[n]del swa fela gryra gefremede,} \\
\text{atol æglæca ealdre þinum,} \\
\text{hynðo on Heorote gif þin hige wære,} \\
\text{sefa swa searogrím, swa þu self talast;} \\
\text{ac he hafað onfunden, þæt he þa fæhde ne þearf,} \\
\text{atole ecgþræce eower leode} \\
\text{swiðe onsittan, Sige-Scylcinga.} \\
\text{Nymeð nydbade, nænegum aræð} \\
\text{leode Deniga, ac he lust wigeð,} \\
\text{swefæð ond sendeð, secce ne weneþ} \\
\text{to Gar-Denum.}
\end{align*}
\]

\text{(Beo 591-601a)}

[that Grendel the horrible demon would never have done so many dread deeds to your prince, such havoc in Heorot, if your heart, your spirit, were as warlike as you say]
yourself. But he has found out that he has no need to dread the enmity, the terrible sword storm of your people, the victorious Scyldings. He takes his toll, spares none of the Danish people, but he takes his pleasure, kills and sends them to death, does not expect strife from the Spear-Danes]

So far the two cases of Beowulf's verbal hynōo are presented; in the image of paralysis in Hrothgar's inaction, and in the retelling of Heorot's complete collapse. As the poem moves on, an image of weakness in the Danish comitatus accumulates, and finally the complete picture of its paralysis is found when the inaction of the Danish warriors is depicted in more concrete and direct terms, i.e. the collapse of three principal constituents of the Danish comitatus, the chief, the hall, and its members. In this later part of his speech, which is originally conceived to accuse Unferth of lack of courage, 'Beowulf then moves on at once to broaden the charge to include all Danes'. As in the two cases of verbal hynōo, this accusation seems unnecessary and inappropriate; therefore it may be assumed that Beowulf reveals some mental weakness. Irving points out that the poet goes to great lengths to establish the sense that Denmark is a proud nation. This makes Beowulf's attack on the Danes especially serious and tactless.

In addition, a serious doubt is raised about the credibility of Beowulf's statement on the inaction and cowardice of the Danes in the face of Grendel.

Irving, Rereading Beowulf, p. 40.

To support his claim, Irving cites the courtly style of the coastguard's speech, and the poet's description of the great banquet scene (Beo 1008b-1250) in which particular stress is given to dynastic pride and formality. See Irving, A Reading of Beowulf, p. 51. 130. 131.

However, Arthur. G. Brodeur says Beowulf believes 'not that the Danes are cowards, but that he and his men are stronger and braver than they'. See Brodeur,
According to Beowulf, Grendel would never have wrought such mischief if Unferth and the Danish warriors had not been such cowards. Two passages contrast with Beowulf's opinion of the inaction of the Danes. In his exchange of speeches with Beowulf, Hrothgar sadly recalls the vain efforts of his warriors:

\begin{verbatim}
Ful oft gebeotedon beore druncne
ofer ealowæge oretmecgas,
\end{verbatim}

\begin{verbatim}
\[hæt hie in beorsele bidan woldon
Grendles guþe mid gryrum ega.
\]

\begin{verbatim}
Donne was þ eos medoheal on morgentid,
drihtsele dreorfah, þonne daeg lixte,
eal bencþelu blode bestymed,
heall heorudreore;
\end{verbatim}

(Beo 480-487a)

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

Irving sees the inaction and cowardice of Unferth juxtaposed with the courage and action of Beowulf in lines 1468b-1471a:

\begin{verbatim}
selfa ne dorste
under yða gewin aldre geneþan,
drihtscype dreogan; hær he dome forleas,
enlenmærðum.
\end{verbatim}

[he himself dared not risk his life beneath the tumult of the waves, accomplish deeds of prowess. There he lost his fame, renown for valour.] But Irving interprets the poet's words too literally. It is not only Unferth, but all the Danes including Hrothgar who are revealed, through Unferth, to be cowards. See Irving, A Reading of Beowulf, p. 81.
[Very often, warriors, after the drinking of beer, pledged themselves over the ale-cup that they would await in the beer-hall the combat with Grendel with terrible swords. Then at morning-time, when day shone forth, this mead-hall, this chamber for retainers, was stained with gore; all the bench-boards deluged with blood and gore of swords]

As has been discussed in ch. 1, Hrothgar, regarding Beowulf's daring eagerness as threatening the pride of the Danes, tries to save his face and keep up the pride of the Danish warriors by presenting a real picture of the frequent efforts of his retainers. Without considering any difference between the surface meaning and the underlying meaning, this statement provides evidence that the Danes were neither idle nor cowards. The conception of loss in battle does not always mean that the warriors involved in the battle were weak in these ways. It may be concluded that the Danish warriors were not idle in the battle against Grendel, but were defeated by Grendel's overpowering might. This interpretation is supported by a series of words denoting the frequent efforts of the Danish warriors: Ful oft, 'very often', bidan woldon, 'would await'. Here Ful oft, combining with woldon, implying a routine, suggest frequent combat between the Danish and Grendel. Furthermore the subsequent description of the blood-stained floors implies that the Danes fought to the last minute at the risk of their lives.

The image of action of the Danish warriors is suggested at the end of the second banquet after Beowulf's victory over Grendel. The hall is now again allocated to the Danish warriors who are always alert to outside attacks:

    Setton him to heafdon hilderandas,

51 Gerald Morgan also believes that 'the devastation of Heorot by Grendel is not to be seen as an indication of Hrothgar's lack of authority, nor of the Danes' lack of valour'. See Morgan, 'The Treachery of Hrothulf', ES, 53 (1972), 23-39 (p. 28).
They sat at their heads battle-shields, bright shield-wood. There on the bench over each noble was easily seen the battle-towering helmets, linked byrnie, glorious spear-wood. It was their custom both at home and in the field that they were always ready for warfare in either case at just such times as need befell their lord. They were a doughty race.

It would be nonsense to assume that the phrase *oft wæron an wig gearwe* is used exclusively of the period of the twelve years of Grendel's attack. The eulogy above for the readiness and alertness of the Danish *comitatus* raised by the poet corresponds well to the Hrothgar's recollection of his warriors' readiness and alertness, though their efforts were in vain. Through these two examples, a fair picture can be drawn of the image of action in the Danish warriors that contrasts with the image of their inaction.

---

52 Neil D. Isaacs attributes the vividness of this image of readiness to the helmets, byrnies and spears, rather than to the Danes themselves. See Isaacs, 'Six Beowulf Cruces', *JEQP*, 62 (1963), 119-28 (pp. 124-25). However, his interpretation seems inconsistent with the poet's concluding comment *wæs seo þeod tilu*, which surely cannot refer to the weapons.
evoked by Beowulf. In this way, it appears that Beowulf, being over-excited by Unferth's verbal attack, is unwittingly overexaggerating the situation in Heorot.

In addition, this verbal humiliation of the Danish comitatus becomes worse when Danish cowardice is brought into sharp juxtaposition with Geatish courage, as this is declared by Beowulf:

\[ \text{Ac ic him Geata sceal} \]
\[ \text{eafod ond ellen ungeara nu,} \]
\[ \text{guhe gebeodon,} \]

(\textit{Beo} 601b-603a)

[But very soon now I shall show him in the fighting the strength and courage of the Geats]

Beowulf's weakness in controlling his mind and emotion is more subtly projected in his dealing with Breca. Breca, the companion of Beowulf's adventure at sea, is eulogized again when Beowulf looks back on his heroic disposition in early years. Up to line 549, Breca is constantly included in the dual \textit{wit} and is described in a positive light. But he begins to be excluded from the scene when Beowulf declares his own martial superiority:

\[ \text{No he wiht fram me} \]
\[ \text{flody\textsuperscript{u}um feor flo\textsuperscript{u}tan meahte} \]

(\textit{Beo} 541b-542)

[He could not by any means swim far from me in the surging waves]

The complete exclusion of Breca from the scene starts from line 550 as the audience witnesses Beowulf's lone adventure at sea. As Chickering points out, Beowulf's heroism is emphasized 'by the shift from the dual person (\textit{wit}, \textit{unc} 'we two,' 'us two') to the isolated \textit{me} that is buffeted by the waves and monsters'.

53 Howell D. Chickering, Jr., ed., \textit{Beowulf: A Dual-Language Edition} (New York:
exclusion of Breca from the scene of actual heroic deeds echoes the absence of Beowulf in the description of Breca's glorious victory in the speech of Unferth. In the second part of Beowulf's speech, which is characterized by his determined proclamation of his martial superiority, such heroic magnanimity and friendly affection (nec ipse ex illo volendo 'I did not wish to go from him' in line 543b) have now disappeared completely:

Breca næfre git
æt heāolace, ne gehwæþer incer,
swa deorlice dæd gefremede

(Beo 583b-585)

[Breca never yet did at the battle-play, nor either of you, perform so bold a deed]

Here the heroic competitiveness in Beowulf's speech, that was initially directed only at Unferth, is now directed also at Breca. This inclusion of Breca appears to suggest that Beowulf displays some degree of lack of self-restraint. Breca repeatedly becomes a victim of circumstance and is finally brought down to the level of Unferth, as he is included in the dual person incer. This sudden change in his speech portrays the other side of Beowulf's character, who a few moments ago was an exemplary figure of honour and friendly kindness, but now has become a ruthless warrior who is determined to express his superiority in martial prowess and achievement at the price of his hearth-friend's reputation. From this inconsistency in Beowulf's character we are driven to ask why Beowulf makes his harmless friend Breca into a victim of heroic competitiveness. The following remarks from Ward Parks in the thematic context help us to understand the motivation of Beowulf's inconsistency:

____________________________________

The eristic impulse manifests in each contestant's attempt to force himself into a position of superiority to his foe and thereby to win kleos (glory) at his adversary's expense.54

The full application of this comment can be seen in the exchange of words between Unferth and Beowulf; in particular, in Beowulf's verbal attacks against his opponent, namely, in the revelation of Unferth as a brother-slayer, his consequent punishment in hell, and Unferth's lack of martial prowess.

As regards the diction and context of Beowulf's speech, Bonjour's view is typical: 'This version is characterized by Beowulf's calm, objective yet orderly, account of the whole incident as it actually happened, rectifying without passion but with great persuasive force Unferth's tendentious and distorted version.'55 However, this view of Beowulf's 'controlled rejoinder' to Unferth's attack appears to ignore the underlying implication of the sub-text, in which Beowulf is presented to establish his heroic identity at the price of the reputations of both Breca and Unferth.56 Also, half of his speech is motivated by turbulent emotion when he claims his superiority and turns the direction of his speech to insult explicitly both Unferth and the Danes.

(d) Beowulf's defence of his early achievement

The first part of Beowulf's speech seems to be misunderstood mainly because cnihtwesende and geogoðfeore have misled scholars into assuming that 'Beowulf is

54 Parks, *Verbal Duelling*, p. 44.
quick to concede in his admission that they were mere foolish boys at the time.\textsuperscript{57} The same view of Beowulf's boyish immaturity is held by Kemp Malone, who says\textsuperscript{53} "The implication is clear that Beowulf who has reached young manhood would not have undertaken such a match. One should not risk one's life in vain."\textsuperscript{58} My initial response is that in referring to his youthful age Beowulf means to show he was really doing the right thing on \textit{geogoðfeore}. In addition, Beowulf's speech illustrates his heroic ideology as the basis of verbal counterattack against Unferth's:

\begin{verbatim}
Wit þæt ge cwædon cnihtwesende
    ond gebeotedon — wæron begun þa git
on geogoðfeore — þæt wit on garsecg ut
    aldrum neðdon; ond þæt geæfndon swa.
\end{verbatim}

\textsc{(Beo} 535-538\textsc{)}

[When we were young, we said to each other, and made a vow on it, we were both then still in the time of youth, that we would risk our lives out on the sea; and that we did accordingly]

This passage has remarkable similarities both syntactically and semantically to Unferth's speech. Both \textit{gecwædon} and \textit{gebeotedon} appear to be designed to replace Unferth's \textit{dolgilpe} ('great words' or 'audacious speech') in line 509a. \textit{Aldrum neðon} in line 510a and \textit{garsecg} occurs in both contexts in line 515a and 537b. Lastly Beowulf's

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{57} Irving, \textit{A Reading of Beowulf}, (1968), p. 70.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{58} Kemp Malone, 'Beowulf' \textit{ES}, 29 (1948), 161-72 (p. 167). Engelhardt also regards the swimming-contest as 'purposeless feat of a boy in early youth'. See George J. Engelhardt, 'Beowulf: A Study in Dilatation', \textit{PMLA}, 70 (1955), 825-52 (p. 835). However, I believe such exploits are demonstrations of heroic potential which would be expected in a warlike society.}
'and that we did accordingly' seems to be conceived to play down Unferth's heroic rebuke delivered in the form of verbal disguise:

Beot eal wið þe

sunu Beanstanes spœ gelæste.

(Beo 523b-524)

[The son of Beanstan performed truly all that he had pledged against you]

In two cases semantic symmetry occurs between Beowulf's geæfndon and also between Unferth's gelæste, also between Beowulf's swa and Unferth's spœ. Unferth insinuates that Breca is a real hero because he consummated his vows in practical terms. In the exact same context Beowulf proclaims that he also carried out his pledges. So, it is assumed that just like Unferth, Beowulf may be setting out his own heroic ideology. However, the true meaning of this passage depends on the exact contexts of cnihtwesende and geogoâfeore. Two main questions are raised: are they regarded as variations or appositions indicating the same stage of growth? Secondly, Are both terms or one of them ever used to recall past heroic achievements in Old English literature? Or, in these physical and mental states, can Beowulf be regarded as capable of carrying out heroic actions? With reference to other Old English poetry, the state of cniht ranges from soon after birth to the period between being a child and being an adult.

Þa he nigonwintre cniht wæs,

(The Old English Orosius, ed. Janet Bately, EETS, ss. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1980), p. 99. 17)

[when he was nine years old]

The following examples show that cniht is used either as a separate state of growth or as one overlapping with the concept of geogoâ in gioguâhad:

Ðæt we magon sweotolor ongietan, gif we Salomones cwida sumne herongemong
eowiað, he cwæð: Bliðsa, cniht, on ðinum gioguðhade.59

(King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care, ed. Henry Sweet, EETS 45 and 50 [2 vols.] (London, 1871), p. 385. 32 (ch. 49)

[So that we may understand more clearly, if we consider one of Solomon's sayings, he said: rejoice, boy, in your youth]

Ond eft Paulus cwæð to his cnihte: Bebiod ðis & lære, ne forsio nan mon ðine gioguðe,60

(King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care, ed. Henry Sweet, EETS 45 and 50 [2 vols.] (London, 1871), p. 385. 29-30 (ch. 49)

[And again Paul said to his youth: Announce this and exhort, let no man scorn your youth]

In the examples shown above cniht and geoguð or gioguð have the same meanings.

Ic on geogoðe wearð on sið dagum syðdan, acenned, cnihtgeong hæleð, (El 638)

[I came into my youth in after days, as a young boy born]

In the following homily, the distinctions between 'childhood', 'boyhood' and 'youth' are clear since each stage of mental growth is shown in terms of a progression.

Witodlice ures andgites merigen, is ure cildhad, ure cnithad swylce underntid on þam astihð ure geogoð.61

59 Henry Sweet, ed., King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care, EETS, 45 and 50 [2 vols.] p. 385. 32 (ch. 49)

60 Sweet, King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care p. 385. 29-30 (ch. 49)

61 Malcolm Godden, ed., Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series EETS ss. 5 (London, 1979), p. 44. 92
[Truly our morning of understanding is our childhood, our boyhood is like the third time, on which rises our youth]

Last two examples above indicate that the state of cniht precedes that of geoguô.

Two sets of examples demonstrate that the state of cniht seems to include either some stage of geoguô or covers the whole of it. Thus it may be induced that geoguô can be used to represent a more advanced state of mind and body. Concerning mental and physical capability, cniht is used to refer to heroic deeds and glorious achievement particularly in Old English poetry.

No hwæþre he ofer Offan eorlseype fremede.
ac Offa geslog ærest monna

\textit{cnihtwesende} cynerica næst
nænig efeneald him eorlscape maran.

\textit{(Wid 37-40)}

[However, he did not perform heroic achievements beyond those of Offa, but of these men Offa, in his youth, first conquered the greatest of kingdoms, no one of same age made a greater heroic achievement]

\textit{Him be healfe stod hyse unweaxen,}
\textit{cniht on gecampe, se full cafllice,}
\textit{bræd of þam beorne blodigne gar,}
\textit{Wulfstanes bearn Wulfmær se geonga;}

\textit{(Maldon 152-155)}

[By his side stood a warrior not fully grown, a youth in the battle, who very bravely drew the bloody spear out of the man, the son of Wulfstan, the young Wulfmær]
With this reference to *cnih† both Wulfmær and Offa are praised as ideal heroes.

In this case it is not clear why this meaning of *cnih† should not apply in Beowulf's case. It can never be certain whether *cnih†wesende* in *Beowulf* refers to boyhood or youth. John Burrow assumes the word *cnih† 'covered the whole period between the end of infancy and the beginning of mature manhood'. Concerning the state of *cnih†wesende* the most reasonable assumption can be drawn from the context to which Beowulf's *cnih†wesende* is referred and how it is dealt with.

In fact, the poem itself provides very useful information about Beowulf's physical and mental condition. Beowulf's physical strength, illustrated by the description of his swimming for five nights in the rough sea, seems to prove that he had already reached a mature state to participate in that swimming-contest. Beowulf's physical ability is also reinforced by his mentality which was evinced through his generous kindness to Breca. It should be borne in mind that Beowulf's ability was demonstrated at the time of *cnih†wesende* and *geogoôfeore*, which was claimed by many critics to indicate Beowulf's rashness and immaturity. Also a similar swimming-contest takes place in the fourteenth century Old Icelandic *Egils Saga Einhenda*, in which the hero Egil is "twelve years old," the age at which an Icelandic youth came of age.

There is some historical indication that in early Germanic society young man matured early. Tacitus in *Germania* (A.D 98) observed that in Germanic society, boys could become 'chiefs' even in their teens. This demonstrates that in such

---


63 Karl P. Wentersdorf, 'Beowulf's Adventure with Breca', *SP*, 72 (1975), 140-66 (p. 150).
societies youth is not necessarily an obstacle to high status. Therefore, if such historical evidence is accepted, then it would be quite natural for the youths of the classical world (or the Geats) to participate in adventures, including warlike deeds, in their early years. And consequently, their early exploits should not be regarded as a sign of rashness, but as an early heroic disposition fitting for the heroic society.

In addition, geoguô is never used as an indication of youthful immaturity in the poem. Instead, this term is frequently used as a stock expression evoking past glorious achievements: Fela ic on giogoðe guðræsa genæs, 'I survived many battle-charges in my youth' (Beo 2426); gomel guðwiga gioguð cwidan, 'old warrior (Hrothgar) would speak of his youth' (Beo 2112); Ic geneðde fela guða on geogoðe, 'I ventured into many a battle in my youth' (Beo 2511b-2512a); hæbbe ic mærða fela ongunnen on geogoðe, 'I have in my youth undertaken many glorious deeds' (Beo 408b-409a); ða ic furþum weold folce Deniga ond on geogoðe heold ginne rice, 'I had just begun to rule the people of Danes, held in my youth the spacious kingdom' (Beo 465-466).

One remarkable feature in these examples is the consistent application of alliteration between geoguð and its contiguous words. Those alliterated terms guðræsa, genæs, guðwiga, guða, ongunnen, and ginne rice symbolize one way or another the heroic world and heroic action. In particular the verb ongunnen is used to evoke direct heroic actions, though it is often used periphrastically to denote the action of other verbs. In addition, the choice and form of verbs in lines 535-8 accentuates both Beowulf’s heroic ideology and his pride in recollecting the contest. The verbs gecwædon, 'said' (Beo 535a), gebeotedon, 'made a vow' (Beo 536a), geæfndon, 'did' (Beo 538b) follow the pattern of heroic action, namely to make a

---

boast and then act upon it. T. P. Dunning and A. J. Bliss observed the difference in the etymological meanings between \textit{gielp} and \textit{beot}. They suggest that 'beot' is from an earlier \textit{behat}, and therefore means "promise"; \textit{gielp}, on the other hand, is related to \textit{giellan}, and originally means "a loud noise". According to this view \textit{beot} in \textit{gebeotedon} in Beowulf's speech is contrasted with \textit{gilp} in \textit{dolgilp} in Unferth's speech, in that Beowulf uses the former to justify his early expedition whilst Unferth cynically uses the latter to degrade Beowulf's youthful adventure with 'a loud voice'. In addition, all three verbs \textit{gecwaedon}, \textit{gebeotedon} and \textit{geæfndon} are prefixed with the perfective particle \textit{ge-}, whose function is to express the completeness of the action, even though the passage would be semantically complete without them. We can thus infer that Beowulf's use of \textit{ge-} is a deliberate means of emphasizing the completeness of his actions, demonstrating his ability to fulfill his boasts. The close relation between the boast and its fulfilment is mirrored in the textual closeness of the verbs, which appear over only four lines.

So far, I have shown that \textit{geoguô} is used as a sign of Beowulf's early heroic disposition. But the actual term used for Beowulf's early adventure is \textit{geogoôfeorh}, dative singular of \textit{geogoôfeorh}. According to BT, \textit{geogoôfeorh} is rendered as 'youthful life, youth', so there is no change of meaning in general. And in Wiglaf's speech on \textit{geogoôfeorh} is again used to imply a proper time of youth in which heroic disposition is revealed. Wiglaf reminds Beowulf of what he vowed in his youthful time and encourages him to fulfil that pledge:

\begin{quotation}
Both R. E. Kaske and David R. Howlett believe that Beowulf's boast (\textit{Beo} 536a) at the time of the swimming-contest was a formal one and one which he took very seriously. See Kaske, '\textit{Sapientia et Fortitudo}', 431; and Howlett, 'Form and Genre in \textit{Beowulf}', \textit{SN}, 46 (1974), 309-25 (p. 312).
\end{quotation}

\begin{quotation}
\end{quotation}
Leofa Biowulf, læst eall tela,
swa ðu on geoguðfeore gecwæde,
þæt ðu ne alæte bē de lifigendum
dom gedreosan;

(Beo 2663-2666a)

[Beloved Beowulf, perform your whole task well just as you declared long ago, in the
days of your youth, that you would never let your glory dwindle while you were alive]

As shown above, although making a vow in the days of youth is hardly
blameworthy, failing to fulfil a pledge made in youth is blameworthy in heroic
society. Though there is no convincing evidence that on geoguðfeore in 2664a
corresponds to on geoguðfeore in 537a in terms of the exact period of youth, the
semantic congruence in these two occasions suggests these two periods overlap. It
means the idea of 'making a vow or pledge in days of youth' is equally expressed on
two occasions within the same semantic structures:

gebeotedon --- on geoguðfeore (Beo 536a-537a)
on geoguðfeore --- gecwæde, (Beo 2664)

I do not think this semantic agreement is accidental but is deliberately contrived by
the poet, who intends to stress the idea of 'making a vow in youth' as a sign of a heroic
disposition.

However, as regards the semantic value of -feore in the two cases, if its
meaning is confined to the sense of 'days or period', then it is used otiosely, since
geogoð alone completes the sense of 'days or periods', as is shown in other cases. BT
shows that feorh has several meanings such as 'life, soul, spirit, a living being, person'.
But such meanings do not make sense in the following passage, which is extracted
from the scop's description of Finn's hall after the slaughter:

Da wæs heal roden
feonda feorum, swilce Fin slægen,
Then the hall was reddened with the life-blood of foes, Finn too was slain.

I agree with Garmonsway's rendering of feorum as 'with the life-blood' rather than 'with corpses'. This sense of 'life-blood' is also supported by Klaeber. In a sense, the image of blood is brought out in this passage to convey the idea of the transience of human life, which is one of the motifs of the Finn Episode. At the same time, the blood-image, conveyed in feonda feorum, 'with the life-blood of foes', is used to evoke a fierce battle scene. The violent battle scene serves to conjure the idea of true warriorship, the value of which is largely measured by actual deeds, regardless of the result of the battle. Thus while the spilling of blood is inevitable in the course of keeping up the duty of warriorship, more importantly it is the proof of the exercise of true warriorship and in this sense blood itself is regarded as a symbol of heroic spirit.

If feorh, 'life-blood', with the connotation of heroic spirit, is combined with geoguô, then the new compound geoguô-feorh will further stress an early heroic spirit, which is quite naturally expected in heroic society. The other evidence to support the view that Beowulf's repetitive use of cniht and geoguô is not designed to signal regret can be drawn from the stylistic features adopted by Beowulf in narrating his version of the swimming-contest and in declaring his superiority in martial prowess. In the description of Beowulf's struggle with sea-monsters and his subsequent victory over them, the audience's attention is drawn to an eulogy evoked by Beowulf himself:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ac on mergenne} & \quad \text{mecum wunde} \\
\text{be yôlafe} & \quad \text{uppe lægon,} \\
\text{sweo[r]dum aswefede,} & \quad \text{þæt syðpan na} \\
\text{ymb brontne ford} & \quad \text{brimliðende}
\end{align*}
\]

lade ne letton.

(Beo 565-569b)

[but at morning they lay wounded by swords, along the sand by the shore, killed by the swords, so that never again would they hinder sea-farers from their voyage across the high seas]

In the subsequent speech furthermore, which is centred on enhancing his martial superiority, Beowulf takes advantage of the fierce struggle against the sea-monsters under the water:

No ic on niht gefrægn
under heofones hwealf heardran feohtan,
ne on egstreamum earmran mann;
hwæpere ic fara feng feore gedigde
siþes werig.

(Beo 575b-579a)

[Never have I been told of harder struggle at night under the vault of heaven, nor of a man more wretched in the ocean streams. Yet I escaped the grip of the monsters with my life, weary of my enterprise]

In this passage it should not be missed that the central meaning of Beowulf's physical strength is reinforced by the use of two comparative adjectives combined with the negative particle no or ne. This combination of a negative and a comparative is conceived to substitute the effect of a superlative and becomes a characteristic feature of Beowulf's speech.

It must be kept in mind that there is a comparison between the hardship suffered by young Beowulf and those suffered in all the heroic adventures known to Beowulf. In other words, Beowulf declares that he, at the time of geoguð, exceeded any kind of martial strength even including that shown by mature warriors. This picture of Beowulf's willingness to impose his position of superiority over his
adversary appears to correspond with the Homeric tradition of winning glory in public. In the face of verbal provocation from Euryalus, for example, Odysseus defends his position by saying that he has been 'in the first rank so long as I was able to rely on the strength of my youth'. Soon after demonstrating his unmatched strength in the game of discus-throwing, Odysseus goes on to list his superiority as a bowman and a javelin-thrower: 'Of all others now alive and eating their bread on the face of the earth, I claim to be by far the best, ... As for the javelin, I can throw it farther than anyone else can shoot an arrow'. As has already been discussed with reference to Dodds' concept of 'shame culture', such an inclination of Odysseus to excessive boasting should not be interpreted as a sign of mental weakness as long as he proves his real capability. Thus, in the light of Homeric tradition, Beowulf's declaration of his superior martial strength can hardly be blamed for his excessive pride. Instead, he is regarded as doing something perfectly appropriate for the customs of his world by recalling proudly his adventure of geogō.

In this context, in which Beowulf uses words in a sophisticated way to their maximum rhetorical effect, Beowulf is probably boasting about his undisputed martial prowess. A clear sense of Beowulf's boasting can be found in his own statement: no ic þæs [fæla] gylpe, 'I do not boast much of that' (Beo 586b). This seemingly humble statement confirms that he was deeply conscious of the swimming contest which he had undertaken at the time of cniht or geoguō as a sign of early heroic quality. This statement entails he has been boasting about his swimming-contest with Breca. Thus the swimming-contest is considered by Beowulf a fit subject for boasting. The fact that Beowulf talks of his youthful boast in gebeotedon, 'made a vow' (Beo 536a), as the subject for his present boast, shows that his early vow was not an idle one motivated by boyish foolishness. As A. Leslie Harris observes, Beowulf 'claims he fulfilled his boast by endurance and courage in swimming and by his ability as a
monster-killer'.\(^6\) The other evidence that Beowulf and Breca were sufficiently well grown up to venture their early heroic prowess at the time of the swimming-contest comes from Unferth's comment on Breca's position. During his flyting with Beowulf, Unferth makes a comment which seems to suggest that Breca, and by implication Beowulf, were not so young at the time of their swimming-contest as is usually believed. He says that Breca folc ahte, burh ond beagas, 'had subjects, a stronghold and treasures' (Beo 522b-3a). Breca and Beowulf were both in the state of geogud at the time of this contest. The fact that a youth could have 'subjects', 'treasures' and 'a stronghold' illustrates how a youth has a status above that of a mere youth. Thus Beowulf's reference to cniht and geogud is best interpreted, not as a sign of immaturity or rashness, but as a confirmation of his early heroic disposition.

(d) Conclusion

The flyting between Beowulf and Unferth is a substitute for physical conflict, in the sense that battle is waged with words, psychology and mental skill. Through their interplay, both characters are more fully revealed. Unferth, who on the surface is a mere agent provocateur, is shown through the examination of sub-text to be a defender of his and his country's heroic pride: his jealousy is as much professional as it is personal. Unferth's version of the Breca Episode reveals his heroic ideology: restrain your boasts until your actions are completed. His adherence to this ideology is shown in his silence after Beowulf's victory over Grendel. His generosity is also apparent when he lends his sword to Beowulf.

---

Beowulf is shown to be a man with a keen sense of the status and pride of his counterparts. But his lack of self-restraint, which was first discussed in ch. 2, is most apparent in his exchange with Unferth, when he accuses Unferth and all the Danes of lack of courage and military incompetence. This lack of self-restraint is not something for which he should be blamed, however. It is rather the natural consequence of the heroic exuberance of a still growing warrior. In his defence of his martial prowess, the emotional side of his character comes to the fore, in contrast to the calm control that he is usually thought to present. Beowulf's proud recollection of his youthful exploits also suggests that for a long time he has been aware of what actions are fitting for a growing warrior.
In the previous chapter I have considered the concept of youth in heroic society with reference to geoguð. In this chapter I shall consider Beowulf's place in this conceptual scheme. Most critics have argued that there is no attention paid in the poem to the chronological development of Beowulf's character. This chapter is an attempt to consider why the concept of age is so important in Beowulf. In this poem, age is vital to an understanding of the chronological development of Beowulf's character, which, contrary to the arguments of most critics, can be to a certain extent traced through the poem. I shall distinguish six stages in Beowulf's development: his childhood at Hrethel's court; the sluggish period of his early geoguð, from the end of Hrethel's reign through Hæthcyn's reign; his middle geoguð, when he undertook his early exploits, such as the swimming-contest with Breca; his mature geoguð, which encompasses his adventure in Denmark; his duguð, which starts after his triumphant return to the Geatish land; and finally, his reign as a king. In particular, I shall focus on two of the key transitions in Beowulf's life: his arrival in Denmark and his return to the Geats. In ordering Beowulf's life in this way, I must also deal with the controversial issue of Beowulf's so-called 'Inglorious Youth'. I shall argue that a period of inactivity is found in Beowulf's life and that this period occurs prior to his time in Denmark, and also prior to Beowulf's early adventures including the swimming-contest with Breca, and not after these adventures, as some critics have argued.

---

1 The phrase 'Inglorious Youth' is from Adrien Bonjour's, in 'Young Beowulf's Inglorious Period', *Anglia*, 70 (1952), 339-44 (p. 339).
It is generally acknowledged that the contrast between young Beowulf and King Hrothgar early in the poem and the similar contrast between old Beowulf and Wiglaf at the end of the poem are important to the overall meaning of this poem. These contrasts reflect the poet's preoccupation with monarchic succession, one which is apparent from the genealogy with which the poem opens. It is therefore not surprising that age is an important topic to consider together with the protagonist of the poem.

My argument in this chapter rests upon a close examination of the use of epithets in Beowulf. Of particular importance in this argument is the consideration of Beowulf's social status at the time of his arrival in Denmark.

(a) The credibility of Beowulf's sluggish period

At the end of Beowulf's lengthy description of his victory over Grendel in front of Hygelac, the poet abruptly intervenes and tells of Beowulf's early character at the court of the Geats:

Hean wæs lange,
swa hyne Geata bearn godne ne tealdon,
ne hyne on medobence micles wyrône
drihten Wedera gedon wolde;
swyðe (wen)don, ḷæt he sleac wære,
æðeling unfrom.

(Beo 2183b-2188a)

[Scorn had lasted a long time, as the sons of the Geats had not thought him a brave man, nor would the lord of the Weder-Geats do him much honour at the mead-bench; they firmly believed he was slothful, a feeble prince]
This mention of Beowulf's unpromising start appears to contrast with other parts of the poem because the poem otherwise gives little indication of Beowulf's 'sluggish youth'. A lot of scholarly effort has been expended in an attempt to reach a satisfactory explanation for this inconsistency. Critical arguments are divided: was there actually such a period of sluggish youth in Beowulf's career? And if there was, when did it occur? It is clear that we have to deal with three possibilities: this sluggish period preceded Beowulf's early exploits; it occurred after his early exploits, before his arrival in Denmark; or it followed the Grendel adventure, before Beowulf became king of the Geats.

In this chapter I shall argue that there is an actual unpromising period early in Beowulf's career, by re-examining the text for evidence which may without contradiction account for this period in Beowulf's youth. In ch. 3, which covers two stages of Beowulf's growth, the stage of *cnihtwesende*, or *on geogoofroe*, I have discussed the implication of the term 'youth' in relation to Beowulf. Thus, so far, we have seen two different stages of Beowulf's life which mainly focus on the 'young' period of his career. In this context of Beowulf's growth, if we successfully link the period of 'Inglorious Youth' with a period either before the Breca episode or before Beowulf's arrival in Danish land, or after Beowulf's victory over Grendel, we can draw a clearer picture of the chronology of Beowulf's life. Up to the point when the poet refers to his sluggish youth, Beowulf has seemed an ideal hero flawless in ability and matchless in prowess, except for the lack of self-restraint, which was discussed in relation to the sub-text of heroic rival-consciousness. Regardless of the truth of the period of 'Inglorious Youth', this sudden revelation of sluggishness in Beowulf's early career is probably meant to 'heighten Beowulf's eminence' as J. Blomfield says, by

2 J. Blomfield, 'The Style and Structure of Beowulf' RES, 14 (1938), 396-403 (p. 402).
contrasting Beowulf's inactivity with his later achievements. Also, as Adrien Bonjour notes the 'sluggish youth' motive in Beowulf may be a remnant of Beowulf's older status as a hero of folktales.³

Apart from the contrast of inactivity with glory, what matters most is the credibility of the period of 'Inglorious Youth'. Beowulf's 'Inglorious Youth' has been thought to be somewhat irrelevant by a few critics; as Klaeber puts it, 'the introduction of the commonplace story of the sluggish youth is not very convincing'⁴ and his view seems to share some common ground with A. C. Bartlett, who says Beowulf's sluggishness 'does indeed appear misplaced'.⁵ Like Klaeber or Bartlett, A. G. Brodeur claims that this passage is awkward on the basis of the fact that 'the flaw lies in the total absence of anything outside this single passage to support a tale of the hero's early inactivity'.⁶ In answer to this alleged absence of other evidence for Beowulf's inglorious youth, however, it should be pointed out that Beowulf himself refers to early fights in other contexts: hæbbe ic mærða fela ongynn on geogoðe, 'I have in my youth undertaken many glorious deeds' (Beo 408b-409a), Fela ic on giogoðe guðræsa genæs, 'I survived many battle-charges in my youth' (Beo 2426), Ic geneððe fela guða on geogoðe, 'I ventured into many a battle in my youth' (Beo 2511b-2512a). All these speeches, delivered directly by Beowulf himself, seem to mitigate the poet's claim of sluggishness in Beowulf's youth. Yet this contradiction occurs only if the

---

⁴ Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 207.
'youth' in the passage (Beo 2187b-88a) in question and the 'youth' referred to by Beowulf himself are understood as the same stage of growth in Beowulf's life.

Another incongruity may result from a speech by Beowulf himself, when he remembers Hrethel's exceptional favour towards him:

Ic wæs syfanwintre,  þa mec sinca baldor,
freawine folca æt minum fæder genam;
heold mec ond hæfde  Hreðel cyning,
geaf me sinc ond symbel,  sibbe gemunde;
æs ic him to life  ládra owihte,
beorn in burgum  þonne his bearna hwylc,
Herebeald ond Hæðcyn  oððe Hygelac min.

(Beo 2428-2434)

[I was seven years old when the lord of treasures, kindly lord of people, took me from my father. King Hrethel had and kept me, gave me wealth and feasted me, and bore in mind our kinship. Never throughout my life was I a whit less liked by him as a warrior within the stronghold than were any of his sons, Herebeald and Hæthcyn or my beloved Hygelac]

This statement appears to clash with the sense of Beowulf's sleac youth cited in Beo 2187b-88a. This incongruity may be found in two main points: firstly, in the passage of 'Inglorious Youth', drihten Wedera, 'the lord of the Weather-Geats' (Beo 2186a) should be identified as Hæthcyn; secondly, the sluggish period would also overlap with the time when Beowulf was favoured by Hrethel.

This kind of repeated inconsistency is taken as an epic tradition by Paul B. Taylor, who comments that 'Beowulf's words throughout the poem contrast with the words and understanding of others, and that this is common to the epic.'

group of scholars have tried to set up a possible period of Beowulf's sluggishness largely on the basis of hypothesis. As regards the time of the sluggish period, Brodeur's view is widely accepted; 'either the sluggish period preceded the early exploit, or it was posterior to them, while taking place before the Grendel adventure'. However, the period during which Beowulf was held in low esteem is more clearly specified by Kemp Malone, who identified three stages in young Beowulf's development. First, he is a boy of great promise. Second, his awareness of his moral duty to God awakens. As a consequence he avoids adventure, to the puzzlement and disapproval of his tribe. Third, he hears of Grendel and realizes his call has come.

Malone's interpretation, with its religious overtones, has been followed by critics more than any other. However, as with other views, Malone's still remains unsatisfactory. Among other things, Malone seems not to pay attention to two points: firstly, textual evidence; secondly, Beowulf's social and martial status when he arrives in Denmark. With regard to the textual evidence, there seems little room for Beowulf being sleac, 'sluggish', or 'slack', or unfrom, ' feeble', or 'unbold' before his adventure with Grendel in Denmark. In his speech to Hrothgar, Beowulf proudly recalls his early involvement in active adventures: hæbbe ic mærôa fela ongunnen on geogo[. 'I have in my youth undertaken many glorious deeds' (Beo 408b-409a). If, as proposed by Malone, Beowulf realizes any obligation to God, i.e. moral duty for higher service rather than youthful adventures for worldly fame, surely Beowulf should not recall his early exploits. In addition, if the period falls before the adventure with Grendel, this would undermine Hrothgar's confidence in Beowulf, as pointed out by R. P. Tripp, Jr: 'Certainly Hrothgar could not have known Beowulf ("when he was a boy")' [Beo

---


9 Kemp Malone, 'Young Beowulf', JEGP, 36 (1937), 21-3 (p. 22).
372b)], and still felt that "Holy God has, As a divine favour sent him to us" (Beo 381b-382), if the lad had been slack'. In this part of Hrothgar's reference to Beowulf's early fame before his arrival in Denmark, the poet introduces Beowulf's wide renown as an objective view by imputing it to hearsay:

\begin{quote}
\textit{bonne sægdon \textit{hæt sælipende},
\textit{ha ðe gifseattas Geata fyredon
\textit{hyder to þance, \textit{hæt he ðritiges
\textit{manna mægencræft on his mundgripe
\textit{heaþorof hæbbe.}
\end{quote}

(\textit{Beo} 377-381a)

[Moreover, the seafarers who have carried costly gifts for the Geats to that land, as a token of my esteem, used to say that he is famed in battle, and has the strength of thirty men in his hand-grip]

This passage clearly demonstrates that Beowulf's reputation as a valiant warrior has been maintained throughout a certain period up to his arrival in Denmark. The strength of Beowulf's reputation may also be seen when the coastguard clearly perceives Beowulf to be an established warrior. Firstly, he says \textit{Næfre ic maran geseah eorla ofer eorlan}. 'Never have I seen a mightier champion upon earth' (Beo 247b-8a); secondly, he says Beowulf \textit{nis \textit{hæt seldguma}}, 'he is not a mere retainer' (Beo 249b); and thirdly, he describes Beowulf as \textit{wæpnum geweorðad}, 'made worthy with weapons' (Beo 250). Hrothgar's conviction of Beowulf's early fame in battle is due to hearsay, which more emphatically proves Beowulf's early fame than any personal statement he might offer. By the time of his arrival in Denmark, Beowulf already has a considerable reputation, as he is the first man to whom Hrothgar has

\textit{\textsuperscript{10} R. P. Tripp, Jr., 'Did Beowulf Have an "Inglorious Youth"?', SN, 61 (1989), 129-43 (p. 130).}
ever entrusted Heorot: *Næfre ic ænegum men ær alyfde, .... òrybærn Denæ buton be nu ða,* 'Never yet have I entrusted the mighty hall of the Danes...except for you now' (Beo 655-7). This objective view of Beowulf's fame is strengthened by the reports of the sæliôende, 'seafarers', who 'used to come back with tall stories of Beowulf's prowess which they had picked up in Geatland'. Without doubt, the source of the hearsay, the seafarers, is introduced here to heighten objectivity in describing Beowulf's early fame. In addition, this reference to 'seafarers' is closely related to the formulaic expression *be sæm tweonum,* 'between the seas', which is used with great emphasis in four instances in the poem in order to contribute to the image of a renowned person whose fame is widely circulated between nations. Firstly, after Beowulf's victory over Grendel his unrivalled reputation as a warrior is proclaimed by Hrothgar's warriors with reference to *be sæm tweonum,* 'between the seas' (Beo 858b). This reference to 'between the seas' serves to evoke the graphic image of widespreadness, an apt way to praise the magnitude of Beowulf's feats. Secondly, Æschere's fame as a renowned warrior is also introduced with the same formula *be sæm tweonum* (Beo 1297b). Thirdly, the kingly reputation of Hrothgar is emphasized by the same formulaic expression *be sæm tweonum* (Beo 1685b). And fourthly in the episode of Modthryth, Offa's fame as an ideal king is narrated with the same formula *bi sæm tweonum* (Beo 1956b).

In this way the fame of Beowulf, Æschere, Hrothgar and Offa is brought to the readers' attention with a graphic image of vast seas. This formulaic use of *be sæm tweonum* has a semantic relationship with sæliôend, men who habitually travel 'between the seas'. Were it not for the 'seafarers' whether they are merchants or warriors, a hero's reputation could not be circulated 'between the seas'. In respect of this correlation, Hrothgar's reference to 'seafarers' implies that Beowulf's fame in

11 *Beowulf,* ed. Wrenn, p. 112.
battle is known 'between the seas'.\textsuperscript{12} It is thus possible that Hrothgar presents a retrospective image of martial prowess in Beowulf as a young man, even before Beowulf arrives in Denmark. More crucial evidence that Beowulf was neither despised nor feeble before he came to Denmark can be drawn from Beowulf himself:

\begin{verbatim}
þæ me þæt gelærdon leode mine,
þæ selestan, snotere ceorlas,
þeoden Hroðgar, þæt ic þe sohte,
forþan hie mægenes cæft min[n]e cuþon;
\end{verbatim}

\textit{(Beo 415-418)}

[Then my people, the noble and wise men, advised me thus, lord Hrothgar, that I should visit you, since they knew the strength of my might]

This speech is evidence that Beowulf was not held in low esteem by his people at least before he set forth on his adventure with Grendel.

(b) Beowulf's status when he arrives in Denmark

Now let us take a close look into Beowulf's social and military status when he arrives in Denmark, whilst bearing in mind Malone's view about the time of Beowulf's sluggishness, which is supposed to fall before the fight with Grendel.\textsuperscript{13} Ward Parks

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Where the vastness of the sea is concerned, Adrien Bonjour and Caroline Brady give other examples of this image in their work on hronrad and swanrad, which are kennings for sea. See Bonjour, \textit{Twelve Beowulf Papers} (Geneva: University of Neuchatel, 1962), p.115-119, and Caroline Brady, 'The Old English Nominal Compounds in -ræd', \textit{PMLA}, 67 (1952), 538-71

\item[13] George J. Engelhardt also believes that Beowulf's 'singularity', namely his
\end{footnotes}
suggests that Beowulf's 'heroic credentials have yet to be established' though he regards Beowulf as 'a great warrior'.\textsuperscript{14} However, his view fails to take account of considerations discussed in this chapter, and depends upon an understanding of dryhten.

Concerning age in the structure of Beowulf, J. R. R. Tolkien expressed his view that 'it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age.'\textsuperscript{15} Tolkien's view was challenged by Kenneth Sisam, who insisted there is no change in the role of the hero as a monster-killer: 'Beowulf is represented from beginning to end as the scourge of monsters, always seeking them out and destroying them by the shortest way.'\textsuperscript{16} Sisam also provides us with a useful comment on the young Beowulf: 'When he first appears in the story (i.e. after the Breca episode before the fight with Grendel) he is a confident and proved hero.'\textsuperscript{17} J. A. Burrow agrees with Sisam's view: 'the "contrast between youth and age" is much less clearly marked in

\begin{flushright}
exceptional maturity in youth, precludes him from the usual subservient activities of a probationary warrior. His lack of participation in such activities was misinterpreted as spiritless sloth by the Geats. This makes the sluggish period, which only ended, according to Engelhardt, with his victory over Grendel, merely apparent. See Engelhardt, 'On the Sequence of Beowulf's Geogol', MLN, 68 (1953), 91-5, (p. 92-4).
\end{flushright}


\textsuperscript{17} Sisam, \textit{The Structure of Beowulf}, p. 23.
the poem than Tolkien's account suggests.' On this matter of Beowulf's state in the first part of the poem, Sisam and Burrow are possibly right. Although we are not told of the exact state or status of the hero when he arrives in Denmark, two phrases hint that Beowulf is still at the stage of youth; firstly hyse, 'young warrior' (Beo 1217a), is Wealhtheow's word for Beowulf, and secondly Hrothgar says Beowulf speaks wisely on swa geongum feore, (Beo 1843a), 'at so young an age'. But I do not think that these references to Beowulf prove his state of geogoð. Though hyse can denote 'young man' in Old English, too much stress should not be laid on the youthful connotation of this word, as is proven in the opening scene of The Battle of Maldon:

Het þa hyssa hwæne hors forlætan,

(Maldon 2)

[(He) ordered then each of the warriors should leave his horse]

Here hyssa, genitive plural of hyse indicates the whole band of Byrhtnoth's followers including both the young and the old. When this late-tenth-century poet intends to emphasize the fact that a man really is young he introduces either a word with the opposite meaning of hyse or qualifies hyse by an adjective such as unweaxen 'not fully grown up':

Da gyt þæt word gecwæð

har hilderinc, hyssas bylde,
bæð gangan forð gode geferan.

(Maldon 168b-170)

[But still the grey-haired warrior delivered words, encouraged the young men and urged them to go forth as good comrades]

Here **hyssas** means 'young warriors' as it is contrasted with **har hilderinc**, 'grey-haired warrior'.

Him be healfe stod hyse unweaxen,
cniht on gecampe,

*(Maldon 152-153a)*

[Beside him a young warrior not fully grown, a youth in battle]

In line 152 of *The Battle of Maldon* hyse thus describes the youthfulness of Wulfmar. In these two instances the poet of *Maldon* is punctilious in defining the exact meaning of the given words. Wealththeow addresses Beowulf as **hyse** after he has killed Grendel (*Beo* 1217a), but the poet of *Beowulf* uses this term in the same way as **hyssa** at 2a in *The Battle of Maldon*, i.e. without clarifying the physical or mental state of Byrhtnoth's military band either by introducing contrasting meaning or a qualifying adjective to stress youthfulness. In this sense it can not be concluded that **hyse** in Wealththeow's speech implies either the youthfulness of Beowulf or the inexperienced stage of his military career. Instead, **hyse**, 'young man', should be regarded as relative to much older warriors. With regard to the state of youth, two examples can be considered, in which the meaning of 'young' is emphatically intensified by the qualifying words. In his farewell speech, Hrothgar, moved by Beowulf's promise of future help, praises Beowulf's discretion:

```plaintext
ne hyrde ic snotorlicor
on swa geongum feore guman þingian.

*(Beo 1842b-1843)*
```

[I have never heard a man at so young an age talk more discreetly]

Here Beowulf's state of youth is stressed by the qualifying adverb **swa**, 'so'. But it should not be forgotten that the expression of 'at so young an age' is uttered by Hrothgar, who is well advanced in his age. Hrothgar's old age is proved by his own phrase, 'fifty years ruling'. Thus it can inferred that Hrothgar is applying 'so young' to
the relatively young Beowulf. If the 'so young age' of Beowulf is to be emphasized in Hrothgar's speech, then it would be appropriate for swa to have metrical stress in line 1843a. However, the metrical type B1 in 1843a suggests that swa does not contain any outstanding metrical value:

\[
\text{on swa geongum feore guman þingian (Beo 1843a)}
\]

\[
x x A x (Nx) (Ax) N(n)x^{19}
\]

Here in Kendall's classification, the qualifying adverb swa is treated as a mere intensifier filling out a metrical vacuum. In relation to the young age, a similar example is drawn from the poet's description of Hygd, the queen of Hygelac:

\[
\text{Bold wæs betlic, bregorof cyning,}
\]

\[
\text{hea[h on] healle, Hygd swiðe geong,}
\]

\[
\text{(Beo 1925-1926)}
\]

[The hall was splendid, the chief a mighty ruler in the lofty hall, Hygd the queen (was) extremely young]

Unlike the use of swa in Hrothgar's speech, swiðe here 'functions as a defining adverb, not as a vague intensifier'.\(^{20}\) This unique position of swiðe with its grammatical function of restricting the meaning of a following verb or adjective, is

---

\(^{19}\) Calvin B. Kendall, *The Metrical Grammar of Beowulf*, CSASE, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 278. Where 'A' indicates a stressed syllable with alliteration, 'N' indicates a stressed syllable without alliteration, '(Ax)', '(Nx)' indicate a short syllable plus another syllable, '(n)' indicates a short syllable of a formative element when followed by another syllable, 'x' indicates a proclitic syllable, or an unstressed enclitic syllable, or any syllable which can be resolved with preceding short stressed syllable.

equally accepted by both Russom and Kendall. According to Russom line 1926b is classified as follows:

\[
\text{Hygd swiðe geong (Beo 1926b)}
\]

\[
[S/ S \times s]
\]

Where 'S' indicates the strong position normally corresponding to a stressed syllable, 's' indicates secondary stress. Kendall scans this line in a very similar way:

\[
\text{Hygd swiðe geong (Beo 1926b)}
\]

\[
A \quad N\times \quad N
\]

Where 'A' indicates a stressed syllable with alliteration, 'N' indicates a stressed syllable without alliteration. The only difference in the two scansions is the degree of stress on geong, in which Russom puts more stress on swiðe than geong, whilst equal metrical stress is laid on both swiðe and geong by Kendall. But in both cases swiðe is regarded as having a major metrical emphasis. The fact that swa in line 1843a does not receive such a stress suggests that Beowulf's youth is not being emphasized by this adverb.

It can be inferred from the unique metrical position of swiðe, on the other hand, that the poet intends particularly to stress Hygd's 'extremely young' age. Perhaps, as is assumed by Russom, the poet wishes to point out that 'Hygd was a child bride'.\(^{21}\) Apart from this wide difference of metrical emphasis between swa and swiðe, there is also a different context. The contextual background of swa in Hrothgar's speech addressed to Beowulf is the huge age gap between Hrothgar and Beowulf; thus 'so young', indicating Beowulf's youthful state, can be reasonably regarded as a relative expression. In contrast, there is no such age gap when 'so young' is applied to Hygd. As is exemplified in the use of swiðe with its unique metrical

emphasis, it can be inferred that the poet of *Beowulf* is very careful in choosing the right words for the expression of a specific concept, that is here, 'so young'.

Burrow appears to propose that when Beowulf arrives in Denmark he belongs to the state of *geogoð* rather than a more advanced state. He says, 'Hrothgar assigned Beowulf this honorable place beside the two princes: it also places Beowulf where at this stage of his career he belongs, among the *geogoð*.'\(^{22}\) The description of the feast at Heorot after the killing of Grendel seems to support Burrow's interpretation:

```
Hwearf þa bi bence þær hyre byre wæron,
Hreðric ond Hroðmund, ond hæleþa bearn,
giogoð ætgæedere; þær se goda sæt,
Beowulf Geata be þæm gebroðrum twæm.
```

*(Beo 1188-1191)*

[Then she turned to the bench where her boys were, Hrethric and Hrothmund, and the sons of the heroes, the younger warriors together, where the brave Beowulf of the Geats sat between the two brothers]

This seating arrangement seems to be a sign of honour and respect to a foreign guest who accomplished his mission successfully rather than an indication of the state of *geogoð*. Farrell argues that though Beowulf is seated among *geogoð* he himself is not *geogoð*; instead he is entitled to sit among the *duguð* by his many exploits. The poem shows clearly that Beowulf was *lagucreftig mon*, 'skilled in sea-craft' *(Beo 209a)*, suggesting that he had a great deal of experience in sea adventures before the

battle with Grendel. However, Farrell suggests that Beowulf 'has been placed among the *geogoð* to show his closeness to the young Danish princes.  

However, this mention of 'young warrior' and 'at so young an age' does not necessarily mean that Beowulf is still an inexperienced warrior. In his parting speech after the final victory over Grendel's mother Beowulf refers to his lord Hygelac as 'young'; *peah be he geong sy*, 'though he is young' (Beo. 1831b). This reference to Hygelac's young age does not seem to indicate that Hygelac is still in the state of immaturity. Later on, we are told that Hygelac was married to Hygd (i.e. he was settled down like a mature warrior [*duguð*]), and became an experienced warrior through many battles such as the battle of Ravenswood. Although scholars are inclined to define those terms *geogoð* and *duguð* according to age, I propose to distinguish the former from the latter in terms of skills and experience of fighting.  

In the two instances I have discussed, the reference to Beowulf's 'young' age appears to be used to heighten his eminence rather than to show his young age.

However, except for these two instances in the first part of the poem, Beowulf seems to have been presented as a rather mature warrior, that is, a 'confident and

---


24 Burrow claims that a member of *duguð* has a 'home responsibility' whereas a member of *geogoð* is free to undertake his own expeditions, such as Beowulf's swimming-contest with Breca. See Burrow, *The Ages of Man*, p. 128. Engelhardt argues that between *geogoð*, characterized by strength, and *yldo*, characterized by wisdom, there is an intermediate stage, whose members are *duguð*, who retain some of the strength of youth and gain some of age's wisdom. See Engelhardt, 'On the Sequence of Beowulf's *Geogoð*', 91-2
proved hero'. At the outset Beowulf's more advanced state, a status greater than than of geogoð, is hinted at by the poet:

Paet fram ham gefrægn Higelaces ðegn
god mid Geatum, Grendles ðæda;
se wæs moncynnes mægenes strengest
on þæm dæge þysses lifes,
aþele ond eacen. Het him yðlidan
godne gegyrwan;

(Beo 194-199a)

Hæfde se goda Geata leoda
cempan gecorone þara þe he cenoste
findan mihte; fiftyna sum

(Beo 205-207)

[A thane of Hygelac, excellent among the Geats, he who was strongest of mankind in might in this life's day, noble and huge, heard in his fatherland of Grendel's deed. He gave orders for a good ship for him; The hero had chosen warriors from the people of the Geats, from the boldest he could find]

From these statements it may be inferred that Beowulf, though still in geogoð, is an experienced and confident warrior who stands at the threshold between geogoð and duguð. Beowulf's enormous physical power and his noble state have been emphasized in Beo 196-7. Besides this, we can raise two significant pieces of evidence to support the claim that Beowulf is exercising his command as a chief or leader of the comitatus: firstly, his order for the launch of the ship; secondly, the choice of his own military band. In this passage we witness Beowulf forming a comitatus of his own warriors for a new military exploit. Therefore, from the beginning, Beowulf is presented to us as a leader of a small warrior group. This
presentation of Beowulf as a leader-figure, though indirect at the outset, becomes more apparent as the story goes on.

When Beowulf is first challenged by the coastguard the poet introduces Beowulf to us as a chief of a military band, as se yldesta, 'chief' (Beo 258a), and werodes wisa, 'leader of the troops' (Beo 259a). With these words the poet shows that Beowulf holds a responsible position among his group. The same epithet for Beowulf occurs again as we hear Wulfgar report Beowulf's arrival to Hrothgar:

Her syndon geferede, feorran cumene
ofer geofenes begang Geata leode;
þone yldestan oretmecgas
Beowulf nemnað.

(Beo 361-364a)

[People of the Geats, come from far, have voyaged here over the broad expansion of the seas, the warriors call their chief Beowulf]

Epithets of this kind indicating Beowulf's senior position among his band occur many times until the end of the first part of the poem; Weder-Geata leod, 'the chieftain (or the prince) of the Geats', (Beo 1492b, 1612b) wigendra hleo, 'the shield of warriors', (Beo 1972b) freadrihten, 'lord', (Beo 796a) winedrihten, 'friend and leader, lord', (Beo 1604b). As regards these epithets, William Whallon says that 'men in Beowulf are described differently when of dissimilar rank, nation, or ancestry.'26 Farrell observes

25 M. J. Swanton compares the use of dryhten in three poems. In Cædmon's Hymn, its original military connotation describe the Christian God. In the Seafarer and in Beowulf it has the sense of both a secular and a spiritual 'lord'. See Swanton, Crisis and Development in Germanic Society 700-800: Beowulf and the Burden of Kingship (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1982), p. 30.

26 William Whallon, 'Formulas For Heroes in The "Iliad" And in "Beowulf"', MP, 63
that the singular form of leod appears thirteen times elsewhere in Beowulf on each occasion meaning 'prince': ten times for Beowulf and once each for Heorogar, Hrothgar and Wulfgar. In these discussions it is assumed that the poet was very conscious of the choice of various epithets for different people according to their circumstance. However, in the case of Beowulf, this observation seems incorrect.

All the epithets above denote Beowulf before he is made king. But two of them, in Weder-Geata leod and winedrihten, are used again after Beowulf becomes a king. In addition, both wigendra hleo and winedrihten are used to describe the similar social positions of Hrothgar and Beowulf. It is entirely appropriate for Beowulf to share the epithet wigendra hleo with Hrothgar because he was known as a leader of a military band, and he was supposed to take responsibility for the safety of his members. But the application of winedrihten to Beowulf before he was king seems inappropriate. Wine has a special meaning in the poem, as Swanton observes; 'wine epitomizes the essentially horizontal structure of heroic society based on personal loyalties.' The importance of wine is more stressed when it is used to highlight the function of the leader of the comitatus. Throughout the poem the role of the leader is illustrated by the common formula goldwine gumena, used three times for Hrothgar (Beo 1171, 1476, 1602) and twice of Beowulf, goldwine Geata (Beo 2419, 2584), but

(1965) 95-104 (p. 99)


29 However, Swanton observed that wine cognate with ON Vinr, simply means 'friend' on at least three occasions: when Hrothgar calls Beowulf wine min Beowulf 'my friend Beowulf' (Beo 457b); min wine (Beo: 2047a); and when Beowulf calls Unferth wine min (Beo 530b). Swanton, Crisis and Development, p. 30.
only after he too has been made king. However, winedrihten is used once for Beowulf in his relations with his comitatus before he is made king (Beo 1604b). And this same epithet refers to Hrothgar in relation to his thane Wulfgar. The sharing of the same epithet between Hrothgar and Beowulf (not yet a king) does not fit into the standard use of wine-compounds. Though Beowulf has been presented as an ideal warrior, full of heroic spirit with his mighty power, and a leader of a small band, the epithet winedrihten is not yet used of him. Thus poet probably applies this epithet to the young Beowulf quite consciously to highlight a 'confident and proved hero'.

All these epithets for Beowulf before he was made king prove that he had passed the state of geogoð at the time of his arrival in Denmark, if indeed geogoð means 'young and untried warrior' at all.

In addition, the use of some key epithets referring to Beowulfs band provides important clues that Beowulf has emerged as a mature warrior holding command over his band. In the poem Beowulf's band is called gedryht, 'troop, band of retainers' (Beo 118, 357, 431, 633, 662, 1672), magoðegn, 'thane, young(?) retainer' (Beo 293, 408, 2757, 1405, 1480), sibbegedriht, 'band of kinsmen' (Beo 387, 729), gesið, 'retainer, companion' (Beo 1297, 1313, 1924, 1934, 2040, 2518, 2632), beodgeneat, 'table-companion' (Beo 343, 1713), heordgeneat, 'hearth-companion, retainer) (Beo 261, 1580, 2180, 2418, 3179), hægstealdra heap, 'band of young(?) warriors' (Beo 1889). Of these epithets gedriht is shared by Beowulf's band (Beo 357, 431, 633), and Hrothgar's band as well (Beo 118, 662, 1672). It is worth noticing that Beowulf's band formed under the order of young Beowulf shares the same description, gedriht, as Hrothgar's retinue, which probably consists of both young and old warriors. Sibbegedriht also indicates Beowulf's band in line 729 and Hrothgar's band in line 387. This sharing of the same epithet is quite significant because the nature of Beowulf's band, especially in terms of their age, can be deduced from the nature of Hrothgar's band, which is big enough to be a mixture of geogoð and duguð. This use
of nouns, equating young Beowulf's band with a king's band, is the same for both young and old Beowulf. Young Beowulf's band in Denmark is called gesið in line 1313 and this noun is applied to King Beowulf's band in line 2518. Also, other kings' bands are called gesið, as shown with Hygelac and Offa in lines 1924 and 1934 respectively. As is demonstrated in the examples of gedryht, sibbgedriht and gesið, it may be assumed that the poet applies these collective nouns to the warriors, irrespective of their social status, either young or old or geoguð or duguð, all of whom are attached to a chief of the comitatus. So far, therefore, it seems that the nature of Beowulf's band, especially in terms of their age, has not been clearly defined.

However, the uses of beodgeneat, 'table-companion' and heorðgeneat, 'hearth-companion', lead us to a more detailed understanding of young Beowulf's band. On two occasions young Beowulf introduces his band to the coastguard and Wulfgar with reference to himself as Hygelac's table-companion, beodgeneat (Beo 343), and Hygelac's hearth-companion, heorðgeneat (Beo 261). These two epithets are also used to indicate the retainers of King Heremod in line 1713, of Hrothgar in 1580 and of old King Beowulf himself in Beo 2180, 2418 and 3179. Thus it may be said that these two nouns are used to indicate the followers of a chief without defining their ages. But the closeness between the followers and the lord is more clearly indicated in the meanings of 'table-companion' and 'hearth-companion' than in gedryht or gesið. With beodgeneat and heorðgeneat, the young Beowulf intends to stress the unique position of his band, including himself, in the court of Hygelac.

Since Beowulf and his band must pass through the challenges of Hrothgar's thanes, this stress on the unique position of Beowulf and his band can be possibly regarded as a tactical manoeuvre, exaggerated in order to convey a good impression. However, the actual context provides sound evidence that young Beowulf and his band are indeed regarded as Hygelac's 'table' or 'hearth' companions, not as mere
members of Hygelac's comitatus. This is clearly hinted at in the following scene, where Beowulf forms his band:

Hæfde se goda Geata leoda
cempan gecorone þara þe he cenoste
findan mihte;

(Beo 205-207a)

[The hero had chosen champions of the Geatish people, the bravest he could find]

This passage makes it very clear that Beowulf's band consists of 'the bravest from the Geatish people'. It is a fair assumption that 'the bravest' warriors are regarded as the closest, most favoured and most honoured at the table of a chief, and hence should be regarded as hearth companions. In this context, Beowulf's reference to beodgeneat and heorðgeneat is not incompatible with the poet's saying 'the bravest'. From this crucial evidence of 'the bravest' and the two epithets beodgeneat, 'table-companion', and heorðgeneat, 'hearth-companion', it can be surmised that the members of young Beowulf's band are most likely to be warriors experienced in battle, hence mature warriors, their maturity and experience being strongly suggested by the meaning of 'the bravest'. No hero is given the title of 'the bravest' in heroic society unless he proves his ability in a series of battles or exploits. The emphatic use of cenoste, 'the bravest', in superlative accusative masculine plural in the passage above shows that one of the main heroic virtues, valour, is manifested by the members of young Beowulf's band through numerous battles. Therefore a fairly sound assumption can be drawn from those epithets and 'the bravest'. That is the members of young Beowulf's band are regarded not only as experienced in battle but also in possession of valour. Beowulf's recollection of his companion in Denmark, Hondscio, with reference to mærum magubegne, 'famous retainer' (Beo 2079a) strongly suggests that some or perhaps most members of young Beowulf's band are already held in high esteem as a result of their exceptional military skill and achievements in battle.
At first my interpretation that young Beowulf’s band consists of skilled, experienced warriors, hence most likely mature warriors, might seem at odds with the poet’s use of magubegn. The applications of magubegn are various. The young Beowulf introduces himself to Hrothgar as maguðegn (Beo 408a), and Hondscio and Wiglaf are also referred to as maguðegn (Beo 2079a, 2757a). Of these three people, Beowulf and Wiglaf are surely well suited to the epithet magubegn, which is glossed as ‘young retainer, thane’ by Wrenn, Klaeber and most translators including Garmonsway.30 There is no textual evidence to support the view that Hondscio is young except for magubegn. As in the cases of the previous epithets, magubegn is also shared both by young Beowulf’s band and Hrothgar’s retainer. Beowulf appeals to Hrothgar to protect his trusty followers who are referred to as magubegn:

\[\text{Wes þu mundbora minum magubegnum, (Beo 1480)}\]

[Be you a guardian of my "retainers" (Clark Hall) or "young followers" (Garmonsway)]31

In other part Hrothgar’s retainers are called magubegn:

\[\text{ofer myrcan mor, magubegna bær (Beo 1405)}\]

[(Grendel’s mother) carried (the best of) kin-thanes of (Hrothgar) over the murky moors]

With regard to the meaning of magubegnas, indicating Hrothgar’s retainers, both critics and translators are reluctant to apply the meaning ‘young followers’ because


they are clearly aware that Hrothgar's retainers are both young and old warriors. On the other hand, most critics have a tendency to interpret magobegnas as 'young followers' when referring to young Beowulf's band in line 1480b. It is not clear from where they drew the sense of 'young followers' from magobegnas when referring to young Beowulf's band. Many critics and translators seem to have a tendency to define young Beowulf's magobegnas as 'young followers' because of Beowulf's youthful age at the time of their adventure in Denmark. But Beowulf's youthful age, which is relative in comparison to the old warrior, does not necessarily mean his followers are likewise young men. It has been proved through a series of epithets that young Beowulf's band are equated with Hrothgar's and other kings'. I think critics are easily led to define Beowulf's magobegnas as 'young followers' on the assumption that the equally young Beowulf was unqualified to form his own military band. Moreover, critics might not pay attention to the crucial fact, which is essential in defining young Beowulf's social status at the time of his exploits in Denmark, that young Beowulf was grown up enough to choose his own military band of 'the bravest' warriors from the Geatish people. It is unlikely that young Beowulf's band is solely made up of 'young' warriors. From the use of epithets and some key lines it can be inferred that young Beowulf's band is made up of experienced and skilled warriors both young and mature, possibly some of whom are advanced in age. This interpretation serves to define more precisely the nature of young Beowulf's social status at the time of his adventure in Denmark. This is mainly because of the difference between Beowulf's having the authority to form his military band out of his peers and his having the authority to choose his band from both young and mature warriors. Undoubtedly, if young Beowulf's band is made up of both young and mature warriors, then his social status should be regarded as higher and more authoritative in Hygelac's court than if we assume that his band is solely made up of 'young' fellows. It is worth noting that Bosworth and Toller do not attach any sense of 'young' in the definition of magobegnas.
beyond the basic meaning, the common appellation indicating a man attached to a chief: 'a thane, vassal, follower, retainer, warrior, servant'.

Possibly the first element maga(u)-, 'son, young man, man' according to Klaeber, 'a child, son, a young person, a servant, strong man, a man' according to BT, could change the sense of magu{)egn to 'young fellows'. But there is no semantic guarantee that magu(a) is solely used with the sense of 'young' in Beowulf. In the poem, maga is used four times as 'son' (Beo 189b, 2143b, 2587b, 1474b). In addition maga is used to indicate the young Wiglaf in line 2675a: ac se maga geonga, 'the young man (warrior)'. Even in this example the youthfulness of Wiglaf's age is ascribed by geonga instead of maga, to which a completely different sense of 'man or warrior' is attached. Thus it may be concluded the use of maga by the poet does not imply the sense of 'young'.

Unlike those epithets discussed so far, the use of hægstealdræ heap, 'the band of thanes (young warriors)' indicating young Beowulf's band in line 1889a may lead us to assume the youthfulness of Beowulf's fellows. The meaning 'young' in hægsteald is accepted by Wrenn, Klaeber and Garmonsway. In contrast, Clark Hall is very cautious in interpreting hægsteald as he defines it as the troop of most courageous 'liegemen'. In this specific line 1889a, BT offers two meanings, 'unmarried' and 'young'. BT glosses hægsteald as a noun 'one living in the lord's house', 'not having his own household', 'an unmarried person', 'a young person', 'bachelor', 'virgin'. The remote etymological source can be drawn from OS haga-stald, -stold, 'a servant, young man', OHG haga-stalt, -stolt, 'mercenarius, cælebs'. And the

32 Also refer to ON s.v. mór (son; youth). Jan de Vries, Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961), p.400

33 Clark Hall, Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, p. 116.

34 Althochdeutsches Wörterbuch, ed. Elisabeth Karg-Gasterstädt, and Theodor
original meaning of \textit{haga} is glossed as 'a place fenced in', 'an enclosure', 'a dwelling in a town'. From these remote etymological sources we can work out a rough but sound meaning of \textit{hegsteald}, first in its noun form in relation to the characteristics of the members of the \textit{comitatus}. In heroic society, once a certain warrior is bound to the code of the \textit{comitatus} through the mutual vow between him and his chief, he is normally classified as a mercenary. Hence OHG \textit{haga-stalt}, ('mercenary') is quoted and at the same time the newly vowed warrior's living boundary will be limited within the court of his lord, hence the meaning of \textit{haga}, 'a place fenced in', 'an enclosure' is applicable. In this sense the meaning of \textit{hegsteald} as a noun 'one living in the lord's house' is quite appropriate. This concept of a warrior group bound by the sacred duty of \textit{comitatus}, especially in terms of the allegiance of a mercenary, can lead as to think of them as unmarried men. But this specially chosen, recruited military group, whose professionalism is supposed to be devoted to keeping allegiance to their lord by means of military service in battle, does not necessarily mean they are always composed of young members, as is hinted from OS \textit{haga-stald}, ('a servant', 'young man'). On the contrary, the warriors of the \textit{comitatus} are most likely to be a mixture of young and old bachelors. This assumption is strongly supported by another derivation of the same etymological root word Ger. \textit{hagestolz}, 'old bachelor'. It is quite appropriate to assume that some members of the \textit{comitatus} are bachelors, but this state does not automatically confirm they are young.

In conclusion, the exact definition of \textit{hegsteald} in line 1889a, indicating young Beowulf's 'band' remains a matter for further discussion. Most definitions of \textit{hegsteald}, as 'young fellows' are inferred from misleading contextual circumstances in which Beowulf is young, hence not entitled to form his band out of both young and

mature warriors. Against this view, I suggest that Beowulf, at the time of his adventure in Denmark, is fully grown both in social and military terms and thus entitled to choose his band from various age groups.

Another important indicator of Beowulf's status at the time of his arrival in Denmark is the poet's epithet for one of his followers ombihtbegn, 'servant, attendant' or 'serving retainer' in Beo 673b. The fact that among Beowulf's band of thirteen men, one is specially allotted the task of attending to Beowulf is further evidence for Beowulf's status as an established leader. Beowulf emerges at the outset as a confident, skilled, mature warrior and is regarded as holding a quite influential position (with military authority) in Hygelac's court.35

Sisam cites four reasons why Beowulf is 'a confident and proved hero' when he first appears in the story: The poet introduces him as the strongest man alive (Beo 196); Hrothgar had heard that he had the strength of thirty men (Beo 377-381a); Unferth knew of his swimming match against Breca; and Beowulf proclaims that he has undertaken many great enterprises in his youth (Beo 408b-9a), and goes on to say that the wisest of the Geats had advised him to make the expedition because they had experience of his powers.36

(c) The textual evidence for Beowulf's sluggish period

35 My view accords with that of Swanton, who claims 'the hero is seen from the beginning as an essentially active agent...singled out from other men as a strong-willed leader'. See Swanton, Crisis and Development, p. 98.

36 Sisam, The Structure of Beowulf, pp. 22-3.
In addition, my argument suggests that there was no slack period in Beowulf's early career between the swimming-contest with Breca and his arrival in Denmark. Instead, I suggest that the duration in which Beowulf is held in low esteem occurs during Hæthcyn's reign: the clearest evidence for this comes from Beowulf's evident absence in the battle of Ravenswood, which would take place before he actively participates in exploits, such as the swimming-contest with Breca. Before old Beowulf goes forth to attack the Dragon, he tells of the war between the Swedes and the Geats:

\[\text{Hæðcynne wearð,}\]
\[\text{Geata dryhtne guð onsæge.}\]
\[\text{Pa ic on morgne gefrægn mæg oðerne}\]
\[\text{billes ecgum on bonan stælan,}\]

*(Beo 2482b-2485)*

[To Hæthcyn, lord of the Geats, the fight was fatal. Then, at morning, as I have been told, one brother avenged the other on the slayer with the edge of the sword]

Before this battle there have been considerable changes in the kingdom of the Geats; the tragic death of Herebeald, the death of Hrethel, Hæthcyn's succession to the throne and the invasion of the Swedes. In Beowulf's reminiscence of the battle of Ravenswood we can find crucial evidence that either Beowulf was absent from the battle scene (presumably at home) or that he did not stand at the front line of the battle: these two possible assumptions can be made on the basis of Beowulf's own statement *pa ic on morgne gefrægn* *(Beo 2484a)*. His own words thus show that he

37 Tripp argues that since by all reports Beowulf was always Hygelac's *begeg*, and *sleac* or *unfrom* behaviour is incompatible with this position, the *hean*-period could not have occurred before Hygelac's death. Tripp claims this period was heralded by his refusal to accept the Geatish throne. See Tripp, *Did Beowulf Have an "Inglorious Youth"?*, 133.
learns of the death of Hæthcyn from hearsay. Beowulf's absence from the battle scene is supported by the Messenger, who recalls the same battle (Beo 2946-98). In the Messenger's reminiscence, not a single word is said about Beowulf. This omission of Beowulf's presence and name from the battle of Ravenswood is significant mainly because two brothers who are brought up together with Beowulf, namely Hæthcyn and Hygelac, actively participate in the fighting at the risk of their lives. So we can draw a picture in which Beowulf's inaction is contrasted with the action of Hæthcyn and Hygelac. We are not told of his exact age at the time of the battle, but we can judge from the relative chronology of Beowulf's relationship with Hrethel and Hygelac that Beowulf is old enough to bear arms at this time.

The vital lines for locating Beowulf's sluggish period is ne hynne on medobence milese wyrðne drehten Wedera gedon wolde, 'nor would the lord of the Weder-Geats do him much honour at the mead-bench' (Beo 2185-86). If the 'lord of the Weder-Geats' mentioned could be identified, then the period of sluggishness could be specified. The four kings who ruled over Beowulf are Hrethel, Hæthcyn, Hygelac and Heardred. The 'lord' in question cannot be Hrethel because, firstly, Beowulf tells how Hrethel favoured him over his own sons, næs ic him to life laðra oðhite, beorn in burgum, bonne his bearna hwylc, Herebeald ond Hæðcyn oððe Hygelac min, 'Never throughout my life was I a whit less liked by him (Hrethel) as a warrior within the stronghold than were any of his sons...Herebeald and Hæthcyn or my own Hygelac' (Beo 2432-34); and secondly, Beowulf tells Hrothgar that he has possessed Hrethel's ancestral treasure (garment), Hredlan laf, 'Hrethel's legacy' (Beo 454b). The fact that Hrethel bestowed something valuable upon Beowulf is clearly indicated by Beowulf himself: geaf me sinc, '(Hrethel) gave me wealth' (Beo 2431a). Nor can it be Hygelac, as Beowulf proudly recalls how he fought in battle for Hygelac: symle ic him on feðan beforan wolde, ana on orde, 'I would always go before him in the marching host' (Beo 2497-98a). It seems highly unlikely that the 'lord' in question could have
been Heardred. The poet reports that *hwæôre he hine on folce freondlarum heold, estum mid are*, 'however, he (Beowulf) upheld him (Heardred) among the people by friendly counsel, good will and respect' (*Beo* 2377-78a). This demonstrates that Beowulf was very much involved in Heardred's reign, which makes it highly improbable that Beowulf would have been considered unfavourably by the King and the Geats.

We know from the poet's narration that Beowulf's sluggish period lasted a long time: *Hean wæs lange*, 'Scorn had lasted a long time' (*Beo* 2183b). This makes it possible for the period to coincide with Hæthcyn's reign, as during his reign the Swedes made ambush many times, *ac ymb Hreosnabeorh eatolne inwitscear oft gefremedon*, 'but (the Swedes) often wrought dreadful malicious slaughter around Hreosnabeorh' (*Beo* 2477b-78), which suggests his reign was not a short one. The following passage implies Beowulf's transition from *geogod* to *duguô*:

```
Het ôa eorla hleo in gefetian,
headorof cyning Hreôles lafe
golde gegyrede; næs mid Geatum ôa
sincmaðhum selra on sweordes had;
þæt he on Biowulfes bearm alegde,
ond him gesalde seofan þusendo,
bold ond bregostol.
```

(*Beo* 2190-2196a)

[Then the protector of earls, the king famous in combat, bade Hrethel's legacy be brought in, decked with gold; among the Geats there was no finer treasure in the shape of a sword. That he laid in Beowulf's lap, and gave him seven thousand hides of land, a hall, and a princely throne] In the heroic world, a warrior's value is reflected in the value of his sword. Thus Hygelac's presentation of Hrethel's legacy (sword) to Beowulf indicates that Beowulf
has become a warrior of the highest rank. Richard North argues more specifically, that
the presentation ceremony marks Beowulf's elevation to the role of Hygelac's
vassal.\(^{38}\) A further illustration of the value of swords in Beowulf comes when Beowulf
gives his sword to the coastguard with the consequence for the coastguard \(\textit{æt he}
\textit{syðban wæs on meodubence mæbne by weor}bra\), 'so that he was more honoured on
the mead-bench for that treasure' (\textit{Beo} 1901b-2).

Beowulf's new status is also confirmed by the gifts of seven thousand hides of
land, a hall and a princely throne endowed on him by Hygelac.\(^{39}\) With land comes
responsibility for domestic affairs. While a warrior in \textit{george} is free to undertake
personal adventure, a warrior in \textit{dugo} must act in the interests of king and \textit{comitatus}.
Hence, as the poem makes clear, Beowulf undertakes no personal adventures such as
the swimming-contest with Breca and the battle with Grendel, after he is elevated to
the status of \textit{dugo}.

(d) Conclusion

It may now be possible to delineate the different stages of Beowulf's development. At
the age of seven, Hrethel takes Beowulf into the Geatish court, where he is brought up
as a prince with Hrethel's sons. Towards the end of Hrethel's reign or early in
Hæthcyn's reign, the period of Beowulf's early \textit{george} begins. At this time he does
not show the heroic disposition expected of him. This is the beginning of his sluggish

\(^{38}\) Richard North, 'Tribal Loyalties in the Finnsburh Fragment and Episode', LSE,
n.s. 21 (1990), 13-43 (p. 29-30).

\(^{39}\) As Klaeber pointed out, this is no small area of land, as seven thousand hides of
land is equivalent to that of North Mercia. See \textit{Beowulf}, ed. Klaeber, p. 207.
period which lasted throughout Hæthcyn's reign. His inaction at the battle of
Ravenswood is further evidence for this chronology. At Ravenswood Hæthcyn is
killed. Hygelac ascended to the throne and around this time Beowulf's middle geogoð begins and his edwenden occurs, as a result of which his fortunes change. Beowulf
begins his youthful adventures, such as the swimming-contest with Breca, which he
later proudly recalls in front of Hrothgar's court. By the time he arrives in Denmark,
though still in geogoð (mature), he is already a 'confident and proven' hero. In general,
I suggest that geogoð implies youth and inexperience in battle whilst duguð implies
maturity in years and experience. Beowulf is an exception, because although he is
young and thus accurately described as geogoð, he has experience in battle. It is not
until Beowulf returns to his land that Hygelac awards him land, a hall and a princely
throne, thus possibly signifying his elevation to the status of duguð. Hygelac's royal
grant of land contrasts with the sine ond symbel, 'wealth and feasting' (not land), in
Beo 2431a which Hrethel awarded Beowulf whilst he was still in geogoð, which did
did not entail the responsibility Hygelac's gift of duguð. As a member of the Geatish
duguð, Beowulf is possibly no longer free to undertake independent adventures but
must take responsibility for the social and economic affairs of the comitatus. The
three stages of his youth are over.
In this chapter I shall discuss the similarities in the presentation of a female character, Wealhtheow, and Beowulf. I shall argue that Wealhtheow, to a large extent, seems to be the equal of Beowulf in three ways: a) the strong visual image of radiance, which is achieved by means of Wealhtheow's gold ornaments and Beowulf's gleaming attire, the value of which is implied in their formulaic use; b) the Beowulf-poet's use of mæpelode in the introductions of their speeches; c) their rhetorical use of words in the sub-texts of their speeches. In (d), the study of Wealhtheow's character sheds light on the character of Beowulf, with whom she shares some attributes.

(a) The comparability in the presentation of Wealhtheow and Beowulf

From her first appearance, the description of Wealhtheow, the queen of the Danes, focuses on her metal ornaments. In Beo 611-41, the passage that follows Beowulf's boastful speech against Unferth, after a few lines on Hrothgar's joyful mood, the queen Wealhtheow is described three times with phrases of the type 'attired in gold': grette goldhroden guman on healle, 'gold-adorned, she greeted the men in hall' (Beo 614); beaghroden cwen, 'the queen adorned with rings' (Beo 623b); ende goldhroden, '(the queen) went adorned with gold' (Beo 640b). This characteristic description of metallic splendour and ornamentation continues in Wealhtheow's second appearance, in which she makes a stately entrance into the hall, walking under gyldnum beage, 'wearing a golden diadem' (Beo 1163a). Helen Damico regards the function of these
descriptions as being 'to establish Wealhtheow's salient physical characteristic'. In this way, the queen's appearance is repeatedly stressed with images of radiance. So it is possible, through these highly visual images, that the poet intends to equate the queen with the value of gold or rings which are regarded as a major binding force of the comitatus.

The poet of Beowulf probably intends solely to enhance the queen's great value with regard to precious metals. Damico suggests that 'the poet's treatment of the queen elevates her to the status of a major figure'. On this view of male equivalence, Chickering considers that the description of the queen with 'the epithet "attired in gold" is linked to a series of epithets for Hrothgar which emphasize his role as the beloved protector of his people'. This view which equates Wealhtheow with the male figure, seems correct; indeed it is possible that this quality exists not only between Hrothgar and Wealhtheow but more apparently between Beowulf and Wealhtheow. As in the description of Wealhtheow, Beowulf's appearance is characterized by brightness and glittering metals. The Danish coast-warden sees Beowulf's band unloading their implements of war: beran ofer bolcan beorhte randas, 'bearing down the gangway, bright shields' (Beo 231). When the Geatish troop, including Beowulf, go on their way towards Heorot, their armour is conspicuously described with bright visual imagery:

Eoforlic scionon

offer hlearber[g]an gehroden golde,

---

2 Damico, Beowulf's Wealhtheow, p. 4.
[Above their cheek-guards shone the figures of boars, adorned with gold, shining and tempered in the flame, held guardianship over life]

Before his first speech to Hrothgar, Beowulf’s metallic brightness is again mentioned: \( \text{on him byrne scan, 'the corslet shone on him'} \) (Beo 405b).

Before Beowulf’s dive into Grendel’s mere, the half-personified helmet also enhances the metallic brightness characterizing Beowulf’s appearance:

\[
\text{ac se hwita helm hafelan werede,}
\text{se þe meregrundas mengan scolde,}
\text{secan sundgebland since geweorðad,}
\]

(\text{Beo 1448-1450})

[But the shining helmet guarded his head, that would have to stir up the watery depths and seek the surging water, exalted by rich ornament]

After the farewell scene between Beowulf and Hrothgar, Beowulf’s heroic achievement is also described in terms of precious metals:

\[
\text{Him Beowulf þanan,}
\text{guðrinc goldwlanc græsmoldan træd}
\text{since hremig;}
\]

(\text{Beo 1880b-1882a})

[Then Beowulf departed, a battle warrior proudly decked with gold, and trod the grassy earth, exulting in his treasure]

When they return to the ship, Beowulf’s band is consistently marked out by the same metallic glittering: \( \text{scaþan scirhame to scipe foron, 'the bright-mailed warriors went to their ship'} \) (Beo 1895).

In this way, metallic brightness and ornamentation become characteristic attributes of both Beowulf and Wealhtheow. The poet probably intends to show
Wealhtheow as a feminine counterpart of Beowulf through a series of almost identical or similar semantic expressions shared with Beowulf. But I do not think that Wealhtheow is equally matched with dominant male figures such as Beowulf in terms of his male role and warlike deeds. Given the heroic society which needs gender-specific roles of male and female, the role of Wealhtheow is considered to be equal in importance to that of the male nobles. I shall discuss her role later. What matters now is a comparison between the presentations of Wealhtheow and Beowulf through the diction of their speeches. A comparison between them is possibly intended by the poet.

As regards this male-female equivalence in terms of the importance of the role of the sexes, Damico expands her idea with research on the element -hroden in goldhroden, in conjunction with another conceptual equivalent -fah. She concludes that '-hroden is apparently associated with military armament and decoration'.

This association becomes more explicit when the description of a helmet is made with the same collocation of words: gehroden golde, 'adorned with gold' (Beo 304b). At the

4 Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow*, p. 76. There are other Old English poems in which goldhroden and other semantically similar words are associated with warrior images of women: Da seo gleawe het golde gefrætewod, 'Then the wise lady, all adorned with gold ordered' (Jud 171), geatolic guðcwen golde gehyrsted, 'a magnificent warlike queen clad in gold' (El 331). Although goldhroden is also used in Widsith the warrior image of a woman is not suggested: goldhrodenecwen, giefe bryttian, 'a queen ornate with gold, bestowing gifts' (Wid 102).

same time, I take this kind of martial connotative value of goldbroden to be applicable also to the phrase under gyldnum beage (1163a), which is used to stress the radiance of Wealhtheow's physical appearance. Under gyldnum beage is variously interpreted as 'wearing a golden diadem' or 'wearing a golden circlet'. In addition, Klaeber cautiously suggests another possible interpretation of wearing a golden 'neck-ring or collar'. Here all three possible interpretations of beag would not be incompatible with the preposition under. In BT, under gyldnum beage (1163a) is given as an example of under, meaning 'where one object is supported by another', together with the same use of under in Wedera leod...heard under helme, 'the Wederas' prince, hardy under his helmet' (Beo 341-342a).

No doubt the presentation of Wealhtheow with frequent reference to metallic ornamentation is designed to enhance the stateliness of her entry, and this is much the same with Beowulf's presentation, which is characterized by the use of helm. At three crucial stages, Beowulf is introduced with the formula heard under helme, which evokes a warrior ready to act with undaunted resolve (Beo 342a, 404a, 2539a). Firstly, confronted by Wulfgar's verbal challenge, Beowulf delivers his speech with confidence and resolution as a formal courtly speech. But the insertion of heard under

(p. 119).

The use of goldhladen, a similar epithet, is not solely confined to the description of women in Old English poetry, as is shown in line 13 of The Fight at Finnsburh: Da aras mænig goldhladen ðegn, 'Then many a thane bedecked with gold arose'.


9 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 177.
helme before this speech foretells that Wulfgar will be impressed also by Beowulf's physical appearance:

wlanc Wedera leod, word æfter spræc
heard under helme:

(Beo 341-342a)

[the proud leader of the Geats, valiant under his helmet, spoke these words]

This introductory sentence emphasizes Beowulf's strength and tough soldierly appearance by means of the formulaic use of heard under helme. This image of stout warriorship continues as Beowulf faces a more crucial meeting with Hrothgar in the heart of Heorot. This time, the image comes more alive as the active verb eode is added:

[heaporinc eode,]
heard under helme, hæt he on heor[/animations] gestod.

(Beo 403b-404)

[the valiant one advanced, hardy under his helmet, until he stood on the hearth]

In this way, rapid action probably becomes a major attribute of Beowulf's heroic virtue. This action is more effectively described in the following silent movement:

Aras ða bi ronde rof oretta,
heard under helme, hiorosercean bær

(Beo 2538-2539)

[Then rose the doughty champion by his shield; bold under his helmet, he went in his war-corslet]

Here the formula heard under helme is placed right in between two active verbs: aras, 'arose', and bær, 'went'. In this scene, Beowulf's advancement is expressed with two simple movements. However, given the situation, there is something more substantial in this expression than mere movement. This third scene occurs just before Beowulf advances to the cave and challenges the dragon. In the face of the Dragon's sudden
attack, Beowulf's breast is troubled with gloomy thoughts, which was not customary for him. He appears to feel doomed, but resolves to go forth at once to fight. Beowulf's tragic resolution to risk his life for the sake of his people, and thus his heroic value, seem to be implicit in heard under helme. In this context, heard under helme works as a metaphor for true warlike prowess. This salient warrior image with reference to the use of helm concides well with Andreas Alfoldi's view on the importance of the helmet as a 'symbol of lordship' (Herrschaftssymbol) among the Germanic peoples.

The image of true warlike prowess is more frequently evoked through direct expressions connoting stout-heartedness in Beowulf. These expressions are normally made by the form of adjective plus noun or the present participle of the verb hycgan: stiō, swiō, heard, guō plus mod, ferhô, hiegende. Their complete forms are found in the following lines: stiōmod, 'stout hearted' (Beo 2566a), swiōmod, 'strong minded' (Beo 1624a), guōmod, 'of warlike mind', swiōferhô, 'strong minded' (Beo 826a, 908a, 493a, 173a), swiōhicgende, 'strong minded' (Beo 919a, 1016a), heardhicgende, 'bold in mind' (Beo 394a, 799a). As is shown above, the image of warlike prowess is conceived through the direct use of 'mind'. Outside Beowulf.

Whereas heard under helme indirectly suggests warlike prowess, the expression hæleô under helmum, 'heroes in their helmets' (Jud 203a) achieves the same result, but more explicitly as hæleô 'heroes or warriors' replaces heard. The close similarity between these two expressions is evidence that under helme is a formulaic expression that can represent true warriorship explicitly or implicitly depending on the word that precedes it.

similar expressions denoting 'stout mind or heart' are found in relation to the use of 'mind or heart'. Hyge is so often alliterated with heard that heard under helmet suggests the quality of hyge, 'courage'. The poet of Beowulf is thus keenly aware of the correlation between his desired image and the implications of words, together with their metrical value.

Now coming back to the emphatic presentation of Wealhtheow, which is stylistically equated with the presentation of Beowulf, I would like to return to two crucial passages:

Aras ôa hi ronde rof oretta,
heard under helme, hiorosercean bær
under stancleofu,

(Beo 2538-2540a)

[Then rose the doughty champion by his shield; bold under his helmet, he went clad in his war-corslet to beneath the rocky cliffs]

ða cwom Wealųeo forð
gan under gyldnum beage þær þa godan twegen
sæton suhtergefæderan;

(Beo 1162b-1164a)

12 OE: on heardum hige, 'in strong mind' (El 808a), Hige sceal þe heardra, 'heart must be the harder' (Maldon 312a), ac se hearda hyge halig wunade, 'but the stout heart continued holy' (Guth 517), Hyge sceal heardum men, 'a bold man must have courage' (Gen 205), hyge heardum men, (Max I III 203), hearde on hige, (Gen 745, Soul I 153), heard hyge, (El 808, Christ 1505, Guth 545, Mald, 312), heard ond hygesnottor, (Guth1109), heardreaþ hige, (Gen 2350); compare OS hard hugiskeft, (Heliand 2447), and ON harôr hugr (Fáfnismál 19, Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar 6, Guðrúnarhvöð 3, Guðrúnarkviða 12)
[Then Wealthow came forth walking, wearing a golden diadem, to where the two nobles sat, uncle and nephew]

In these two passages, the lexicon, syntax, and even the length of two passages are similar. These similarities may suggest that Wealthow is as important as Beowulf. In addition, these two settings have something else in common, in that both Beowulf and Wealthow are to take a crucial role in the following scenes. As in the case of Beo 2538-40a, Wealthow is also presented with two active verbs cwom and gan expressing her silent gradual movements. But her movements, like Beowulf's, become more visualized and significant as her moving is slowed a little by under gyldnum beage. According to Damico's research, both gylden and beag as representatives of gold or ornaments, carry a strong martial connotative value. Thus Damico is probably right to take Wealthow's glittering dress, decorated with various ornaments, for a warrior's shining armour, representing a valiant warrior figure.

The appropriateness of this dual image becomes more apparent when helm replaces beag. According to Kendall's metrical classification, heard under helme is classified as ++A/ xxAx, and is thus A2, and gan under gyldnum beage is a/ xxAx/

13 Renoir has pointed out that in the scene where Beowulf and his band advance towards Heorot after landing in Denmark, Beowulf, his band and the hall all share the same quality of radiance and shininess: (Beo 308a, 313a, 311a, 321b, 322b). See Alain Renoir, A Key to Old Poems: The Oral-Formulaic Approach to the Interpretation of West-Germanic Verse (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), p.122. What Renoir did not notice is that Queen Wealthow also shares these qualities and so her entry into the great banquet hall (Heorot) parallels the advancement of Beowulf and his band.

14 Damico, Beowulf's Wealthow, pp. 74-86.
In all three occasions of heard under helme in Beo 341-2a, 403b-4 and 2538-9, the foot pattern of under helme is always xxAx and the primary stress falls on the first syllable of helme as helme alliterates with a word in the b-verse. But in gan under gyldnum beage the primary stress falls on the first syllable of gyldnum, alliterating with godan in the b-verse; in this case beage does not take a stress as helm does. Yet the metrical pattern xxAx in under healme is still preserved in under gyldnum. So it is likely that the poet intends to project the image of an active member of the court onto the female figure of Wealhtheow by juxtaposing a formulaic expression under helme with under gyldnum beage, which have similarities of lexicon, syntax and metre. As in the case of heard under helme, a double image is conjured up by gan under gyldnum beage: the radiant and glittering image of physical appearance; and Wealhtheow's inner capability to bring peace to her royal family.

Despite her role as an active member of Hrothgar's court, Wealhtheow faces a scene charged with tension, when she approaches the king and his nephew. This tension is expressed in the poet's first use of hypermetric lines in the poem:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{gan under gyldnum beage} & \quad \text{þær ãa godan twegen} \\
\text{sæton suhtergfæderan;} & \quad \text{þa gyt ðæs hiera sib ætgædere,}
\text{æghwylc oðrum trywe.} & \quad \text{Swylce þær Unferþ þyle}
\text{æt fotum sæt frean Scyldinga;} & \quad \text{gehwylc hiora his fæhþe treowde,}
\text{þæt he hæfde mod micel,} & \quad \text{þeah þe he his magum nære}
\text{arfaest æt eçga gelacum.} & \quad \text{Spræc ða ides Scyldinga:}
\end{align*}
\]

(\textit{Beo} 1162b-1168)

[Then Wealhtheow came forth, walking, wearing a golden diadem, to where the two nobles sat, uncle and nephew; as yet, there was peace between them, and each was true to the other. Moreover, there sat Unferth the spokesman at the Scylding chieftain's feet; all of them trusted in his spirit, that he had much courage, although in the play of sword blades he had shown no mercy to his kinsmen]

According to Pope, the effect of expanded verse, that is, of the hypermetric lines shown above, tends to slow down the tempo of the line. Damico's interpretation of Wealhtheow's entrance is that 'retardation not only would impose a gravity and stately elegance to the queen's progress into and across the room, but would lend additional import to her presence'. Irving also mentions the use of hypermetric verse, saying that it may be used 'to direct the audience's attention to the ironic potentialities of her progress'. It is quite true that the effect of retardation in hypermetric verses is to a larger extent aimed at heightening the queen's importance. But at the same time, the poet's skilful treatment of this hypermetric verses lies in keeping two opposite forces in balance. Both the queen's stately entrance, her bearing and importance, and the tension in the court, are elevated by the effect of retardation in these hypermetric verses.


(b) The mode and function of *maþelode*

The descriptive equation between Wealhþeow and Beowulf is much furthered in the introduction of their speeches and their contents. Wealhþeow's two speeches are introduced differently. The first speech is introduced with *spræc* whilst the second with *maþelode*.

The formulaic system that uses *maþelode* appears in several forms in Old English Poetry, of which the most common is 'X spoke, son of Y'. This form appears in *Beowulf* in these examples: *Beowulf maþelode, bearn Ecgþeowes*, 'Beowulf, son of Ecgþeow, made a speech' (*Beo* 529); *Unferð maþelode, Ecglafes bearn*, 'Unferth, the son of Ecglaf, made a speech' (*Beo* 499). This formula is a means of identifying the speaker. However, the following examples show that *maþelode* is used in the context of identifying the audience to whom the speech is addressed: *Wulfgar maþelode to his winedrihtne*, 'Wulfgar spoke to his beloved lord' (*Beo* 360); *Wealhþeo maþelode, heo fore þæm werede spræc*, 'Wealhþeow made a speech, she spoke before the company' (*Beo* 1215); *Wiglaf maþelode, wordrihta fela sæged gesiðum*, 'Wiglaf spoke many fitting words, uttering to his companions' (*Beo* 2631-2632a). Besides its identification of either speaker or audience, *maþelode* is used in connection with the location of the speaker: the coastguard spoke formally where he sat on the horse *Weard maþelode, ðæer on wicge sæt*, 'The watchman spoke sitting there on his horse' (*Beo* 286); *Unferð maþelode, Ecglafes bearn, he æt ðotum sæt frean Scyldinga*, 'Unferth, the son of Ecglaf, spoke, who sat at the feet of the lord of the Scyldings' (*Beo* 499-500).

*Maþelode* is employed in combination with the state of mind of the speaker. This method of describing the speaker's state of mind by use of *maþelode* is prominent in *Elene*: *Elene maþelade ond him yrre oncwæð*, 'Helen spoke and, angry, said to them' (*El* 573); *Judas maþelade (him wes geomor sefæ)*, 'Judas spoke, sad at
heart', (El 627); *Elene mæpelode burh eorle hyge,* 'Helen spoke in impassioned mood' (El 685); *Judas mæpelode, gleaw in gebance,* 'Judas spoke, clear-sighted in his thinking' (El 806).

Similarly, in *Beowulf,* Wiglaf starts his speech of rebuke to the cowards: *Wiglaf mæpelode, Weohstanes sunu, sec[...]*, 'Wiglaf, the son of Weohstan, spoke out, the man, sad at heart' (Beo 2862-2863a)

In addition, *mæpelode* is employed alongside the physical state of the speaker: *Biowulf mæpelode he ofer benne spræc,* 'Beowulf spoke despite his wound' (Beo 2724). *Mæpelode* is also used when the contents of the following speech are indicated in the form of *word-riht,* 'right word', and *beot-word,* 'boastful speech': *Beowulf mæpelode, beotwordum spræc,* 'Beowulf made a speech, spoke with words of boasting' (Beo 2510); *Wiglaf mæpelode, wordrihta fela,* 'Wiglaf spoke many right words' (Beo 2631). In this way, *mæpelode* in *Beowulf* is widely used to identify (i) the speaker (ii) the audience (iii) the location of the speaker (iv) the state of mind of the speaker (v) the physical state of the speaker and (vi) the contents of the speech.

The other form of *mæpelian* can be used tautologously, with other verbs of speech such as *spræc, sægde* and the noun form of *andswarian*:

*Wealhþæo mæpelode, heo fore þæm werede spræc:* (Beo 1215)  
[Wealhþeow made a speech, she said before the companion]

*Beowulf mæpelode, beotwordum spræc*  
[Beowulf made a speech, spoke with words of boasting]

*Biowulf mæpelode — he ofer benne spræc,*  
[Beowulf made a speech, he spoke despite his wound]

*Wiglaf mæpelode, wordrihta fela*
sægde gesiðum

[Wiglaf made a speech, said many right words to his companions]

Hroðgar mæbelode him on andswære:

[Hrothgar spoke in answer]

Mæbelian shares the same root as mæbel, which has the meanings 'assembly, council, judicial meeting, speech, address, harangue, conversation', according to Beowulf's Elene, in which mæbelode is first employed to introduce the speech of Elene to one thousand wise men. This speech is regarded as her most formal one to the meeting:

Elene mæbelode ond for eorlum spræc:

[Elene made a speech, spoke before the noblemen]

Here the public nature of mæbelode is defined by for eorlum, 'before the noblemen'.

As in Elene, publicity and formality are equally present in the use of mæbelode in many cases in Old English poetry. This form of publicity is fairly typical of Beowulf, in which speeches delivered at court and before a public audience are introduced by mæbelode in Beo 499, 529 and 199. But a public audience is not always implied in Beowulf when mæbelode is employed: Wulfgar mæbelode to his winedrihtne, 'Wulfgar made a speech to his friend and lord (Hrothgar)' (Beo 360); Hroðgar mæbelode, helm Scyldinga, 'Hrothgar made a speech, helm of the Scyldings' (Beo 371). Though these

19 However, the public speeches in Elene are not always made by the use of mæbelode. Often they are introduced with the formulae i) word plus cwædon (El 169b); ii) word plus negan (El 287b); iii) word plus mælde (El 351b)

OE mælan, however, may be related (through mæðlan, ‘to speak’) with mæbelian.

163
speeches of Wulfgar and Hrothgar are introduced by *mæpelode*, the public form of address is inapplicable mainly because their speeches are solely directed at one person.\(^{20}\) This lack of a public audience occurs again with *mæpelode* in the speeches of Beowulf and Wiglaf. After the fatal wound, Beowulf feels that death is near and asks Wiglaf to bring the treasure out of the cave: *Beowulf mæpelode — he ofer benne spræc.* 'Beowulf made speech, he spoke despite his wound' (Beo 2724). Here again Beowulf's speech is delivered to a single person Wiglaf.

In addition, several speeches made before a public audience are introduced with other forms rather than *mæpelode*.\(^{21}\) After Beowulf's final victory over Grendel's family, Hrothgar publicly affirms the pre-eminence of Beowulf, and confirms his promise to him, with *spræc*: *Pa se wisa spræc sunu Healfdene —swigedon ealle—.* 'Then the wise son of Healfdene spoke, and all were silent' (Beo 1698b-1699). The form of publicity is much heightened by the indirect reference to a public audience within *swigedon ealle*. Another public speech made this time with *sægde*, not with *mæpelode*, is shown in the messenger's speech. The messenger fears that when Beowulf's death is common knowledge, there will be trouble with the Franks and Frisians. Again, a public form of address is implied: *sægde ofer ealle.* '(the messenger) spoke in front of them all' (Beo 2899b). From these examples it might be concluded that public speeches are not always made with *mæpelode* in *Beowulf*. However, whether or not the speeches with *mæpelode* aim at publicity, they are characterized by a formality which indicates an eloquence and dignity suited to the heroic world.

\(^{20}\) Outside *Beowulf* this exception is also appears in: *mon mæpelade se be me gesægde.* 'a man spoke, who said to me' (Rid 38.5).

\(^{21}\) Apart from the use of *mæpelode*, public speeches are introduced with *word* plus *cwaed* (Jud 151b, Jul 45a); and *word* plus *negan* (El 559b); or with *spræcan.*
This regular use of *maþelode* before public speech is common with Beowulf and Wealthæow. Apart from the formality of courtly or heroic speech, Beowulf's speeches divide into two categories: one is the speech delivered to a single person with no background of a public setting, such as the court or in front of group of people; the other is the speech made before a public audience. In the second category, the presence of a public audience is more valued than the person to whom Beowulf's speech is directed.

The first use of *maþelode* in Beowulf's speech is reserved for the moment when he stands in front of Hrothgar's court. With the coastguard and Wulfgar, Beowulf's speeches are introduced with forms other than *maþelode*. In his reply to the coastguard, that is the first speech of Beowulf, his speech is introduced by *andswarode* rather than *maþelode*: ^22^ *Him se yldesta andswarode*, 'The leader of the band (Beowulf) answered to him (the coastguard)' (Beo 258). This introduction of Beowulf's first speech contrasts with that of the coastguard's second speech, which starts with *maþelode*: *Weard maþelode, òær on wicge sæt*, 'The coastguard made a speech, sitting there on his horse' (Beo 286). With Beowulf's *andswarode* and the coastguard's *maþelode*, it may be assumed that the poet is quite conscious of the audience to whom each speech is directed.

With regard to the use or disuse of *maþelode*, the poet's consciousness of the audience becomes clearer in the exchange of speeches between Beowulf and Wulfgar. Here again Beowulf's speech is introduced with *andswarode*, rather than *maþelode*, in the reply to Wulfgar: *Him ba ellenrof andswarode*, 'Then the man renowned in strength answered him' (Beo 340). To Beowulf's request, Wulfgar's speech is

---

^22^ Although Beowulf's first speech is not introduced with *maþelode*, but with *wordhord onleac* (Beo 259b), this latter expression has the same connotations of courtliness, formality and eloquence.
introduced with *maþelode*, as in the case of the coastguard's speech: Wulfgar *maþelode* — hæt wæs Wendla leod, 'Wulfgar made a speech, he was the prince of Wendels' (Beo 348). Again, the relative size of the audience is taken into account. Beowulf's audience is a single person, Wulfgar, whilst Wulfgar speaks to Beowulf and his band as well. As above, this regular use or non-use of *maþelode*, in accordance with the size of audience, works as a kind of stylistic norm in Beowulf's speeches except for only one occasion. This exception occurs when the fatally wounded Beowulf made a speech with no audience except for Wiglaf alone: Biowulf *maþelode* — he ofer benne spræc (Beo 2724). Apart from this exception, *maþelode* in Beowulf's speech is meant to indicate that his speeches are delivered in the form of public speech.

This distinction in *maþelode* between public speech and speech directed to only one person becomes characteristic of Beowulf's and Wealhtheow's speeches. To this extent, with this common method of introduction of speech, Wealhtheow may be equated with Beowulf.

Like Beowulf's speech, Wealhtheow's first speech is not introduced with the form of *maþelode*, but of *spræc*: Spræc ða ides Scyldinga, 'The lady of Scyldings spoke' (Beo 1168b). This introduction of her first speech contrasts with that of her second speech: Wealhþeo *maþelode*, heo fore þær þære spræc, 'Wealhtheow made a speech, she spoke before the companions' (Beo 1215). The phrase 'before the companions' characterizes the use of *maþelode*, that is the form of public speech. In comparison to the introduction of the second speech, the introduction of Wealhtheow's first speech lacks the words referring to the audience to whom the speech is delivered. But, the contents of the first speech make it clear that her speech is solely directed to one person, Hrothgar, in the form of private advice.23 The evidence that this speech is private will be discussed in section (c).

23 Outside *Beowulf* an example of private talk is found in *The Husband's Message*.
This form of *spæc*, lacking a public audience, is also used by Beowulf when he makes a boastful speech before he lay down in bed: *Gespære ba se goda gyþworda sum*. 'Then the hero made a boastful speech' (Beo 675). According to heroic tradition, Beowulf made a boastful speech, but this time there is no clear indication of a public audience, either in the introduction or content of the speech. The form of this speech is public, probably because that is the form of speech to which Beowulf is accustomed. However, the setting of this speech proves that there is no specific audience except for himself. It is told in the previous passages that Hrothgar has retired with his followers and has left Heorot in charge of Beowulf. Thus it may be inferred that there is no public audience of Danes. Nor can the Geats accompanying Beowulf be regarded as the audience of the vaunting speech, since there is no cause for Beowulf to deliver the speech to his companions.

As above, *spæc* seems to be used to introduce speeches without a public audience by both Beowulf and Wealhtheow. Apart from this common stylistic

_\textbf{Nu ic onsundran be secgan will.} 'Now I will speak to you in private' (\textit{Hush} 1). In this case the poet by using \textit{onsundran}, 'privately', explicitly states that the conversation is a private one, suggesting that \textit{secgan} is used for private conversation._

24 However, the use of *spæc* with a clear indication of public audience as in the case of \textit{mæpelode} is found in the following examples:

1. hlynhande *spæc*
   
   \textit{modig to hære mengo} \hspace{1cm} (\textit{Descent} 24b-25a)
   
   [\textit{(he) spoke to the multitude of them}]
2. *Spæc ða seo æðele to eallum þam folce:} \hspace{1cm} (\textit{Jud} 176)
   
   [The noble one then spoke to all the people]
feature in the introduction of their speeches, Wealththeow and Beowulf deliver their speeches in the same manner. When Wealththeow tells of the purpose of Hrothgar's adoption of Beowulf, she relies on hearsay:

Me man sægde, þæt þu ðe for sunu wolde
hereri[n]c habban.

(Beo 1175-1176a)

[I have been told that you wish to take this warrior to be as a son to you]

This use of an impersonal construction, 'someone told me', instead of 'I heard of' or 'you told', is fitting for courtly speech, as it is much more polite. With this construction, Wealththeow is able to attribute her knowledge of the adoption to hearsay. This is more polite than directly attributing it to Hrothgar, and is therefore less likely to offend him.25

But, there is something more than courtly formality in this use of the passive. Given the circumstance in which Wealththeow warns Hrothgar not to leave his kingdom to a foreigner, adoption is potentially a highly delicate matter. With her impersonal construction in me man sægde, with regard to the adoption, she directs her warning, which is the main aim of her speech, to Hrothgar. The following passage shows that Wealththeow is present at the time when Hrothgar makes his announcement that he would treat Beowulf as a son. Here, both Hrothgar and Wealththeow are seen together on their way to the strange sight of Grendel's limb left in the hall, where Hrothgar reveals his intention to adopt Beowulf:

swylce self cyning
of brydbure, beahhorda weard,

25 Klaeber believes that the poet used Me man sægde instead of gefrægn- formula purely for stylistic variety. See Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 117. I think the use of this phrase is for more than just stylistic variety.
tryddode tirfæst getrume micle,
cystum gecyj)ed,  ond his cwen mid him
medostigge mæt  mægþa hose.

(Beo 920b-924)

[the king, too, guardian of ring-hoards, came from his bed-chamber, he, famed for
noble qualities, advanced majestically with a great company, and his queen with him
made her way along the path to the mead-hall with a retinue of maidens]

Both Wealhtheow and Beowulf take great care not to hurt the pride of their social
equals. Wealhtheow's cautious approach to her main point recalls Beowulf's carefully
designed use of words. In his reply to the coastguard, Beowulf ascribes the story of
Grendel to hearsay by using the phrase secgan hyrdon, 'we have heard tell' (Beo
273b). As with the use of the passive voice in Wealhtheow's speech, Beowulf's
indirect manner of speech is probably designed not to hurt the pride of the Danes.

With regard to the savage attack of Grendel, Beowulf, reporting his intention to come
before Hrothgar, again ascribes the source of the story to the hearsay of seafarers:

Me wearð Grendele þing
on minre eþeltyrf  undyrne cuð;
secgað sæliðend,

(Beo 409b-411a)

[Grendel's doings became plainly known to me in my fatherland, seafarers say]

This construction is most effective when Beowulf says that his new adventure is
motivated by his people, not by himself

Þa me þæt gelærdon  leode mine,
Þa selestan,  snotere ceorlas,

(Beo 415-416)

[then my people, the noblest and most wisest, advised me]
Here once again Beowulf's cautious approach to the real cause of his coming to Denmark is characterized by indirectness. Like Wealhtheow, Beowulf, by referring to the advice of his people, reveals his intention gradually and tactically. Beowulf is keenly aware of the heroic pride of the Danes, so to announce himself as a proven hero would be inappropriate. Therefore Beowulf's verbal strategy is to make his status clear though the sub-text of his speech, while he says that his noblest and wisest people advised him. In this phrase Beowulf's proven status is emphasized by the repetition of the nature of Beowulf's people, who acknowledge Beowulf's ability to cope with his subsequent adventure, together with the repetition of superlatives. Thus the underlying meaning may be to assure Hrothgar that he is a man of reputation with the necessary capacity to deal with Grendel.

With regard to the application of sub-textual meaning, the exact same tactic is found in Wealhtheow's handling of her intention. The phrase Me man sægde is designed not only to not hurt Hrothgar but also to remind Hrothgar of the fact that he publicly proclaimed that he would like to adopt Beowulf as his son, which might be considered a potential problem for the succession of the Danish throne. By means of this indirect construction both Beowulf and Wealhtheow are equated and their comparable status is highlighted.

(c) Wealhtheow's verbal tactics revealing her awareness of the importance of gift-giving

I have suggested above that Wealhtheow's first speech introduced with spræc is delivered to Hrothgar in the form of private advice. The circumstances of

26 Gillian R. Overing assumes Wealhtheow's first speech is delivered in the presence
Wealhtheow's speech, a large gathering, may seem to make the privacy of Wealhtheow's speech less plausible. However, two things must be born in mind. Firstly, the very crowdedness and noise of the banquet, even greater than usual given the extraordinary event being celebrated, actually makes confidential exchanges easier, as the background noise makes eavesdropping difficult. The fact that banquets are filled with noisy revelry is clearly presented in the poem: Dær wæs hæleða hleahtor, hlyn swynsode, word wæron wynsume. 'There was glad laughter among the warriors, noise resounded, the words were joyous' (Beo 611-2a); Leod wæs asungen, gleomannes gyd. Gamen eft astah, beorhtode bencsweg. 'the song, the minstrel's lay was sung. Then mirth rose high, the noise from the benches rang out more clearly' (Beo 1159b-1161a). The latter describes the banquet scene just before Wealhtheow enters, proving that she emerges amid great noise. Secondly, Wealhtheow is pouring wine when she speaks to the king, as is shown by her words Onfuh bissum fulle, 'Take this cup' (Beo 1169a), which means that she is very close to the king, close enough to whisper in his ear easily. The content of Wealhtheow's speech is as follows:

Hearing that Hrothgar intends to adopt Beowulf as a son, she discreetly suggests to the king to be generous to him, but to leave the kingdom to his own descendants. She feels that if Hrothgar dies soon, Hrothulf will prove a faithful guardian to their children (Hrethric and Hrothmund) in response to the kindness she and the king have shown him.

On the other hand, one reason why it could be difficult for Wealhtheow to deliver a private speech is that she is apparently in the glare of attention. There are two reasons for believing this. Firstly, many critics argue that this is a tense scene, with particular tensions arising between Hrothgar, Hrothulf and Unferth, visible in the of a public audience. See Overing, Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf (Carbondale and Edwardsville IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), p. 93.
description of the close seating arrangement in lines from 1162b-66a. However, the poet says of this threesome: *ha gyt wæs hiera sib ætgædere, æghwylc oôrum trywe*, 'as yet, there was peace between them, and each was true to the other' (*Beo* 1164b-65a). This shows that the three were at ease, at least at the time of this entertainment, so Wealtheow would have been able to speak to the king without arousing suspicion. Secondly, the poet draws our attention to Wealtheow's entrance. Again, this would suggest that she is the centre of attention, which would have made confidential exchanges very difficult. However, though the reader's attention is undoubtedly drawn towards Wealtheow, there is no textual evidence that the attention of the warriors in the hall is directed the same way.

These considerations show that there are no contextual objections to the view that Wealtheow's first speech was directed only to the King. I believe that the noisy setting and most of all the contents of Wealtheow's speech referring to Hrothulf and Beowulf support the supposition that Wealtheow's first speech was a private one. In this scene it is most likely that Hrothulf and Beowulf's attention is directed towards the entertainment of the hall.

This supposition that her first speech was private is evinced by two major components of her speech. Wealtheow, hearing that Hrothgar intends to adopt Beowulf as a son, discreetly suggests to Hrothgar that he be generous to Beowulf but more generous to his own kin: *ond binum magum læf folc ond rice*, 'and leave folk and kingdom to your descendants' (*Beo* 1178b-79a). If Beowulf had heard this advice, then he might be offended or at least embarrassed by Wealtheow's implication that he is an unwelcome interference to the succession rights for her sons. Furthermore, it is questionable whether a public banquet attended by foreign warriors, including Beowulf whom Hrothgar had just publicly adopted as his son, was an appropriate occasion for Wealtheow to advise the king. Hence, it is almost certain that this advice is meant to be delivered privately to Hrothgar. The other evidence that her first
speech was private is found in the mentioning of her and Hrothgar's past favours towards Hrothulf:

\[
\text{wene ic } \text{hæt } \text{he mid gode gyldan wille}
\]
\[
\text{uncran eaferan, gif he } \text{hæt eal gemon,}
\]
\[
\text{hwæt wæt to willan ond to worðmyndum}
\]
\[
\text{umborwesendum ær arna gefremedon.}
\]

(Beo 1184-1187)

[I can expect that he (Hrothulf) will repay our sons, if he remembers all the honours that we bestowed on him in the past when he was a child, for his pleasure]

It is most unlikely that Wealhtheow, who has a keen sense of heroic pride, intends her words to be heard by Beowulf and Hrothulf. With regard to the direction of Wealhtheow's speech, Brodeur seems to be quite convinced that her speech is directed 'not less to Hrothulf than to the King'. However, the actual scene seems to be at odds with this interpretation, which entails that Wealhtheow tactfully reminds Hrothulf, the future rebel and the subsequent usurper of the kingdom, of all the favours he has received from Hrothgar and herself. However, the manner of her speech, especially the use of the hypothetical phrase \text{gif he } \text{hæt eal gemon}, 'if he remembers all' (Beo 1185b) suggests otherwise. Had Wealhtheow intended Hrothulf to hear her, she would not have alluded to his indebtedness to the king and the queen, as this would have caused displeasure to Hrothulf. We would have to believe that Wealhtheow intended to remind Hrothulf of their favours, which he would interpret as a call for him to take responsibility for their sons. If this reminder is delivered in the public form of speech, then Wealhtheow damages Hrothulf's pride; this is hardly

conceivable. With these two pieces of contextual evidence, it can be reasonably inferred that Wealhtheow addressed her first speech privately to Hrothgar.

Wealhtheow's actions in the banquet scenes closely accord with the duties demanded of a woman in *Maxims I*:

\[
\begin{align*}
ond \ wif \ gejîeon \\
leod \ mid \ hyre \ leodum, \ leohtmod \ wesan, \\
rune \ healdan, \ rumheorte \ beon \\
mearum \ ond \ mapum, \ meodorædenne \\
for \ gesiðmægen \ symle \ æghwær \\
eodor \ æþelinga \ ærest \ gegretan, \\
forman \ fulle \ to \ frean \ hond \\
ricene \ geræcan, \ ond \ him \ ræd \ witan \\
boldagendum \ bæm \ ætæsome.
\end{align*}
\]

(Max I 84b-92)

[and the woman must excel as one cherished among her people, and be buoyant of mood, keep confidence, be open-heartedly generous with horses and with treasures; in deliberation over the mead, in the presence of the troop of companions, she must always and everywhere greet first the chief of those princes and instantly offer the chalice to her lord's hand, and she must know what is prudent for them as rulers of the hall]

In keeping with the obligations set out in this passage, which represents the *Beowulf*-poet's background, in two banquet scenes Wealhtheow offers drink to her lord Hrothgar: *ond pa freolic wif ful gesalde ærest East-Dena æpelwearde*, 'and then the noble woman gave the cup first to the guardian of the land of the East-Danes (Beo 615-16); *Onfoh bissum fulle*, 'Take this cup' (Beo 1169a). Martin Stevens is right
when he regards the communal cup as 'the catalyst of all celebration'. In this banquet scene the functional role of cup is much emphasized by Wealhtheow whose offering of a cup of wine goes beyond social custom to highly charged intention, which I expand upon in the following discussion. Apart from this courtly etiquette of serving wine to her lord, Wealhtheow is presented as materially generous and prudent. Her prudence is revealed through her skilful use of words, just before she advises Hrothgar to leave his kingdom to his own descendants:

Heorot is gefælsod,
beahsele beorhta; bruc þenden þu mote
manigra medo, ond þinum magum læf
folc ond rice,

(Beo 1176b-1179a)

[Heorot is cleansed, the bright hall of the ring-giving, enjoy while you may in giving many rewards, and to leave folk and kingdom to your descendants]

This advice follows immediately after the passage in which Hrothgar's adoption of Beowulf is mentioned by Wealhtheow. Here she suggests to Hrothgar not to take the newly made kinship seriously. In this part of her speech we can find the conditional structure underlying the surface structure. The underlying meaning of Wealhtheow's advice to Hrothgar can be rendered as follows: 'Since the hall has now been cleansed you need no longer regard your promise to adopt Beowulf as binding. If you go ahead with your adoption then your own son's ascension to the throne will be threatened'. In this sense, Wealhtheow's speech can be regarded as highly diplomatic, as her underlying message is set out to prevent a potential future conflict. A similar conditional structure is found in her speech referring to Hrothulf:

---

Ic minne can
glædne Hroðulf, þæt he þa geogoðe wile
arum healdan, gyf þu ær þonne he,
wine Scildinga, worold oflætest;
wene ic þæt he mid gode gyldan wille
uncran eaferan, gif he þæt eal gemon,
hwæt wit to willan ond to worðmyndum
umborwesendum ær arna gefremedon.

(Beo 1180b-1187)

[I know my gracious Hrothulf, that he will hold these youths in honour, if you, lord of the Scyldings, should leave this world sooner than he. I can trust that he will faithfully requite our children, if he is mindful of all the honours which we both bestowed on him when he was still a child for his pleasure and honour]

Wealhtheow reminds Hrothgar of their past generosity and favours to Hrothulf in order to advise him to continue giving gifts to guarantee their son's smooth ascension to the throne. This reminder is not intended to impose any obligation on Hrothulf, as some critics have suggested. On the contrary, Wealhtheow is imposing a crucial social obligation on Hrothgar to safeguard the kingdom. The implication of Wealhtheow's speech is best expressed in the conditional form: 'if we endow more treasure and favour upon him (Hrothulf) then we can be more sure of his loyalty to our sons and kingdom in the future'.

29 T. A. Shippey believes Wealhtheow's repetitive use of gif (Beo 1182b, 1185b) implies 'vulnerability' reflecting her anxiety for her sons' future. See Shippey, Old English Verse (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1972), p.34. However, as I have shown, the underlying conditional form appears to project Wealhtheow's confidence in the power of gift-giving to assure future safety.
future turmoil. But she is confident that such turmoil can be eliminated or diminished by the present exercise of material generosity. This part of Wealhtheow's speech reveals that she is keenly aware of the socio-economic function of a lord's material generosity. Her awareness of the importance of gift-giving is also found in the early part of her speech Beo wið Geatas glæd, geofena gemyndig, nean ond feorran þu nu hafast, 'Be gracious towards the Geats, mindful of gifts, which you now possess from near and far' (Beo 1173-74). This reminder of the need for material generosity is quite significant since we have already been told at length about Hrothgar's bestowing of treasure on Beowulf and his band in lines 1020-1055. Her underlying meaning may be that Hrothgar should make the best use of this public opportunity by letting his material generosity be known to the public. She knows that this kind of public performance will bind the lord and his retainers. In this sense she has the psychological upper hand.

Wealhtheow's play on psychology is more clearly manifest in the way in which she delivers her second speech to Beowulf:

Bruc ðisses beages, Beowulf leofa,  
hyse, mid hæle, ond þisses hrægles neot,  
þeodgestreona, ond geþeoh tela,  
cen þec mid cræfte, ond þyssum cnyhtum wes  
lara liðe! Ic þe þæs lean geman.  
(Beo 1216-1220)

----------------------------------------

Wes þenden þu lifige,  
æþeling, eadig! Ic þe an tela  
sincgestreona. Beo þu sunu minum  
dædum gedefe, dreamhealdende!  
(Beo 1224b-1227)
[Enjoy this circlet with good luck, beloved Beowulf, a young warrior. Make use of this robe, a nation's treasure, and may you prosper well. Prove yourself for valour, and be kind in council to these boys. I will remember to reward to you for that.--- Be prosperous, prince, as long as you live. I wish you well of rich treasures. Be friendly to my sons in deeds!]

In this speech, her masterly handling of circumstance becomes more explicit as the speech is delivered in the public-speech form: Wealtheow maþelode, heo fore þæm werede spræc, 'Wealhtheow spoke, she spoke before the company' (Beo 1215). This introduction has a particular function when we consider Wealhtheow's awareness of the importance of gift-giving, which should be performed in public. The publicity of both promises and guarantees of gift-giving work as a binding force, as is shown repeatedly in the poem. Wealhtheow publicly announces that she will reward Beowulf with treasure. This is introduced by the characteristic use of maþelode. This speech consists mainly of two themes, her repeated promises of reward and her begging to Beowulf for the safety of her sons in the future. Wealhtheow's two speeches are quite different in type. The first speech, introduced by spræc, consists largely of suggestion and supposition, whilst the second, introduced by maþelode, contains promises and proclamations. Despite her difference of approach in these two speeches, a thematic link can be found in their sub-textual meaning: possibly in Wealhtheow's implicit emphasis on the value of gift-giving, which she regards as socially cohesive. Wealhtheow thus appears to believe that munificence guarantees to a large extent both her future and the future of her family. Brodeur is quite right when he sees Wealhtheow's role of gift-giving in her second speech to Beowulf as a confirmation of her reminder to Hrothgar of the importance of material generosity.\(^{30}\) In her first speech Wealhtheow urges Hrothgar to be even more generous to Beowulf and his men.

\(^{30}\) Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf, pp. 120-1.
though Hrothgar has already done. Furthermore, she, through her underlying message, urges Hrothgar to continue his generosity to Hrothulf. Her second speech shows that she is consistent with her words in her first speech. Immediately after the introduction of her second speech, Wealhtheow is shown bestowing precious gifts on Beowulf and promising more reward in the future in exchange for the safety of her sons.

In addition to her confirmation as a gift-giver, Wealhtheow's second speech also contains a high degree of tactical subtlety, as two sub-texts are combined with each other: reward and kinship. Her skillful use of words, with her diplomatic intentions is once more revealed in her implicit reference to Hrothgar's adoption of Beowulf. In her first speech, we have witnessed that Wealhtheow advised Hrothgar not to take the newly made kinship seriously. In contrast, Wealhtheow's second speech, directed to Beowulf, shows quite a different picture of her treatment of the kinship between Hrothgar and Beowulf. As regards the future welfare of her two sons, Wealhtheow, by using imperatives charged with emotion, twice begs Beowulf to be kind to them: *ond byssum cnyhtum wes lara liðe!*, 'and be gentle in council to these boys! (Beo 1219b-20a); *Beo pu su nu minum dædum gedefe, dreamhealdende!*, 'Be gracious to my son in your deeds, winner of hall joys! (Beo 1226b-27). With regard to Wealhtheow's repetitive pleas, there seems to be no cause for Wealhtheow to ask Beowulf to be kind to her sons. I think this importuning speech is directed to Beowulf on the assumption that both Wealhtheow and Beowulf are keenly aware of the newly made kinship between Hrothgar and Beowulf. But it is for Wealhtheow to impose the obligation of kinship on Beowulf by commending her boys to him. She is now stressing the value of the kinship, which she ignored in the first speech. Thus the sub-

---

31 Both Wealhtheow and Beowulf rely on the use of imperatives at crucial stages: lines 1219-20 and 269b *wes pu us larena god!* ('be you to us good guide!') are examples of striking similarities between Wealhtheow and Beowulf.
text of her second speech demonstrates that Wealhtheow is manipulating circumstances to her will. The execution of her social duties is used by Wealhtheow as a means of extracting from Beowulf the promises she seeks.

(d) Beowulf’s perception of Wealhtheow’s intention

In his farewell speech, Beowulf guarantees the future safety of the Danish monarchy under any circumstances. This means any potential threat to or usurpation of the Danish throne will be opposed by mighty Beowulf and his people. All these guarantees are directed both implicitly and explicitly in the same manner as Wealhtheow: explicitly, when he pledges his help to Hrothgar; implicitly, when he guarantees the safety of Hrethric in the event of future turmoil. This is a warning to any potential usurper whoever he may be:

\[ \text{æt ic ðe wel herige} \]
\[ ðe to geoce garholt bere, } \]
\[ mægenes fultum, ðær ðe bið manna þearf. } \]
\[ Gif him þonne Hreperc to hofum Geata } \]
\[ gehingeð þeodnes bearn, he mæg ðær fela } \]
\[ freonda findan; feorcypðe beoð } \]
\[ selran gesohte þæm þe him selfa deah. } \]

(\textit{Beo} 1833b-1839)

[that I may show my honour for you, and could bring my shafted spear and the support of my strength to your aid when you might have need of men. And then if Hrethric, the king’s son, should decide to come to the Geatish court, he would find many friends there; far countries are better sought by one who himself is strong]
I believe that Beowulf's assurance of aid to the Danes is largely motivated by his awareness of Wealhtheow's tactical use of words, in which Beowulf and 'the Geats are placed under obligation deep enough to ensure their aid'. The specific reference to Hrethric, regarded as Hrothgar's rightful heir, seems to be a deliberate response to Wealhtheow's second speech, in which she implores Beowulf to look after her sons. Robinson believes that this passage regarding Hrethric's visit is 'indirectly phrased so as not to alarm Hrothulf'. The mention of Hrethric's possible visit could well be in response to Wealhtheow's earlier pleas to Beowulf to look after her sons. But how far Beowulf's offer of welcome to Hrethric is a response to Wealhtheow's pleading largely depends on the nature of the visit in question. There has been controversy over the nature of the visit. Is it i) a casual visit, or ii) a pre-arranged diplomatic visit to form a peace-time alliance, or iii) a visit to seek refuge in the Geatish land as a result of domestic turmoil? This has usually been taken as merely a polite invitation. But the appositive beodnes bearn, 'the king's son' (Beo 1837a), subtly calls attention to Hrethric's standing in the line of succession to the Danish throne; Hrethric appears to be the elder son of the king, and Wealhtheow's anxious allusions to her sons' succession and her appeals to Beowulf to support them in Beo 1178-87, 1219-20, 1226-27, give special significance to Beowulf's seemingly casual apposition of terms. Moreover, Beowulf describes Hrethric's visit with the curious expression him gebingeð [MS gebinged], implying arrangements or negotiations rather than a casual visit.

32 Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf, p. 121.
33 Fred C. Robinson, Beowulf and the Appositive Style (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), p. 84.
34 Robinson, Beowulf and the Appositive Style, p. 5.
(e) Conclusion

In this chapter, various points of comparability between Wealhtheow and Beowulf have been examined. The appearance of each figure features gleaming metal. Both display keen mental insight. Wealhtheow demonstrates this quality by her advice to Hrothgar and in her extracting of a pledge from Beowulf. Wealhtheow, aware of the role she must play in the banquet, manipulates circumstances to achieve the end she desires: the safe succession of her son. Wealhtheow thus successfully performs the role of gift-giver through her public proclamations, promising rewards for Beowulf. Her public performance fits well with the functional use of *mæbelode*. Beowulf also shows his keen sense of perception. His offer of welcome for Wealhtheow's elder son Hrethric demonstrates that he perceives Wealhtheow's hidden intention. In these ways, the poet of *Beowulf* builds on the characterization of his heroic archetype.
So far my study of Beowulf's character has centred on his mental capabilities, demonstrated by his verbal skill, and on his social status and age. Beowulf's use of words reveals him to be a man with a keen perception of his surroundings, the demands of heroic society and the inner feelings of others. My examination of his social status has also contributed to a picture of the hero's character. Next it is necessary to consider Beowulf's emotional responses, the examination of which will provide more insight into his characterization. The methodology adopted is to examine the formulae within the diction of his speeches. This will reveal the emotional responses of the main figures, with particular regard to the sub-text of these speeches. Once the key formulae have been examined, I shall focus my analysis on Beowulf's treatment of Hondscio.

Many aspects of Beowulf's emotions have been apparent at several points in this thesis. Beowulf shows anger in response to Unferth's taunting speech, and during his fights with Grendel and the Dragon. He shows joy when he defeats Grendel and many years later he shows regret for the absence of an heir. Through his telling of the stories of Hrethel and the old churl, we also gain an insight into Beowulf's sorrow and grief (Beowulf's emotional response to the Dragon's attack will be discussed in ch. 7). In this chapter, however, Beowulf's affection and humour will be more closely examined. His affection for Hondscio will be compared with Hrothgar's affection for Æschere. Perhaps the least noticeable indicator of Beowulf's emotional responses is his occasional use of humour in direct speech. This is most apparent in his use of word-play in relation to Hondscio's name. The examination of the many and various emotional responses of Beowulf reveals an archetype who possesses not only the attributes of an archetypal character, but also many shadings of individuality.
Formulaic expressions for sorrow in main characters

One of the most moving scenes in *Beowulf* is the farewell scene between Beowulf and Hrothgar, in which Hrothgar kisses and embraces Beowulf and weeps at his departure:

\begin{quote}
Gecyste þæ cyning æþelum god,
þeoden Scyldinga ðegn betstan
ond be healæ genam; hruron him tearas
blondenfeaxum. Him wæs bega wen
ealdum infrodum, opres swiðor,
þæt h[i]e seoða(n) [no] geseon moston,
modige on mēple. Wæs him se man to þon leof,
þæt he þone breostwylm forberan ne mehte;
ac him on hreþre hygebendum fæst
æfter deorum men dyrne langað
beorn wið blode.
\end{quote}

(\textit{Beo} 1870-1880a)

[Then the king who was the prince of the Scyldings, high in noble birth, kissed the best of thanes, and clasped him round the neck; tears fell from the grey-haired man. Being very old and wise, he had thought of two things, but knew the other was the more likely that they would not see one another afterwards, brave men in council. The man was so beloved by him that he could not hold back his surging sorrow in his breast; a secret longing for this dear man burnt in his blood, and was held fast in the bonds of his heart]
In this passage Hrothgar's intense grief is effectively conveyed by *bæt he bæne breostwylm forberan ne mehte*, 'he could not hold back his surging sorrow in his breast' (Beo 1877). Here the dramatic description of Hrothgar is intensified by the use of circumlocution, in which Hrothgar's uncontrollable emotional feeling is captured in the frame of *forberan ne mehte*. Also, this example of litotes with *ne*, 'not', in line 1877, is characteristic of the Beowulf-poet. This description of emotional upheaval combines a verb like *forberan*, 'hold back', 'restrain oneself' plus an object which describes the quality of mind, in this case *breostwylm*. This type of combination is characteristic of the expressions of emotional upheaval in Beowulf. In other parts of Beowulf, similar emotional responses of the characters are described with *forhabban*, 'restrain oneself', 'forbear', instead of *forberan*. One example is found in the episode of King Finn (Beo 1071-1159a), in which a state of mind prior to violence, caused by a sudden attack by Guthlaf and Oslaf, is described: *ne meahete waefre mod forhabban in hrepere*, 'the restless spirit could not be restrained within the breast' (Beo 1150b-51a). This kind of emotional expression, both within the semantic frame of verbs *forhabban*, or *forberan*, plus its object, and within the syntactical frame with *ne*, is found again in Wiglaf's calling on the Geats to mind the favours he had had from Beowulf: *ne milhte 5a forhabban*, 'and then he [Wiglaf] could not hold back' (Beo 2609a). Though the object, the quality of mind, of *forhabban*, is missing, the assumed 'feeling of remorse' can be convincingly inferred from the context in which Wiglaf is struck with remorse and prepares to help Beowulf.

Apart from this structure of verbs denoting 'hold back', 'restrain', plus their object qualifying the state of mind, a slightly less dramatic way of expressing emotional distress is introduced with the almost formulaic use of expressions which mean 'heart/breast surged'. After a formal greeting, Hygelac asks about Beowulf's adventures in Denmark with much curiosity and reveals that he had been gloomy when Beowulf set off for this land:
Ic ðæs modceare
sorhwylmum sead, side ne truwode
leofes mannes;

(Bo 1992b-1994a)

[For that I was troubled with anxious mind and the surgings of sorrow seethed within me, I did not trust in my dear liegeman's adventure]

Unlike the poet's description of Hrothgar's grief in line 1877, Hygelac here speaks of his inner state of mind — characterized by anxiety and sorrow caused by his ominous prediction concerning Beowulf's adventure in Denmark — straightforwardly rather than by means of either circumlocution or litotes. However, considering Hygelac's affection towards Beowulf contained in the phrase above, the depths of Hygelac's emotional feelings equal those of Hrothgar towards Beowulf in line 1877. Though this expression of Hygelac's emotion is devoid of circumlocution or litotes, it has much in common with the words used of Hrothgar's emotion above. In line 1877, Hrothgar's state of mind is expressed by breostwylm. The words forming this kenning breostwylm are 'breast' and 'welling' or 'surging', thus the literal meaning of breostwylm is interpreted as 'welling or surging of breast'. However, this literal meaning derived from the compound-base is not enough to explain fully what the word breostwylm implies.¹ According to BT and Klaeber's glossary, breostwylm, 'welling or surging of breast', is interpreted as 'emotion'. Wrenn also glosses it as 'emotion' and 'strong feeling'. But these scholars do not intend to attach an explicit

¹ Arthur G. Brodeur describes a range of -wylm compounds from the literal to the figurative. In brynewylm, the association of the 'surging of fire' with the 'welling billows of the sea' is a natural one, and even in more figurative cearwylm. See Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1959), p. 12.
sense of 'sorrow' or 'grief', though they hint at this, to the meaning of 'emotion', which is better interpreted either as a joyful or a sorrowful response according to the circumstances. Thus the full meaning of breostwylm depends on the context in which the term is placed. Undoubtedly the contextual sense of 'emotion' in line 1877 is of sorrow, that is Hrothgar's grief at Beowulf's departure. My own interpretation of breostwylm, as 'surging sorrow in his breast', is intended to clarify the fact that, in the context of the passages discussed above, breostwylm refers to a sense of sorrow. This contextual meaning of 'surging sorrow in his breast' is semantically similar to sorhwylm, 'surging sorrow', in line 1993a which expresses Hygelac's inner state of mind. Besides this semantic congruity between the nouns breostwylm and sorhwylm, the effective uses of verbs in these two cases brings about an equally strong feeling of sorrow. Instead of the use of litotes in forberan ne mehte, the inner state of Hygelac's mind is expressed with the verb seað, 'seethed', creating a more explicit sense of the outburst of sorrowful feeling than in Hrothgar's case. However, even though forberan ne mehte is circumlocutory and seað, 'surged, boiled' is explicit, these phrases are semantically related to the extent that the sense of forberan ne mehte, 'could not hold back' is equivalent to 'boiled or seethed', seað: both expressions show an outburst of emotion.

In these two cases of nouns and verbs containing semantic congruity between two different instances, it may be assumed that the poet is consciously creating some sort of formulaic frame to show personal grief. Both breostwylm and sorhwylm, together with the skilful use of their controlling verbs, work as crucial elements in intensifying the sense of sorrow. However, the second element of -wylm seems to be rather awkwardly combined with breost- and sorh- compared to the modern English compounds that render these words. In Beowulf, wylm is frequently used to imply a
strong kinetic image, when combined with brim-, holm-, sæ- meaning 'sea' or 'water'. In the case of brimwylm, the intensity of emotion is more apparent when we consider Tripp's observation that brim, 'surf, flood, wave, sea-edge', may be etymologically related to bremman, 'rage, roar'. In a metaphorical sense the movement of sea or water reflects the fluctuation of human emotion. In this context, the kinetic image evoked from the surging of sea or water is transferred to the sense of 'surging of sorrow' or 'surging in the breast' and is effectively preserved. Thus, within wylm, the kinetic image of the movement of water is incorporated into the visual image of the scene of water or sea. When wylm, containing both these images, is joined with breost- or sorh-, indicating the fluctuation of human feeling or emotion, the new compounds breostwylm and sorhwylm serve to evoke a stronger feeling of sorrow or grief owing to an effect of synaesthesis.

A formulaic expression equivalent to 'heart surged', one which does not occur in compound form, is found again in Beowulf's report to Hygelac in which Beowulf portrays Hrothgar's lament for his bygone days:

hreðer inne weoll,

---

2 Brimwylm, 'surge of water' (Beo 1494b), holmwylym, 'surge of the sea' (Beo 2411b), sæwylm, 'sea-welling' (Beo 393b). The other -wylm compounds in Beowulf also convey a kinetic image: cearwylm, 'care-surge' (Beo 282a), fyrwylm, 'fire-surge' (Beo 2671a), headowylm, 'battle-surge, hostile flame' (Beo 82b, 2819a).


[his heart was surging within him as he, wise in years, remembered so much]

As in the previous cases, here Hrothgar's emotion is portrayed within the formulaic combination of a noun _hreðer_, meaning 'heart or mind', plus a verb _weallan_, meaning 'boil or surge'. As with the preceding examples, both the kinetic and visual images are combined with each other in order to evoke a stronger feeling than a single image can produce.

More examples of this type of combination are found in the description of Wiglaf's and Beowulf's dire states of mind. Perceiving the grave situation of Beowulf, who has been abandoned by his band and tortured by the heat of the Dragon, Wiglaf's heart is moved:

_Hiora in anum weoll_

_sefa wið sorgum;_

( _Beo_ 2599b-2600a)

[The heart of one of them surged with sorrow]

Earlier in the poem, at the Dragon's first attack, old Beowulf fears that he must have displeased Almighty God, and sinks into unwonted dejection:

_breost innan weoll_

_þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs._

( _Beo_ 2331b-2332)

[his heart within him was surging with dark thoughts, which was not customary for him]

This last description of Beowulf's grief-stricken heart is a significant turning point in the characterization of Beowulf, since the same kind of extreme emotional response is not found in young Beowulf. Compared to the emotional Hrothgar, young Beowulf is generally regarded as a man of heroic restraint. However, the description
of old Beowulf's emotional trait above proves that old Beowulf is to a large extent identified as a man of emotion. This new emotionality has a very close affinity with that of Hrothgar in terms of the method of expression adopted by the poet. The almost identical expressional techniques used on two different occasions are discussed above with the examples of Hrothgar's and Hygelac's emotion: *het he bone breostwylm forberan ne mehte* (Beo 1877), *sorhwylmun sead* (Beo 1993a). These instances are similar to the following example of old Beowulf's emotional response: *breost innan weoll* (Beo 2331b). In these three cases, the grammatical functions of the verbs differ widely. In the first example, the verb controls the object *breost*, 'heart', whereas in the third example the verb indicates the quality of its subject *breost*. Thus *forberan ne mehte* is circumlocutory whilst *weoll* in Beo 2331b is a form of direct expression. In the light of these co-existing similarities of meaning and expressional technique between Beo 1877 and Beo 2331b, it might be deduced that the poet is consciously demonstrating old Beowulf's emotional tendencies in the same language as Hrothgar's emotional response.

About a hundred lines after the example above, at his farewell speech to his companions, the same emotional response in Beowulf is depicted again:

Him wæs geomor sefa,

wæfre ond wælfus, wyrd ungemete neah,

(Beo 2419b-2420)

[his heart was sad, restless and ready for death, the fate was immeasurably near]

This revelation of the other side of Beowulf's character can be ascribed to an unusual situation in which Beowulf intuitively perceives the fated day of his death. We have already witnessed Beowulf's outburst of emotion in ch. 3 in the exchange of speeches with Unferth. This exchange shows that when Beowulf's heroic credentials are questioned, his usual restraint is transformed into an uncontrollable outburst of emotion which unnecessarily humiliates Unferth and the Danes.
In Beowulf's later feelings of sadness, old Beowulf is contrasted to young Beowulf; old Beowulf also shares something in common with Hrothgar, who is commonly regarded as a man of emotion. At the farewell scene quoted above, Hrothgar is filled with strong fatherly affection for the young champion who has delivered him from the monsters; he kisses and embraces him and weeps at his departure. However, Beowulf does not show any sign of reciprocal grief. This absence of Beowulf's emotional response to Hrothgar's grieving remains puzzling to those who expect a quite natural response from Beowulf. It might be assumed that Hrothgar's extreme emotional response is possibly motivated by the thought that he would not see Beowulf again because of his old age: *ær h[i]e seo ôôa(n) no geôson moston*, 'that they would not see each other again' (Beo 1875). But for young Beowulf there would be many opportunities lying ahead of him, as he promises to come back to help Hrothgar whenever he is needed. In a sense, the more important contrast, as Irving pointed out, is 'between youth and age rather than between heroic self-restraint and emotionalism.' However, the young Beowulf is not entirely excluded from emotionality, which becomes a characteristic attribute of Hrothgar's disposition. At the end of the lengthy report of his adventure to Hygelac, Beowulf appears to be overcome by emotion at the thought of his kinship with Hygelac, upon which he puts the value of his life on earth:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gen is eall æt ðe} \\
\text{lissa gelong; ic lyt hafó} \\
\text{heafodmaga nefne, Hygelac, ðec.}
\end{align*}
\]

(Beo 2149b-2151)

[All of my favours still depend on you, I have few chief-kinsmen save you, O Hygelac!]

---

As Brodeur says, Beowulf's 'strongest and most enduring emotion' is found in his reciprocated love for Hygelac. On the surface, Beowulf's near outburst of emotion is caused by human affection between Hygelac and Beowulf, but on a deeper level the expression of extreme emotion should be understood in the context of kinship, which is regarded as 'the most sacred of Germanic relationships'. As Brodeur puts it, Hygelac emerges as the 'centre of Beowulf's world'.

The reciprocal loyalty between the lord and his followers works as the binding force of a heroic society. To Beowulf, Hygelac serves the roles of both his lord and a close relative. Beowulf seems to become more emotional in the context of these two functional roles. From this point of kinship it might be assumed that Beowulf is not immune from revealing his intense emotion, even though he is young.

However, in his report to Hygelac, Beowulf does not show any sign of grief as he describes the death of Hondscio, who is one of his military band involved in the adventure in the Danish land. Sisam sees Hondscio's position nearest to the hall door as a 'post of honour for a bodyguard'. If Sisam is correct, then Beowulf's lack of grief for Hondscio becomes even more puzzling. Besides, this lack of emotion sharply contrasts with the intense grief of Hrothgar at the death of his counsellor Æschere.

(b) Ties of affection between Beowulf and Hondscio, and between Hrothgar and Æschere

---

A study of three relationships between Hygelac and Beowulf, Hrothgar and Æschere, and Beowulf and Hondscio must be undertaken before the lack of young Beowulf's emotional response at the death of Hondscio can be examined. Compared to the other two relationships, the tie between Beowulf and Hondscio is seen as less constructive. This is mainly because Beowulf's military band, to which Hondscio belongs, seems to be formed *ad hoc* by Beowulf when he sets off on an adventure, and not on the basis of a formal bond between the lord and his followers, as is the case between Hygelac and Beowulf, and between Hrothgar and Æschere. The nature of Beowulf's military band in Denmark, with Beowulf as its leader and with Hondscio as a member, is that of a temporary military group seeking martial exploits abroad. Though the young Beowulf emerges as a military leader at the time of his adventure in Denmark, Hondscio can hardly be regarded as his thane, whereas young Beowulf is a thane of Hygelac and Æschere is a thane of Hrothgar. With regard to the formally constructed lord-thane relationship, Beowulf proudly proclaims that he and his band are members of Hygelac's *comitatus*: *We synt Higelaces heorô geneatas*; 'We are Hygelac's hearth-companions' (*Beo* 260-61). Also Hrothgar says that Æschere was the key member of his *comitatus*, and that the tie between them was made on the basis of a formal oath of allegiance:

\[
\text{Dead is Æschere,} \\
\text{Yrmenlaf's yldra broþor,} \\
\text{min runwita ond min rædbora,} \\
\text{ealgestealla,} \\
\text{(*Beo* 1323b-1326a)}
\]

[Æschere is dead, Yrmenlaf's elder brother, my trusted counsellor, my adviser and close comrade]

This kind of strong tie, based on a formal oath of allegiance, is lacking in the relationship between Beowulf and Hondscio, though Beowulf leads the band to which
Hondscio belongs. It is presumed that Hondscio just happened to join Beowulf's military band, in search of adventure. Furthermore, Hondscio is differentiated from Æschere in terms of the length of their respective relationships with Beowulf and Hrothgar. Æschere has fought for a long time with Hrothgar in the defence of Denmark. This unique relationship between Hrothgar and Æschere, supported by Æschere's triple roles of runwita, 'counsellor', rædbora, 'adviser', eaxlgestella, 'close comrade', serves to draw more intense emotion from Hrothgar at the death of Æschere. Even Beowulf himself in his report to Hygelac mentions the depth of Hrothgar's grief: *bæt wæs Hroôgare hreowa tornost*, 'That was the bitterest of griefs for Hrothgar' (Beo 2129).

All this information about Hondscio appears to lead us not to expect from Beowulf as strong an emotional reaction as Hrothgar's response at the death of Æschere. So, did Beowulf not care about Hondscio's death or did he restrain himself from the outburst of his feeling?

From the outset, Beowulf is shown to stick to his own heroic motto, that is, to act, not to hesitate, at the time of need. This heroic principle is explicitly demonstrated in his advice to Hrothgar not to weep at the death of Æschere but to avenge his death:

 Selre bið æghwæm,
 þæt he his freond wrecce, þonne he fela murne.

(Beo 1384b-1385)

[It is better for each man that he should avenge his friend, than greatly mourn]

In his description of the battle with Grendel in front of Hrothgar, Beowulf tells of the fight without mentioning the death of Hondscio, which could be the crucial element in the context of heroic comradeship. This omission of the death of Hondscio right after the victory over Grendel may be contrasted to Hrothgar's emotional response soon after he discovers that Æschere has been killed by Grendel's mother. Beowulf's
reticence over the death of Hondscio might be regarded as an action of indifference to personal disaster. But, given the context of his heroic motto, Beowulf's unexpected reticence at the death of Hondscio can be justified, for he successfully avenged Hondscio's death as he advised Hrothgar to do. Thus action through revenge seems to be substitute for emotional response. Much detail concerning Hondscio's death is revealed by Beowulf in his report of his adventure in Denmark to Hygelac:

\[
\begin{align*}
&\text{bær wæs Hondscio hild onsæge,} \\
&\text{feorhbealu fægum; he fyrmest læg,} \\
&\text{gyrded cempa; him Grendel wearð,} \\
&\text{mærum magulbegne to muðbonan,} \\
&\text{leofes mannes lic eall forswealg. }
\end{align*}
\]

(Beo 2076-2080)

[There was battle impending for Hondscio, violent death for the doomed man; he, belted champion, fell first. Grendel slew the famous young thane with his mouth, swallowing the whole body of the beloved man]

Goldsmith's comment on this passage is worth quoting in full:

he [Beowulf] betrays no grief for Hondscio as Hrothgar does for Æschere in similar circumstances. [...] In his report to Hygelac, Beowulf does indeed speak briefly of him in terms of esteem and affection, but without mention of personal sorrow.  

Though Goldsmith appears to be correct here, she does not explain the detailed context of the terms of 'esteem and affection'. Possibly, the phrase \textit{mærum magulbegne}, 'famous young thane', is used to indicate the renowned fame of Hondscio's prowess and thus enhances Beowulf's feeling of respect for Hondscio. In addition, the feeling

of 'affection' is embedded in leofes mannes, 'of the beloved man'. However, the exact sense of leof, 'dear', 'beloved', remains in question. Goldsmith wonders what kind of feeling the word implies in Wiglaf leofa, 'beloved Wiglaf' (Beo 2745a).\(^{10}\) In the poem leof is widely used by different characters on various occasions. As far as the role of a word for 'dear', 'beloved' is concerned, swæs is used as well as leof in Beowulf. However, the use of swæs in Beowulf differs from that of leof as it is solely used to describe a group of people rather than individuals. According to BT, swæs is used 'mostly in reference to the connection that belongs to relationship by blood or by marriage, or to dear companionship'.

The actual application of swæs in Beowulf fits into this definition well. In particular, the sense of the heroic bond between the lord and his followers in the comitatus is implied in the use of swæs. After a long reign, Scyld was at his own request taken to the sea-shore by his retainers. In this scene, swæs refers to Scyld's followers, who carried his body and became his retainers on the basis of the oath of allegiance:

$$
\text{hi hyne } \text{ha ætbærôn to brimes farôe,}
$$
$$
\text{swæse gesiþas, swa he selfa bæd,}
$$

(\text{Beo 28-29})
[they, his beloved retainers carried him to the sea's flood, as he himself asked]

Here, the phrase swæse gesiþas is emphatically used to represent strong comradeship based on mutual loyalty in heroic society. Another example which demonstrates dear companionship occurs when Hrothgar asks Beowulf to come to visit his dear people: leode swæse secean (Beo 1868-1869). The same phrase 'dear companions' appears again in the episode of Modthryth, in which the court retainers, who displeased

Modthryth, were treacherously killed and are also referred to as *swæsra gesiða* (Beo 1934a). Also in the episode of Freawaru's marriage to Ingeld, the death of the Heathobards is associated with their being *swæse gesiðas*, 'dear companions' (Beo 2040a). Beowulf himself refers to his dear companions as the same *swæse gesiðas* (Beo 2518a), when he makes a final boasting speech to his retainers. The only occasion when *swæs* is not used in connection with a group of people is found in *swæsne eþel* (Beo 520b), 'beloved fatherland', which is used to highlight the glorious return of Breca. As is shown in these examples, it can be inferred that the use of *swæs* is strictly confined to a group of people who are the dear members of *comitatus*, rather than to a particular individual.

However, *leof*, even though it shares the same meanings 'dear' and 'beloved' with *swæs*, is used solely to describe specific individuals in *Beowulf*. Such individuals as Scyld, Beowulf, Breca, Hrothgar, Wiglaf, Hondscio, Æschere all have *leof* applied to them. In the poem, the use of *leof* is divided into two main categories; one is the honorific expression as a sign of honour, respect, and gratitude, and the other is for emotionally charged scenes. *Leof* as a sign of honour, respect, and gratitude is found on numerous occasions, of which Wealhtheow's calling Beowulf *Beowulf leofa*, 'beloved Beowulf' (Beo 1216b) is the outstanding example, together with Beowulf's calling the Danish King *Hroðgar leofa*, 'beloved Hrothgar' (Beo 1483a), and the coastguard's calling Beowulf *leofne mannan*, 'beloved man' (Beo 297b). All these examples may demonstrate that *leof* can be used devoid of the sense of personal feeling and emotional reaction. However, the following examples show *leof* may also be used to indicate an intense personal affection towards an individual beyond the sense of honour, respect, and gratitude. Such examples of personal affection for an individual can be found in the following: Hrothgar's extreme emotional reaction at the farewell scene with Beowulf is expressed with *leof*: *Wæs him se man to bon leof*, 'the man was so beloved by him' (Beo 1876b). Hygelac's
personal affection for Beowulf when Beowulf returns from his adventure is also expressed with the repeated use of leof. Hygelac's anxiety about Beowulf's adventure in Denmark is converted into the intense feeling of affection as he refers to Beowulf with leof: *Hu lomp eow on lade, leofa Biowulf*, 'What happened to you on your journey, much-loved Beowulf' (*Beo* 1987). This emotionally charged adjective of Hygelac's occurs again a few lines later: *siôe ne truwode leofes mannes*, 'no faith had I in the journey of a beloved man' (*Beo* 1993b-1994a). This kind of emotional reaction captured in the use of leof occurs also in the relationship between Beowulf and Wiglaf. Beowulf, feeling that death is near, grieving that he has no son to whom he may leave his armour, asks Wiglaf to bring the treasure out of the tomb. In this much intensified mood, Beowulf calls Wiglaf, who later takes possession of Beowulf's armour as a sign of his inheritance, *Wiglaf leofa*, 'my beloved Wiglaf' (*Beo* 2745a). With the same emotional reaction, Wiglaf calls his king *leofa Biowulf*, 'beloved Beowulf' (*Beo* 2663a) when he encourages him to do his best, and assures him of his help.

As regards the use of leof in line 2080a, in which Beowulf refers to Hondscio as *leof mann*, 'of the beloved man', it should now be considered whether this use of leof is designed to express honour or respect for Hondscio, or reveal Beowulf's intense personal affection for him. The exact implication of leof, the word attached to Hondscio by Beowulf, can be inferred from the examination of the sub-text of the passage in which Beowulf reports to Hygelac.

In his description of Grendel's attack on his party and the subsequent death of Hondscio, Beowulf tells Hygelac his version of the scene, which differs slightly from the poet's account of it:

```
  gæst yrre cwom,
  eatol æfengrom user neosan,
  ðær we gesunde sæl weardodon.
```
Dær wæs Hondscio hild onsæge,  
feorhbealu fægum;  

(Beo 2073b-2077a)

[there came a furious spirit, fearsome in the evening, to seek us out where we, still whole, kept watch over the hall. There was battle impending for (/falling upon) Hondscio, mortal disaster for the doomed man]

Here Beowulf tells Hygelac that he and his band were awake at the time of Grendel's attack on them: we sæl weardodon, 'we kept watch over the hall' (Beo 2075).

However, the poet tells a different story:

Sceotend swæfon,  
þa þæt hornreced healdan scoldon,  
ealle buton anum.  

(Beo 703b-705a)

[The marksmen who had to guard that gabled hall slept, all except one]

According to the poet's version, it can be inferred that all the members of Beowulf's band including Hondscio are asleep, except for Beowulf, when Grendel advances towards the hall. The fact that Beowulf alone is awake and his companions fall asleep is repeated again even when Grendel steps inside the hall:

Geseah he in recede rinca manige,  
swefan sibbegedriht samod ætgædere,  

(Beo 728-729)

[He saw many warriors in the hall, a band of kinsmen, sleeping all together]

Þryðswyð beheold  
mæg Higelaces, hu se manscāða  
under fæргripum gefaran wolde.  

(Beo 736b-738)
[The kinsman of Hygelac, mighty in his strength, kept watching how the murderous foe would set to work his sudden attacks]

The poet clearly indicates that Hondscio was also asleep at the time of Grendel's attack:

\[ ac \ he \ gefeng \ hraðe \ forman \ siðe \ slæpendne \ rinc, \]

\[(Beo\ 740-741a)\]

[but he [Grendel] quickly seized a sleeping warrior (Hondscio) as a beginning]

This episode of Hondscio's death is a good illustration of Klaeber's general remark that 'the same incident is related several times from different point of view' in Beowulf.¹¹ The poet's version that Grendel seized the sleeping warrior Hondscio contradicts Beowulf's assertion that there was battle impending for Hondscio.

The poet's description of the death of Hondscio implies that Hondscio was not even mindful of the confrontation of Grendel because he was asleep. According to the poet's accounts, Grendel did not meet any form of martial confrontation from Hondscio, who was simply picked up and devoured by Grendel. The absence of martial activity by Hondscio in the face of Grendel's attack is strongly suggested in the poet's description.

In contrast, Beowulf's account on the same scene hints that Hondscio was mindful of Grendel's attack and exercised his martial prowess against him. This interpretation is inferred from the passage quoted above in which Beowulf says: 'we kept watch over the hall, there was battle impending for Hondscio'. As regards \textit{pær wæs Hondscio hild onsege} (Beo 2076), Garmonsway suggests a different translation which reads as follows: 'This attack proved fated for Hondscio'.¹² Compared to my


¹² G. N. Garmonsway and Jacqueline Simpson, trans., \textit{Beowulf and its Analogues}
translation 'there was battle impending for Hondscio', Garmonsway's translation is much closer to the contextual meaning of the poet's account: that is, that Hondscio did not exercise his prowess against Grendel. In this way, Garmonsway appears to be conscious of the previous account of the poet when he interprets the same event, for his interpretation appears not to agree with the literal meaning of hild onsæge. With reference to hild (guð) onsæge another example is found in the poem:

Hæðcynne weard,
Geata dryhtne guð onsæge.

(Beo 2482b-2483)

[War had come upon Hæthcyn, lord of the Geats, (the fight was fatal to Hæthcyn, lord of the Geats)]

This scene implies that Hæthcyn was killed in the middle of the fight with the Swedes. He was simply overpowered by his enemy. With the same context, hild onsæge in Beowulf's description of Hondscio's death indicates that Hondscio was involved in the fight against Grendel at the risk of his life. Thus Beowulf hides the fact that Hondscio was sleeping and killed by Grendel, and did not even try to wield his power against Grendel. Through the description of Hondscio, the image of military failure is converted to the image of a real warrior, who did his best at the risk of his life though he did not win a victory over Grendel.

Within this context, it becomes clearer that Beowulf intends to project Hondscio as a desirable warrior figure to Hygelac and the court. This kind of attitude that Beowulf has towards his dead battle comrade can be regarded as a sign of esteem and respect. From time to time Beowulf is portrayed as a man who 'is conscious of his
duty towards his men collectively.\textsuperscript{14} This image of collectivism is consistently drawn from Beowulf's attitude towards his companions. This characteristic feature of Beowulf's magnanimity is first demonstrated as he reports the victory over Grendel to Hrothgar:

\begin{verbatim}
We ðæt ellenweorc estum miclum,
feohtan fremedon,
\end{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{(Beo 958-959a)}

[We undertook this fight with right good will, this deed of valour]

As I have suggested earlier, in the use of \textit{We}, here Beowulf is shown to share the honours of victory with his companions, which were acquired by himself alone. The same kind of magnanimity in Beowulf occurs as he tells of the successful adventure in Denmark in front of Hygelac:

\begin{verbatim}
ðæt ðu geare cunne,
sinces brytta, to hwan syðdan weartð
hondræs hæleða.
\end{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{(Beo 2070b-2072a)}

[O giver of treasure, you may clearly know the result of the hand-to-hand struggle of the champions]

As in the case of his report to Hrothgar, Beowulf thus shares his single-handed victory with his companions. In this way, the apparent discrepancy between the poet's and Beowulf's accounts on the same event disappears within the narrative context of Beowulf's magnanimity.

In that Beowulf uses \textit{leof} in \textit{leof mann}, 'beloved man' (\textit{Beo} 2080a) to describe Hondscio, it is unlikely that there is a sense of personal feeling charged with intense emotion. Though Beowulf tells of the event in terms of esteem for Hondscio, his

\textsuperscript{14} Goldsmith, \textit{The Mode and Meaning of 'Beowulf'}, p. 215.
report is devoid of a strong emotional reaction. This interpretation is based on the contextual meaning of the poet's accounts of Beowulf's attitude at the time of Hondscio's death:

\[\text{Hryðswyð beheold}\\mæg \text{Higelaces, hu se manscæða}\\under \text{færgripum gefaran wolde.}\]

(\text{Beo 736b-738})

[Hygelac's kinsman, mighty in strength, kept watching how the murderous foe would set to work with his sudden attacks]

From this narrative testimony, that Beowulf was awake at the time of Grendel's attack, it can be inferred that Beowulf made no attempt to save Hondscio, choosing instead to observe the Grendel's mode of attack. In this sense Hondscio can be seen as a victim of Beowulf's military tactics.\(^\text{15}\) However, Tripp believes that Beowulf did not save Hondscio because he had fallen asleep, confident of his bravery and in God.\(^\text{16}\)

This view entails some textual inconsistencies. Firstly, we are told that Beowulf

\(^{15}\) Brodeur rejects the theory that Beowulf allowed Hondscio to die in order to observe Grendel's mode of attack, claiming that this would be utterly inconsistent with Beowulf's character. However, young Beowulf is prone to inconsistency. Most notably, he regards Breca as a good companion in the sea in \text{Beo 544}, only to denigrate him later: 'Never did Breca at the battle-play perform so bold a deed. (\text{Beo 583b-5}). Brodeur also rejects the view that Hondscio's death is the remnant of a folk-tale. Rather it is the necessary climax of the horror which the poet intentionally builds up. See Brodeur, \text{The Art of Beowulf}, p. 92-3.

behold, 'kept watching' (Beo 736b), as Grendel entered the hall. Secondly, Beowulf later offers an eyewitness account of Hondscio's death in Beo 2069b-81. Thus it seems unlikely that Beowulf now conveys any intense personal feeling in the use of *leof mann*, 'beloved man'. *Leof* describing Hondscio by Beowulf may instead be understood to indicate respect rather than the personal feeling evident when Hrothgar calls Beowulf *leof* and when Beowulf calls Wiglaf *leof* and *vice versa*.

Though there exists a wide gap in the degree of emotional responses between Beowulf's feeling for the death of Hondscio and that of Hrothgar at the death of Æschere, two major thematic features are common to the two occasions.

Firstly, the tone of eulogy in terms of esteem, respect, and honour contained in Beowulf's recollection of the death of Hondscio occurs again in Hrothgar's lament scene at the death of Æschere:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{hæs pe hinecan mæg } & \text{ þegne monegum,} \\
\text{se } & \text{ æfter sinægyfan on sefan greoteþ,} \\
\text{hreþerbealo hearde; } & \text{ nu seo hand ligeð,} \\
\text{se } & \text{ eow welhwylcra wilna dohte.} \\
\end{align*}
\]

*(Beo 1341-1344)*

[as it may seem to many a thane who mourns his treasure-giver in his breast, a heavy heart-grief; Now the hand lies dead which was willing to help you all your desires]

As is shown here and in the preceding passages, Hrothgar's response to the death of Æschere is not solely emotionally based, but is mixed with eulogy to an ideal chieftain rather than an ideal warrior. This new image of Æschere of an ideal chieftain is supported by the epithet *sinægifæ*, 'treasure-giver', which is, as a sense of 'distributor of treasure or gifts', normally indicative of a leader of a *comitatus*. According to Levin
L. Schücking, Hrothgar's use of the epithet, *sincgifa* for Æschere shows how much he valued him, as if he speaks of a king.¹⁷

In the poem *Beowulf*, ideal lordship is emphatically connected with the sense of generosity, which is demonstrated by the action of distributing gifts, gold, and treasures. Fittingly for this ideal kingship, Hrothgar is referred to with those appellations or epithets denoting his generosity such as *ymb hyra sincgyfa*, 'about their treasure giver' (*Beo* 1012a), *beaga bryttan*, 'from rings' bestower' (*Beo* 352a), *sinces brytta*, 'treasure's giver' (*Beo* 607b), *goldwine gumena*, 'gold-friend of men' (*Beo* 1602a). Among these epithets, *sincgyfa* is shared both by Hrothgar and Æschere. Klaeber comments that Æschere, who occupied an exalted position, receives a title fit for a king.¹⁸

As is demonstrated by many epithets indicating his liberality in giving treasures, Hrothgar is constantly distinguished by this quality of generosity. Besides these epithets, Hrothgar's disposition of munificence in distributing gifts and gold is revealed repeatedly through his own words, which are delivered in the form of promises of reward for heroic actions. Upon receiving *Beowulf* at Heorot, Hrothgar's voice promising reward is heard:

*Ic þæm godan sceal
for his modþraece madmas beodon.*

(*Beo* 384-385)

[I shall offer the good man treasures for his courage]

At the first banquet scene Hrothgar, entrusting Heorot to *Beowulf*'s keeping, promises him ample recompense:


Ne bið þe wilna gad,

gif þu þæt ellenweorc aldre gedigest.

(Beo 660b-661)

[You shall lack nothing of what you may desire, if you come back alive after that deed of valour]

After Beowulf's first victory over Grendel, Hrothgar, beholding Grendel's limb, promises his reward again for Beowulf's deeds:

Ne bið þe [n]ænigre gad

worolde wilna,

(Beo 949b-950a)

[You shall lack nothing in this world which you may desire]

At Grendel's mother's attack, Hrothgar appeals to Beowulf for help and promises compensation for his action:

Ic þe þa fæhðe feo leanige,
ealdgestreonum, swa ic ær dyde,

(Beo 1380-1381)

[I will reward you for the feud with wealth, with ancient treasures, as I did before]

At the end of the long speech, the so-called 'Hrothgar's sermon', Hrothgar promises Beowulf much treasure in the morning:

unc sceal worn fela

mæþma gemænra, sıþan morgen bið.

(Beo 1783b-1784)

[we shall share many treasures between us when morning comes]

As the examples above show, the sense of 'I will reward you with treasure' becomes almost a stock expression in Hrothgar's speeches and characterizes his liberality in giving treasures.
It is a fair assumption that Hrothgar's tendency towards material generosity is clearly transferred into the tone of his eulogy for Æschere, which is delivered with a memory of Æschere's generosity. In my view this thematic connection is not accidental. On the contrary, the poet, who is keenly aware of thematic unity over different occasions, intends to convey Hrothgar's interest in generosity even in his eulogy for Æschere.

The same narrative technique of revealing the speaker's disposition through his eulogy for his follower is found in Beowulf's dealing with the death of Hondscio. As has been pointed out, Beowulf is contrasted with Hrothgar in terms of action and emotionality. Beowulf speaks of Hondscio as a man of action and valour rather than material generosity, which reflects Beowulf's own quality. Because we hear of Æschere and Hondscio only through their leaders' words, their qualities are coloured by those of their leaders. Thus, regardless of their true disposition, both Æschere and Hondscio are likely to be characterized by their leaders' qualities in their leaders' speeches. A closer examination of Beowulf's treatment of the death of Hondscio proves that Beowulf's tendency towards physical resolution and valour is implied in the context of his eulogy for Hondscio. As discussed already, Hondscio, who is portrayed by the poet as an inactive, helpless victim in the face of Grendel's attack, is converted into the image of an active and daring warrior by Beowulf's description. In this way, Beowulf intends to pay homage to Hondscio's death by evoking an image of a valorous warrior, who is risking his life at the fight, even though he dies while asleep on duty. Through this description one particular quality of Hondscio is highlighted by Beowulf's eulogy, that is Hondscio's martial resolution even at the risk of his life, which is in sharp contrast to Æschere's alleged generosity as presented by Hrothgar.

Beowulf's willingness to project an ideal image of a warrior in Hondscio in terms of action, is more clearly suggested by the treatment of the name of Hondscio.
Grendel's **glof**, 'glove or pouch', made of 'dragon skins', **dracan fellum** (**Beo** 2088b), is semantically related to the name of his victim, **Hondscio**, which means 'hand shoe', a kenning for 'glove'. **Hondscio** occurs nowhere else in Old English, but occurs in Old and Middle High German and is related to or an equivalent of the modern German **Handschiuh**, 'glove'. But the play on words is even more complex, as Hondscio's name is omitted from the description of his death by the poet and is only mentioned in Beowulf's recollection of his death. Thus the question arises, why does the poet leave him unnamed in the first scene? With regard to this anonymity, Rosier supposes that 'the poet did not know or conceive of a name because he had no reason to give the Geat a particular identity'.

I cannot agree with this view that at the time of his description of Hondscio's death the poet did not have any reason to give the victim a name. By contrast, it is assumed the poet omitted the name of Hondscio deliberately in the first scene for a purpose. The poet, who is always conscious of two occasions which have the same context, tries to avoid a monotonous repetiton of the first instance by making the second different. The absence and presence of the name of Hondscio appears to be the result of the deliberately designed artistic form. However, the word-play on Hondscio and Grendel's **glof** is more complicated, as there seems no explicit thematic linkage between the two except for the symbolic interpretation.

It should also be remembered that Hondscio is a member of Beowulf's **handscalu** (**Beo** 1317a) meaning 'troop, band, companions'. In the choice of Hondscio and **handscalu** (/ -scolu), it is assumed that the poet aims at delivering more than the meanings of the compound prefixes. Over two occasions (**Beo** 1317a, 1963b) **hand** or

---

19 I would suggest that perhaps Grendel's dragon-skin glove is a portent of the Dragon's attack on the Geatish land.

hond is used to indicate a particular member or all the members of Beowulf's troop. The image of the hand in the name of Hondscio most appropriately fits the image of ideal prowess, which is determined by the action carried out by hands. With the same context, the hand in handscolu seems to be used to characterize a particular quality of its meaning 'troop, band'. The second element scolu, whose etymological origin is derived from Latin, is widely used in OS as skola meaning 'a band, troop', and in OHG scuola meaning 'schola', and in Icel. skóli 'a school'. However, in spite of the two different meanings being combined, most scholars gloss handscolu as meaning 'troop, band', ignoring the meaning of the first element hand. I do not believe that handscolu is inserted in order to fit alliterative metre as might be suggested in the following scene, in which Beowulf and his band walk through the hall to meet Hrothgar:

mid his handscale, —healwudu dynede —

(Beo 1317)

[with his small band of picked men the hall wood dinned]

This interpretation of 'band of picked men' or 'hand-picked band' keeping the meaning of hand is suggested by Garmonsway. I believe this sense of 'band of men picked by hand' is most appropriate when we consider how Beowulf's band is formed. Textual evidence supporting the sense of 'band of picked men' is found in the following scene, which describes Beowulf's choosing his troop for the overseas exploits in Denmark:

Hæfde se goda Geata leoda
cempan gecorone þara þe he cenoste
findan mihte;

[The hero had picked champions of the Geatish people, the bravest he could find]

This passage indicates clearly that Beowulf's band is specially chosen from the best warriors of the Geats. Taking into account this particular band of warriors, the poet might need a special term indicating Beowulf's troop, which is distinguished from other ordinary military groups. Hence handscolu is created as a word emphasizing the sense of 'carefully chosen by hand'. I suggest that the fact that Beowulf's band is chosen by 'hand' is found in the name Hondscio, a compound of 'hand' and 'shoe'. In addition, the value of Hondscio is demonstrated by Hrothgar's payment of a wergild to compensate for his death in the Danish cause. Sisam also sees Hondscio's position nearest to the hall-door as a 'post of honour for a bodyguard'.

This sense of 'carefully chosen by hand' is again emphasized by another hand-compound hondgesella referring to young Beowulf's band. Beowulf bids Hrothgar protect his close companions in case he loses his life before he goes down into the lake:

\[ Wes þu mundbora minum magoþegnum, \]

---


23 Sisam, The Structure of Beowulf, p. 47.
hondgesellum, gif mec hild nime;

(Beo 1480-1481)

[Be you a guardian of my retainers, my close comrades, if combat takes me off]

The closeness between Beowulf and his fellows is deeply embedded in the sense of hand-, and this extra semantic addition fits into this emotion-charged begging scene well. The emotion running beneath this scene gains more momentum by means of the characteristic use of variations. Both magogeornum, 'to retainers', and hondgesellum, 'to hand-picked comrades, close comrades' refer to Beowulf's band but their semantic value differs widely, as the latter serves to narrow down the general concept of retainers into a more specific concept which involves the literal sense of 'hand chosen, hand-picked', or possibly implying the close relationships between members of band who are 'within hands' reach' of each other. Thus the variations referring to the same military band appear to increase the depth of Beowulf's affection for his comrades the more he refers to his followers with the above words. This emotional intensity is clearly shown in this unique combination of hond- and gesella. If hondgesellum is not intended to emphasize the emotional side of this scene, then the other variation of the second element -gesella, 'companion, comrade' alone (of course within the context of metrical grammar) would be sufficient.

The same kind of emotional intensity is found again with reference to the same compound handgesteallan in the scene of the retreat of Beowulf's retainers:

Nealles him on heape handgesteallan,
æðelinga bearn ymbe gestodon
hildecystum, ac hy on holt bugon,

(Beo 2596-2598)

[But not at all did his hand-picked companions, sons of nobles, stand round him in a group in battle valour, but they fled to the wood]
In contrast to the emotional intensity of Beowulf's affection for his followers in the previous example, this scene centres on the intensity of emotion resulting from the cowardly deeds of Beowulf's band with reference to the same epithet handgesteallan. As in the previous example, here the first element hand- plays a key role in heightening the emotion with its literal sense of 'hand-picked or hand chosen'. Using æðelinga bearn, 'sons of nobles', which is another variation referring to Beowulf's followers, would fall short of maximizing the required feeling of betrayal. In this scene the theme of the breach of heroic duty comes to the foreground in connection with the feeling of abandonment on the chief's side. This feeling of betrayal or abandonment is more intensely revealed by the sense of 'hand-picked or hand-chosen followers' than 'sons of nobles'. The physical distance of those cowards from Beowulf, implied by means of the retreat into the forest, serves to increase the feeling of betrayal and abandonment. This physical distance is opposed to the spiritual closeness signified in handgesteallan, 'hand-chosen or hand-picked companions'. Above all, this symbolic contrast between the physical and spiritual is used to increase the intensity of emotion. In addition, this inner momentum of feeling is effectively expressed within the syntax, which contains the emphatic use of nealles. It should be pointed out that handgesteallan is more closely attached to nealles than æðelinga bearn. This is surely designed to heighten the emotion required as the poet's putting in nealles handgesteallan, 'not a whit hand-picked companions' (Beo 2596) first thus conveys the depth of the cowardly action.

As is demonstrated by the use of hondgesellum and handgesteallan, the poet is keenly aware of the close relationship between Beowulf and his band. The name Hondscioh, who is one of a handscolu, or hondgesellan, is probably created with
reference to these words. Greenfield argues that the various metonymic usage of 'hand', 'shoulder' and 'arm' frequently carry connotations of power and ability.  

In Beowulf there are several metonymous uses of the word hand in which the whole person is implied. As has been shown already in Hrothgar's eulogy for Æschere in lines 1343b-4, the implication of hand is that Æschere was famous for his generosity. The metaphorical usage in this passage, that is 'hand lies' instead of 'Æschere lies', denotes Æschere by a particular attribute: material generosity. The same metaphorical usage of hand is also applied to Beowulf's eulogy for Hondscio, in which the new image of an active warrior is appropriately transferred into the name of Hondscio. In turn, 'hand' in the name Hondscio also conjures up the image of active movement in the battlefield. In this context it is assumed that the presence or absence of the identity of the thane is skillfully manipulated by the poet, who is keenly aware of an artistic form used to fill the gap of narrative inconsistency.

This kind of metaphorical usage of 'hand' is also applied to the use of 'hand' referring to Beowulf and Grendel. As Leslie Whitbread observed, 'Æschere's hand is not a mere metonymy for his whole person, but is surely meant to remind us of the hand and arm of Grendel to which so much prominence has been given before 1343f. The quality or state of Grendel is often epitomized with the reference of 'hand' or 'arm'. The most prominent example of this metonymy is found in the mention of Grendel's hand left behind:

— he to healle geong,
  stod on stapole, geseah steapne hrof
  golde fahne ond Grendles hond —:

[he (Hrothgar) went to the hall, stood on the steps, looked on the lofty roof, adorned with gold, and Grendel's hand]

In this scene, Grendel's hand stuck on the high gable is not merely meant to evoke a strong visual image, but to denote the state of Grendel, who is now a loser in battle owing to the paralysis of his physical power. This implication of Grendel's defeat with reference to 'hand' is shown twice again when Beowulf speaks of his victory in front of Hrothgar and Hygelac:

\[
\text{hwæpere he his folme forlet}
\]
\[
to lifwrahte last weardian,
\]
\[
earm ond eaxle;
\]

[Yet he has left behind his hand, his arm and shoulder as life-pledge]

\[
\text{hwæpere him sio swiðre swaðe weardade}
\]
\[
\text{hand on Hiorte,}
\]

[yet his right hand remained behind at Heorot]

According to James L. Rosier, the use of 'hand' in Beowulf falls into three categories, of which the first is that 'the 'hands' are used literally to describe and emphasize the principal 'weapon' of Grendel and Beowulf, initially in the murder of thanes and then in the hand-to-hand combat. In accordance with this interpretation, Grendel's severed hand appears to reflect the inaction of Grendel. The function of 'weapon' with reference to 'hand' is not confined to Grendel's hand but also to Beowulf's hand, particularly with the sense of mundgrip, 'hand grip' (Beo 380b). From the early part of Beowulf onwards, Beowulf's physical power is measured by his hand grip, equal to

the strength of thirty men. This metonymic word *mundgrip* implies the strength of Beowulf and works as a source of his confidence in battle as well.

(c) The unexpected element of humour

There are several examples of humour in the poem, which will be discussed in this section. Two situations occur where the humour comes out of the poet's description. After Beowulf's victory over Grendel, Hrothgar's warriors praise Beowulf's great feat with superative in the form of litotes:

\[\text{Der wæs Beowulfes mærdæ mæned; monig oft gecwæd}\]
\[\text{þætte suð ne norð be sæm tweonum ofer eormengrund ðæðer næenig}\]
\[\text{under swegles begong selra nære rondhæbbendra, rices wyrdræ.}\]
\[\text{Ne hie huru winedrihten wiht ne logon, glædne Hroðgar, ac þæt wæs god cyning.}\]

*(Beo 856b-863)*

[Then Beowulf's triumph was proclaimed, many often said that no other man, south or north, between the seas, anywhere on this vast earth, was more excellent among shield-bearers under the expanse of heaven, or worthier of empire. Yet did they not at all decry their friend and lord, the gracious Hrothgar; he was a good king.]*
The humour in this passage comes from an image of youthful impulsiveness: of warriors who, having praised Beowulf superatively, then attempt to claim that this in no way denigrates their own king.28

A similar situation arises when Hygelac bestows land, hall and a high-seat upon Beowulf:

ond him gesæalde seofan þusendo,
bold ond bregostol. Him wæs bam samod
on ðam leodscipe lond gecynde,
eard eðelriht, ðærum swiðor
side rice þam ðær selra wæs.

(Beo 2195-2199)

[and gave him seven thousand (hides of land), a hall and high-seat. Both of them together had inherited land within that nation, the native right to hold the homeland, but a great kingdom belonged rather to the one who was higher in rank.]

In this case, it is the poet who emphasizes Beowulf's advancement whilst trying not to denigrate Hygelac. The poet's awareness of the importance of status is thus used with an apparently amusing effect.

Perhaps the earliest example of humour can be found in Beowulf's ironic use of words. Beowulf says to Hrothgar:

Na þu minne þearft
hafalan hydan, ac he me habban wile

---

28 According to John C. McGalliard, the phrase 'he (Hrothgar) was a good king' belongs to a formulaic verse with having a 'definitive emphasis'; here 'it rounds out the poet's assurance that the Danes' praise of Beowulf...entailed no disparagement of their king'. See McGalliard, 'The Poet's Comment in Beowulf', SP, 75 (1978), 244-70 (p. 244).
[You will have no need to cover my head in burial, if death seizes me. He with his mouth will carry my body to a bloody feast, intends to taste me, the lone-prowler will eat me unlamenting]

Since Beowulf would have been slain far from his own country, it would have been the duty of Hrothgar to provide a decent burial for Beowulf. With a touch of black humour, Beowulf describes how, if defeated by Grendel, his body would surely be devoured, thus saving Hrothgar the trouble of arranging a burial. A similar situation occurs again when Beowulf reports Æschere's death at the hands of Grendel's mother:

Nor could the people of the Danes, when morning had come, bum his body after death, nor lay the beloved man on the funeral pyre]

This statement echoes the grim humour of Beowulf's earlier comment concerning his own funeral.

In two instances, word-play on the names of Æschere and Hondscio provides an amusing irony from both Beowulf and the poet. Æschere, Hrothgar's chief warrior, is described by Hrothgar as having 'defended heads' (hafelan weredon) (Beo 1327a). One hundred lines later the poet tells how Æschere's decapitated head is found: syðdan Æscheres on ham holmclife hafelan metton, 'when they found Æschere's head upon the lake cliff' (Beo 1420b-21). It may be intended as ironic that Æschere should
lose that part of the body which he was praised for defending. It is possible that a similar amusing irony can be found in the fact that Hondscio, whose name means 'glove', is killed by Grendel, who has a glosf, 'glove' or 'bag', attached to his side. Soon after, Beowulf makes another word-play when he notes of Grendel that No ðy ær ut ða gen ðelhende, 'Not the sooner would he leave empty-handed' (Beo 2081), knowing that any spoils Grendel took, he would put in his bag. The metaphorical 'empty-handed' thus refers to actual empty glove, which Beowulf goes on to describe.

(d) Conclusion

This chapter has focused on Beowulf's emotional responses of sorrow, grief, affection and humour. The examination of these responses has centred on comparisons between the relationships of Hrothgar and Beowulf, Hygelac and Beowulf, Hrothgar and Æschere, and Beowulf and Hondscio. When Beowulf is about to leave Denmark, Hrothgar's extreme emotion contrasts with Beowulf's restraint. However, Beowulf's sign of emotion towards Hygelac at the end of his speech on his return to the Geatish land shows that Beowulf is capable of strong feeling. Hrothgar's great sorrow for the loss of Æschere also contrasts with Beowulf's relative coolness towards the death of Hondscio. Beowulf eschews emotion in this case and instead pays tribute to Hondscio, showing his respect for his deceased comrade as well as his keen perception of what is fitting for a formal public report on a warrior's death delivered to a king. His emotional sensitivity is also revealed in his delicate use of humour: in his reference to Grendel, in his apparent pun on Hondscio's name and in his darkly humorous comment on his own possible death. Beowulf thus manifests a variety of emotional responses, revealing the individualized traits whereby the poet builds his Beowulf-archetype into a character.
Thus far, Beowulf's character has been examined mainly through his own direct speeches in response to his interlocutors. No other part of the poem takes us closer to Beowulf's inner mind than the poet's comments on Beowulf's 'gloomy thoughts' in Beo 2332a and Beowulf's own subsequent reflections on his past life. An examination of Beowulf's inner mind will provide further insights into his character. In this chapter, I shall examine the cause of Beowulf's sense of guilt and his 'gloomy thoughts'. I believe the major cause of his guilt is his realization of his unfaithfulness to the heroic code of revenge. This interpretation will be supported by an examination of the sub-texts of revenge and kinship in the words of the poet and Beowulf. Beowulf's reflections lead him beyond the conventions of pre-Christian Germanic ethics that have governed his actions so far, to a greater consciousness of spirituality.

(a) The cause of Beowulf's 'gloomy thoughts'

The poet's more intimate account of Beowulf's state of mind comes after the Dragon's devastation of Geatland and immediately precedes the fight with the Dragon. This passage in which Beowulf's 'gloomy thoughts' are described and his subsequent reflections is crucial for revealing Beowulf's inner mind and his own assessment of his life.\(^1\) In a number of ways, this picture of Beowulf's mind is disturbing, mainly because of the pessimistic tone:

---

\(^1\) In this scene, Beowulf is seated, and as Hugh Magennis points out, sitting can
wende se wisa, þæt he Wealdende
ofe ealde riht ecean Dryhtne
bitre gebulge; breost innan weoll
þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs.

(Beo 2329-2332)

[the wise man supposed that he had bitterly angered the Ruler, the eternal Lord, contrary to the ancient law; within him his breast was troubled with gloomy (dark) thoughts, which was not customary for him]

The widely accepted interpretation of these lines, suggested by Klaeber, is that 'Beowulf did not yet know the real cause of the dragon's ravages'. Consistent with Klaeber's cautious approach to this passage, the poem makes no direct mention of Beowulf's breaking any such laws.

Many critics tend to regard the passage above as Beowulf's evidence of belief that some sin of his own may have brought on his tribe's catastrophe; in other words, that the Dragon is a punishment sent by God. Granting that Beowulf is a guilty man, John Gardner tries to set up a circle of cause and effect with reference to the death of Ongentheow, whom he regards as an innocent victim of Hygelac. According to the divine law of this poem, by which Ongentheow will be avenged, Gardner suggests that 'Beowulf dies, because when Ongentheow was murdered, he was there, fighting in the foremost'.

'reflect the emotional state of a character', and more particularly, sometimes 'the calm of solitary contemplation.' See Magennis, 'Monig oft gesæt: Some Images of Sitting in Old English Poetry', Neophil. 70 (1986), 442-52 (p. 450).

2 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 211.

However, this image of a 'tainted Beowulf' owing to his direct involvement in the death of Ongentheow is ruled out by the actual scene of Ongentheow's death, in which Beowulf appears not to have been present. The text here contradicts Gardner's reading of the scene as 'fighting in the foremost'. Beowulf says:

inha ic on morgne gefrægn mæg oðerne
billes ecgum on bonan stælan,
þær Ongenþeow Eofores niosað;
guðhelm toglad, gomela Scylfing
hreas [heor]þlac;

(Beo 2484-2488a)

Then, in the morning, as I have been told, one brother revenged himself on his kinsman's slayer with the edge of the sword when Ongentheow met Eofor; the war- helm split and the aged Scylfing Ongentheow fell, pale from the sword]

This passage, describing the death of Ongentheow, is narrated by Beowulf himself in the form of a recollection before he fights the Dragon at the end of the poem. Most important of all, it should not be forgotten that Beowulf knows of the death of Ongentheow through hearsay: this reason for his knowledge is clearly shown by 'in the morning, as I have been told'. This passage makes clear that Beowulf was not there when Ongentheow fell. The tendency to assume that Beowulf was present at the scene of the death of Ongentheow by showing that either he witnessed the scene, or he himself was directly involved in the battle with Ongentheow as part of Hygelac's army, is affected by the following passage a few lines on:

Næs him ænig þearf,
þæt he to Gifðum oððe to Gar-Denum

There was no need for him that he (Hygelac) should have to seek among the Giflhas or Spear-Danes, or in the Swedish realm, a less good warrior, to purchase him with treasure. I would go before him in the marching host, alone in the van.

As for ealde riht, in Beo 2330a, two possible assumptions can be made: either ealde riht is introduced for metrical reasons; or ealde riht is used to suggest textual or contextual meanings. Although scholars have been aware of the importance of ealde riht, their attempts to explain this phrase have not been rigorous. Both Klaeber and Wrenn take the same view of eald as BT (s.v. cæld), in its senses of 'old, ancient, time-honored, exalted, great, long-lasting, of noble antiquity'. When these base meanings of cæld are combined with riht ('what is right, law', accepted by Klaeber, Wrenn and BT), the denotative meaning of ealde riht can be surmised as a valuable morality, inherited from generation to generation, commonly accepted by the members of a given society as their ethical principle. Wrenn thus assumes the ealde riht may refer to 'Natural Law'.

This metaphorical interpretation seems to coincide with Klaeber's interpretation of a Christian meaning in this phrase. Though I do not exclude a symbolic dimension in the interpretation of the poem, it is difficult to see how 'Natural Law' fits the context. As regards the nature of ealde riht, I presume the poet was quite conscious of the social ethical background of the poem, that is, the code of the comitatus. In this respect, Charles Donahue is probably right to regard ealde riht as

---

5 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 211.
a law which requires the warrior to sacrifice all, even his life if necessary, for his lord, but which does not require the king to make such a sacrifice. However, Donahue believes that Beowulf had done nothing contrary to the ealde riht, with reference to Christian law. The warrior code suggested by Donahue and many other critics pervades the theme of Beowulf and seems to be the most suitable concept of the ealde riht. Yet in my view of the poem, Beowulf appears to breach the warrior code and feels some degree of guilt when he examines his conscience in keeping with the ealde riht, if this is understood as an ethical principle passed on from generation to generation in heroic pagan society. Hence the study of ealde riht and its relation to the heroic code is of great importance. A proper appreciation of the meaning of ealde riht may show how far Beowulf was faithful to this code.

(b) Formulaic expressions for the heroic code

Throughout the poem, as I shall now show, the moral precepts binding each member of heroic society are often presented with the formulaic use of swa sceal and swylce scolde. This use of sculan, meaning 'must', 'to be obliged to' is expressive of 'Ethical Obligations' or 'Categorical Imperatives', according to John C. McGalliard, and is introduced from the outset to establish a moral obligation. The poet moralizes on the

---


7 Donahue, 'Potlatch and Charity', pp. 32-3.

8 John C. McGalliard, 'The Poet's Comment in Beowulf', SP, 75 (1978), 244-70 (p.
ideal prince in contemplating the success of King 'Beowulf' the Dane. The ethical obligation begins with a characteristic *swa sceal*:

1. *Swa sceal* (geong g)uma gode gewyrcean,  
   fromum feohgiftum on fæder (bea)rme,  
   *(Beo 20-21)*  
   [So ought a young man to act with noble deeds, with liberal gifts in his father's care]

This passage lays out a moral obligation for a prince, who must practice virtue and generosity in youth so as to ensure later support. The same formulaic use of *swa sceal* is also found in the expression of ideal lordship. The queen Wealhtheow exhorts Hrothgar to be of good cheer and gracious to the Geats with gentle words:

2. bu on sælum wes,  
   goldwine gumena, ond to Geatum spræc  
   mildum wordum, *swa sceal* man don!  
   *(Beo 1170-1172)*  
   [Be you of joyful mood, gold-friend of men, and speak to the Geats with kindly words, as a man ought to do!]

A moral obligation which characterizes an ideal nobility is also presented with a similar formulaic usage:

3. *Swy(lc) scolde eorl wesan.*  
   [æþeling] ærgod, *swylc* Æschere wæs!  
   *(Beo 1328b-1329)*  
   [Æschere was such a man as a noble should be, a noble most excellent!]

246).
Again, when the sword fails Beowulf in his fight with Grendel's mother, he flings it aside and trusts to his mighty hand-grip. The poet generalizes Beowulf's heroic disposition with the same formula:

4.  þæt hit on eorðan læg,  
    stið ond stylecg; strenge getruwode,  
mundgripe mægenes. Swa sceal man don,  

(Beo 1532b-1534)  
[so that it lay on earth, strong and steely-edged; he trusted to his strength, the hand-grip of his might. So shall a man do]

The bond of kinship is emphasized when Beowulf hands over Hrothgar's gifts to his uncle Hygelac. This moral obligation of mutual loyalty is also expressed with the same formula:

5.  he him est geteah  
meara ond maðma, — Swa sceal mæg don,  
nealles inwitnet oðrum bregdon  
dyrnum cræfte, deað ren(ian)  
hondgesteallan.  

(Beo 2165b-2169a)  
[he gave him possession of the steeds and treasures. So should a kinsman do, and never weave a cunning snare for another, or contrive death for his bosom friend by secret craft]

The obligation of kinship is expounded when the poet generalizes from Wiglaf's effort to help Beowulf destroy the Dragon:

6.  ond hi hyne þa begen  abroten hæfdon,  
sibæðelingas; swylc sceolde secg wesan,  
þegn æt ðearfe!  

(Beo 2707-2709a)
[and they then both, the kindred nobles, had destroyed him, so should a man be, a thane in time of need!]

However, ethical judgments are sometimes rendered in negative terms as is observed by McGalliard in the case of Modpytho's ruthless treatment of her courtiers, who displeased her and henceforth were treacherously killed:9

7. Ne bid swylc cwenlic þeaw  
idese to efnanne, þeah þe hio ænlicu sy,  
þætte freðuwebbe feores onsæce  
æfter ligetorne leofne mannan.  

(Beo 1940b-1943)

[This is no queenly custom for a woman to practise, peerless though she may be, that a peace-weaver should deprive the life of a valued liegeman, because of a fancied wrong]

In addition, weapons can be personified to embody a moral judgement, with the same formula, swa sceolde, plus a negative:

8. guðbill geswac  
nacod æt niðe, swa hyt no sceolde,  
iren ærgod.—  

(Beo 2584b-2586a)

[the war-blade failed, the naked weapon in the fight, as it should never have done, the iron proven excellent]

In this way, the formula swa sceal is used with great emphasis to indicate a moral obligation commonly accepted in heroic society.

Coming back to the nature of calde riht, 'something valuable which deserves to be inherited from generation to generation as a moral principle', all the 'ethical

obligations' introduced with the characteristic formula *swa sceal* appear to be well absorbed into the nature of *ealde riht*. Hence the contents of *swa sceal* sentences expounding ethical obligations may be to a large extent equated with the nature of *ealde riht*, 'ancient law', in *Beowulf*. Also, considering the poem's heroic pagan background, it is reasonable to infer that *ealde riht* has something to do with the *comitatus*.

Throughout the poem, Beowulf seems not to be presented as a breaker of old law or of the code of heroic society or ethical obligations set out by the *swa sceal* syntax. However, readers are confronted with contradicting accounts in which Beowulf is said to violate a certain law, *ofer ealde riht* (*BEO 2330a*). Thus the question arises as to whether or not Beowulf was faithful to the ethical obligations enforced by heroic society. Among other ethical obligations, the ideal bond of kinship works as a vital force to maintain the heroic society. Kinship is emphasized with the *swa sceal* formula, as seen in examples of 5 and 6, in which both Beowulf and Wiglaf's exemplary deeds towards their lords are shown. Within the poem kinship and its obligations are treated almost as a maxim by the poet, who praises Wiglaf's loyalty to Beowulf with the following words:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{sibb' æfre ne mæg} \\
\text{wiht onwendan } \text{þam } \text{ðe wel } \text{þenceð.}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
(BEO 2600b-2601)
\]

[nothing can ever set aside the bonds of kinship, for a man who thinks rightly]

The kinship between Beowulf and Wiglaf is here implied, and Wiglaf's subsequent actions towards Beowulf illustrate the poet's maxim. In this respect, it is not easy to explain Beowulf's deeds towards his Lord Hygelac. As Brodeur rightly observed,
Hygelac is the central figure in Beowulf's actions and thinking both in part one and part two.10

As regards ethical obligations, this time loyalty to one's lord, some doubt may arise if we follow the poet's accounts in which Beowulf alone escapes the battle against the Frisians by swimming away whilst ignoring the death of his Lord Hygelac at the hands of the enemy:

ponan Biowulf com
sylfes cæfte, sundnytte dreah;
haefde him on earme (ana) þritig
hildegeatwa, þa he to holme (st)ag.

(Beo 2359b-2362)

[Thence Beowulf got away by his own strength, used his power of swimming—alone he had on his arm thirty battle-dresses, when he plunged in the sea]

This escape scene leads some critics to believe that Beowulf was not wholly faithful to the code of the comitatus — the principle of revenge — when they ask how Beowulf manages to preserve his honour while fleeing the scene of his lord's death in battle. Tacitus's account of a lord-retainer relationship in Agricola and Germania (A. D 98) is crucial to this argument:

And to leave a battle alive after their chief has fallen means lifelong infamy and shame. To defend and protect him, and to let him get the credit for their own acts of heroism, are the most solemn obligations of their allegiance.11


Many of these points are exemplified in Beowulf. Wiglaf sharply rebukes Beowulf's followers for retreating and not aiding their lord:

Deað bið sella
corla gehwylcum þonne edwitlif!

(Beo 2890b-2891)

[Better is death to every one of noble birth than an inglorious life!]

Thus both Tacitus and Wiglaf commonly praise loyalty even unto death in battle. A similar ethic of revenge is found in young Beowulf, when he resolves to take action to avenge the loss of Æschere on behalf of adopted Lord Hrothgar:

Ne sorga, snotor guma! Selre bið æghwæm,
þæt he his freond wrece, þonne he fela murne.

(Beo 1384-1385)

[sorrow not, wise man. Better is it for each one of us that he should avenge his friend, than greatly mourn]

At this point Beowulf makes his adherence to the revenge ethic clear. This manifesto is immediately proved by quick action. As Martin Camargo suggests, Beowulf is not required to risk his life because Æschere is not regarded as his lord; thus the code of allegiance between Beowulf and Æschere does not apply. It remains controversial as to whether Beowulf is obliged to avenge Æschere, for one of two possible reasons: the first is that, as Beowulf killed Grendel, he is responsible for Grendel's mother's ensuing murder of Æschere; the second is that the newly established lord-thane relationship between Beowulf and Hrothgar obliges Beowulf to avenge Hrothgar's loss. Whether or not either of these analyses is correct, Beowulf promptly acts to accomplish the revenge of which he alone is capable.

This prompt action at the risk of his life stands in sharp contrast with his later escape from the scene of his lord Hygelac's death. Charles Moorman suggests that 'we should have expected Beowulf to have died at Hygelac's side, and it may well be that his flight is the violation of an ealde riht of the comites which he recalls and laments at the end of his life'.\(^\text{13}\) Beowulf's breach of the revenge ethic would not be completely unforgivable, because he later repays Dæghrefn for the death of Hygelac. But it must be accepted that Beowulf's escape goes against our expectation that he should die at Hygelac's side and against the strict heroic code. Nobody can be sure of his faithfulness to the code of revenge.

Most of all, the scene of Beowulf's flight by swimming appears to be in sharp contrast to Beowulf's own proclamation on his faithful service towards Hygelac:

\begin{verbatim}
symle ic him on feðan beforan wolde, ana on orde, ond swa to aldre sceall sæcce fremman, þenden þis sweord þolað,
\end{verbatim}

\textit{(Beo 2497-2499)}

[I would always go before him in the marching host, alone in the front, while life lasts, I shall do battle, as long as this sword endures]

Without any hint of doubt, Beowulf's own statement here perfectly fits the code of the comitatus, in which he is supposed to die at the side of his lord as a result of his heroic resolution to fight 'while life lasts'. However, this statement, which Klaeber regards as of 'true heroic note', seems to lose its credibility when confronted with Beowulf's flight scene.\(^\text{14}\) However, it should be borne in mind that this seeming inconsistency results from the confrontation of the poet's description and Beowulf's statement. In

---


many cases Beowulf's emotions are hidden, so we are to a large extent obliged to rely
on the poet's perception of Beowulf's inner mind. Such is the case of the poet's
comment on Beowulf's so-called *beostrum geboncum*, 'gloomy thoughts', in Beo
2332a with reference to *ealde riht*. The poet's statement on Beowulf's flight may be
regarded as a token of unfaithfulness to the heroic code in the light of Beowulf's
strong verbal commitment shown above.

Let us see how the poet treats Beowulf's flight from Frisia. This is how he
responds to Beowulf's escape by swimming from the battle in which Hygelac is slain:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{Bonan Biowulf com} \\
& \text{sylfes cæfte, sundnytte dreah;} \\
& \text{hæfde him on earme (ana) Pritig} \\
& \text{hildegetwa, } \text{ha he to holme (st)ag.} \\
& \text{Nealles Hetware } \text{hremge } \text{þorft on} \\
& \text{feðewiges, } \text{he him foran ongean} \\
& \text{linde bæron; lyt eft becwom} \\
& \text{fram } \text{þam hildfreca hames niosan!} \\
& \text{Oferswam } \text{da sioleða bigong sunu Ecgðeowes,} \\
& \text{earm anhaga eft to leodum;}
\end{align*}
\]

(\textit{Beo} 2359b-2368)

[Thence Beowulf had got away by his own strength, using his power of swimming-
alone, he had on his arm thirty battle-dresses, when he plunged in the sea. No need
had the Hetware to be exultant about their fight on foot, when they carried their linden
shields forward against him; very few escaped with their lives from that daring
warrior, to seek their own homes. Thus the son of Ecgtheow swam back to his people
over the sea's expanse, a wretched solitary wanderer]
Here, in the first half of this passage, Beowulf is shown to have extraordinary swimming skill, and he is praised for his proficiency in swimming. Also, the poet comments on Beowulf's successful defence against his enemies: Nealles Hetware bremge borf(t)on feðewiges, be him foran ongean linde baeron, 'The Hetware, who, bearing their shields, went forth against him, had no cause to boast about their fight on foot' (Beo 2363-65a). So far the poet's attention is solely focused on Beowulf's defence against his enemies as he fights his way through them towards the sea. But it should not be forgotten that this scene of defence has nothing to do with the defence of his lord, but is an effort to avoid the loss of his own life.

However, in the last two lines 2367-68, the poet's response to Beowulf's escape changes drastically as he calls Beowulf, who swam across the sea, earm anhaga, 'a wretched solitary wanderer' (Beo 2368a). Beowulf is here characterized with a formulaic phrase from exile poetry such as in Wan 1 and 40. His lord is dead, and he is alone on the sea, far from home. However, there is a clear difference in the image of the 'lonely wanderer' between the exile poetry and this scene in Beowulf. Since, in exile poetry, the heroic code of allegiance is not a prime factor in the image of the 'lonely wanderer', the ethic of revenge does not come to the foreground.

Conversely, the image of a 'lonely wanderer' in the scene of Beowulf's escape is evoked immediately after the death of Hygelac, who is associated with Beowulf in terms of allegiance; Beowulf is thus bound to the ethical obligation revenge. In this context the image of a 'lonely wanderer' in this scene from Beowulf should be understood differently. It is more likely that by emphasizing an-, 'alone', the poet, who

15 Beowulf, ed. Klaeber, p. 211.
is always aware of the contextual background, tries to deliver something more than an elegiac lament. As Howell D. Chickering remarks, 'the singular an rings out all through this part of the poem not only to sound the elegiac note but also to define Beowulf as the exceptional man. The hero, by nature, is set apart from other men. Beowulf is also something more: he is the last hero'.

Chickering seems right in this definition of Beowulf. Yet, his view appears to be solely based on the positive senses of an, as is demonstrated in the following cases.

Before Hrothgar, Beowulf declares that he alone will decide the feud with Grendel:

1. ond nu wið Grendel sceal,
   wið þam aglæcan ana gehegan
   ðing wið þyrse.

   (Beo 424b-426a)

   [And now I will decide the matter alone against the monster, the giant, Grendel]

In the poet's comment on the God's intervention Beowulf's martial credential is also praised with reference to an:

2. þæt hie feond heora
   þurh anes cæfet ealle ofercomon,
   selfes mihtum.

   (Beo 698b-700a)

   [so that they should all overcome their enemy through the power of one man, through his own strength]

Again, Beowulf is singled out by his vigilance and readiness before the battle with reference to an:

3. Sceotend swæfon,

pa þæt hornreced  healdan scoldon,
ealle buton anum.

(Beo 703b-705a)

[The sharp shooters who had to guard the gabled hall slept, all except one]

With an, a hero's glorious adventure is emphatically described as is seen in the episode of Sigemund's dragon killing:

4. he under harne stan,
æþelinges bearn  ana geneðde
frecne dæde,  ne wæs him Fitela mid;

(Beo 887b-889)

[Under the grey rock, he, son of a prince, ventured the perilous deed alone, Fitela was not with him]

This positive sense of an occurs again as Hrothgar appeals to Beowulf for help against the attack of Grendel's mother:

5. Nu is se ræd gelang
eft æt þe anum.

(Beo 1376b-1377a)

[Now the remedy belongs to you again alone]

At the dragon's attack Beowulf declares that this heroic venture is 'his alone':

6. Nis þæt eower sið,
ne gemet mannes, nefn(e) min anes,

(Beo 2532b-2533)

[that is not your affair, nor is it in any man's power save mine alone]

Beowulf recalls proudly his past service for Hroðgar in the battle:

7. symle ic him on feðan  beforan wolde,
an on orde,

(Beo 2497-2498a)
[I always would go before him in troop, alone in the vanguard]

Probably as a result of the use of an in the above examples, nobody appears to question the semantic value of an as being solely invested to evoke a strong positive feeling for the hero's uniqueness.

However, it should not be overlooked that the poet applies the word an to the unfavourable situations, in which senses of loneliness, separation, dejection, helplessness, sadness and sorrow are attached to an. Soon after the beginning of the poem the poet tells of the arrival of Scyld, the legendary Danish king who had been put out to sea alone as a helpless foundling:

8. þe hine æt frumsceafte forô onsendon
   ænne ofer yðe umborwesende.
   (Beo 45-46)

[who, at the outset, sent him(Scyld) forth over the sea alone as an infant-being]

Here the feeling of powerlessness and helplessness are evoked by the formulaic use of an. Again, the most dramatic image of alienation from the human world of joy is conceived in the description of King Heremod of the Danes, a cruel and ungenerous tyrant:

9.       op þæt he ana hwearf,
   mære þeoden mondreamum from,
   (Beo 1714b-1715)

[u]ntil he, the famous prince, turned aside alone from the joys of mankind]

Among other scenes, the sense of complete loneliness is conveyed effectively in the form of an elegy sung by the last survivor:

10. Swa giomormod giohôo mænde
      an æafter eallum, unblïðe hwe(raf)
      dæges ond nihtes,
      (Beo 2267-2269a)
[Thus with sad heart he mourned his troubles, alone in memory of them all, and sorrowfully paced about by day and night]

This sense of solitary sadness is found again in Beowulf's description of Hrethel's state of mind (with almost the same syntactical pattern):

11. Gewiteð þonne on sealman, sorhleoð gæleð
    an æfter anum;

(Beo 2460-2461a)

[So he goes to his chamber and sings a sorrowful lay alone in memory of one man]

Wiglaf's use of an also seems negative:

12. Oft sceall eorl monig anes willan
    wræc adreogan, swa us geworden is.

(Beo 3077-3078)

[Many an earl must often endure anguish through the will of one man, as it has happened to us]

So far, we have seen how in examples 8 to 12 an is used quite differently from examples 1 to 7.

Returning to the use of an- in earm anhaga, 'wretched solitary one' (Beo 2368a), in the scene where Beowulf escapes by means of his swimming skill, the context leads the audience to conclude that this application of an belongs to the second group of the formulaic use of an. Unlike the previous passage, in which Beowulf's swimming skill with thirty mail-coats in his arms is presented in eulogy, the poet apparently tries to project a different image of a figure swimming in the sea as he adds the sense of 'wretched' to the meaning of 'solitary one'. As the metre shows, in earm anhaga eft to leodum (Beo 2368) earm alliterates with eft with an alliterative emphasis that is apparently designed to increase the semantic function. Thus earm, 'wretched', is more clearly defined as the quality of the state of the 'solitary one'.

236
Anhaga appears nowhere else in Beowulf except for line 2368a. In the poem here an image of loneliness and separation is conceived by the use of an, in keeping with the second group of the use of an examples from 8 to 11. This intense image of loneliness suddenly produces a sense of negative feelings of dejection, distress, misery and sadness when anhaga is incorporated with earm. In this combination, earm is probably used to define Beowulf's inner state of mind. The state of a lonely swimmer, Beowulf, whose moral principle is firmly rooted in his now failed duty to avenge the death of his lord, is fittingly reflected in earm. In this context Beowulf's wretchedness is quite different from the other occasion in the Breca episode, which shares the same word earm:

ne on egstreamum earmran mannon;

(Beo 577)

[nor of a man more wretched in the ocean streams]

Unlike the description of spiritual affliction in line 2368a, the state of earm here is said to be caused by the attacks from the sea monsters; thus physical affliction is emphasized. This state of wretchedness related to physical agony occurs again in the episode of the battle of Ravenswood, where the Geats are at risk from the threatening attacks by the Swedes, led by the king Ongentheow:

wean oft gehet
earmre teohhe ondlonge niht,

(Beo 2937b-2938)

[all night long he(Ongentheow) often vowed to the wretched band]

The semantic value of earm in Beo 2368a is dependent on the context. Compared to the reason for earm in 2368a, Beowulf is neither attacked by the sea monsters nor threatened by his enemy any more because he is in the sea. As the poet said that Beowulf had already cut through the enemy, earm is used differently to focus on his
spiritual state — the shame caused by his failure to share the death of his lord, thus breaking the principle of allegiance:

If Beowulf's escape scene in Beo 2367-8 is intended by the poet to evoke an image of the extraordinary skill of ancient Germanic tribes in swimming, then the semantic value of earm is incompatible with the context, in which earm is characterized by its sense of spiritual rather than physical affliction. I think that the poet, however, who is well aware of the poem's pagan background of the ethic of revenge, intends to convey the sense of guilt pressing on Beowulf's mind through the use of earm, 'wretched', denoting a spiritual crisis resulting from his failure to die with his lord. In this context the sense of earm is regarded as the verbal confirmation of the poet's perception of Beowulf's consciousness.

F. C. Robinson believes that oferswam in line 2367a means simply 'crossed' without indicating how the crossing was made, and so it need not be supposed that Beowulf performed the extraordinary feat of swimming. I believe Robinson's interpretation on oferswam is appropriate in this context, as the importance of this passage is not Beowulf's supposed feat but the fact of his escape. See Robinson, 'Elements of the Marvellous in the Characterization of Beowulf: a Reconsideration of the Textual Evidence', in Old English Studies in Honour of John C. Pope, ed. Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irving, Jr. (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto, 1974), pp. 119-37 (pp. 125-26).

There are certain parallels between Beowulf and Wan. Ralph W. V. Elliott argues that the speaker in Wan was forced into exile because of the humiliation of failing to carry out a boast to fight for his lord until death. The speaker then carries his guilt in secret. Beowulf also failed to defend his lord until death and although he did not become an exile, the description of his escape from the scene of his lord's death evokes the image of the exile through the use of the words earm anhaga.
With the same context the phrase *ofor ealde riht*, 'against the ancient law' (*Beo* 2330a), may be regarded as the poet's verbal confirmation of Beowulf's spiritual conflict, which is possibly motivated by breaking a code inherited within heroic society (*ealde riht*). By listing a number of *swa sceal* formulae, I have tried to establish the variety of ethical obligations that can be included in *ealde riht*. The code of kinship and the ethic of allegiance are major components of the *swa sceal* formula, as may be seen in the case of Beowulf and Wiglaf:

> *ond hi hyne ba begen abroten hæfdon, sibæôelingas; swylc sceolde secg wesan, ðeg æt ðearfe. 'and they then both, the kindred nobles, had destroyed him, so should a man be, a thane in time of need!'*  

(*Beo* 2707-2709a). The premise in this argument is that the ethical obligation of allegiance is founded on the act of revenge.

Charles Moorman's view, in which Beowulf is supposed to violate an *ealde riht* of the heroic society as he takes flight instead of dying at the side of his lord Hygelac, is probably evidence that a vengeance ethic is not incompatible with the sense of *ealde riht*. This compatibility can be drawn from the poem's unique development of the structure in which the motif of revenge works as a central force in each episode and serves as a nexus connecting all the episodes by one theme, from the poet's description of Beowulf's unwonted dejection at the attack from the Dragon (starting from line 2327b), to Beowulf's farewell speech to his followers (ending at line 2537).

*The Wanderer's shame is paralleled by Beowulf's guilt. See Elliott, 'The Wanderer's Conscience', ES, 39 (1958), 193-200 (p. 194).*
The motif of vengeance occurs six times within the structure of lines 2327b-2537. The first and the sixth vengeance motifs are the same: Beowulf's resolution to take revenge on the Dragon. This positioning of motifs might be called an envelope pattern, in which the end reiterates the beginning, but this time in Beowulf's own words rather than the poet's.

The poet's description of Beowulf's resolution to take revenge on the Dragon, follows on immediately from the picture of Beowulf's dejection (the first motif of vengeance) and exactly coincides with the sixth motif of vengeance at the end of this verse sequence in which Beowulf announces his intention to go forth to avenge the damage done by the Dragon. The only difference between the first and sixth occurrences of this motif is the speaker of the intention: the first is the poet and the second is Beowulf himself.

With regard to the main six motifs of vengeance in this sequence, I shall present the first three; then elaborate on the third motif in a long digression; then present the final three motifs. The first motif occurs in Beo 2327b-2354a: only a few lines after the description of Beowulf's dejection and the mention of ealde riht, the poet reveals Beowulf's determination to fight the dragon single-handed:

him ðæs guðkyning,

Wedera þioden  wræce lærnode.

(Beo 2335b-2336)

[For that the warlike king, the Geats' prince, contrived to take revenge on him]

This determination of vengeance is quite significant because Beowulf's new resolution to fulfill the act of vengeance (effect) can be regarded as an action to compensate for his alleged transgression ofer ealde riht (cause). This cause and effect in relation to ealde riht and the act of revenge continues in the second motif of vengeance.
The second motif occurs in Beo 2354b-2379a: this part deals with the death of Hygelac and Beowulf's escape by swimming from the battle. The relationship between the ethical obligation of revenge and ealde riht has already been discussed with reference to earm anhaga, 'wretched solitary wanderer'. Here again the symbolic image of earm anhaga implies Beowulf's inner mental affliction resulting from his alleged act of breaking the ancient law, ealde riht.

The third motif occurs in Beo 2379b-2396: this section, the first of the two Swedish wars, is part of a series of flashbacks concerning the turbulent events that lead to Beowulf's succession. Beowulf protects Heardred, who is later killed by Onela of Sweden. Heardred had given protection to Ohthere's sons, Eanmund and Eadgils, who fought their uncle Onela. Onela kills Heardred in revenge and Beowulf is left to rule the Geats. Later Beowulf avenges Heardred's death by helping Eadgils to kill Onela. In this short description of the event, two kinds of vengeance occur. One is Beowulf's vengeance on Onela for the death of Heardred and the other is Eadgils' vengeance on Onela for his brother Eanmund. This time, the internal affairs of another nation comes to the foreground of the story. However, as in the case of Hygelac's death and its importance in the strict ethical law of revenge, Beowulf's delayed vengeance on Onela for the death of his lord Heardred throws serious doubt on his adherence to pagan ethics. As Moorman rightly points out, Beowulf's retreat from Hygelac's battle 'makes a subtle but quite definite allusion to another failure in

20 For further discussion of Beowulf's involvement in the Swedish wars see Richard North, 'Saxo and the Swedish Wars in Beowulf', in Saxo Grammaticus: Tra Storiografia e Letteratura, ed. Carlo Santini (Rome: il Calamo, 1992), pp.175-88 (pp.184-87)
substitution, that of Beowulf for Heardred.\textsuperscript{21} This delay of vengeance is clearly evinced by the text itself:

\begin{quote}
Se ðæs leodhryres lean gemunde
uferan dogrum,
\end{quote}

\textit{(Beo 2391-2392a)}

[In later days he (Beowulf) remembered (thought of) revenge for his chief's (Heardred's) fall]

W. W. Lawrence raised a question in this context by suggesting that 'a hero of Beowulf's prowess and spirit might be expected to take an earlier and more direct revenge for the death of Heardred, since this was one of the most binding duties that lay upon the Germanic warrior.\textsuperscript{22} However, the text shows that there are several points to be resolved prior to the direct application of the revenge ethic in this case of Heardred's death. The first is the consideration of tribal relationships existing between Beowulf and Onela, and Beowulf and Wiglaf, and Onela and Wiglaf's father Weohstan. At the end of the poem Beowulf appears to adopt Wiglaf as his heir and gives him the responsibility of attending to the people's needs henceforth. Wiglaf is a Wægmunding, apparently a kinsman of Beowulf and the prince of the Scylfingas and son of Weohstan. Beowulf, Wiglaf and Weohstan appear to be of the Wægmundings (possibly originally Swedish), a tribe that probably originates in the border land between the Geats and Swedes and is bound to pay homage to one of its neighbours. It was a common thing for a warrior to seek service under a foreign prince. Examples of such foreign service are easily found in Beowulf: the hero himself was, for a time,

\textsuperscript{21} Moorman, 'The Essential Paganism of Beowulf', 16.

\textsuperscript{22} Though Lawrence is here discussing Tacitus' \textit{Germania}, the point is clearly relevant to Beowulf. See W. W. Lawrence, \textit{Beowulf and Epic Tradition} (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930), p. 102.
Hrothgar's 'man'; his father, Ecgtheow, took allegiance to Hrothgar at one point in his career; Wulfgar, though in the Danish court, is a prince of the Vandals. In times of continual warfare, such additions to the military efficiency of a tribe were sure to be welcomed and any stranger of proved bravery was given a cordial reception. Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow, was attached to the Geatish royal house when he married Hrethel's daughter (Hygelac's sister), so that Beowulf was half-Wægmunding (on his father's side), half-Geat (on his mother's side). Weohstan must have chosen the Wægmunding side and been well considered in the Swedish court. Even at Beowulf's death Wiglaf is called a Scylding, i.e. a Swede: prince leod Scyldinga (Beo 2603b). Weohstan helps Onela of Sweden in his punitive raid against his nephews Eadgils and Eanmund, whom Heardred and the Geats support. Weohstan even kills Eanmund and is rewarded without hesitation by Onela. In spite of Beowulf's active support of Eadgils, however, Weohstan appears to have been well received by Beowulf, probably because of their common origins. Wiglaf calls to mind what Beowulf has bestowed on him:

wicstede weligne Wægmundinga,
folcrihta gehwylc, swa his fæder ahte:

(Beo 2607-2608)

[the wealthy home-land of Wægmundings, and all power over the people, just as his father had it]

Onela has given Weohstan his nephew Eanmund's armour, and this passes to Wiglaf on Weohstan's death. From this context it can be fairly deduced that the relationship between the Wægmundings and the Swedes is favourable when Eanmund and Eadgils rise up against Onela, and during their subsequent refuge in Geatland. This favourable

---

23 For more detailed social bonds in which Beowulf is involved see R. T. Farrell, 'Beowulf, Swedes and Geats', Saga-Book, 18 (1972), 225-86 (pp. 237-56).
relationship between Beowulf (the Wægmunding) and Onela (the Swede) appears to be confirmed by this much discussed, controversial passage:

syððan Heardred læg,

let ðone bregostol Biowulf healdan,

Geatum wealdan; þæt was god cyning.

(Beo 2388b-2390)

[when Heardred lay dead, (Onela) let Beowulf hold the princely throne and rule the Geats—a fine king was he]

This text may state that, after Heardred's death, Onela departs for Sweden and allows (let) Beowulf to hold the Geatish throne.

However, there are two possible interpretations of the meaning of leð in this passage. The first interprets leð to mean that Onela directly appointed Beowulf as king of the Geats. The second pays more attention to the context of the situation. In this case Onela's departure for his country after killing King Heardred leaves a power vacuum, which Beowulf fills. On the evidence of this reading, leð means 'caused' (another meaning of leð, according to BT) and Beowulf becomes king as an indirect result of Onela's departure. In this context Onela is no more than one contribution to the cause of Beowulf's succession to the Geatish throne. Moorman suspects that god cyning in line 2390b refers to Onela, whose attitude towards Beowulf is here praised.\(^\text{24}\) Moorman argues that if this short eulogy is truly directed to Onela, then Beowulf's later action against Onela is inexcusable, because his action is regarded as betraying his benefactor for the sake of revenge.\(^\text{25}\) With regard to the conflict over the

\(^{24}\) Moorman, 'The Essential Paganism of Beowulf', 16. Farrell also believes that god cyning in line 2390b refers to Onela, not to Beowulf. See Farrell, Saga-Book, p. 235.

\(^{25}\) Moorman, 'The Essential Paganism of Beowulf', 16.
choice between the two contradictory moral values, Beowulf in connection with his delayed avenging of the death of Heardred, appears to have something in common with both Hengest and Ingeld. If god cyning at line 2390b refers to Onela and let is interpreted literally, then it might be assumed that there is a certain kind of peace-treaty between Beowulf and Onela, allowing Beowulf to be king of the Geats after slaying Heardred. Unfortunately, the text does not say anything about the presumed agony of Beowulf, torn between Onela's excessive favouritism and his duty to avenge Heardred. The evidence for the interpretation of Beowulf's alleged conflict is drawn from the passage already cited: Se ðæs leodhryres lean gemunde uferan dogrum, 'In later days he (Beowulf) remembered (thought of) revenge for the chief's (Heardred's) fall' (Beo 2391-2392a). Farrell rightly points out that this passage suggests that Beowulf 'felt it necessary to take appropriate action in revenging his lord'. This passage clearly states that the relationship between Beowulf and his once favourite foreign partner ended up in bloodshed, as Beowulf eventually resorts to the revenge ethic. In addition, the mental agony between two opposing moral values can be more convincingly traced in the phrase uferan dogrum, 'in later days' (Beo 2392b). I do not think this phrase means that Beowulf has forgotten the killing of Heardred by Onela completely and delays the ethic of revenge until 'later days'. On the contrary, 'in later days' appears to bring about the image of prolonged mental conflict haunting Beowulf. It may be assumed that the lapse of time and the mental agony of the choice between two moral values combine to leave a traumatic experience on Beowulf's subsequent life. An image of hesitation and mental conflict is presented implicitly in the cases of Beowulf's dealing with the deaths of Hygelac and Heardred. Such a conflict over two contradicting ethical obligations may be grasped in the episode of Finn (Beo 1071-1159a), of which I shall give a brief reconstruction.

Finn, king of the Frisians and son of Folcwald, marries Hildeburh, sister of Hnæf, a Scylding chieftain. Hnæf is staying with his sister Hildeburh when a quarrel arises and Hnæf is slain in a night attack on the hall in which he and his followers are lodging. A son of Hildeburh is also slain. After a quarrel there is a peace treaty between the Frisians and the Danes. Hengest (a Jute), who may have been Hnæf's chief man among his followers is allowed to remain in Frisia and be treated by Finn on equal terms with his own subjects. Hengest, however, broods over the past, and plans revenge after the winter is over, being incited thereto by Hunlafing, the 'son of Hunlaf'. In the spring Hengest takes revenge, Finn is killed in his own castle, and Queen Hildeburh is taken back to Denmark.

In this episode Hengest is seen as a man hesitating, torn between his oath of loyalty to Finn and his duty to avenge Hnæf or Finn's Jutes. According to Shippey, Hengest is regarded as a 'man in the middle', torn between the impulse to act and the restraint that comes from an awareness of results, continually looking back to the past and forward to the future, wondering how, in the present, he can alter the chain of events.\(^{27}\) Richard North argues that Hengest, a relative of Jutes on the Frisian side, has no overriding duty to avenge his Danish leader Hnæf: Hengest plans to avenge himself on Finn's Jutes, who in leading the Frisian attack, betrayed the pledges of their own tribal loyalty.\(^{28}\)

The weather scene, occurring just before Hengest's resolution of vengeance (probably for Hnæf on Finn's Jutes), is intended by the poet to symbolize Hengest's dilemma:


\(^{28}\) Richard North, 'Tribal Loyalties in the Finnsburh Fragment and Episode', *LSE*, n.s. 21 (1990), 13-43 (pp. 14-15).
Hengest ða gyt
wælfagne winter wunode mid Finne
[ea]l unhitme; eard gemunde,
beah þe ne [MS: he] meahte on mere drifan
hringedstefhan,— holm storme weol,
won wið winde, winter þe beleac
isgebinde, ³ð ðæt ðæter com
gear in geardas,— swa nu gyt deð,

(Beo 1127b-1134)

[Yet Hengest still dwelt with Finn throughout that slaughter-stained winter, very unhappily; his native land was in his thoughts, although he could not put out to sea in his ship with the curling prow. The ocean heaved with the storm, contended with the wind; winter had locked the waves in its icy bonds, until the next year came to the dwellings of men, as it still does now]

Here the wintry sea, characterized by the violent movement of stormy wind, serves to represent in a most effective way the image of Hengest's mental conflict. Also, the strong image of stasis evoked by the visual description of the wintry ocean frozen by the 'icy bonds', shows Hengest's dilemma, in which he is described as a victim of circumstance against his will, daring not to take any action until a favourable time.

With regard to the subject of the delay of revenge, which works as a crucial factor in the hero's mental agony, there exists a syntactical, semantic parallel between Beowulf and Hengest. This can be found between uferan doegrum, 'in later days' (Beo 2392a) in the scene of Beowulf's later resolution of vengeance of Heardred's death, and the formulaic expression oð ðæt, 'until' (Beo 1133b), in the winter scene above. As noted above, uferan doegrum shows that Beowulf has hesitated to avenge the death of Heardred until 'later days'. This contextual meaning of uferan doegrum coincides
with that of *ôæt*, in which Hengest's hesitation and the delay of revenge is explicitly stated.

This kind of syntactical and semantic parallelism goes further in these two cases of delayed revenge. As quoted already, Beowulf's later decision to avenge the death of Heardred is clearly suggested in the passage 'in later days he (Beowulf) thought of (remembered) revenge for his chief's (Heardred's) fall'. In particular, the sense of *gemunde*, 'remembered, thought of', echoes again in the description of Hengest's strong inclination towards the duty of revenge:

```
fundode wrecce,
gist of geardum; he to gymwræce
swiðor þohte þonne to sælade,
```

(Beo 1137b-1139)

[the exiled guest was anxious to depart from the dwellings, yet he (Hengest) thought rather about grief-vengeance than a sea-voyage]

Here the counterpart of *lean gemunde*, 'thought of, remembered requital (vengeance)' can be found in the words *gymwræce*, 'grief vengeance' and *þohte*, 'thought'.

It is unlikely that this kind of syntactical and semantic parallelism is an accident. It is rather that the poet intends to emphasize some kind of moral value, which is most likely equivalent to *ealde riht*, as a value universally accepted in pagan heroic society. However, it should be pointed out that the poet's emphasis on the revenge ethic, which provides a thematic continuity of its own, does not result in a monotonous repetition of the same subject. This has been shown through the poet's subtle treatment of the revenge ethic, with its contrasts of two alternatives: immediate action following the death of one's lord; and the hesitation or delay of vengeance on his behalf. These contrasting options are presented in the poem implicitly. We have seen that both Beowulf and Hengest delay their acts of vengeance. Their inaction is clearly suggested in the phrases *uferan dogrum*, 'in later days', and *ôæt*, 'until'.
Thus, on two occasions, both 'in later days' and 'until' not only indicate the lapse of time but denote inaction as something throwing an unfavourable light on the ideal hero.

In *Beowulf*, ideal martial prowess in relation to the revenge ethic is often emphatically stressed by the use of another formula 'at the time of need'. The necessity of timing to help one's lord works as a crucial prerequisite to the forming of the ideal warrior, who commits himself to the code of allegiance, as can be seen in the following ten examples. I shall present these, before returning to the six motifs of vengeance in *Beo* 2327b-2537.

From the early part of the poem, Beowulf is uniquely distinguished from ordinary warriors as a man of action when he determined to take a ship and aid Hrothgar:

1. *cwæð, he guðcyning*
   *ofer swanrade secean wolde, mæne þeoden, þæ him wæs manna bearef.*
   *(Beo 199b-201)*
   [he said he would seek the warrior-king, the noted prince, over the swan's road, since he was in need of men]

After the banquet following Beowulf's victory over Grendel was over, the loyalty of the Danes towards Hrothgar is praised with reference to their readiness at the time of their lord's need:

2. *Wæs þeaw hyra, þæt hie oft wæron an wig gearwe, ge æt ham ge on herge, ge gehwæþer þara efne swylce mæla, swylce hira mandryhtne þearf gesælde; wæs seo þeod tilu.*
   *(Beo 1246b-1250)*
[It was their custom both at home and in the field that they should always be ready for warfare in either case at just such times as need befell their lord; a worthy race were they]

The importance of timing at the moment of someone's need also appears in Beowulf's farewell speech to Hrothgar as a sign of a strong verbal commitment to fulfill a code of allegiance that was newly established between Beowulf and Hrothgar when Hrothgar declared his intention to adopt Beowulf as his son:

3. Jæt ic þe wel herige
   ond þe to geoce garholt bere,
   mægenes fultum, þær ðe bið manna þearf.
   (Beo 1833b-1835)

[so that I will honour you well and bring shafted spears and the support of my strength to your aid when you have need of men]

The importance of timing with reference to 'in one's need' is also extended to the function of the sword. Hrunting, the famous sword which Unferth lends Beowulf, is praised as if it were a true hero fulfilling his task at the time of need in battle:

4. næfre hit æt hilde ne swac
   manna ængum þara þe hit mid mundum bewand,
   (Beo 1460b-1461)

[it had never failed any man in time of war, of those who grasped it with their hands]

However, the value of Hrunting is reversed later on as is expressed in terms of an unsuccessful warrior with reference to the failure of 'in one's need':

5. ac seo ecg geswac
   ðeodne æt þearfe;
   (Beo 1524b-1525a)

[but the blade failed the nobleman in his need]
Here the value of the weapon is measured in terms of a heroic moral principle, in which timing in association with 'one's need' plays a key role.

Throughout the poem, true heroic conduct is consistently measured in terms of a man's response to his lord's need, but this is not always expressed in positive syntax. Instead, it is often highlighted in the negative 'no need' as is seen in Beowulf's recollection on his past service to Hrothgar:

6. Næs him ænig þearf,
þæt he to Gifðum odoðe to Gar-Denum
odoðe in Swiorice secean þurfe
wyrsan wigfrecan, weorðe gecypan;

(Beo 2493b-2496)

[There was no need for him that he should have to seek among the Gifthas or Spear-Danes, or in the Swedish realm, a less worthy warrior, and to hire him with treasure]

A heroic intention of this kind, expressed with a contextual phrase such as 'at the time of a lord's need of men', is transferred to Wiglaf's action. Before Wiglaf goes to help Beowulf, he rebukes his comrades for their ingratitude and cowardice in his hour of need. Wiglaf's speech of rebuke, which is often cited as a good example to distinguish the true hero from the non-hero, is very much focused on the requirements of warriors' immediate action in 'the time of lord's need':

7. ðe us ðas beagas geaf,
þæt we him ða guðgetawa gyldan woldon,
gif him þyslicu þearf gelumpe,
helmas ond heard sweord.

(Beo 2635b-2638a)

[who gave us these rings, that we would repay him for the war-equipments, the helmets and hard swords, if any need such as this befell him]
Unlike his comrades, Wiglaf emerges as a true hero when he resolves to act at the
time of his lord's need:

8. 
\[ \text{I am told that then in the (dire) need of the people's king, the noble warrior stood}
up and showed his courage, his skill and daring, as his nature was} \]

The importance and necessity of acting 'at the time of one's lord's need' is again
emphasized in the scene where Wiglaf helps his lord in battle. This is held up as an
example in the form of a maxim-like ethical obligation which is an essential part of
the code of allegiance:

9. 
\[ \text{I am told that then in the (dire) need of the people's king, the noble warrior stood}
up and showed his courage, his skill and daring, as his nature was} \]

The poet himself defines cowardice in terms of the failure to meet the time of the
lord's need:

10. 
\[ \text{I am told that then in the (dire) need of the people's king, the noble warrior stood}
up and showed his courage, his skill and daring, as his nature was} \]
As shown in these ten examples above, heroic conduct is consistently defined as one's action at the right time. Thus it may be concluded that one's sense of timing is an essential component of a 'heroic code'. In this context, Beowulf's uferan dogrum, 'in later days', or Hengest's oh bæt, 'until', could cast doubt on their commitment to the heroic principle of immediate action. However, Beowulf is not seen as a complete failure in terms of carrying out his service for his lords Hygelac and Heardred, since he eventually avenges their deaths. Nonetheless, Beowulf might be blamed for his delay, and it is this hesitation which may be the hidden cause of his 'gloomy thoughts' on having transgressed ofer ealde riht, 'against the ancient law' (Beo 2330a).

The Beowulf-Hengest parallel continues, as the two events are united with each other by the application of the same concept of the heroic code, which is contained in the terms ealde riht and woroldræden respectively. I have already defined ealde riht as some kind of moral principle or ethical obligation universally accepted by the members of a given society, which here is the heroic society portrayed in the poem Beowulf. In addition, in view of the contextual correlation between the scene of 'gloomy thoughts' and the ensuing dominant theme of revenge, I have suggested that the revenge ethic is most likely to be the major component of ealde riht. If my reading is correct, then the relationship between the revenge ethic and woroldræden constitutes a vital element in the Beowulf and Hengest parallel. We are told that Hengest resolves to follow the obligation of a revenge ethic:

Swa he ne forwyrdode woroldrædenne,
þonne him Hunlafing hildeleoman,
billa selest on bearm dyde;

(Beo 1142-1144)

[Thus he did not refuse what the whole world would counsel when Hunlafing placed the flashing sword, best of weapons, on his lap]
Scholars are generally agreed in defining *woroldræden* as 'law, way, rule, or custom, of the world, implying such diverse ideas as "fate", "revenge", "duty", "sanctity of oath", "universal obligation"'. These definitions are in keeping with *ealde riht*, 'ancient law, custom obliged by inherited tradition, universally acknowledged ethical obligation' (BT). Again, Wrenn's definition of *woroldræden* as 'the universally acknowledged duty (of vengeance)' corresponds closely to the contextual interpretation of *ealde riht* as 'ethical obligation of the revenge code'. Despite this conceptual affinity between *ealde riht* and *woroldræden*, no critics have so far regarded these two as synonyms in which a revenge ethic might be implied. The concordance between the two terms is strongly reinforced by the supposed contextual similarities between the two occasions. I think that the scene of Beowulf's 'gloomy thoughts' with reference to *ofer ealde riht*, 'against ancient law', provides the likeliest scene for the answer to the question of how Hengest felt when he refused or failed to carry out his duty. Beowulf's recollection of Hrethel can be seen as another example of the feelings of bitterness and agony caused by the breach of the revenge ethic.

The fourth motif of revenge (Beo 2426-2471) occurs when Beowulf tells briefly how in his early youth he was a favourite at King Hrethel's court, and how the king's son Herebeald was killed by his other son Hæthcyn, and whose death remained unavenged. On the surface, this tragic episode is designed to stress Beowulf's own kin-feelings for his foster-father Hrethel. His feeling of sorrow intensifies as Beowulf compares Hrethel's fate with the piteous case of a father who loses a son by a violent death, which is portrayed in an elegiac passage. It is generally accepted by the critics that the poignant atmosphere of grief in the 'Old Father's Lament' (Beo 2444-2462a) is designed to bring home the depths of Hrethel's grief to the audience. Thus the 'Old

---

Father's Lament' is seen as a counterpart to Hrethel's tragic case. This view is clearly supported by the opening word swa, 'In like manner' (Beo 2462b), which comments on Hrethel's sorrowful mind and at the same time equates the two emotional circumstances as one:

Swa Wedra helm
æfter Herebealde heortan sorge
weallinde wæg;

(Beo 2462b-2464a)

[In like manner the protector of the Wederas felt surging sorrow in his heart for Herebealde]

In the two cases of the sudden deaths of the fathers' sons, emotion looms large, occupying the foreground of the scene. As regards the accidental killing of Herebeald by his brother, Bonjour takes this incident to symbolize 'the inexorability of fate'. He is quite right to suggest that the death of Herebeald is contrived in this passage to show the mutability of human life. However, I think his view is to a large extent based on the overall structure of the poem, in which wyrd, 'fate', works as a dominant theme. Particular attention should also be paid to the fact that the predominant emotions evoked by the two death scenes are built up against the background of the revenge ethic. The cause of Hrethel's grief is the loss of his son Herebeald, but his sorrow is increased owing to his recognition that he can not avenge the death of his son. Hrethel can not fulfill the duty of avenging his son because he must not lift his hand against another of his sons, Hæthcyn. Hrethel's dilemma is thus emphasized by the fifth revenge motif, which is recurrent around and within Beowulf's recollection of Hrethel.

From the structural point of view, Beowulf's recollection of Hrethel's tragedy is divided into two parts: the first part from 2425 to 2443 and the second from 2463b to 2472. The scene of the 'Old Father's Lament' falls between these two parts. The first part ends with the suggestion of the agony caused by the failure to honour the code of revenge:

*sceolde hwæðre swa þeah
æðeling unwrencen ealdres linnan.*

*(Beo 2442b-2443)*

[yet for all that, the prince had to depart from life unavenged]

This theme of unfulfilled duty occurs once again soon after the scene of the 'Old Father's Lament':

*wihte ne meahte
on ðam feorhbonan þæghðe gebetan;*

*(Beo 2464b-2465)*

[he (Hrethel) could not at all avenge that feud on the life-slayer]

This second statement about revenge serves as a reminder of the first one, thus reemphasizing the agony of Hrethel. Most of all, however, this repetition of the revenge motif appears to show an emotion which reaches its apex in the interposing 'Old Father's Lament'. This is proved by the repetition of the *swa* structure. The 'Old Father's Lament', following immediately after the end of the first part of Hrethel's tragedy, begins with *sва:*

*Swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle
to gebidanne, þæt his byre ride
giong on galgan;*

*(Beo 2444-2446a)*

*[In like manner, it is painful to an old man to suffer that his son should swing upon the gallows in his youth]*
Here, the introduction of *swa*, 'in like manner', effectively unites two separate tragedies (those concerning Hrethel and Herebeald on one hand, and concerning the old father and his dead son on the other) into a common emotional frame. Again, the depth of the unknown old father's grief is transferred into Hrethel's sorrow, in the second part, with the introduction of *swa* following immediately after the end of the scene of the 'Old Father's Lament':

*Swa* Wedra helm

Æfter Herebealde heortan sorge

weallinde wæg;

*(Beo* 2463b-2464a)*

[In like manner the protector of the Wederæs felt surging sorrow in his heart for Herebeald]

In this way, the interposing scene of the 'Old Father's Lament' is compared to the second part of Hrethel's agony by the use of *swa*. Once again, for this reason, a common emotional background is established between Hrethel's and the old father's grief and it is likely that the scene of the 'Old Father's Lament' is designed to reflect Hrethel's feelings, which have hitherto remained undisclosed. Here the expression of the emotional response involves a three stage structure.

Firstly, Beowulf empathetically enters Hrethel's inner mind, and by doing so reveals how Hrethel's emotions reflect his own. Secondly, Beowulf empathetically enters the old father's inner mind, revealing how Beowulf's and the old father's emotions reflect each other. Thirdly, the old father's inner mind is shown to reflect Hrethel's inner mind. Hence all three characters reflect one another in the same way, revealing a strong similarity in their inner minds. Both Hrethel and Beowulf may be regarded as suffering intense grief. In Hrethel's case it is his poignant recognition of his failure to carry out the duty of revenge which drives him into morbid grief. Shippey is right when he suggests that in the two cases of Hrethel and the old father,
connected in terms of revenge ethic, they are prevented from taking any action to avenge the deaths of their sons. Shippey sees Beowulf's current situation as similar, because Beowulf must act with little more hope of gain than the hanged man's father or King Hrethel. But Shippey takes a different view on the triangle connection of Hrethel, the old father and Beowulf because he concentrates on Beowulf's present and future situation rather than the past when Beowulf was not faithful to the revenge ethic. Concerning the revenge ethic, which has been the dominant theme since Beowulf's 'gloomy thoughts', Hrethel's case is paralleled with Beowulf's delay in avenging the deaths of Hygelac and Heardred. This latent parallelism between Hrethel and Beowulf is not exact, since Hrethel's desire to fulfill the duty of revenge is blocked against his will, whilst Beowulf's is postponed until he refreshes his resolution. In spite of this difference, it is possible that Hrethel's grief refers indirectly to Beowulf's mental agony caused by his delay of revenge, a delay at which the words ofer ealde riht hint.

Chickering regards this part of Beowulf's brooding on Hrethel's grief as being inserted 'to increase our awe at Beowulf's endurance'. In addition to that, I would like to emphasize the psychology of Beowulf that the poet reveals in this monologue, as his means of showing Beowulf's spiritual awakening to a moral principle in which the duty of revenge (in the sense of ealde riht) is included. This interpretation is made possible by comparisons with 'Hrothgar's Sermon', with reference to the commonly applicable expressions which are used to imply a drastic change of mind at the time of new spiritual experience.

32 Shippey, Old English Verse, p. 50.
33 Chickering, Beowulf, p. 368.
(d) Beowulf's spiritual awakening: reflection of Hrothgar's precepts

To return to the scene to which I allude at the beginning of this chapter, upon receiving the dragon's savage attack Beowulf sinks into unwonted dejection:

breost innan weoll
þeostrum geþoncum, swa him geþywe ne wæs.

(Beo 2331b-2332)

[within him his breast was troubled with gloomy thoughts, which was not customary for him]

Here the words swa him geþywe ne wæl prove that this kind of gloomy mood in Beowulf is exceptional, especially at the time of a possible subsequent battle against his enemy. It is probable that nowhere else in the poem are we closer to understanding Beowulf's character or inner state of mind. This scene provides an insight into a completely different aspect of Beowulf's character. Also, this gloomy mood is characteristically described with expressions with the sense of 'heart surged, welled', often used to imply intense fluctuation of emotion in the poem. Besides, Beowulf's emotion here is further characterized by 'gloomy (dark) thoughts'. This expression of mood, with reference to the colour black, occurs previously in 'Hrothgar's sermon', in which man's prosperity is described with litotes, the emphatic use of the negative particle ne:

ne him inwitsorh
on sefa(n) sweorceð, ne gesacu ohwaer
ecghe te eoweð, ac him eal worold
wendeð on willan;

(Beo 1736b-1739a)

[no grievous malice darkens his spirit, no enmity anywhere reveals its murderous hate, for the whole world world goes according to his will]
In the case of Heremod, Hrothgar extracts the moral that a man's life seems in his favour until a sudden change of fortune. Most significantly, man's prosperity is expressed as the opposite of an image of blackness. The opposite meaning of 'no grievous malice darkens his spirit' is that when a man's fortune declines to the point of its nadir, his spirit darkens. Thus Beowulf's dejection scene is described with the image of blackness. Therefore, since the meaning of sweorcan, 'become dark, become grievous' (Beo 1737a), in Hrothgar's moral exhortation coincides with beostre, 'dark, gloomy' (Beo 2332a), in Beowulf's mood, it is possible that Beowulf is aware that his fortune has declined. It also seems certain that on these two occasions the image of the colour black is intended to signify a negative aspect of the human mind. However, I do not think this is all that the image of the colour black is used for in these cases. These two occurrences of the black image are united with each other in hinting at a sort of spiritual awakening to a new experience of life. This common feature is strongly supported by the two words, sweorcan, beostre which are used on two occasions and are closely related with each other in terms of the implications of their meanings.

With regard to the hints of a spiritual awakening, four major common features may be found between Hrothgar's moral exhortation and Beowulf's 'dark thoughts'. The first is the use of the image of darkness, which has already been discussed. The second is the implication of oō þæt, 'until' (Beo 1740a). In Hrothgar's moral exhortation, which is mainly focused in lines 1722b to 1768, his moral principle is centred on the motif of edwenden, 'change, reversal'. This can be found in the use of oō þæt, following immediately after the image of the colour black, and introducing new aspect of life, marking the end of the period of man's prosperity whilst hinting at the reversal of fortune owing to the growth of pride and the failure to acknowledge God's bounty upon him:

he þæt wyrse ne con —,
he knows nothing of a worse thing, until a portion of overbearing pride grows and flourishes in him, while the ward and the soul's guardian sleeps]
Likewise, the motif of edwenden, with reference to oðæt, occurs again in the course of Beowulf's life. We are told that Beowulf's 'dark thoughts' result from the dragon's attack after his successful fifty year reign. This sudden change in Beowulf's fortune is also described with reference to oðæt:

he geheold tela
fiftig wintra — wæs ða færo cyning,
eald eðelweard —, oðæt an ongan
deorcum nihtum draca rics[...]

[he (Beowulf) ruled it well for fifty winters — when he was a king old in wisdom and a veteran guardian of his people, — until a certain dragon in the nights began to have power]
Here, a dramatic change in Beowulf's fortune is suggested by the introduction of 'until', which Hrothgar also uses to indicate change in his sermon.

The third common feature is the use of passages showing the discovery of a new meaning in life. This new meaning seems to entail a spiritual awakening. Two key sentences suggest this. The first comes from Hrothgar's sermon, in which a man's pride, arrogance and greed are reflected in his attitude towards material possessions:

hineð him to lytel,  þæt he lange heold,

[what he had held for a long time seems to him too little]
Here, an image of possessions is created in order to represent man's corrupted, degraded state. As in the case of the image of darkness in Beo 1737a, the opposed state can be inferred as a corollary: for a virtuous man what he had held for a long time seems to him too much. Hrothgar's ability to perceive the faults of materialistic man shows how he himself has gone beyond the material to a more spiritual state of mind. This realization of the emptiness of pride and material possessions is made manifest in Beowulf's description of the old father's mind:

\[\text{þuhte him eall to rum, wongas ond wicstede.}\]

(Beo 2461b-2462a)

[everything seems too spacious for him, both fields and dwelling-place]

This statement and that of Hrothgar's quoted above, are similar in syntax, choice of words and in actual content. Most important of all, these two passages are set against the common context of a reversal of fortune. Hence they suggest an experience which draws one's attention to a new aspect of life. As in the case of Hrothgar's moral exhortation, the unknown old father might feel that 'what he had held for a long time seems to him too little' until he loses his son by a sudden violent death, whereupon he feels instead that 'everything seems too spacious for him'. After the death of the unknown father's son it seems inconceivable that the old man could, as Hrothgar's degraded man did, think of what he had as too little. However, it should not be forgotten that this spiritual realization is not voiced by the old father himself but by the speaker Beowulf, who appears to act out his psychology through this discourse. In this way, there is another reason for suggesting that the old father's new spiritual state is that of Beowulf.

The fourth common feature is the relationship between the nature of Godes leoht, 'God's light' (Beo 2469b), in Beowulf's description of Hrethel and ece redas, 'the eternal counsels' (Beo 1760a), in Hrothgar's exhortation to Beowulf. At the end of
Beowulf’s description of Hrethel's solitary sadness, Beowulf tells of Hrethel's spiritual awakening, when he turned away from the concerns of the world to God:

He ðæa mid þære sorhge, þe him to sar belamp,
gumdream ofgeaf, Godes leoht geceas;
eferum læfde, swa deð cadig mon,
lond ond leodbyrig, þa he of life gewat.

(Beo 2468-71)

[Thus he gave up the joys of men, with that sorrow in his heart, when that grief befell him, he chose God’s light; when he departed from life he left his sons lands and the stronghold of their people, as a prosperous (blessed, happy) man]

Here, the nature of Hrethel's choice, geceas, 'chose' (Beo 2469b) is dependent on the meaning of Godes leoht, 'God's light' (Beo 2469b). Scholars tend to interpret Godes leoht geceas as a Christian euphemism for 'he died'. However, I believe that a literal rather than figurative rendering is more appropriate because the sense of 'chose' suggests Hrethel's voluntary decision. The meaning of 'God's light' can be inferred from the context, which places 'God's light' in contrast to the concerns of the world. Therefore, choosing 'God's light' can be equated with the abandonment of worldly concerns. Hrethel's withdrawal from the worldly matters is clearly shown in gumdream ofgeaf, 'gave up the joys of man' (Beo 2469a). Immediately after this,


35 This view of the literal translation is accepted by Garmonsway, Chickering, and Clark Hall. See Garmonsway, Beowulf and its Analogues, p. 66, Chickering, Beowulf, p. 197, and Clark Hall, Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment, pp. 144-5.
Hrethel is said to choose 'God's light', which suggests he turned away from worldly matters to a new spiritual view of life. Hrethel's turning to spirituality follows the precepts of Hrothgar's advice to Beowulf *ond be bæt selre gecceos, ece rædas*, 'choose for yourself the better part, the eternal counsels' (*Beo* 1759b-60a). That 'better part' is contrasted with the mutability of physical strength and worldly success:

```oldenglish
Hit on endestæf eft gelimpeð,
þæt se lichoma læne gedreoseð,
faege gefalleð; fehð oþer to,
se þe unmurnlice madmas dælep,
eorles ærgestreon, egesan ne gymeð.
Bebeorh þe þone bealonið, Beowulf leofa,
secg betsta, ond þe bæt selre gecceos,
cec rædas; oferhyda ne gym,
mære cempa!
``` (*Beo* 1753-1761a)

And yet at the end of life it shall come to pass that this transitory body crumbles away and falls as preordained. Another man succeeds him, who gives out ornaments and ancient possessions of this earl, he is not troubled with terror. Be on guard against such evil rancour, dear Beowulf, best of men; and choose for yourself the better part, the eternal gains. Do not set your mind upon arrogance, renowned champion!

An old and wise man who has experienced much joy and sorrow, and who has recently suffered greatly, thus makes a heartfelt plea to a young man of extreme promise to recognize the transitory nature of life. Hrothgar's advice is best interpreted as a call to go beyond the concerns of the world, which are subject to constant change. Hence from their contexts, both *Godes leohht*, 'God's light' (*Beo* 2469b) and *ece rædas*, 'the eternal gains' (*Beo* 1760a) can be seen as transcending worldly matters. Hrethel's
transformation is significant because his inner mind reflects that of Beowulf.\textsuperscript{36} Hence Beowulf's own spiritual awakening is revealed through his description of Hrethel.

Another similarity is found in the use of \textit{geceas}, 'chose' (\textit{Beo} 2469b), and \textit{geceos}, 'choose' (\textit{Beo} 1759b). I believe that this repetition of this verb is contrived by the poet, who wishes to highlight Beowulf's turning to spirituality. The use of 'choose' also emphasizes the role of a man's will in bringing about such a change. Beowulf's use of 'chose' referring to the new state of Hrethel's mind reflects Beowulf's acceptance of Hrothgar's exhortation to 'choose' spiritual value. The close similarities between Hrothgar's sermon and Beowulf's spiritual awakening suggest that the poet intends us to see Beowulf's development of character as an actual manifestation of Hrothgar's precepts.

(e) Conclusion

Beowulf's reflections prior to the fight with the Dragon reveal a major change in his moral view. Until now he has followed Germanic morality. But at this point, Beowulf adopts a more spiritual morality which replaces worldly concerns and pride with concerns for God and the ancient law. These are the same values which Hrothgar emphasized in his sermon to Beowulf. Beowulf's recollection of Hrethel's turning to spirituality highlights his own spiritual awakening. This marks the consummation of Beowulf's inner development.

\textsuperscript{36} Beowulf's identification with Hrethel goes beyond the discovery of a new meaning of life, most explicitly when he mourns the absence of a son. About this view see Martin Stevens, 'The Structure of \textit{Beowulf} from Gold-Hoard to Word-Hoard', \textit{MLQ}, 39 (1978), 219-38 (p. 236).
Conclusion

There are four main sub-texts operating in Beowulf. The first of these is the sub-text of rival-consciousness, which is prominent in the first part of this poem, but which entirely disappears in the second part. The second sub-text, of the reward ethos, is present throughout the poem and is prominent at the time of Wealhtheow's speech. The third sub-text, the revenge ethos, emerges at the time of Grendel's death, becomes more important during the Finn Episode and the killing of Dæghreðn, and reaches its apex when the Dragon is slain. Finally, there is the sub-text of spiritual realization, which is occasionally presented in the early part of the poem, becomes more apparent in Hrothgar's sermon, and emerges fully in Beowulf's final reflections before he faces the Dragon.

The study of sub-text is essential to a full understanding of the figures in Beowulf. Through analysis of the speeches and interactions of these figures, we can learn of their sensitivity to the four sub-textual elements. The way in which they show differing sensitivities to rival-consciousness, the reward ethos, the revenge ethos and spirituality demonstrates their diversity and individuality as characters. This suggests a radical reappraisal of the generally accepted view that 'the characters in Beowulf are not much more than types; not much more clearly individual than the persons of a comedy of Terence'.

From Beowulf's arrival in the Danish land to the moment when the Danes finally accept his help, Beowulf is careful not to hurt the heroic pride of his hosts. Although

his lack of restraint sometimes overrides this caution, generally Beowulf maintains a high degree of rival-consciousness. Three times Beowulf emphasizes his achievement using the formulaic expressions 'never have I been told of a harder struggle at night under the vault of heaven' (Beo 575b-576). This formula demonstrates Beowulf's awareness of rivalry and places him above his rivals. Thus the poet's description of Unferth 'for he grudged that any other man under heaven should ever obtain more glory on this earth than he himself' (Beo 503b-505) could equally well be applied to Beowulf.

Whereas the coastguard does not show this sensitivity, Wulfgar does, for he pleads to Hrothgar to receive Beowulf, knowing that Hrothgar's heroic pride may lead him to refuse this new arrival. Hrothgar then demonstrates his rival-consciousness in three ways. Firstly, he reminds Beowulf of his father's debt. Secondly, he counteracts Beowulf's boast by recalling his youthful reign, on geogode heold gimme rice, 'in my youth I have held a spacious kingdom' (Beo 466), with an expression similar to that which Beowulf uses: hebe ic mera fela ongumen on geogode, 'I have in my youth undertaken many deeds of daring' (Beo 408b-9a). Thirdly, he recalls his warriors' bravery against Grendel to show that their lack of success is not due to a lack of courage.

Finally, Unferth defends the heroic pride of his country by demanding that Beowulf either proves his boasts or restrains them. He is keenly aware of Beowulf's threat to Danish pride, as well as to his own heroic pride. For this reason, Unferth's verbal attack on Beowulf is firmly based on rival-consciousness.

One of the binding forces in a comitatus is the reward ethos, by which the king duly rewards his thanes for their future and past actions. In return, these warriors must risk their lives in battle. Although Hrothgar is not Beowulf's king, a similar contract is tacitly drawn up between them. Hrothgar demonstrates his awareness of this contract
when he promises Beowulf treasures if he kills Grendel, and later, if he kills Grendel's mother.

The sub-text of the reward ethos is most prominent in Wealhtheow's speeches. Firstly, she reminds Hrothgar of the importance of observing the reward ethos if he is to secure the helps of Beowulf. Secondly, she also reminds him of the role of the reward ethos in preventing a future threat to the throne from Hrothulf. Thirdly, by promising Beowulf treasures in order to secure the future safety of her sons, she shows her own awareness of the reward ethos.

There are hints of the revenge ethos in Beowulf's recollection of the slaying of the sea-monsters in the Breca episode and in his killing of Grendel and his mother. But this sub-text becomes more important towards the end of the poem. Firstly, I have argued that it is likely Beowulf fails to meet the strict demands of the revenge ethos when he escapes the scene of his lord Hygelac's death. However, when Beowulf does finally slay Dæghrefn, the importance this event has for the revenge ethos is clear. The revenge ethos continues to be accentuated in digressions in Beowulf. It is only when Beowulf finally meets and kills the Dragon alone that the revenge ethos is fully fulfilled in this poem.

The sub-text of spiritual awakening is found in young Beowulf's frequent references to fate or God's providence. From the outset Beowulf is presented as a man who is prepared to accept the will of God. The spiritual dimension is more fully evoked in Hrothgar's sermon. Although the focus of his sermon is a warning against pride and arrogance, the underlying theme is the mutability of the world and the deviation of the mind from the God's righteous way. Then Hrothgar enters the mind of such a person with the words *hineð him to lytel, þæt he lange heold,* 'what he had held for a long time seems to him too little' (Beo 1748), thus indicating the vacuum caused by the neglect of spirituality. Hrothgar describes the man who is possessed by arrogance neglecting the great duty of giving, forgetful of God's bounty to him and of
his own future. Hrothgar's ability to enter another person's mind and detect spiritual emptiness there reveals his own spirituality.

Likewise, during his recollection in the wake of the Dragon's raid, Beowulf enters the mind of Hrethel and then the Old Father's mind with the words 'everything seems too spacious for him, both fields and dwelling place' (Beo 2461b-62a). Just as Hrothgar detected the spiritual void in the arrogant man's heart, Beowulf detects emptiness in Hrethel's world now that he is left merely with his hall and other material possessions. Beowulf's ability to perceive this problem, namely the ultimate failure of a pre-Christian ideology, demonstrates his own advanced spiritual awareness.

In the course of this thesis, I have attempted to show the character of Beowulf as more than just an archetype. His individuality is manifest in several main features: his wisdom, courage, sense of humour, emotional response, political insight, inner reflection, and ability to deal with circumstance and magnanimity. As Kaske observed, Beowulf is presented from the outset as a man of wisdom. However, the Beowulf-poet, in presenting Beowulf as a fully-formed individual, does not present this wisdom as flawless. Through the examination of the sub-text of Beowulf's speeches in the first part of this poem, we can perceive Beowulf's lack of restraint. First, in his speech to the coastguard, he portrays Hrothgar as a non-hero, jeopardizing his chances of meeting Hrothgar. Second, his description of Heorot 'empty' and 'useless' in front of Hrothgar risks offending his host. Third, in his exchange with Unferth, Beowulf implies that the Danes are not brave men, thus insulting them.

Beowulf's courage is remarkably consistent throughout the poem and marks him out as superior to the other characters. But even in this respect, Beowulf is not entirely perfect. When Beowulf flees the scene of his lord Hygelac's death, he is clearly breaking the heroic code of revenge. Although he later avenges Hygelac's death, his failure to act immediately is a failure to conform to the heroic archetype. Perhaps the last thing we would expect to find in the hero of an epic narrative poem is
a sense of humour. However, this is precisely what we do find in Beowulf, which is arguably the feature which is most unique to this hero. Beowulf's amusing remark, that if he is eaten he would not have to be buried, may be typical of a warrior's humour. Beowulf's playing on words between Hondscio's name and Grendel's glove also appears to reveal a dark sense of irony, even though the circumstances here are far from amusing.

Beowulf demonstrates that he is an adaptable and dexterous character by his use of speech to deal with the coastguard, Wulfgar, Hrothgar, and Unferth. To the coastguard, he presents himself as a supplicant, hiding his true intention and playing down his role of helper. To Wulfgar, he is humble and courteous. He manages to convince Hrothgar of his heroic capability. Attacked by Unferth, Beowulf counters with great skill to reassert his heroic status and humble his opponent. Beowulf also presents an honourable account of Hondscio's death, concealing the true details of the incident in order to meet the demands of the circumstances. Beowulf displays magnanimity towards Unferth and his band. Beowulf shares his victory over Grendel with his band, even though it was solely his feat.

Beowulf's emotional responses are many and varied, revealing him to be much more complex than a two-dimensional folk-tale archetype. He is angry when his heroic capabilities are questioned by Unferth and when he fights Grendel. Beowulf remains restrained in the face of Hrothgar's sorrowful outburst, but in front of his lord Hygelac, Beowulf has his own outburst of affection. When describing Hondscio's death, Beowulf is able to control his sorrow and grief and expresses his feelings for his lost comrade in the form of an eulogy. After the battle with the Dragon, Beowulf, feeling that death is near, regrets that he has no son to whom he may leave his armour. When he emerges victorious from battle he rejoices. This range of emotions — anger, sorrow, grief, regret, joy and affection — reveals the inner mind of a developed literary individual.
Another distinctive feature of Beowulf is his political insight. His assurance of substantial help to Hrothgar in case of a new emergency and his offer to foster Wealhtheow's son Hrethric at the Geatish court reveal his awareness of the political turmoil to come in the Danish kingdom. He is also shown to be acute, in that he rightly predicts that the marriage of convenience between Ingeld and Freawaru is doomed to fail. In later life, Beowulf's sense of guilt is revealed by his response to the Dragon's attack, when he believes he has committed some past sin. In old age, Beowulf becomes a more reflective character with a heightened awareness of his spiritual state. In Beowulf, we are thus granted unprecedented insight into the deeper workings of the hero's mind.

Concerning the poem's structure and thematic unity, both Klaeber and Brodeur suggest that the only advance occurs in the person of the hero. I agree that there is an advancement in Beowulf's character, which I have argued entails Beowulf's physical growth and the deepening of Beowulf's mentality and spirituality. The poem itself provides a fair picture of Beowulf's physical growth from the age of 7: his adoption by Hrethel at the age of 7 (early childhood); his sluggish period under the King Hæthcyn, when he failed to display his early heroic potential, which led the Geats to believe he was a feeble prince (the period of early youth); his youthful adventures and subsequent achievement, such as the Breca episode (the stage of youth), which firmly established his heroic credibility and fame abroad; his arrival in the Danish land, by which time he has already emerged as a proven hero (mature state of youth); his promotion to the landed aristocracy resulting from his expedition in Denmark; his period as a warrior king terminating in his self-sacrificing death.

Presuming that young Beowulf's heroic prowess and valour have already been established before he arrives in Denmark, what is the significance of his adventure there? Whereas his early youthful adventures including the Breca episode shows only his physical strength, martial prowess and valour, his adventure in the Danish land
mark him out as a hero well endowed with mental abilities, demonstrated by his use of words, as well as growing physical capabilities. However, his mental abilities are not perfect, as is shown through a series of verbal exchanges with other figures from his arrival speech to the coastguard to the farewell speech to Hrothgar. In a sense this series of exchanges is a substitute for physical war. This war of words marks him out as a man of wisdom. This new mental dimension distinguishes the Danish expedition from his earlier adventures.

Furthermore, as Beowulf grows older, his style of speech changes. In the second part of this poem, the sub-text of heroic rivalry is gone. The resulting form of speech is largely in monologue, often of an elegiac and backward-looking content. This shift is reflected in form in the move from present and future tenses to the increasing use of past tenses, and in content by a move from promising, boasting and firm resolution to talk of past deeds and depth of inner reflection. The shift of main narrative style, from central to digressive, also shows Beowulf’s growth in mentality and spirituality. In the first part of this poem, his speech full of promises and boasts reflects his youthful spirit, whilst his retrospective speeches in old age reflect old Beowulf’s new state of mind. This growth of mental maturity gains a spiritual dimension as he examines his state of mind in relation to God. Beowulf’s self-examination culminates in his entering into the minds of Hrethel and the ‘old father’. This spiritual dimension takes Beowulf beyond the concerns of a pagan hero to an awareness of his own spirituality and guilt. Beowulf’s capacity to examine his state of mind and sense of guilt is his greatest achievement, which enables him to go beyond the level of a pagan hero. The greatest virtue in Beowulf’s character is finally his ability to look into his own conscience.

In these ways, the poet of Beowulf takes the heroic archetype and from it builds an individualized character. He portrays the development of a virtuous pagan hero into a more mature spiritually advanced figure. This remarkable colouring of
pagan conventions with spirituality and individuality marks the greatest achievement of the poet.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aertsen, Henk, and Bremmer, Rolf H. Jr., ed., Companion to Old English Poetry
(Amsterdam: Free University Press, 1994)

Alföldi, Andreas, 'Eine spätromische Helmform und ihre Schicksale im Germanisch-
Romanischen Mittelalter', Acta Archaeologica, 5 (1934), 99-144


Bandy, Stephen C., 'Beowulf: The Defense of Heorot', Neophil, 56 (1972), 86-91

Bately, Janet, ed., The Old English Orosius, EETS, ss. 6 (Oxford: Oxford University
Press, 1980)

Benedict, Ruth, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture
(London: Secker & Warburg, 1947)

Blomfield, Joan, 'The Style and Structure of Beowulf', RES, 14 (1938), 396-403

Bloomfield, Morton W., 'Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of
Unferth', Traditio, 7 (1949-51), 410-415


_____ 'Young Beowulf's Inglorious Period', Anglia, 70 (1952), 339-44

_____ 'On Sea Images in Beowulf', JEGP, 54 (1955), 111-15

_____ 'Beowulf and the Beasts of Battle', PMLA, 72 (1957), 563-573

_____ Twelve Beowulf Papers: 1940-1960, with Additional Comments (Geneva:
University of Neuchatel, 1962)

Bosworth, Jospeh, ed., and T. Northcote Toller, ed. and rev., An Anglo-Saxon

Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1982)

274
Cameron, Angus, and Allison Kingsmill and Ashley Crandell Amos, ed., *Old English Word Studies: A Preliminary Author and Word Index*, Toronto Old English Series VIII (Toronto, 1983)
Brady, Caroline, 'The Old English Nominal Compounds in -RAD', PMLA, 67 (1952), 538-71
_____ 'Unferth, Grendel and the Christian Meaning of Beowulf, NM, 72 (1971), 246-50
Camargo, Martin, 'The Finn Episode and the Tragedy of Revenge in Beowulf', SP, 78 (1981), 120-134
Chambers, R. W., Man's Unconquerable Mind: Studies of English Writers, from Bede to A. E. Housman and W. P. Ker (London: Jonathan Cape, 1939)
_____ Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn, 3rd ed. with supplement by C. L. Wrenn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959)
Cook, Albert Stanburrough, 'The Beowulfian mæodelode', JEGP, 25 (1926), 1-6

Crozier, Alan, 'Old West Norse iþrótt and Old English indryhtu', *SN*, 58 (1986), 3-10


Earl, James W., 'Beowulf's Rowing-Match', *Neophil*, 63 (1979), 285-90

Einarsson, Stefán, 'Old English Beot and Old Icelandic Heitstrenging', *PMLA*, 49 (1934), 975-993

Eliason, Norman E., 'Beowulf's Inglorious Youth', *SP*, 76 (1979), 101-108


_____ 'Beowulf: A Study in Dilatation', *PMLA*, 70 (1955), 825-852


Feldman, Thalia Phillies, 'The Taunter in Ancient Epic: The Iliad, Odyssey, Aeneid, and Beowulf', *PLL*, 15 (1979), 3-16

276

Fulk, R. D., 'Unferth and His Name', *MP*, 85 (1987-88), 113-127


Gardner, Thomas, 'How Free was the Beowulf Poet?', *MP*, 71 (1973-74), 111-127


Godden, Malcom, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series* *EETS* ss. 5 (London, 1979), p. 44. 92


Hall, J. R. Clark, trans., Beowulf and the Finnesburg Fragment (London: George
Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1963)

Hallander, Lars-G., 'Old English Dryht and its Cognates', SN, 45 (1973), 20-31


55-69

Harris, A. Leslie, 'Techniques of Pacing in Beowulf', ES, 63 (1982), 97-108

Hollowell, Ida Masters, 'Unferth the Pyle in Beowulf', SP, 73 (1976), 239-65

Howlett, David R., Form and Genre in Beowulf', SN, 46 (1974), 309-25

Hughes, Geoffrey, 'Beowulf, Unferth and Hrunting: An Interpretation', ES, 58 (1977),
385-95


Isaacs, Neil D., 'Six Beowulf Cruces', IEGP, 62 (1963), 119-128


Jóhannesson, Alexander, ed., Isländisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch (Bern: A.
Francke AG Verlag, 1956)


Kaske, R. E., 'Sapiencia et Fortitudo as the Controlling Theme of *Beowulf*, *SP*, 55 (1958), 423-56

---

Kavros, Harry E., 'Swefan æfter symble: The Feast-Sleep Theme in *Beowulf*, *Neophil*, 65 (1981), 120-128


Kennedy, Charles W., trans., *Beowulf: The Oldest English Epic* (New York, London and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1940)


Kroll, Norma, 'Beowulf: The Hero as Keeper of Human Polity', *MP*, 84 (1986), 117-29


Lumiansky, R. M., 'The Dramatic Audience in *Beowulf*, *JEGP*, 51 (1952), 545-550

Magennis, Hugh, 'Monig offt gesæt: Some Images of Sitting in Old English Poetry', *Neophil*, 70 (1986), 442-52

Malone, Kemp, 'The Finn Episode in *Beowulf*, *JEGP*, 25 (1926), 157-72

---

Malone, Kemp, 'Young Beowulf', *JEGP*, 36 (1937), 21-3

---

Malone, Kemp, 'Beowulf', *ES*, 29 (1948), 161-72

---


McGalliard, John C., 'The Poet's Comment in *Beowulf*, *SP*, 75 (1978), 244-70


Moorman, Charles, 'The Essential Paganism of *Beowulf*', *MLQ*, 28 (1967), 3-18

Morgan, Gerald, 'The Treachery of Hrothulf', *ES*, 53 (1972), 23-39

Newton, Sam, *The Origins of Beowulf and the Pre-Viking Kingdom of East Anglia* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993)


North, Richard, 'Tribal Loyalties in the Finnsburh Fragment and Episode', *LSE*, n.s. 21 (1990), 13-43.
____ 'Saxo and the Swedish Wars in Beowulf', in Saxo Grammaticus: Tra
Olsen, Alexandra Hennessy, Speech, Song, and Poetic Craft: The Artistry of the
Cynewulf Canon (New York: Peter Lang, 1984)
Overing, Gillian R., Language, Sign, and Gender in Beowulf (Carbondale and
Parks, Ward, Verbal Duelling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English
Pepperdene, M. W., 'Beowulf and the Coast-guard', ES, 47 (1966), 409-419
Pope, John C., 'Beowulf 505, "gehedde ",and the Pretensions of Unferth', in Modes of
Interpretation in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B.
Greenfield, ed. Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton and Fred C.
173-87.
____ 'Beowulf's Old Age', in Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English
Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt, ed. James L. Rosier
Renoir, Alain, A Key to Old Poems: The Oral-Formulaic Approach to the
Interpretation of West-Germanic Verse (London: The Pennsylvania State
Robinson, Fred C., 'Elements of the Marvellous in the Characterization of Beowulf: a
Reconsideration of the Textual Evidence', in Old English Studies in Honour of
John C. Pope, ed. Robert B. Burlin and Edward B. Irving, Jr. (Toronto and
Schabram, Hans, Superbia: Studien zum altenglischen Wortschatz, Teil I (Munich, 1965)

____ Beowulf and the Appositive style (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985)

Rosier, J. L., 'Design for Treachery: The Unferth Intrigue.' PMLA, 77 (1962), 1-7

____ 'The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in Beowulf', PMLA, 78 (1963), 8-14


____ The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts EETS n.s. 300 (London: 1992)

Shippey, T. A., Old English Verse (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1972)

____ Beowulf (London: Edward Arnold, 1978)

Silber, Patricia, 'Rhetoric as Prowess in the Unferth Episode', TSLL, 23 (1981), 471-83


Stevens, Martin, 'The Structure of Beowulf from Gold-Hoard to Word-Hoard', MLQ, 39 (1978), 219-38
Swanton, M. J., Crisis and Development in Germanic Society 700-800: Beowulf and the Burden of Kingship (Göttingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1982)


Tolkien, J. R. R., 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,' PBA, 22 (1936)

Tonsfeldt, H. Ward, 'Ring Structure in Beowulf', Neophil. 61 (1977), 443-52


_____ 'Did Beowulf Have an "Inglorious Youth"?', SN, 61 (1989), 129-43


Wentersdorf, Karl P., 'Beowulf's Adventure with Breca', SP, 72 (1975), 140-166


Wood, Cecil, 'Nis hæt Seldguma: Beowulf 249', PMLA, 75 (1960), 481-84

Woold, Henry Bosley, 'Young Beowulf', JEGP, 36 (1937), 21-28